

Ralph Nader Radio Hour

Episode #518

“Slanted Opinions on Gaza/One Family’s Tragedy

February 10th, 2024

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

David Feldman: Good morning.

Steve Skrovan: And the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hello, everybody. Today's show reminds me of Joseph Conrad's statement—the horror of it all. Stay tuned.

Steve Skrovan: On today's program, we're going to continue our coverage of the ongoing crisis in Gaza.

First up, we're going to speak to Janine Jackson, who is the program director of FAIR, which stands for Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting. She is also the host of FAIR's weekly syndicated radio show, *CounterSpin*. In general, FAIR does exceptional work analyzing how the American corporate press covers important issues and the biases in that coverage. And not surprisingly, the genocide in Gaza is no exception.

In a recent analysis of leading newspapers, including the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, FAIR determined that "Their pages leaned heavily toward a conversation dominated by Israeli interests and concerns." We'll speak to Janine Jackson about why our papers of record skew so heavily towards a pro-Zionist perspective.

In the second half of the program, we're going to reacquaint ourselves with the human side of this tragedy. Dr. Tariq Haddad is a member of the Virginia Coalition for Human Rights who grew up in Gaza. He has lost nearly 100 family members in the Israeli bombardment. In fact, on October 25th, 10 members of his family, all three generations of one side of his family, were killed. Last week, Secretary of State Antony Blinken held a roundtable meeting to discuss the situation in Gaza with a number of Palestinian-Americans. Dr. Haddad was one of several invitees who refused to attend. We'll speak to Dr. Haddad about why he made that choice.

As always, somewhere along the line, we'll check in with our steadfast corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, we heard the news today. Oh, boy. David?

David Feldman: Janine Jackson is the program director of Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, (FAIR) and she's the producer and host of FAIR's syndicated weekly radio show, *CounterSpin*. Ms. Jackson contributes frequently to FAIR's newsletter, *Extra!*. Her articles have appeared in various publications, including *In These Times* and the *United Auto Workers' Solidarity*, and in books including *Civil Rights Since 1787* and *Stop the Next War Now: Effective Responses to Violence and Terrorism*.

Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Janine Jackson.

Janine Jackson: It's a pleasure to be here.

Ralph Nader: Welcome indeed, Janine. Tell us about FAIR and what it does. It stands for Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting.

Janine Jackson: FAIR, thank you, is a media watch group. We've been around since 1986. And the basic mission is consumer advocacy.

I really do see media criticism as consumer advocacy. We basically try to call folks' attention every day in every way to the conflict between journalism, which is a public service and a public good, and media, which in this country at this time is a profit-making business. And those things come into conflict in lots of ways, and they affect the news that we are able to see and hear.

FAIR tries to talk about, write about, and call attention to the fact of that conflict—the reasons that journalists are not always using journalistic judgment to determine what gets in the paper. It's not about changing the *New York Times* or improving ABC News. That'd be great, but our work is really about educating us. It's really about talking to people and giving people questions that they should bring to bear when they're looking at any news media, whether it's the *New York Times* or whether it's the online thing that your uncle sent you that's in all caps, we always need to be bringing critical questions to bear. And FAIR tries to do that, and to remind folks of that all the time.

Ralph Nader: Now, tell us about the most recent report in the light of the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Janine Jackson: We did a research piece, and I want to call out Julie Hollar, my colleague, but also Xenia Gonikberg, Phillip HoSang and Pai Liu, who are our interns. FAIR does not function without interns.

When we took a look at op-eds in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* from October 7th on the Hamas attack through December 6th. And we're looking at opinion columns. We're not looking, in this particular case, at news reporting. And it was, and always is very interesting.

The first thing that we found—we always ask who gets to speak in the newspaper, because obviously the people we're hearing from are determining the content of what we're being told—

whenever it turns to who gets to speak, the occupational category is military and government officials. and that was the case in this study as well.

I want to highlight the fact that we're looking at opinion columns. Although we know that military and government officials are being sourced a lot in the news reporting. But even in the opinion columns, where there's room to get in other perspectives, we still see the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* relying, for at least a quarter of their guest essays, on government officials.

