

Ralph Nader Radio Hour

Episode 522

“Tribe Over Truth”

March 9th, 2024

Steve Skrovan: Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. My name is Steve Skrovan, along with my trusty co-host, David Feldman. Hello, David.

David Feldman: The antitrust co-host.

Steve Skrovan: Antitrust co-host, especially since what happened with JetBlue and Spirit this week. And also, the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hello, everybody.

Steve Skrovan: I hope you've gotten over your birthday hangover.

Our first guest today is Professor Barbara McQuade. Some of you may recognize her from the legal commentary she provides NBC News and MSNBC. She also teaches law at the University of Michigan and has written a book which is climbing the charts. It's entitled, *Attack from Within: How Disinformation is Sabotaging America*.

In the book, she defines disinformation as "the deliberate use of lies to manipulate people, whether to extract profit or to advance a political agenda. Its unwitting accomplice, misinformation, is spread by unknowing dupes who repeat lies they believe to be true." Professor McQuade chronicles how authoritarians use these techniques to disarm their enemies and rise to power, and how, in this historical moment, the Trump/MAGA movement is using the same playbook.

Then we turn back to the ongoing genocide in Gaza. For that, we welcome back frequent guest, retired Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson. Regular listeners know Colonel Wilkerson as Secretary of State Colin Powell's Chief of Staff and Special Assistant to General Powell when he was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He's been in the rooms where these types of military and diplomatic decisions have been made and will give us his take on how to interpret what is happening now. And stay tuned because Colonel Wilkerson is not one to mince words.

As always in between, we will check in with our indefatigable corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, Ralph has stated many times that empires usually crumble from within. Our first guest has outlined for us the nature of that attack. David?

David Feldman: Barbara McQuade served as United States attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan from 2010 to 2017. As part of President Donald Trump's 2017 dismissal of US attorneys, she stepped down in March of 2017. She's a Professor of Law at the University of Michigan Law

School, a legal analyst for NBC News and MSNBC. Her latest book is *Attack from Within: How Disinformation is Sabotaging America*. It's published by Seven Stories Press.

Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Barbara McQuade.

Barbara McQuade: Well, thanks very much for having me. I'm really glad to be here.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much, Barbara. First, I always like to give authors opportunity to explain their book before we then start the question process. And I'm going to ask you to do that as well.

But before I do, I just want to ask you, why did you use the word disinformation? And I asked that for two reasons. One is, this is a relatively recent word. The word used to be propaganda. And in 1970, Merriam-Webster Dictionary, disinformation isn't even listed. And if you asked an ordinary person or persons, "What does disinformation mean to you," what would they say?

Barbara McQuade: Disinformation comes from a world that I'm familiar with, which is in national security. As a prosecutor, I worked in counterintelligence, and as a law professor, I teach a course on national security.

And so, disinformation is information warfare. It is an effort to use information in a way that is designed to mislead, to deceive, and to manipulate. So, in some ways, I suppose it's similar to propaganda, but it is a tradecraft. And in my book, what I hope to do is to educate people about this tradecraft, open their eyes to how it works so that they can build resilience against it and prevent the kind of manipulation it is designed to achieve.

Ralph Nader: This is an overwhelming book, listeners. It's a jackhammer of documentation about what's happening to the very concept of truth in this country, never mind facts. So can you tell us what you tried to do with this book and describe it in your own words?

Barbara McQuade: Yes. Thank you for that opportunity. The goal of the book is to describe what I see happening in our country at the moment, to explain how it is harming our democracy, public safety, and the rule of law, and offer some proposed solutions.

I intend to make it very accessible to the average reader so that we can try to understand this political moment and get out from under it. My background is as a national security prosecutor, so I see this as a threat to our national security.

There are two main drivers of what is happening right now that is causing this onslaught of disinformation. One is technology, which can be a wonderful tool. The ability to communicate with people around the world about our interests and hobbies and connections is a wonderful thing. But like most technology, like most tools, it can be used as a weapon. And so for those who want to deceive or manipulate people, it has become very easy to take false information and push it online. And what used to take months or years to indoctrinate people can now be done with the

push of a button by sending a message that will reach millions of people in just a moment. So that technology is a game-changer.

The other thing that is happening right now is that we are seeing people who are so convinced that their side is right, we are so polarized that they are willing to choose the ends over the means. They care about their vision of America, and therefore they are willing to say whatever it takes to support that vision of America.

Some people are deceived by these lies, but many others know the truth and yet push false claims anyway. These are people who are choosing tribe over truth. Just to give you example, there are certainly some people who believe that the 2020 election was stolen. But there are plenty of other people in Congress who absolutely know that was not the case and yet will push that claim anyway because they believe it helps them politically.

Elise Stefanik, the congresswoman from New York, has begun repeating the phrase Donald Trump uses, which is to refer to defendants who have been convicted and incarcerated for their acts on January 6th as hostages, suggesting that they are political prisoners in some way. She most certainly knows better.

Josh Hawley and Ted Cruz, senators who are Ivy League educated lawyers, certainly know how elections are supposed to be counted and certified and know that there was no fraud in the last election. Yet, even after the attack on the Capitol, they voted against certifying the results of that election. And so, I think that it is that deliberate choice of tribe over truth combined with technology that has put us in a very dangerous place.

