

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EPISODE 485 TRANSCRIPT

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

Hannah Feldman: Hello, Steve.

Steve Skrovan: Nice to have you with us. David is off this week. And of course, we have the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hi. The latest issue of the *Capitol Hill Citizen* is about to roll off the presses. Go to capitolhillcitizen.com to find out more details.

Steve Skrovan: Today we're going to take another look at the military-congressional-media-industrial complex. In the post 9/11 United States, our dark American tradition of war profiteering got a boost. The Iraq War, our War in Afghanistan, and the War on Terror fed and were fed by war contractors with blank checks from the Pentagon and an American public that was starved of honest information.

Our guest today is journalist and political analyst Norman Solomon. We'll speak to him about his new book, *War Made Easy, Made Love, Got War*, and his newest book, *War Made Invisible: How America Hides the Human Toll of Its Military Machine*, and the causes and consequences of America's invisible wars.

As always, somewhere along the line we'll check in with *Corporate Crime Reporter*, Russell Mokhiber. But first, how does the United States get away with murder with the compliance of Congress, the complicity of the American press, and the complacency of the public. Hannah?

Hannah Feldman: Norman Solomon is co-founder of RootsAction.org and executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. He is the author of *War Made Easy, Made Love, Got War*, and his newest book, *War Made Invisible: How America Hides the Human Toll of Its Military Machine*.

Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Norman Solomon.

Norman Solomon: Hey, thanks a lot.

Ralph Nader: Welcome indeed, Norman. Let's get underway here because listeners should know this is not an ordinary book on war and peace. It's a very personal book. And you'll see what I mean when I start engaging with Norman.

The book basically is about what happened after 9/11 and the war in Afghanistan, which according to the jacket copy, "set into motion a hugely consequential shift in American foreign policy—a perpetual state of war that is almost entirely invisible to the American public. *War Made Invisible*, by the journalist and political analyst Norman Solomon, exposes how this happened, and what its consequences are, from military and civilian casualties to drained

resources at home." And Norman Solomon is not saying there weren't wars before 9/11. He lists many empire wars of the U.S. illegal under the Constitution because they were never declared in a whole variety of countries.

But Norman, let's start with this. Before Bush and Cheney engaged in their criminal invasion of Iraq, for which they should have been impeached and for which they still should be prosecuted under the criminal laws, which does not exempt former presidents or vice presidents, as we discussed in a former show. Before the invasion in Iraq, sometime between March 19th and March 20th, 2003, you went to Iraq a number of times from your home in San Francisco. Could you describe that and what you found?

Norman Solomon: It was really an initiative to try to head off the impending invasion, which was really signaled as of the summer of 2002. And the impetus for me and for my colleagues at the Institute for Public Accuracy is that the dictator Saddam Hussein had invited members of Congress to come and look for purported weapons of mass destruction. And that was immediately pooh-pooed and mocked by the U.S. media and members of Congress and the George W. Bush administration. And I thought, well, that's an opening. And so we began to beat the bushes, not the Bush family, but metaphorically beat the bushes on Capitol Hill. And luckily at our institute, we had worked with the wonderful former Senator James Abourezk, an extraordinary member of the House and then the Senate back during the 1970s. And Jim Abourezk was somebody who really cared about the people of the Middle East. And he had a former colleague that he knew from Congress, Nick Rahall, a House representative from West Virginia, and they agreed to go with me and James Jennings, from the Conscience International Group, to Baghdad.

So, long story short, in September 2002, the four of us formed a mini-delegation and we went to Baghdad. We met with Tariq Aziz, the second in command of the Iraqi government, and the weapons inspectors had been withdrawn by the United Nations four years earlier because the U.S. was about to bomb; it had made clear it was going to bomb under the Clinton administration. So for the safety of those inspectors, they left. Whether it is causality or simultaneity, within a day after our meeting with Tariq Aziz, the Iraqi government suddenly agreed to allow those inspectors back in. And that was the last thing the Bush administration wanted because they were just trying to railroad the country into attacking Iraq illegally and immorally. That was September 2002.

I made two other trips after the U.S. Congress voted for war in October of 2002. A lot of doors that had seemed to be opened for a subsequent trip were slammed in our face. Part of my thinking was, if Congress people are in Baghdad, it's tougher for the Pentagon to bomb that capital city. But after October, and this was really the collusion of Dick Gephardt with Republicans, Gephardt being the leading member of the House among Democrats. As I recall, we had this terrible vote in October, so receptivity dried up. We had other members of Congress who wanted to go but wouldn't.