What does that mean? That means you're going to hear from people who are employed by the US government. You're not going to hear a highly critical discussion of what the US government is doing. That's an important thing. We look at: what's the job of these people that are getting to speak?

Journalists are the second highest occupational category that are bylining these op-eds. What I like to say is, we hear a lot from people we hear a lot from. The conversation becomes insular, and it's very much a pro-US, whatever the US is doing position, with some criticism around the edges. The point is, you're not hearing from the people who are recipients/victims of US policy. You're hearing overwhelmingly from the people who make that policy. That was one of the things that we found in this op-ed study that is baseline significant.

Ralph Nader: Give us some names of columnists at the *Post* and *Times*.

Janine Jackson: You've got me scrambling, but one of the things that we also found in this study was that a lot of *New York Times* and *Post* editorialists like Nicholas Kristof, Thomas Friedman, and Bret Stephens were also bylining op-eds.

We heard from the former US Ambassador to Israel, Daniel Kurtzer. We heard from Gershon Baskin, (columnist for the *Times of Israel* and the daily *Palestinian Jerusalem Al Quds*) who has negotiated previous deals. We've heard from folks who have had various positions in the US government and in US military operations. They were getting bylines.

It's not that we don't need to hear from them. It's just that who else do we need to hear from? We need to hear other voices in that conversation, particularly in opinion columns where you've got room to include folks who are not on staff.

Ralph Nader: It's actually more intriguing than that. Bret Stephens (former Editor-in-Chief of the *Jerusalem Post*) is the bullhorn of Netanyahu on the *New York Times* editorial page. He gets a lot of space, and anybody who wants to criticize him from inside the *Times* knows they're going to be accused of antisemitism. He's the one who defines what antisemitism is.

He wrote a column a couple of months ago called, "Antisemitism: A Primer for the Perplexed," which means he's assumed the role of defining it and so cheapening the currency of real antisemitism like occurred in World War II in Europe, that he has intimidated people inside the *Times* from looking at his columns critically, which are full of advocacy for policies that are unconstitutional, violate the Geneva Conventions, federal law, or simple factual mistakes as he

rolls out one column after another out of the Netanyahu cabinet. How do you react to this? It's really much worse, Janine.

Janine Jackson: It's terrible, and I would send folks to fair.org for the full report, but you only need to look at Bret Stephens' (October 15, 2023) headline. " Hamas Bears the Blame for Every Death in This War." The "Ceasefire Now imposture" where he's maligning anyone who calls for a ceasefire, who calls for an end to bloody violence. That's an "imposture."

Also, the attacks - and this is another big thing that US news media are doing - is vilifying anyone who calls for peace or a ceasefire or a diplomatic way forward, as antisemitic, as you're saying, but also as unserious, also as not grown-up. [October 10, 2023], Bret Stephens wrote "The Anti-Israel Left Needs to Take a Hard Look at Itself". [November 28, 2023], he also wrote, "The Left Is Dooming Any Hope for a Palestinian State." All of this conveys, beyond the so-called information that's in it, an attitude. It's conveying a posture which says, *you're wrong*. But if you look at images of Gazans dying—the UN is now saying maybe 100,000 Palestinians killed, wounded, or missing under the rubble. And he's saying, *yes, but if you say we need to put a stop to that, you are probably antisemitic and you need to grow up*, essentially.

I find this so horrifying on so many levels; but it makes me angriest because it's lying to people about themselves. It's lying to us about the way we feel and what we believe and what we are capable of.

Ralph Nader: It's even worse because these columnists don't even read the reporters in their own newspapers, who've often written great features, satellite imagery of neighborhood by neighborhood obliterated by Israeli-American made F-16s over Gaza, on-the-scene descriptions, videos showing the screaming and the grieving, amputations without anesthesia because hospitals were being closed down because they couldn't get the essential supplies, medicines. It's not that the news part of the newspaper is failing to do its job. It's people like Bret Stephens, who said in his January 16, 2024 column "The Genocide Charge Against Israel Is a Moral Obscenity," that he didn't think the level of force used by the Israeli military was excessive. He then said, "Every death in Gaza is due to Hamas blowing apart refugee camps and schools and mosques and roads and hospitals and clinics and ambulances. That's all Hamas' fault."