Ralph Nader: Let's dissect this. Do you think, on the whole, that the Internet has damaged democracy and truth and factual dialogue more than it's enhanced it?

Barbara McQuade: I don't know. Maybe a little bit of both. We have the ability now to talk with a lot of other people across differences.

One of the things that technology and social media has done is it has really changed the way we talk about politics. It used to be said that all politics is local. Now all politics is national, and some of that is because we are talking at a national and even international level with people online about what's happening in our country and our world, instead of talking with our neighbors in person about the garbage pickup and the streetlights. And that that has caused us to disengage from normal civic society, and instead spend our political time reading online, communicating with people online and not in real life.

There's also been a contributing factor in the demise of local journalism that has made it harder for us to come together as communities and understand what's happening in our communities. Instead, we are left to rely on proxies to tell us what's happening at the national level rather than engaging at the local level. And that's to our detriment.

Ralph Nader: The local journalism point is very crucial in your book, because local journalism has a checkmate of local observation for accuracy, and not only does it generate original content, but it also is more accountable because it's more immediate to the readers. And the readers, in their knowledge of the community, can debunk any false statements.

But I'm not asking you about the potential of the Internet. I'm saying, as of today, March 2024, since the Internet came on board with the funding of the Pentagon to develop it, do you think, on balance, it has damaged democracy in all its disparate characteristics more than it's enhanced it?

Barbara McQuade: I don't know if I can reach a calculation. Certainly, if social media is what allowed the Arab Spring individuals to organize and share information, so in some ways, there is some power that is gained by the people with it, but also certainly some harms.

One of the things that I teach in my national security class is the conclusions of Robert Mueller in his investigation in the 2016 election and about Russian influence. Most people focus on the aspects about Donald Trump, but the aspects about Russia in there are really interesting because it describes in great detail how Russian operatives were able to use social media and the Internet to deceive American people and influence our elections and sow division in society, which they are still actively doing. And now American political operatives have seen how effective it can be and do the same thing.

For example, some of the things that Robert Mueller cites are accounts that were run by Russian operatives that were set up many, many months before the 2016 election and were designed to develop loyal followers. They had names like "Blacktivists" that looked like a black political activist, or "United Muslims of America", or "Tennessee GOP", or "Heart of Texas", or "Coal Miners of America". All of these looked like they were genuine grassroots Americans. And they said things that most members of those groups would believe in and find noncontroversial and that they would support.

Over time, they built large, large followings. And then as they get close to the election, they would say things that were incredibly harmful and damaging, like the Blacktivist account repeated over and over again, like black voters should not go out and vote for Hillary Clinton, she's never done anything for us, she ignores us, and so we should send a strong message that we should not be ignored, you can't ignore our voice, and not show up or vote for her on election day.

Ralph Nader: You're dodging the question. The question is, to date, has the Internet been more of a damage to our democracy than it has helped? My answer is yes. And you know what my basic evidence for that is? It's called the book by Barbara McQuade, called *Attack from Within: How Disinformation is Sabotaging America*.

You're making a point that's very important. People are not willing to come to these conclusions because it's too dispiriting, it's too fatalistic, but it's true. Let me indicate one part in your book.

Anonymity. Anonymity on the Internet is the cause of a huge amount of threats, slanders, fake information, corrosive dialogue, defamation, et cetera. I say to newspaper editors, you don't allow

anonymity when you print a letter to the editor. Why are you allowing anonymity on your website? Well, we want to get more clicks. We want to get more visits. How would you handle anonymity on the Internet by regulation?

Barbara McQuade: Yeah. That's a great question. And for the record, my answer to your question about are we better or worse off is, I don't know. I think we're both. I think we're better off in many ways, and we're worse off in others. But it's here to stay, so I don't think it's a solution to say, let's abolish the Internet. I think it's, how can we fix it and make it better?

When the Internet began, it was endless possibilities, and we did not foresee all the ways in which it could be abused. In 1996, when social media didn't even exist, it was just in its infancy, we passed Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which provided for immunity from legal liability for social media platforms, which probably sounded like a great idea at the time. It probably allowed all of the innovation that we have seen come to roost today, some of which is great. America is a leader in social media platforms. But we've reached a point where we see the problems and the collateral consequences, and we need to make some changes.

As I say in the book, Ralph, the Internet is like growing a baby alligator in your bathtub. It was adorable when it started, and so exciting. Then it grew into a man-eating predator. So we need to change the way we deal with it. So, with regard to anonymity, it would be beneficial to prohibit anonymity online for just the reasons you say. People behave horribly when they can be anonymous. People are just mean when they can behave anonymously.

I think about my own behavior. If I'm in the bank or if I'm in the grocery store, I am the model of good behavior. I stand in line obediently, and I smile and nod politely to others around me. But put me behind the wheel of a car in traffic where I'm anonymous and unaccountable, and I'm an animal, right? I'm cutting people off, and I'm waiting to get over in that lane when the sign reads "Lane Closed Ahead," because I have no accountability, and no one can see me face-to-face.

Ralph Nader: Let me amplify that by reading a section in your book, on page 145, which I think is one of the most important pages in your book, and it's under a subtitle called "A Round Peg in the Town Square."