So we went out to Hollywood and elsewhere, and Sean Penn agreed to go with me in December. That got a lot of media attention. There was fury not only among the Fox News crowd, but others. He was called "Baghdad Sean." But it was again an opening to try to say there are alternatives to the U.S. invading. And then I went another time with former UN official Denis

Halliday in January of 2003. Each of these three visits, for me, was the growth of a feeling of doom, as Tariq Aziz said, “doomed if we do, doomed if we don't; let the weapons inspectors in or not.”

So at a personal level, as well as the kind of media outreach we were doing in the process, it was like, as I say in the book, not just visiting two different countries, but almost intergalactic travel—two different universes in one country. There was a debate in the United States in the corporate media on when and how should the U.S. attack Iraq. In Iraq, people were worrying about how to survive an invasion.

Ralph Nader: Well, let's talk about the corporate media in which you've concentrated for many years. We're talking with Norman Solomon brand new book called *War Made Invisible: How America Hides the Human Toll of Its Military Machine*. Let's talk about the *New York Times*. It's quite clear Fox and a lot of the hoopla on TV and radio just wanted war, war, war. But as we know, after Bush-Cheney invaded Iraq, Bush sent his chief trusted inspector to see whether Saddam had any weapons of mass destruction. So he went over there about a month after the invasion and with his team went all over Iraq. This is an expert in detection. And he comes back to the White House and he says to Bush, well, boss, we looked and we looked, there are no weapons of mass destruction. You think this would have paused George W. Bush? No. He moved to destroy a country and millions of its people, refugees, over a million dead, millions injured, sickened, destroyed electricity facilities, drinking water facilities, street security. It was something that Putin could only aspire to, given what he's already done to Ukraine.

This was a real sociocide—thousands and thousands of bombs and missiles dropped on Iraq. And here's the *New York Times*, being fed total lies about Saddam by Judith Miller, one of their reporters

—about Saddam importing uranium from Niger, a country in western Africa and other falsehoods that made page one in the *New York Times*. What is clearly probably its darkest journalistic chapter, but then there was Tom Friedman, the prince of pomposity, as one *New York Times* reporter once called him. He was regaled for his columns. He called the Iraq War, as you say on page 81, "One of the noblest things this country has ever attempted abroad." And later on, he tried to dodge the fact that he was a big booster. Can you describe the *New York Times* performance here as well as the other media? Because there doesn't seem to be anything learned, so they could just as well do it today against another country.

Norman Solomon: A tacit motto implicitly of huge media outlets like the *Times* is: Being pro-war means never having to say you're sorry. If a journalist, or for that matter a media outlet, is in favor of the U.S. engaging in war, that is couched as "objective." If a journalist (such as Phil Donahue on MSNBC) in the lead-up to the war raises questions even, serious questions critical of an impending invasion or an ongoing U.S. war, that's considered "biased." And the *New York Times* functioned with that basic psychological and ethical - to use a stretch word - framework.

And so, Ralph, as you're saying, Judith Miller had front page stories, which were complete lies. They were recycling of stuff from the Bush-Cheney administration hell bent on an invasion and justifying an invasion. And her colleague in journalistic malfeasance, Michael Gordon, shared

the byline and he's eminent now today reporting on Ukraine and U.S. military affairs for the *Wall Street Journal*, where he landed.

Part of the dynamic, which the *Times* and the big networks were part of, like *Meet the Press*, was that lies would be fed from Dick Cheney's office about weapons of mass destruction, yellowcake uranium, aluminum tubes, all supposedly showing that there was a nuclear weapons of mass destruction program in Iraq. And that pseudo info would be fed to the networks and the *New York Times* in particular. And then someone like Cheney would go on a show like *Meet the Press* and say it's not just me saying it, it's the *New York Times* reporting it, even though his office was the source of the *New York Times* reporting overall.

Part of what is so disturbing and infuriating about a place like the *New York Times* is that there is no accountability. As I document in the book, way after the invasion, as at the *Washington Post*, the *Times* published a semi mea culpa, we could have done better, a very mild self-criticism. And it was clear at that point that not only the right-wing media but the corporate media, the so-called liberal media, had really enabled the invasion to take place.

It's sort of like "Get Me Rewrite!" in terms of what happened historically. So they at the *New York Times* and elsewhere knew that they looked bad in retrospect, so they tried to pretty it up. And this was the *Times*; it was also the *New Yorker* magazine—a long list of outlets where that dynamic was in play.

Ralph Nader: Well, Norman, why don't we talk about what happened to Phil Donahue and MSNBC, owned by NBC, owned by General Electric, a major weapons producer, and name names if you could. He had just started a popular program; it had the highest ratings on MSNBC. And he decided to have people on all sides of the pending Iraq evasion on his show. And then he began to receive orders from the boss, Mr. Wright at NBC. Why don't you lay that out for us because most people don't know what happened in that episode which crystallizes a major point in your book *War Made Invisible*. One of them is censorship. Go ahead.