So we have this hesitancy, even by Nicholas Kristof. He's always making some good points, but every other paragraph, he's backing and filling and backing and filling as if he's being intimidated by this defamatory slur of antisemitism.

There's no critique other than FAIR's that actually takes it apart. When was the last time you saw the American Friends Committee on legislation, the Quakers, get an op-ed in the *New York Times*? When was the last time you saw the editor of *Middle East Report*, which has been coming out for 45 years, started by two retired US ambassadors to countries in the Middle East, get an op-ed? So it's not only a slant, it's an exclusion of voices.

They've had Professor Khalidi and some Palestinian-Americans as op-eds in terms of their own personal experience. But in terms of policy, there aren't many, like Professor Khalidi, who are

allowed entry into the hallowed two pages of the *New York Times*. What do you think of all this? What can be done?

Janine Jackson: You mentioned Kristof, and I think folks think of him as a humanitarian. And it's interesting because he wrote pieces talking about civilian casualties, and pieces lamenting the devastation. But then, as you say, the next paragraph, he will refer to a ceasefire as, arguably, a Hamas victory.

So, we're talking about a ceasefire, the ending of the mass murder and violence and displacement and ethnic cleansing of Gaza, to which he says, well, I understand why people might want to call for that, but that would be arguably a Hamas victory. And that tells you the limits of debate. And I don't want to end without saying that at FAIR, we call for all kinds of things all the time--a full range of voices, an absence of censorship, a balance of perspectives, stopping the over reliance on military officials, but we do assume and hope for a bedrock of humanity.

A lot of listeners will have front-of-mind the piece by *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, in which he compared the targets of US bombs to vermin. He compared the nation of Iran to a recently discovered species of parasitoid wasps that injects its eggs into live caterpillars, and the baby wasp larvae slowly eat the caterpillar from the inside out, bursting out once they have eaten their fill. This is an entire column by Thomas Friedman in the country's so-called paper of record, in which he compares Lebanon, Yemen, Syria and Iraq to caterpillars with venomous eggs hatching inside of them. And they therefore call—you're talking about bugs; you're calling people vermin. So then he says, "We have no counter strategy that safely and efficiently kills the wasp without setting fire to the whole jungle." This is very old-school demonization/dehumanization. I can't believe it. I'm shocked every day, and I'm still shocked by this *New York Times* column comparing people who are currently dying under US-funded and built bombs to vermin.

Ralph Nader: Especially since the prime minister, which Tom Friedman despises, Netanyahu's cabinet ministers, after October 7th, said that no food, no medicine, no electricity, no water, these are human animals, and they were described in those terms. And for Tom Friedman, who is the supposed star of foreign policy columnists in the *New York Times*, to pick that up shows how tone-deaf he is. There's also one-sided words. Not only do they only apply, like CBS refers to Hamas terrorists, but they never refer to the massive targeted civilian deaths by Israeli state terrorism. The other thing you never hear, Janine, is do Palestinians have a right to defend themselves? They're the occupied. They're the oppressed. They're the invaded. They're the ones whose houses are being bulldozed at night by Israeli military in the West Bank. Of course, now Gaza.

And Congress, You never hear anybody in Congress, except two or three people, say "Palestinians have a right to defend themselves." It's always "Israelis have a right to defend themselves", as if other people don't have a right to defend themselves. And the columnists pick that up. They constantly say Israel has a right to defend itself. The question is, what's itself? What's its borders? That's the big question. Every country has a right to defend itself. The question is, does Palestine have a right to defend itself?

Janine Jackson: It's bizarre. Yeah. It goes to another main absence, including of news reporting, which I agree there are excellent, exceptional, in-depth articles that talk to real people and present issues in a way that is understandable. But in general, even in reporting, there's a lack of history.