You basically say "Anonymity, bots, algorithms, and different social norms make social media platforms completely distinct from a public forum on a street corner. When one considers how badly the metaphor fits, comparing profit-driven social media platforms to public space is itself a kind of disinformation. Anonymity online is one way in which social media are different from the traditional town square. In the town square, we know who's speaking because we can see and hear them. We base our assessment of arguments, in part, on the credibility of the speaker. In contrast, some social media platforms permit anonymous accounts, allowing anyone to pose as someone else."

Because when you look at all the media that the Trumpsters have got, national, state, local, that the election was stolen, there's an asymmetry between the rebuttal of people saying, where's your

evidence? The key question—where's your evidence, where is your authority under law—are dim and indistinct. Let's start with an easy one.

On page 84, you have a section that says "insult them to death. You start with a favorite topic of mine, the unrebutted nicknames that Trump has pejoratively given to friends and foes alike who disagree or oppose him. I'll quote.

"I cannot remember Trump ever publicly telling a conventional joke or engaging in a politician's standard self-deprecating humor. Instead, he mocks his opponent with demeaning nickname by calling his political rivals names like, 'Crooked Hillary' Clinton, or 'Sleepy Joe Biden', Trump reduces them to negative caricatures, creating false but enduring impressions. Trump jabbed at Senator Elizabeth Warren's claimed Native American heritage by calling her 'Pocahontas.' He also relentlessly targeted any member of his own party who dared to challenge him. He called Texas Senator Ted Cruz, a rival candidate, 'Lying Ted'. He called his own attorney general who recused himself from the Trump-Russia investigation, 'Mr. Magoo', after the cartoon character."

How would you respond if you were a political consultant? How would you respond to his nicknames and his getting away with it? How would you give him some of his own medicine?

Barbara McQuade: I'm not a political consultant, and what I would love to see is not giving people some of their own medicine, because I think it just escalates until we're all in the sewer calling each other names.

I mentioned in the book how others have taken up this mantle by local politicians engaging in name-calling against their opponents. It is such a base and demeaning way of engaging in discourse. What I'd rather see is people call this out and talk about how incredibly inappropriate it is to reduce someone to a nickname instead of focusing on solving real problems.

You may have legitimate arguments and concerns about your opponent. Maybe they have been hypocritical in their view on positions. Maybe they have held positions that are not in the best interest of the country. Those are all fair game. But to simply call them names is so juvenile and so damaging to democracy. What I would point out is, this person is not a serious person who wants to engage in issues. This person wants to hurl insults and bring all of us down to that level.

Ralph Nader: Is that happening? Is there a rebuttal at your high level of exchange? Are Democrats, for example, engaging that rebuttal or just letting them have free exercise?

Barbara McQuade: People are still bewildered about how to respond to Donald Trump. The media is bewildered because we've never seen anything like him. He's an absolute disruptor of how our system works.

He's a big bully who runs around and says all kinds of mean things and nobody knows how to deal with it. The media still struggles to decide how do you cover someone when we've been trained to give both sides of an argument, which presumes that both sides are engaging in good faith, when instead you have someone who is not engaging in good faith, engaging in lies, making even inconsistent statements. Classic example is Donald Trump accusing the FBI of planting evidence

in his home and then later saying he had every right to take those documents that are now in his home. So not even demanding consistency on the arguments he makes.

The media has been confused. Do you cover his rallies, or are you just giving airtime and oxygen to lies? Or do you not cover his rallies where he can say things that then go unrebutted because people aren't even aware of what he is saying other than his supporters? So, I'm not sure I know the answer of how best to cover these things, but I think real-time fact-checking of lies is important. And I think criticizing the use of a belittling nickname is the most effective way to push back, rather than just calling him a name; then we're all debased.

Ralph Nader: I agree with you. You don't want to go down in the mud with people. But when the national press begins and continues to be his bullhorn, verbatim, repeating it, repeating it, giving no right of reply, there's no way you can simply say, I don't want to go to his level, because the press has raised it to a level that is devastating to our democracy and all the things you have in this book.

Did you ever think that you were making too strong a case without inserting more of the rebuttals in the text itself? Because I'm worried about people just saying, it's hopeless, it's over, she's made such a case, there's no way we're going to recover the Internet über alles.

Barbara McQuade: No, because the introduction to the book and the last 50 pages of the book talk about solutions. It's actually, I like to think, a hopeful book, a book about remembering what unites us as opposed to what divides us, focusing on the commitments that prior generations have made to defending democracy, and I hope, pointing out how important it is that we preserve our institutions, like democracy and public safety and the rule of law. So I am hopeful that what I've done in this book is to help people identify some of these tactics so that they can understand them and avoid being manipulated by them.

And I offer solutions, some that are at the governmental level, like regulating social media and removing dark money from politics. But many of them are at the individual level, like media literacy, and giving people some tips for how they can spot false claims when they read them online. But in the end, I say that if we are going to survive as a democracy, we have to recommit ourselves to truth. So, what I'm really hoping to do with this book is to just spark a national conversation about the importance of truth.