Norman Solomon: Yes, it's tacit censorship. Nobody comes to the door and throws you in prison in the United States for what you say. But the effect is to either enforce de facto self-censorship or people are out the door.

And Phil Donahue, as you say, had the top-rated primetime show on then new network, MSNBC. And for a while he was being touted by the network brass as a great innovation. Of course, Phil was famous for his hugely popular show in previous decades. But Phil committed a cardinal sin. He actually wanted to do journalism where there would be a variety of voices heard. Yes, he had pro-war people on, but he also had people like Phyllis Bennis at the Institute for Policy Studies. And from IPS, for instance, Phyllis would raise questions about where is the evidence of weapons of mass destruction? Well, that, as the war came closer, became intolerable for management. And some listeners might think is this speculation? The answer is no, because there was a leaked memo from the top of NBC where internally there was discussion about how, as the war was approaching, "the flag waivers," as the memo said at CNN and Fox, would make MSNBC look bad if Phil Donahue was still on the air. And so the *Donahue Show* was axed. And I think it was not only an assault on journalism and a way to narrow discourse before the

invasion, but also an object lesson for other programmers, producers, hosts, journalists across the media spectrum.

One other example, Ralph, is that at the same network, MSNBC, and I think this book, *War Made Invisible*, goes into details, for the first time in a book, about what happened to Ashleigh Banfield who was a rising star at MSNBC and then NBC. She was being touted as a potential replacement, the next person, next generation, after Katie Couric to have the top broadcasting anchor job of the entire NBC network. And she went to many countries after covering live the attack on the twin towers in Manhattan, 9/11. And then after that, she committed one sin, which was shortly after Saddam Hussein's statue fell in Baghdad. She spoke at a university in Kansas, and she said that there's a difference between journalism and coverage, that we got coverage of the Iraq invasion. Although we saw what was happening when the rockets and the missiles were launched, we didn't see what happened to people when they landed. And for her, simply in one speech in one hour to make that point was too much. Basically, her network career was over; she was gone; she was put in essentially a tape closet. Her contract was not allowed, although she begged for it to happen, it was not allowed to expire or be canceled. So, she was basically warehoused for many, many months and then she was done. And again, that's an object lesson, that in corporate media, when the warfare state is on the march, the journalists who should be doing journalism basically salute.

Ralph Nader: Well, it was even more coarse than that because Phil Donahue told me and others that he got orders from upstairs at NBC that he had to have three pro-war witnesses for every antiwar witness before they fired him, giving him four days' notice to clear out his twelve staff and his desk.

Norman Solomon: Yeah, it was outrageous because a balanced discourse was not what management wanted. And even then, even when, as you say, there were these orders to have an imbalance with more pro-war guests, that wasn't enough. Just to have any articulate voice, well informed and emphatic, to raise questions about the impending war, was just too much for NBC management. And my friend and yours, Jeff Cohen, who was a senior producer for *Phil Donahue Show* who had founded FAIR, (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting), used to joke that if the NBC management felt they needed to outweigh and balance out the power, the logic, the persuasiveness of, say, Noam Chomsky on that stage, they would have had to have a dozen or more pro-war right wingers. That's the direction it was all going in. And after unsuccessfully trying to micromanage the guest list, the managers of NBC just threw *Phil Donahue Show* under the bus and through journalism under the bus.

Ralph Nader: Let's get some names here. How did Joe Biden, as a senator, vote to invade Iraq?

Norman Solomon: He not only voted for invading Iraq and gave a strong speech on the Senate floor in favor, but he chaired the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and they had sham hearings. I remember at the time at the Institute for Public Accuracy, we were trying very hard with news releases to offer alternative sources pointing out how skewed and one-sided those hearings were. These were seminal hearings, two days in the summer of 2002, with Biden holding the gavel, and there was a fella who was the chief of staff who helped engineer the guest

list. And that railroad that was basically a propaganda vehicle to shore up political support for the impending invasion, his name was Anthony Blinken. And so what we've been dealing--

Ralph Nader: Who is now the Secretary of State.

Norman Solomon: Yes, a duo that back in 2002, as today, with all the liberal trappings of rhetoric serving the warfare state, the military industrial complex, to use a term coined by President Dwight Eisenhower in his farewell address, we could now call it the "military-industrial-media-intelligence complex," these were two people who were serving and what they were wanting to serve.

And today I have to say, Ralph, that it's really hard, when I listen to outlets like NPR's *All Things Considered* in "Morning Edition," just taking at face value without any comment, the denunciations by Anthony Blinken and President Biden now, that one country, they say in 2023, must never invade another country, that international law and international order is paramount. And of course, they're talking about Russia. And I certainly agree. Russia, as I point out in the book, has committed enormous war crimes, and so should be held to a standard that you don't get to, as one country, go and invade another and violate international law and human decency in the process.