People in my life have said, what's a Palestinian? Palestine doesn't exist. That's not a country. Part of that ignorance comes from a media that don't start the clock except at last week or a month ago or five years ago. They don't give you the historical, social, and the international complexity and context to understand what's happening.

And you're talking about language, which is, of course, something that we at FAIR look at. In this study, even of op-eds, where newspapers have the space to include a range of views, nobody is using—one or two people use the word "apartheid" to describe the situation in Israel-Palestine. This is a term that has a definition, and international groups and human rights groups have a definition for that term, and they've designated this as an apartheid situation.

But when media don't talk about it in those terms, even in their op-eds, it makes more sense to have people say, I don't even know what is a Palestinian. What even does that mean? There were clear calls for a ceasefire even during this study period, which ended at December 6th, but we only found two mentions of the word "ceasefire" in opinion columns at the *New York Times* and one at the *Washington Post*.

Media are not just dehumanizing, they're also not reflecting the way that people, including in the US, even think about these things. They are an inadequate reflection of what public opinion really is. They're just trying to lead folks in a particular direction rather than reporting on the way folks actually feel.

Ralph Nader: And the situation in reporting an opinion on Iran eclipses history. We toppled the popular, democratically elected leader, Mosaddegh, in the 1950s of Iran, and Putin again reinstated the Shah, the brutal Shah dictatorship for 29 years, and we don't think the Iranians remember that?

When George W. Bush described Iran as part of the axis of evil with Iraq and North Korea, and then invaded Iraq, are we surprised that the Iranians are freaking out? We had the US military on the east and Afghanistan. We had them on the western border of Iran. Israel is sending lethal operations into Iran surreptitiously. We have all kinds of sanctions on Iran, all kinds of talk in jingoistic circles in the US—bomb Iran, bomb Iran, get rid of the regime in Iran. And then we wonder why Iran is freaked out and wants to have allies in Lebanon and Syria.

The total obliviousness. We don't ever ask the question, what if the shoe was on the other foot and we were surrounded by some massively powerful Islamic military power and behaved like that? You think we'd be sitting around, twiddling our thumbs? This is the indication of empire. This is one of the markers of empire thinking.

Janine, have you covered Letters to the Editor? How fair are Letters to the Editor on this subject?

Janine Jackson: We've not done a lot of research on it, but what I always say to folks, because I believe that it's still true, is that the Letters to the Editor are some of the most read pages of the newspaper. So, folks think, it's just spitting in the wind. It's not. If you write a letter and you get that in the paper, it's actually incredibly meaningful, because that's what a lot of folks read in the newspaper.

And the other thing to say is that, although we do know that they are curated, we know that they're not printing all of the letters that are critical of the media outlet itself. But we also know that newspapers in particular—we have no Letters to the Editor space in other media; it's even disappeared in television and radio; there's no talk-back space anymore--- we know that newspapers might need to get 50 letters presenting a point of view to print even one of those letters.

Another thing that I always encourage people to do is write that letter anyway, because even if your letter doesn't get in, your letter might be helping another letter that represents your perspective to get into the paper. I'm glad you brought that up, because, no, they don't reflect the range of opinion that exists in the country, but part of that has to do with folks' disengagement with media.

A lot of folks have just given up on mainstream news media as being an accurate reflection of the world, of what they need to know, of what public opinion is. They're not there anymore, so they're not even bothering to interact with it. But it's worth doing, and folks should remember that what a lot of folks read is those public letters to the editor.

Ralph Nader: It's worth doing for another reason. In the Internet age, if they don't print your letter, you can put it up on websites.

Janine Jackson: Exactly. And going to what you were saying, one of the things that is weirdest, frankly, about US news media is the way they pretend that there is no international community, as though they don't understand that folks are able—I'm able to read the British press. I'm able to read press from Sub-Saharan Africa. I'm able to see Iranian news media.