Ralph Nader: Okay. Now, in the section where you start with the solutions, which you title, "We Alone Can Fix It: Proposed Solutions," you have the statement "The tandem threats of authoritarianism and disinformation can seem overwhelming, but we as a nation have solved big problems before." And then you say, "We can reduce disinformation from the supply side. We can regulate online publishers, and like other industries, make them suable for defamation, for example. We can prohibit anonymous users and bots. We can require disclosure of funding sources—who's the dark money here. We can regulate algorithms. We can end spon-con, fake news stories that are sponsored by advertisers and not disclosed on television and radio. We can subsidize paywalls. We can strengthen local journalism." I'm big on that. "We can restore equal time and the Fairness Doctrine that was rejected under Reagan and the Federal Communications

Commission. We can create a code of ethics for social media platforms. We can reduce disinformation from the demand side. The consumer can say, this is nonsense, and reject it. We can promote civic engagement, use and improve online tools, mitigate the harms to democracy, reform campaign finance, protect election machinery, and mitigate the harms to public safety and national security.”

Now, some of these are self-enforcing by civic awareness and civic response. Some of them might be headed off if we taught civics seriously in our elementary and high schools and connected it to civic experience in the community under adult guidance. But most of them require Congress, like to restore the ban on assault weapons, to police violent content online, and so forth.

But you don't focus on the Congress. Can you tell our listeners what they have to do to get all these recommendations moving by becoming a force on Congress, becoming what we call a Capitol Hill Citizen, which is the title of our new newspaper on Congress, which I'd be happy to send you copies of.

Barbara McQuade: Yeah, I'd love to see it.

Many of these solutions, not all of them, but many of them do require acts of Congress, amending Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, regulating social media, adjusting the way campaign finance laws work. All of those will require acts of Congress. And so to that extent, we the people, hold that power by electing members of Congress who will commit themselves to the truth.

We're in dire circumstances here, with some members of one party refusing to commit themselves to truth. When people like Liz Cheney and Adam Kinzinger tried to focus on truth, they were purged from their party, so it's going to take some political courage to do that.

But if we can elect honorable members of Congress from both parties who are committed to truth, then we could begin to make some progress on adjusting some of these laws, which are not dramatic changes in the law, by the way, but things that would mitigate the harms of disinformation. And mostly we need to demand that we commit ourselves to truth.

Ralph Nader: Well, you make good points. The Republicans are the leaders in disinformation in Congress on climate violence, on the IRS budget and what the IRS plans to do with an expanding budget to minimize the Republicans aiding and abetting mass tax evasion by the super-rich and corporations. But I've noticed there are some areas where there isn't any disinformation because they're democracy deserts and corporate crime and corporate welfare. Do you see disinformation on that?

Barbara McQuade: Absolutely, Ralph. That's certainly the case. As a prosecutor prosecuting cases of corporate fraud, I saw the ways that corporations are really benefited in our legal system. One is the penalties for white-collar crime pale in comparison to the street crimes that are committed by ordinary people. So that's one area where there is a disparity.

But also, one of the things we have seen in recent years, is this effort by some politicians to drive a wedge between white citizens and lower-wealth minority citizens. And that is because if you can keep them apart from each other, you can keep whites on your side as a voting bloc, and they will even vote on issues that are against their own self-interest.

If you can convince them that the real danger to America is immigrants or minorities or the LGBTQ community. And if the politician is going to give corporate tax cuts and tax cuts for the wealthy that makes you less well-off financially, then you'll be willing to overlook that because they've convinced you that the real threat is something else. The disinformation out there is designed to benefit the haves over the have-nots.

Ralph Nader: What do you think law schools should be doing about this?

Barbara McQuade: I hope opening our eyes to our students to help them understand that there are disparities that exist in the system, that people will work to manipulate others to preserve their power or to gain power, but that the rule of law is a great tool for achieving equal justice under law.

Ralph Nader: Any last comments to our listeners that I haven't asked you about you'd like to end with?

Barbara McQuade: I will just say thank you, Ralph, for having me on, and we need to demand truth. We can't allow ourselves even, to engage in fiction, even if we believe it is, to advance our ends. The ends can never justify the means. Our country is built on integrity in the rule of law, and we need to demand truth if we are going to have a democracy and effective self-governance.

Ralph Nader: We've been speaking with Professor Barbara McQuade, who's often a commentator on MSNBC and other outlets. Her book is *Attack from Within: How Disinformation is Sabotaging America*. It's rising to bestseller levels. I urge you to read it, give it to your libraries, and incorporate it in your civic discussion at the local level and keep local newspapers alive.

Thank you very much, Barbara McQuade.

Barbara McQuade: Thank you, Ralph.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Barbara McQuade. We will link to *Attack from Within* at ralphnaderradiohour.com.

Up next, Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson joins us to tell us exactly what he thinks of the people in the US government who are supporting the Israeli genocide in Gaza. But first, let's hear from our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber.

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press Building in Washington, D.C., this is your *Corporate Crime Reporter Morning Minute* for Friday, March 8, 2024. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Family Dollar stores pled guilty last week to holding food, drugs, medical devices, and cosmetics under insanitary conditions related to a rodent infestation at the company's West Memphis, Arkansas distribution center. A criminal information unsealed last week in federal court in Little Rock, charged Family Dollar with one misdemeanor count of causing FDA regulated products to become adulterated while being held under insanitary conditions. The company, a subsidiary of Dollar Tree, entered into a guilty plea agreement that includes a sentence of a fine and forfeiture amount totaling \$41 million, the largest-ever monetary criminal penalty in a food safety case.

For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russell. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. My name is Steve Skrovan, along with David Feldman and Ralph.

For his take on how the Biden Administration is dealing with Israel in relation to their relentless bombardment of Gaza, we turn to retired Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson. David?