But the doublethink, as Orwell described it has gotten so flagrant because we have Biden and Blinken, who back a couple of decades ago, were doing exactly what they denounce Vladimir Putin for doing now. This goes to a very deep question about what kind of intellectual or moral honesty exists on Capitol Hill and in the major media of this country. Doublethink seems very much in play.

One principle, as Orwell described it, is that one fact could be put on the shelf and then, when convenient, taken off the shelf brandished and used, and then when inconvenient, put back on the shelf. That describes with U.S. foreign policy the way that our mass media functions.

Ralph Nader: Well, let's talk briefly Hillary Clinton, and then I want you to talk about her role in Libya and that of the former dean of Yale Law School, Harold Koh. How did she vote? She was on the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Norman Solomon: She gave a very strident speech in favor of the invasion of Iraq, voted for it in the fall of 2002, and helped that to happen and make it a bipartisan supported war. Parenthetically, Barack Obama played that function later to make the so-called War on Terror perennial war bipartisan when he carried it forward as president. In terms of Hillary Clinton, I think it's notable that many years later, when she lost the presidency in 2016, she and her top leaders would not acknowledge in any way that the six-figure fee she got from speaking to Wall Street firms, and that her closeness to the big power elites and economic forces among corporate American entities, were factors in why she lost.

She was seen accurately as an economic elitist. She was also very pro-war. I document a study that purports if Hillary Clinton had not been perceived accurately as a war hawk, she probably would have won the election because of swing states where the working class was sick and tired

of low- and middle-income people going off to war and suffering psychologically and physically. As a result, they were tired of wars. And Hillary Clinton was somebody who was unwilling to acknowledge that her militarism and her corporatism had cost her popular support, but she blamed Russia.

And it's well documented in a book by a couple of political reporters called *Shattered*, that 24 hours after she lost the election, her top officials, Podesta, and others of the campaign met, and they decided, we're going to blame Russia. And that set the tone and planted the seeds for many years now of a new Cold War, a very dangerous one that's underway.

Ralph Nader: She led the fight to attack Libya and Gaddafi after Gaddafi dismantled his weapons. She was the one who pushed Obama against the opinion of the Secretary of Defense at that time, Secretary Gates, who said, what are you doing going after Libya? Do you know what's going to happen when Gaddafi is toppled? Do you have a plan B as to destruction, chaos, and the spill over into neighboring African countries? But that didn't matter to generalissimo Hillary. Describe that, please, the war in Libya.

Norman Solomon: I'm glad you brought that up because it's so important and so emblematic. Of course, this was under the Obama administration and Hillary Clinton, Secretary of State. She, as you say, around 2011, was gung-ho for the U.S. to lead the bombing of Libya. The aftermath we know hatched ISIS and other terrorist groups. It created a terrible vacuum, and the upheaval the Middle East continues to suffer; it had terrible effects. Although, Muammar Gaddafi was a dictator, but the reality is that the U.S. going in and illegally bombing and so forth, leading the bombing, simply made matters in Libya and elsewhere in the region much, much worse.

It is stunning and goes to this question of, frankly, intellectual prostitution, where you have Harold Koh, highly esteemed Ivy League professor whose reputation was of somebody critical of executive overreach. He pointed out that in Article 1 Section 8, Congress gets to decide about going to war. And yet when he was brought into the Obama administration, he made a 180 and flipped over. All of a sudden, it was fine; it was cool for the president to unilaterally bring the country into war.

And then a problem that he addressed when he testified to a Congressional committee that there is what's called the War Powers Resolution that's supposed to be in effect since shortly after the Vietnam War. And that requires congressional assent when the United States engages in war, within a few months, that is required.

So Koh goes to the Congressional committee and says, the United States isn't at war in Libya. And he would be questioned, well, the United States is continuing to drop a lot of bombs on Libya. The U.S. has already spent \$1 billion to do that, and you're telling us the United States isn't at war in Libya, how could that be? And his reply was, no Americans have died, so it's not a war.

And that really goes to the theme of war made invisible that these wars are treated as though they aren't wars. That they don't exist. That "there's nothing to see here, folks!" because we say so. We have our own criteria. And part of that is the jingoism and the nationalism and the racism

that says if the people at the other end of U.S. firepower don't look like us, are not in a country allied with us, then we don't think there's really a reason to consider it a major problem. It's only a problem when Americans are dying.

Ralph Nader: To be precise, Norman, on page 39 of your book is a focus on Harold Koh, former dean of the Yale Law School, no less, and his switcheroo as legal advisor to the State Department under Hillary Clinton. They asked him about there being no declaration of war by Congress, no authorization of money by Congress, no appropriation of money for sending the bombs and planes over there by Congress. It was the furthest overreach of presidential role in illegal wars in American history as far as Congress is concerned. And this was Obama, a constitutional law teacher, no less.