So when US news media say, "The international community is with us," well, I can push one finger and see that that's not true. So it becomes even more strange, the idea that, of course, the US is with the international community, the whole world is behind the US and whatever the US is choosing to do. We know that's not true. What we don't have in mainstream news media is an explanation, an explication of those other worldviews. They are not incorporated into the news that we are generally consuming. So we have to patch it together for ourselves.

Because if you just read the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, the US is the world. We're the only good country in the world. Anything we do is democracy. Anybody we bomb, we're bombing in service to democracy. So, you're just supposed to keep swallowing that. And I feel that the elite news media don't understand that people are not buying it anymore.

So, these efforts that we're now seeing to label anyone who calls for a ceasefire - anyone who calls for peace - an anti-Semite, anti-Israeli, a horrible person, and let's release a list of their names and make sure they never get jobs and never get into school. This is bizarro-world censorship. And I

don't know how media can continue to exist and continue putting forward this view that tries to shut everyone up who isn't saying the official prescribed view.

We understand that the US is one country in a world of many countries, and we do not have a right to go around the world killing whoever we say we want to kill and saying that we're doing that in the name of democracy and human rights. The sale is not working anymore.

Ralph Nader: I wanted to ask you; the problem is a little bit more nuanced here. When I read the *Times* and *Post*, I managed to clip a lot of good articles on this whole Gaza, Palestine, Israeli war, yet I don't find them having any impact whatsoever on Congress. One of the reasons we started our new newspaper, the *Capitol Hill Citizen*, is to show what can be reported on Congress by a newspaper that is not considered official source journalism.

Your group, FAIR, puts out a nice newsletter too, called *Extra!* We'll tell you how to get it in a moment. Do you ever focus on the coverage of Congress in the context of different subject matters?

Janine Jackson: That's interesting because one of the things that is very frustrating to us is the way that news media cover democratic participation and electoral politics. What we find when we look at coverage of Congress, the stories are not about congressional representatives responding to constituents. The stories are overwhelmingly Republican and Democrat congressional members fighting with one another. So, it makes it seem like a sporting event, like a football game. Who's going to win today, Democrats or Republicans? What we don't see is the gap that exists between sometimes what both parties are doing and what the US public is calling for or wants.

I know folks know about Citizens United and the idea that we think money is speech and that basically just pull a lever every four years and that's supposed to be the extent of your democratic participation and your role in making policy. But media play into that, too, by suggesting that the policies, the decisions that affect every moment of all of our lives, are mainly a fight between these two groups that we're led to believe are very different from each other. Media tells us the score all the time on everything—who's winning, who's up, who's down this week.

Ralph Nader: It's the cash register, too, who's raised more money in the last month than the other. That takes up a lot of space as well.

Janine Jackson: Absolutely. And who are they raising it from? Who are they raising? Not you and me. They're raising it from corporations and wildly wealthy individuals. Is that who we want in charge of our politics? I'm all for media talking about funding and financing but talk about it in a critical way. Talk about why people with money have more influence than people without, when we know that people without greatly outnumber the those that have.

Ralph Nader: Can you tell the listeners how they can get the newsletter and how they can access more of FAIR's reports?

Janine Jackson: Thank you, first of all. And I encourage folks to go to our website, fair.org. There you can learn about and subscribe to the newsletter, *Extra!* You can also find out how to

access *CounterSpin*, the radio show that I do every week, which is not only a podcast, but is also on brick and mortar radio stations around the country.

Part of what we do on the website is encourage folks to take action. So, when we see something like the Thomas Friedman column, we put in a little information, like here's how you can write to the *Times*. Here's how you can speak to the *New York Times*. FAIR is also an action network. The place for folks to learn about all that we're doing is fair.org. Thank you very much for the opportunity to say that.

Ralph Nader: Thank you. We're talking to Janine Jackson of FAIR. Steve?

Steve Skrovan: Janine, what would be your vision of an ideal media landscape that would be... fair?

Janine Jackson: First of all, thank you for calling it a landscape, because sometimes when I give speeches, and I say all the things that I say, folks will come up to me afterwards and say, "All right, well now, I don't like the *New York Times* anymore. What can I read?" They're looking for a single replacement media outlet that is going to give them a fair and balanced vision and tell them all they need to know. That doesn't exist.