David Feldman: Lawrence Wilkerson is a retired US Army colonel. Over his 31 years of service, Colonel Wilkerson served as Secretary of State Colin Powell's Chief of Staff, from 2002 to 2005, and Special Assistant to General Powell when he was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, from 1989 to 1993. He is currently a Senior Fellow at the Eisenhower Media Network, Senior Advisor to the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, and Co-founder of the All-Volunteer Force Forum.

Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson.

Lawrence Wilkerson: Thanks for having me.

Ralph Nader: Welcome indeed, Larry. You've had experience in the military and State Department, and what's going on in the US weaponizing the Israeli military, providing political cover at the UN with automatic vetoes, Security Council and other ways, making sure our allies don't stray from the US official position, that the Israeli government can do no wrong.

Tell us what your appraisal is of our State Department since October 7th, as if history started then. And in that context, we have five federal laws that are being violated by the US government because they are not using them to condition weapons sales to Israel on the basis of human rights and not being used for offensive purposes—all the laws that you're familiar with that are not being recognized by the State Department and Secretary of State Blinken.

Give us your appraisal of the State Department here, which, of course, reflects Joe Biden's instructions and position.

Lawrence Wilkerson: There's a lot to unpack in what you just said. Let me try some of it.

All of the spokespersons, from Admiral Kirby, who absolutely disgusts me, to those who speak for the State Department, and others who speak from time to time for the White House, are all

singing off essentially the same shooting music, even when they're disgusting, particularly Kirby. So I have to believe that Blinken, Sullivan, Kirby, all of them are reflecting, not their own personal views. Although they may indeed line up with those views, I don't think they're reflecting that. They're reflecting the president. I can't explain it any other way.

I know Biden is a neophyte, vice president for eight years, but really a neophyte at exercising power from the Oval Office. I'm not sure he's ever going to learn. I know he's not just a fan, but a dear lover of Israel. So, the things that they're saying, and the things that they're doing, which at least half the world finds disgusting, as I do, if not more so, are being fed to them, I assume, by the President of the United States. Otherwise, I've got to condemn them all of being these hardcore, irascible, stupid, unwise idiots.

Take Kirby, for example, when he talked about the South African application to the court. A good diplomat like Colin Powell would have said something like this: *The State of South Africa, recognized by the UN as a legitimate state in the global structure, has a right to do what it's done. We don't necessarily agree with the application, but they certainly have a sovereign right to do what they have done*, and then go on from there.

But no, Kirby used three just horrible adjectives to describe their application right off the bat and dismissed it. Not even thinking, too, that as a good diplomat would, it's predominantly a black state or perceived as a black state. And you're a white man, Admiral Kirby, a very, very apparently unfeeling, white man.

So that's the image they're giving off. And let me tell you that it's not only losing Joe Biden about 100,000 voters every week with regard to his stance on Gaza, but it's also causing the 2-billion-plus people in the world to add to its numbers astronomically who absolutely abominate the United States of America and the American empire. That really isn't good for us. ~~It really isn't good for us.~~ We started it big time with state-sponsored torture. We started it with endless stupid wars in Afghanistan, in Iraq, in Libya, in Syria, and a host of other places that the American people don't even know about. But we're losing, and we're losing big time.

As I said, the title of my talk yesterday was "American Power at an Inflection Point." And what I said to them was the inflection point, if you will, is downward. We are not just standing at the precipice of the cliff. We're going over it. From all manner of power parameters, we are going over.

Ralph Nader: Before we get to the Gaza situation, Larry Wilkinson, let's go back to the Veterans for Peace put out a petition to the State Department to observe five federal laws which the Biden Administration is clearly violating by sending unconditional weaponry and political support to Israel's devastation.

Lawrence Wilkerson: Josh Paul has already resigned over that. And Josh Paul resigned over something that when I thought about what he said and did, and I know Josh now, I probably should have resigned over, too.

I used to attend Lincoln Bloomfield's meetings in the mornings at Richard Haass' request when I was on the policy planning staff at the State Department. And it hardly passed that something didn't happen with a country that was using US munitions that violated significantly, in some cases, with Israel, in particular, the law. I remember one morning when we sat down and we were acquainted with immediately a strike that the Israelis had made with an Apache AH-64 helicopter and hellfire missiles, killing people in a hotel room, some of whom were women and children.

That automatically violated US laws and at least call for diplomatic demarche to the Israeli Embassy, if not more significant action. And if you followed the law to the letter of the law, you would cease selling that equipment to those people. We never did. We didn't even demarche. That's how much of a hold AIPAC, and the State of Israel in particular, has over the United States Congress, over our laws, over our White House, over everything meaningful in this country with regard to leadership and national security. In many respects, AIPAC owns it.

Ralph Nader: Well, the protests own the streets, and AIPAC and their cohorts own the suites, the Congress and the White House.

How do you characterize the completely out-of-control Israeli military assault on Gaza and its 2.3 million inhabitants after declaring on October 8th by the Ministry of Defense's declaration that they're "human animals—no food, no medicine, no water, no electricity, no fuel—we're going to act accordingly." Is there a command-and-control structure over the military, the pilots, the tank commanders and the snipers, and what's going on there?

Because it seems like they're on the way to eradicating by starvation and by violating international law, that when you control an area militarily, you have to protect the civilian population. Instead of protecting them, they're eradicating men, women, and children, mostly women and children. How do you characterize it as a former military man?