Harold Koh basically flipped and said that this could be a military effort emanating just from the White House and the White House say-so using some black budget money from the Pentagon. He said, "It was a mission involving no U.S. ground presence or, to this point, U.S. casualties." Nor is there "a threat of significant U.S. casualties." Therefore, it didn't have to be declared, it didn't have to be subject to congressional appropriation of funds.

Connect this with what you said in the book about the coming of autonomous weapons and push-button lethality from a computer room in Nevada or in Virginia where they can destroy people anywhere in the world in a matter of seconds. So, your thesis in *War Made Invisible*, is the nth level of making war invisible to the American people, is it not?

Norman Solomon: The invisibility really is becoming more and more extreme. The physical distance, the psychological distance, the blurring out and the negating of the humanity of people who are at the other end of U.S. firepower. And the media might simply describe technological "advances" in the process. But it also depends on what purposes the technology is put to. And one could imagine that the digital technology that we know exists now could be put to use in a very different way. We could in real time know about people's suffering, their malnutrition, what is happening; even if there is a war, it could be looked at via digital capacities for how can we rush in relief to people who are suffering in various places. But that's the exact opposite of what technology is being used for. It's being used with just a few seconds delay for somebody, as you say, Ralph, in Nevada to look at people who are in Afghanistan or Iraq or a country in Africa, Somalia now and say, okay, well, we know they'll be in a slightly different position in five seconds when the missile hits. But I'm going to push the button, the console button here. This is long distance war and it's part of a strategy. From the vantage point of the corporate media and the militarists that they're so entwined with, Iraq and Afghanistan was a mixed result at best. They were able to generate humongous profits for the military contractors and they were able to accomplish certain goals, but they also failed to "win" from some vantage points. So that is a lesson learned. And politically, if the U.S. doesn't again "win" a war after the years go by, as was the case of the Vietnam War, people tire of it in the United States. It doesn't press all the jingoistic buttons so sufficiently, and the political terrain shifts, and that's where we are now to a large extent.

When President Biden spoke in September of 2021 at the United Nations, the last U.S. troops had just been withdrawn from Afghanistan, and Biden proclaimed point blank that the United

States was no longer at war. Well, that was a complete lie. The Costs of War Project at Brown University has documented that the U.S. is engaged in some kind of military activity in the so-called War on Terror in 80 countries, and sometimes it is missile strikes—Somalia, Syria—that's even been reported in corporate media, although on back pages since Biden made that speech. But that's the kind of deception involved.

As a matter of fact, I quote Reuters, the big news service, after Biden's speech, saying that his new budget was a "peacetime budget, yet the U.S. is sending missiles in, there's special operations; the U.S. taxpayers are financing these military activities, including killing people, while we're told this is a peacetime budget.

That's where we are to a large extent, because the Biden administration and the president himself has proclaimed that the future of war, although he says "we will send in ground troops as necessary," and the future is "over the horizon," which is a marketing way of saying that we're going to bomb people and rely on air power to work our will militarily.

Ralph Nader: Let's talk about something almost never talked about, Norman. How long is it going to be before these weapons are turned against us? We drone countries overseas killing civilians, not just suspects; the President can ignite an armed attack anywhere in the world, kill anybody, prosecutor, judge, jury, executioner, often in secret under both Republican, Democrat administrations. But you have more and more of these weapons being produced by other countries, for example, Turkey and Iran are producing and selling drones to the Russians. At what point is Fortress America going to start being vulnerable for a counterattack? Because the assumption is that we have all the defenses in the world and we're totally invulnerable. And of course, the Congress doesn't have a role anymore. They just rubber stamp military budgets and rubber stamp presidential wars. Is anybody thinking about that in the Pentagon or in the peace movement, which I want you to talk about in a moment. There's never any indication that this country can be very, very vulnerable. We freak out at levels of casualties that occur every day in places like Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya. What do you say about that?

Norman Solomon: There's very little discussion of this key dynamic. The truth is that, as the saying goes, what goes around comes around. We've seen that the rhetoric, and a lot of the thinking underneath it about "American exceptionalism" is really unhinged. You would think that somehow there is a Fortress America or we're almost on another planet. Climate emergency shows that that is not only ridiculous, but ecocidal. This is not the thinking that humanity deserves. And when we look at the threat of nuclear conflagration, the late and much mourned Daniel Ellsberg pointed out in his book *The Doomsday Machine* that the best science tells us 99% of humanity would be destroyed because of nuclear winter after a nuclear war. So the idea that the United States can sell all these weapons, the U.S. being the largest single exporter of military arms, and the idea that doing so is just good for the GDP and no problem, is foolish.