We really are talking about a landscape of different kinds of media, and that landscape needs to involve media that are differently structured. Can there be for-profit media? Sure. Should there be state-supported media? Absolutely. Can there be media out of academic institutions, as well as? Absolutely. Can there be things both listener- and reader-supported media? Absolutely. We need all of those options.

And in that context, we need to always bring our critical thinking skills to ask ourselves who is funding this, what is their relationship to power, what am I not going to hear from this outlet because of its structure and because of its relationship to power? And that doesn't mean discounting all the news they give you. It just means being conscious.

I see a landscape of differently structured, differently funded media outlets, that have a vision. What's currently missing is funded, supported outlets that have a bottom-up vision, and that don't define news as primarily what powerful people say and do, and that's what we're looking at right now.

There need to be outlets that are talking to community at a local community level. There need to be outlets that profile whistleblowers and folks who have critical things to say about institutions within which they work. There need to be outlets that bring us international perspectives that make it clear that the US is not a shining city on a hill necessarily, and that tell us what's happening in other places.

The very fact that you use the word "landscape", gets me to that answer. We need access to a range of media outlets that bring us a range of perspectives that aren't simply top-down.

Ralph Nader: We're seeing some of that with the Intercept press organization, Center for Public Integrity, *ProPublica*.

Janine Jackson: Absolutely. *The Lever*. We're seeing a number of folks just supporting themselves on Medium or on Substack. There really isn't a replacement. You can't expect something to be served at your breakfast table that's going to give you a view of the world. There is no substitute for informing yourself independently. We need to support those outlets that exist to bring us, not just in the news reports, but also opinion columns that stretch beyond just another government official telling you why you need to support what the US government is doing, or another corporate honcho telling you why whatever corporate America is doing is in your best interest. We need folks who can be critical of power in a sustained, ongoing way to fill the gaping hole in the US news media system.

Ralph Nader: Hannah?

Hannah Feldman: Why do we take opinion columns seriously? If Thomas Friedman knows so much about Gaza, why isn't he covering it as a journalist with all of the checks and rigors that that requires? Why are we so accepting of opinion columns in newspapers as good sources of information?

Janine Jackson: That's an excellent question. And why these Sunday shows where folks sit around in a circle and stroke their chins and offer their opinions—like who are you? Are you a regional expert or an historian? No, you're just a journalist who has some stray thoughts. So, why should we take that seriously? That is part of what FAIR complains about: the idea that news media don't seem to go to folks who have experience, history, knowledge, or expertise. Instead, they're in the same circle of folks that they talk to. And it doesn't matter if those folks get things catastrophically historically wrong, they're still in the conversation. And it doesn't matter if folks outside of that conversation get things right. So why do we take it seriously? I think we do less and less. But there's a tendency to just pick up a paper or turn on a TV news show and imagine that you're being told everything you need to know about what's going on and that the people you're hearing from on various issues are the people best placed to tell it to you. That's a difficult thing to disabuse ourselves of, but it's happening.

Ralph Nader: We've been talking with Janine Jackson, who is FAIR's program director and producer/host of FAIR's syndicated weekly radio show *CounterSpin*, which I urge all of you to listen to. It's so tight and focused and sequential, very professionally produced, I must say, Janine.

Janine Jackson: Thank you so much.

Ralph Nader: And we thank you very much. Give our listeners once again how they can get *Extra!* and get more information.

Janine Jackson: It's been my sincere pleasure to be here. I will say again, I am a media critic because I see it as consumer advocacy. And my love for consumer advocacy has a whole lot to do with Ralph Nader. So, I thank you again.

Folks can go to fair.org and learn more about the work that we do. A lot of it's on the website, but it's also the way to get access to *Extra!*, the newsletter, and *CounterSpin*, the radio show.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, Janine Jackson, for all your good work and those at FAIR.