Lawrence Wilkerson: And don't forget, they dropped 2000-pound bombs on buildings. They [those bombs] are just people killers. They're indiscriminate. They do not necessarily say, I'm going after you, Hamas. They go after everybody in that building.

And so, as Gideon Levy has pointed out a number of times at *Haaretz*, the United States is just as guilty as Israel. Every bomb that's dropped is from the United States, as it were. And all the munitions that they're using now are out of our war reserve stocks in their own country, the largest, I think, of war reserve stocks. It's our fault. We're aiding and abetting this happening. So everything you've said just put it at the doorstep of the United States, too.

The IDF started this in a big way. It's not that they haven't been doing it all along in piecemeal fashion, but they started it in a big way in Operation Cast Lead, if you remember that. I happened to have a student in my George Washington University seminar who had served in the IDF and who gave us a personal appreciation of what happened during that operation.

Ralph Nader: What was the date?

Lawrence Wilkerson: It was back in 2011, I think, or so. It only took about 23 days. But go back and look at it. There is some video. Go back and look at the write-ups. That operation was a short precursor for this.

The instructions to the soldiers were to kill everything that moved. Because you may recall that sometime earlier, Hezbollah had given Israel and the IDF a little bit of a black mark. They had embarrassed them. They had pretty much stood them off. And so, this operation was conducted, in part at least, to demonstrate to everyone in the region that you didn't mess with the IDF. And the way they do that is they kill everything in sight—women, dogs, cats, children, whatever.

What the IDF is doing now is augmented by and led by, if you will, because when Israel goes to war, they let the people in the field dictate what happens in the field. Unlike us, we keep a civilian chain of command. With this group, though, Netanyahu is very much in charge. And what's happening from the extreme in Likud is that their policies are being implemented because they have threatened him with breaking away from his government if he doesn't go along with it. Not that I don't think from time-to-time Netanyahu isn't one of them, too, but he has no choice, otherwise he's going to jail. His coalition will break up and he'll go to jail.

So they are carrying this out, as they have slowly and surely in the West Bank and beginning in East Jerusalem, in Gaza on a large scale. And I have no doubt, and I've already got reports from northern Gaza that this is happening even as I speak, that Ben-Gvir and his people are already ready to start settling Gaza just as soon as they can get into any part of it, probably in the north first, and begin to settle it just as they've been doing in the West Bank and just as they're now doing in East Jerusalem.

So, the purpose of this whole operation is to set as much territory up as possible for the settlers, Ben-Gvir and his boys to get in there, and to do what they do, which is build settlements that then become nice places to live, that then become Hollywood Hills with autobahns and everything else. Go look at the West Bank, for example. That's what they're doing. And now they're doing it—because of October the 7th, they were given sort of the 9/11 impetus that we had. They were given the wherewithal to do it wholesalely, and that's what they're doing.

Ralph Nader: Well, let's talk about casualty figures here. There's something that Netanyahu and Hamas have in common. Of course, we should always remember Netanyahu for years bragged about supporting and facilitating the funding of Hamas because it opposes a two-state solution supported by the Palestinian Authority.

Why is there such a vast undercount of the deaths? My best appraisal, Larry, is there's already been 200,000 fatalities. You have 5000 babies born every month into the rubble with no healthcare, for example, mothers unable to feed their infants. What's your view on this adoption by friend and foe alike in the Western media and civic groups, all using the Hamas health ministry's figures which are absurdly low?

Lawrence Wilkerson: Whatever they're going to use is going to be the lowest figures they can find. Look at the *New York Times*, for example. The *New York Times* is an Israeli agent in all

practical ways. The media is an Israeli agent. When they do give some kind of deference to the other side, as it were, it's always in words and terminology and short sentences to make you think that they are fair and balanced.-They're about as fair and balanced as my left foot. That's the way it is. The purpose here is eradication, elimination, or expulsion. Period. Eradication, elimination, or expulsion.

Ralph Nader: You're talking about the Israeli government?

Lawrence Wilkerson: I'm talking about the Israeli government vis-à-vis the Palestinians. Eradication, expulsion, elimination. Pick your verb. That means essentially the same thing.

Ralph Nader: Would you describe this as Israeli State terrorism on a grand scale?

Lawrence Wilkerson: Absolutely. I'm with Erdoğan there. Erdoğan has told his parliament time and time again that Benjamin Netanyahu is a terrorist.

Ralph Nader: So, what do you think is going to happen if the Palestinians are not even allowed to count their dead accurately? They can't bury their dead. They can't surrender. They can't flee. They're trapped. There's no food and no water. Would you call this the Palestinian Holocaust?

Lawrence Wilkerson: Yes. Again, eradication, expulsion, elimination. Pick your verb. That is the purpose of this operation. And if they stop short, then Netanyahu will just pass it on to the next leader, because they are going to stop short in terms of eliminating Hamas. That's an impossibility. His strategic objectives, all of them, are impossible. But he doesn't care because he'll be gone, and hopefully he'll be kept out of jail. I'm sure that's the way he feels about it.