I got to know a scientist, John Gofman, who had been at Lawrence Livermore Laboratory, and turned against nuclear power. He used to mock this claim that nuclear power had never hurt anybody. And this was before even what happened at Three Mile Island and then Chernobyl. He said it's like somebody jumping off the top of a skyscraper and before hitting the ground saying that there's no problem. That's the mentality that says we can arm so much of the world that it

won't come back to haunt us. And as you're pointing out, Ralph, you can go to certain areas of the globe where the U.S. armed certain factions and governments, and then later on as the U.S. intervenes, it's facing those very weapons coming at us. A clear example is the 1980s, the Mujahideen armed to the teeth in Afghanistan, first by the Carter administration then by Reagan in the '80s. And then that became Taliban weapons. That's just the way it all morphed.

Ralph Nader: Well, in your book, you point out this fraternization that goes on between the Democrats and Republicans in Congress and elsewhere. Like the Democrats/Republicans are about to increase the military budget even more than the generals and Biden have asked for, with Jack Reed, Senator from Rhode Island, leading the parade. How do you explain this? Michelle Obama is a very widely admired woman in America. And in December 2019, she explained her friendship with George W. Bush on national television with the following words, "Our values are the same. We disagree on policy, but we don't disagree on humanity. We don't disagree about love and compassion."

This is so stunning from a Princeton graduate and a Harvard Law School graduate and the First Lady that it's almost beyond explanation. Here's a president who killed over a million people in Iraq alone and blew the whole country apart - quite apart from what George W. Bush and Dick Cheney did in Afghanistan and a lot of other countries in the world. How can she make a statement like this?

Norman Solomon: It's part of an elitist circle and mentality where all is forgiven, but it's not hers to forgive. We have in this instance, Michelle Obama saying that bygones can be bygones. And among other things, that's messaging for the next war criminals. And by the way, I see in news media of the United States frequent references to Vladimir Putin as being a war criminal. I'm still looking for one major U.S. media outlet to suggest that George W. Bush is a war criminal, so there we go in terms of invasion and international law.

One of the most disturbing aspects of Michelle Obama's public adulation of George W. Bush is that it's not only about the past, it's pre-figurative. It is conveying to people that no matter what war crimes are led by what U.S. leaders, all will be forgiven later on. And it's also a way to say that the lives of people who were killed by those lies and that militarism, really don't matter very much. And not only the estimated one million Iraqis who died from the U.S. invasion ordered by Bush, but even the several thousand Americans who directly died there. So here you have a former First Lady saying, in effect, not a big deal. Former President Bush, when he was in office, lied us into war that took all this human toll, but not a big problem.

Ralph Nader: We're talking with Norman Solomon, author of the brand-new book just published, *War Made Invisible: How America Hides the Human Toll of Its Military Machine*, published by New Press. I hope this book is not made invisible. I want you just to briefly go through some of your chapter titles to indicate to our listeners just how broad ranging this book is. I was interested in two quotes you have at the beginning of the book by Aldous Huxley, one in 1936, which goes as follows, "The propagandist's purpose is to make one set of people forget that certain other sets of people are human." Another one in 1946 is by the British science writer Aldous Huxley, author *Brave New World* who said, "The greatest triumphs of propaganda have

been accomplished, not by doing something, but by refraining from doing. Great is truth, but still greater, from a practical point of view, is silence about truth."

Before we get into what should be done about all this and get your take on some of the active antiwar movements in the country, often by the Quakers, Unitarians, and other peace veterans what did you mean when you titled one of your chapters "The Color of War?"

Norman Solomon: It's really a topic that almost in a stunning way, and talk about silences, silences being so powerful, it dawned on me partway working through this book, that almost 100% of the people who have been killed in this so-called war on terror in the last two decades, virtually all of them have been people of color. And when we consider that in the last few years especially, and this is a good thing, more and more discourse about what's called systemic racism in this country, and in the aftermath of the police murder in Minneapolis, of George Floyd, there has been more discussion and we need more about institutional racism in the United States—systemic racism.

All of that discussion stops at the water's edge and the reality that the U.S. wars of this century have been killing basically only people of color that's too hot to handle. We have so much justified outrage against systemic racism in U.S. domestic policy. And when it comes to talking about how it goes beyond the borders of the United States and is killing people in other countries, it's a virtual taboo to even raise the topic.

Ralph Nader: Another chapter is called "Unintended Deaths," where you quote an official source, the Congressional Research Service attached to the Library Congress, which reported, "U.S. and British forces used almost 13,000 cluster munitions, containing an estimated 1.8 million to 2 million submunitions that tears flesh, by the way, during the first three weeks of combat in Iraq in 2003. But when Russia used cluster munitions during its 2022 invasion of Iraq, it was a wholly different story," you write. Suddenly American media put these horrible weapons in a glaring spotlight. Tell us what you mean by unintended deaths.