It reminds me of Donald Rumsfeld when Powell's lawyer asked him, "Do you know, Mr. Secretary, you have a 13-year-old down there in Guantanamo?" "Yeah." "Well, are you prepared to keep him there for 70 years? He might live that long." "Oh, we'll cross that bridge when we get to it." Donald Rumsfeld is dead now. He doesn't have to cross that bridge. And we still have people in Guantanamo. This is just that sort of thing on a much larger scale, including massacre and genocide.

Ralph Nader: Well, just for our listeners, when Larry Wilkerson talks about Netanyahu going to jail, it's because he's been under serious corruption charges by Israeli prosecutors for years, and what's keeping him out of jail is his position as prime minister. So he has an interest in prolonging the war. As long as he prolongs the war, he can defer the culmination of the prosecution against him for corruption.

So, what do you see coming here? You see a larger war? You see the US playing the game Israel wants to play by bombing in Iraq and Syria and threatening Iran? What's the likelihood of a larger war?

Lawrence Wilkerson: Netanyahu knows from his top generals that he has to do one of two things, or both of them, in order to conduct the ground offensive he wants to conduct against Rafah.

He has to redeploy troops within Gaza, or he has to call up a sizable amount of new reservists or both. And that's going to take him, and he's said this over and over again, not explicitly, but he's got to take a breather here, he's got to do all this. Well, in that breather, he's got time to think about what you just pointed out. That if he had a wider war, if he had other enemies, if he was more hard-pressed, really genuinely hard-pressed, then the United States would be in for a penny, in for a pound.

So, what does he do? He looks over at Nasrallah, he looks over to Ron and he says about Hezbollah, "Well, I think maybe I'll widen the war to Hezbollah." They don't want it. Nasrallah doesn't want it, Iran doesn't want it. And Iran certainly doesn't want an attack on it. But what has been Bibi Netanyahu's strategic purpose vis-à-vis the United States ever since he was finance minister over 20 years? To get the United States to attack Iran. So, yes, I do see a very pregnant possibility that he might widen this war between now and Ramadan, as he says.

Ralph Nader: Let's talk about the military operation in Gaza. What's the strategy? There doesn't seem to be much resistance by Hamas. They're hunkering down in the tunnel system. Israeli casualties are minimal by their own standards.

Lawrence Wilkerson: They're pretty high.

Ralph Nader: What's going on there?

Lawrence Wilkerson: Those are being lied about, too. Israeli casualties, I'm being told by reputable sources, are pretty high, higher than they've ever been in an Israeli military operation like this before.

Ralph Nader: Well, certainly they can fudge the injury level and friendly fire level, but they can't fudge the fatalities. There are about 260 fatalities.

Lawrence Wilkerson: I'm told it's double that. I don't have any way of confirming that, but I'm told it's double that. Just as in Ukraine, I'm told it's double what Zelensky is putting out.

Ralph Nader: What do you think? This is not a war in Gaza. It's just a one-sided devastating attack. There's hardly any resistance other than a few popping up here and there from the tunnel entrances or exits. What's the nature of the fighting here, other than demolishing the whole place day by day?

Lawrence Wilkerson: I think there's more opposition than you're hinting at there. And there's also, in Afghanistan and Iraq, in World War II. Hell, in any conflict, you get as many, if not more, in Afghanistan you got more, casualties from "non-hostile action" than you do from the actual conflict itself.

Tanks run over people, armored cars run over people, buildings fall on people. You shoot your own troops. You don't mean to, but you do, because combat is tough stuff. So the casualties are never what we say they are.

In the United States, we say KIA (killed in action) and WIA (wounded in action) based on what happens in the course of the war. We don't give the non-hostile action deaths out, which exceed the war deaths, except every now and then. And then when you look at them and you say, well, what's this? Why did this happen? Well, a helicopter crashed. Well, a tank ran into a building. Well, that armored car turned over and fell into a wadi. You take more casualties from non-hostile action than you do from hostile action.

Ralph Nader: Let's turn to Trump and the election.

Lawrence Wilkerson: I'm not nearly as worried about Trump being president again, if he is elected as some people are, because I believe in our checks and balances and I believe in the ability of the American people to recognize a scoundrel finally and do something about it. Secondly, I don't believe he's going to be elected.

Now, let me say, I think the choice the American people face is abysmal, absolutely abysmal. One of the things we concluded yesterday in our seminar was that is the case. And it probably is known by at least 60% of the electorate. They don't have any choice. Either side they go to is warmongering, locked up with the oligarchs, moneyed to the hilt, and driven by everything but the American national security interest and the American domestic interest. They are driven by that. All you have to do is look at the borders, look at what we're doing with Ukraine.

Do you know what Dwight Eisenhower did with Hungary when a similar thing happened in '56, and what LBJ did with Czechoslovakia when a similar thing happened in '68? We didn't throw billions of dollars into the defense of Hungary or the defense of Czechoslovakia. We knew it would be utterly absurd to do so. Now look what we're doing with Ukraine. We have no leadership, Ralph. We have incompetence across the board.

Ralph Nader: Tell us what President Eisenhower did when the French, British and Israeli Air Force were attacking Nasser in Egypt because he had just nationalized the Suez Canal.

Lawrence Wilkerson: He picked up the phone and told his diplomats, including Dulles, to tell them all to get out and to get out ASAP (as soon as possible). The Israelis dragged their feet and tried to stay. He gave them an ultimatum, finally, that said, if you don't get out, you are going to have real problems with the United States of America. And so, they finally did get out.