Norman Solomon: Cluster munitions are such heinous weapons, so terrible that more than 100 countries have banned them, but not the U.S., Russia or Ukraine. One of the tropes, and it's a propaganda line from the Pentagon and the White House, and this goes back through many, many decades to the present day, we're always told, oh yes, there are civilian casualties in U.S. warfare, but it's unintended, so therefore we have no culpability. We don't want it to happen. The reality is that it is completely predictable. When you have an imperial war, when you're bombing from the air, when you don't have any connection to the culture or people of the country, this is going to happen. And I compare it to, let's say, in your own community, you live somewhere. And in your downtown, the police are looking for criminals, so they routinely spray the front of storefronts with machine gunfire. While people are shopping, they're spraying apartment buildings. People are living there, the police could always say, hey, we're chasing criminals we didn't intend. These were unintentional deaths. That would not satisfy us at all. Yet when people in other countries have been, and in some cases still are, being subjected to U.S. warfare, it really doesn't matter to a grieving brother, or sister or parent or child that they've lost a loved one because somebody in the Pentagon said it was not intentional.

Ralph Nader: Then you get down to why the American people should be concerned about this directly on your chapter “Costs of War.”

Norman Solomon: Financially, what we are experiencing is the militarization, which is part of the corporatization of our entire society, that some people are expendable. And the warfare state is really central to that. We have a bit more than half of the discretionary funds of the U.S. government going to the military. Martin Luther King in 1967 described this out-of-control military spending as a "demonic suction tube." And it's even worse than ever now.

Going around communities in the United States, you see the lack of adequate health care, education, housing, neonatal care, elderly care and more. And that is the theft going on continuously in this case. And I've come to really feel in writing this book that U.S. media and politics function with a tacit belief that on the planet there are two tiers of grief—theirs and ours. The tiers of grief that don't matter because they're at the other end of U.S. military firepower or very different cultures or countries not aligned with the United States. And then there's the grief of Americans. Very prominently after 9/11 3000 deaths, several thousand soldiers who die, their loved ones in U.S. wars so far in this century. But the hundreds of thousands really into the millions, according to Costs of War Project at Brown University, into the millions, several millions who directly or indirectly have died on this planet because of U.S. wars. They're demoted tacitly to the status of non-humans. Their grief doesn't really matter. And that's a spiritual as well as moral or ethical illness in the United States that is now prevailing.

Ralph Nader: Well, you have your last chapter, it's called “Now It Can Be Told.” What can be told?

Norman Solomon: Years too late usually about the wars. We have the semi-apologies. We have, for instance, after the 20 years, astonishing to have a war go for 20 years virtually in Afghanistan with 90% U.S. support when the U.S. was getting ready to attack Afghanistan. Only 5%, according to Gallup, of the U.S. population was opposed to the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan.

When you have only one out of 20 in a country opposed to a war of aggression, that tells you something about the power of the propaganda state that we live in. And now we are in a situation where Afghanistan is an example of the U.S. doing whatever it wants to do and it's just considered to be fine and we will forget all about it.

Ralph Nader: Well, let's go in terms of what I'm sure some of our listeners are interested in, what kind of movement is there against these criminal wars of aggression, the devouring of the taxpayer base with military budgets. When you mentioned the military budget is over half of the U.S. government's discretionary budget, what you meant was its operating budget. All the departments of health, education, interior, agriculture, FDA, you name it, all the rest of the departments and agencies, including the health and safety regulatory agencies, have a total budget less than the Pentagon, which is an unaudited budget. And the Pentagon is violating a 1992 federal law requiring it to send every year to Congress an auditable budget. It's the only department that violates it, and every Secretary of State admits it and says he/she's going to correct it, but she/he never gets around to it before leaving the job.

What's going on around the country in terms of district-by-district Congressional mobilization? I think the Quakers have chapters all over the country in their National Committee on Legislation, the Friends Committee on Legislation, and they have wonderful materials. They don't get much mass media, press. Veterans for Peace are marching and demonstrating, but they're a small group, which I'm a member of, by the way. And tell us what's going on and what you hope this book will spark, Norman Solomon.

Norman Solomon: I would say that there's a tremendous amount of antiwar sentiment in this country, but relatively small amounts of galvanized activism, and I think that really needs to change. There are some indications it's beginning to. People are tiring of huge quantities and expensive weaponry into the billions and billions sent to Ukraine without support for diplomacy. I think polling shows, but it's not galvanized into political muscle, that most people do want diplomacy to end the war in Ukraine instead of simply sending more weapons.