But it was a completely different time then and a completely different man. Dwight Eisenhower was arguably the only really experienced, talented, competent leader we've had from the 1945 to 2024 period.

Ralph Nader: And it's been all downhill in the White House since then in terms of standing up for America's national interest, world peace, and holding the regime over there accountable.

Now, you speak to a lot of gatherings in Washington and around the country. What else would you like to tell our listeners that we haven't asked you about?

Lawrence Wilkerson: That they need to wake up. We all need to wake up. And we need to start taking action, such as we can locally, whatever's within our purview and power to do, because we're losing this country. We're losing it to the moneyed oligarchy. We're losing it to the unprecedented amount of money because of Citizens United that's pouring into the political coffers of people who have no interest in what you want. Gun control, whatever it might be that you want, you muster your majorities, it doesn't matter, because these people are basing their decisions on money. Money, not you.

They're not the people's representatives. They're the representatives of the deep state, which is the oligarchy, not the bureaucracy within the federal government. It's the oligarchy. It's the Elon Musks. It's the [Peter] Thiels. It's all these people with these unprecedented amounts of money who can influence anything anytime they want to, with a few telephone calls. That's what's running your country.

And the predatory capitalism that they're advancing is running the world into the ground, which is why a lot of the world is deciding that if I got a choice between the Chinese and the offer they're making, and the Americans and the offers they've been making for years now, I'm going to pick the Chinese. That's a dangerous way to do business in the world, and we need to wake up and do something about it.

Ralph Nader: The first step of waking up, Larry, the first step of waking up, what do you think of people presenting well-informed petitions to members of Congress to come back home for town meetings arranged by the people with a lot of left-right civic support, I might add, so they can be challenged and instructed in town meetings and answer questions without intermediary people and assistance getting in the way? What do you think of a summons of the people to members, senators, representatives to come back to town meetings?

Lawrence Wilkerson: I think that's a great idea. And I'll just cite one example. We had a meeting in Texas with the Texas government about climate change and a revenue-neutral carbon tax. And we actually got floored essentially by the speaker of the Texas House, who listened and then started to take action.

Well, part of that was taking action with their two senators in Washington and some of the representatives. Long story short, we managed to get into their offices, and we managed to talk to them and they said, *Well, we're going back and we're going to see. We're going to Houston, we're going to McAllen, we're going to Dallas Fort Worth. We're going to see what the people think.* They came back and said, *My God, you're right. We went back to those town hall meetings, and these people are concerned about hurricanes coming up the ship channel and all this other stuff.*

That's probably the most important thing you can do. Either come to Washington in the constituent visit and put your desires on the table in front of your member, or get them all back, even better,

as Ralph said, in their places and in their towns and villages and meet and hammer them and hammer them and hammer them again. Let them know what you want and let them know you're going to un-elect them if they don't do it.

Ralph Nader: Well, over a million acres of Texas land has already been burned, the biggest fire in Texas history linked to global warming and the climate catastrophe. So it's coming home in very, very visceral ways to people that will overcome whatever preordained ideological views they may have. It's the reality that's probably beginning to change opinions even in southern red states like Texas, wouldn't you say?

Lawrence Wilkerson: Yes. When we showed them the analysis that RAND had made of a Category 4, not even a Cat 5, but a Cat 4 hurricane coming up a certain way through the ship channel and the billions of dollars of damage and the thousands of lives it would probably cost, we got their attention.

Ralph Nader: Well, this is a very encouraging note to close on. We've been talking with retired Colonel Larry Wilkerson, who has taught at a number of colleges and speaks from his experience and has revisited some of the decisions he made with Colin Powell, and is a leading spokesperson now for peace and justice domestically and around the world, and calls them as he sees them. Thank you very much, Larry.

Lawrence Wilkerson: Thank you, Ralph.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking to Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson. We will link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com.

I want to thank our guests again today, Barbara McQuade and Lawrence Wilkerson. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material you all know. We call it "The Wrap Up", featuring Francesco DeSantis with "In Case You Haven't Heard", and a wider ranging discussion with Colonel Wilkerson. A transcript of this program will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* Substack site soon after the episode is posted.

David Feldman: Subscribe to us on our *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* YouTube channel. And for Ralph's weekly column, it's free, go to nader.org. For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to corporatecrimereporter.com.

Steve Skrovan: The American Museum of Tort Law has gone virtual. Go tortmuseum.org to explore the exhibits, take a virtual tour and learn about iconic tort cases from history.

David Feldman: We have a new issue of the *Capitol Hill Citizen*. It's out now. To order your copy of the *Capitol Hill Citizen*, "Democracy Dies in Broad Daylight," go to capitolhillcitizen.com.

Steve Skrovan: And remember to continue the conversation. After each show, go to the comments section at ralphnaderradiohour.com and post a comment or question on this week's episode.

David Feldman: The producers of the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marran. Our executive producer is Alan Minsky.

Steve Skrovan: Our theme music, "Stand Up, Rise Up", was written and performed by Kemp Harris. Our proofreader is Elisabeth Solomon. Our associate producer is Hannah Feldman. Our social media manager is Steven Wendt.

David Feldman: Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you. The demand for the brand-new issue of *Capitol Hill Citizen* is running out of supply. We're going to have to reprint. Go for capitolhillcitizen.com and become a Capitol Hill citizen yourself when you get these 40 pages of print-only.