But the word diplomacy along Pennsylvania Avenue is sort of a dirty word in that context. While there is willingness to raise questions, we need to organize a lot more effectively. My colleagues at RootsAction.org are engaged in that process, Progressive Democrats of America, Code Pink, Veterans for Peace, some groups are very active. I think it's important that grassroots and national antiwar groups be supported.

I hope that my book *War Made Invisible* will deepen the analysis of what is wrong with our militarized state and what could be done to change it. And to me, one of the core messages of the book has to do with our true lack of humanity in our own national and international policies. It's rarely said out loud in front of conveying the true picture, that we have bifurcated the world into us and them. We have basically portrayed in our own narratives, and maybe in our own hearts, a Manichean view of the world where there are people who matter and people who don't. That's so fundamental to what is wrong with U.S. foreign policy and militarism and corporate power overall.

And one other thing that I do hope, that the book will accomplish, is to extend the critique of corporate power to corporate militarism. And this is a real challenge because even someone I admire greatly, I was a delegate twice for him to the Democratic National Convention, Bernie Sanders, who is so wonderful in challenging corporate power in domestic spheres, has not been willing to do it with the same intensity and rigor when it comes to the Pentagon and foreign policy. Militarism is inseparable from corporate power. And corporate capitalism is bent on destroying this country and the world to maximize profits. That's a reality. That's part of, as the title of the book says, *War Made Invisible* with such terrible results.

Ralph Nader: Well said. We're talking with Norman Solomon, author of the brand new book *War Made Invisible: How America Hides the Human Toll of Its Military Machine*. This is not Norman Solomon's first book. I think he's written about a dozen books titled *War Made Easy*, *Target Iraq*, *The Habits of Highly Deceptive Media*, *Through the Media Looking Glass*, co-author, *Adventures in Medialand*, co-author, one of my favorites, *Unreliable Sources*, another co-author.

I want to quote a high point here in your book. This is really an astonishing declaration of high morality by Phyllis and Orlando Rodriguez, whose son Greg died in the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. And this is what they said in a public appeal later, "We read enough of the news to sense that our government is heading in the direction of violent revenge, with the prospect of sons, daughters, parents, friends in distant lands, dying, suffering, and nursing further grievances against us. It is not the way to go. It will not avenge our son's death. Not in our son's name.

Our son died a victim of an inhuman ideology. Our actions should not serve the same purpose. Let us grieve. Let us reflect and pray. Let us think about a rational response that brings real peace and justice to our world."

This is quite a rare expression of high morality. They weren't saying, you don't go after the attackers. They say, you don't blow up an entire country and destroy hundreds of thousands of lives and create millions of refugees instead. How did you react to that?

Norman Solomon: At the time, it was very moving. It was a statement that I set aside only to come back to when I was working on this book. As you say, Ralph, there's a profound prophetic morality to what they and others were saying and were trying to get through the media of the country to warn about what was coming and ended up in a Cassandra sort of role, really seeing what was underway then in the autumn of 2001, kind of a displaced rage that a lot of people would need to die, which is a really sick dynamic, but in the mentality in power in Washington, that a lot of people would need to die somewhere because of what happened on 9/11.

Ralph Nader: It's what you say in your book, "The humanity of people who died on 9/11 loomed so large that the humanity of Iraqi people would be rendered invisible." Of course, Iraq and Saddam had nothing to do with 9/11. That's been proven over and over again.

So thank you very much for coming on. I hope you will be interviewed by NPR and PBS and radio and TV stations around the country for this very important book, *War Made Invisible: How America Hides the Human Toll of Its Military Machine*. Thank you very much, Norman Solomon.

Norman Solomon: Thanks so much, Ralph. I really appreciate it.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Norman Solomon. We will link to his book *War Made Invisible* at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Now let's check in with 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, June 23, 2023. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

The Federal Trade Commission is taking action against Amazon for its effort to enroll consumers into its Prime program without their consent while knowingly making it difficult for consumers to cancel their subscriptions to Prime. The Federal Trade Commission charges that Amazon has knowingly duped millions of consumers into unknowingly enrolling in Amazon Prime.

Specifically, Amazon used manipulative, coercive, or deceptive user-interface designs known as “dark patterns” to trick consumers into enrolling in automatically renewing Prime subscriptions. Amazon also knowingly complicated the cancellation process for Prime subscribers who sought to end their membership.

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

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russell. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan, along with Hannah Feldman and Ralph. And that's our show. I want to thank our guest again, Norman Solomon.

For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up." Also featuring Francesco DeSantis in “In Case You Haven't Heard.” A transcript of this program will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* Substack site soon after the episode is posted.

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

Ralph Nader: Thank you everybody.