Janine Jackson: Been my pleasure. Thank you, Ralph Nader.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Janine Jackson. We will link to FAIR ralphnaderradiohour.com. Up next, we put a human face on the tragedy in Gaza. But first, 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, February 9, 2024. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

America has recently brought its age-old love of sports betting out of the shadows and onto our phones, and this has created an all-time mismatch, pitting man against machine. Gamblers, overwhelmingly young men versus gambling companies armed with sophisticated AI data and engineering, enticing fans to make snap bets not just on games, but on every play within games. The early results, billions for gambling companies, leagues and state governments, and a growing population of sports bettors struggling to defend against the rush. That's according to a report from the CBS news program *60 Minutes*.

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 David Feldman and Hannah and Ralph.

Dr. Tariq Haddad was raised in Gaza, lives in America now, and has lost nearly 100 members of his family in the ongoing bombardment. David?

David Feldman: Dr. Tariq Haddad is a cardiologist and member of the Virginia Coalition for Human Rights—a broad-based, growing coalition, 19 organizations with over 10,000 Virginians from diverse backgrounds who advocate for Palestinian human rights. Dr. Haddad grew up in Gaza. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Dr. Tariq Haddad.

Tariq Haddad: Thank you very much. Thank you for having me.

Ralph Nader: Welcome indeed. But what you're going to relate is not going to be easy to for our listeners to take, so bear with us, listeners. We have to face up to it because it's your tax dollars, it's your US weapons, it's the backing of the United States with the Security Council veto of any resolution designed to protect the safety and human rights of Palestinian people. And, of course, the full-throated support of the Netanyahu regime, regardless of what is stated about minimizing civilian casualties by Secretary of State Blinken or President Biden, it's the shipment of weapons

and cover, diplomatic and political, that is what Netanyahu wants and gets. The rest is just deceptive rhetoric.

You've lost almost 100 members of your family in Gaza since October 7th.

Tariq Haddad: That's correct.

Ralph Nader: I'd like you to describe the whole scene as you know it so well.

Tariq Haddad: I apologize. It's a little bit difficult to go through, but the last four months have been an absolute nightmare for our family.

We have a large family. My mother's side of the family is from the town of Khan Yunis, which is the southern Gaza Strip, and my father's side of the family is from Gaza City. We have hundreds and hundreds of family members. I grew up there. Basically, over the past four months, my routine has been basically every morning finding out who's died, who's survived, who's suffering, who needs help. And that's been a constant daily thing, starting from October.

Just to recount a couple of stories. On October 25th, we got word, from Khan Yunis, one of my cousins, Jamal El-Farra, his son, Tawfiq El-Farra, who is a physician; his wife, who was pregnant, Dana; two of their beautiful daughters, Reem and Hala; Jamal's brother Esam; and his wife, Semad; and their daughters, Rusul, Tuqa and Nadian—three generations of one family, multiple siblings, grandfather, grandkids—ten people, every one of them were killed. Ten people.

Tuqa, one of the children who was in her early 20s, her wedding day was the day she was killed. They all came from very modest means, and they grew up just a couple of houses down from where I was raised. And three of them actually had built their family homes with their own hands because they were of such modest means. The entire multilevel house got destroyed. This entire family, essentially, three generations, got erased off the civil registry.

Literally another couple of days later, in late October, my cousins Hatem and Aziz El-Farra, also from Khan Yunis, from my mom's El-Farra side of the family, who lived 20 yards from where I grew up, from my grandparents' home in Khan Yunis, were killed along with 14 members of their family, seven of their children. Aziz was a pharmacist, his brother Hatem, a community figure who literally would do anything to help anybody in Khan Yunis. He was always around to help. Whoever needed help, he would help.

The day before, Hatem had actually gone to my uncle Wajih and asked him if he could house five families who were made homeless by the Israeli missile strikes in my grandparents' home. And my uncle said, "Of course, please put them in our home." And that was what he was doing the day before he got killed.

There was one child, one from this whole sixteen people this side of the family, who survived. A little kid, Hamza. And this child, who survived with an amputation, woke up in the hospital to find out his father, his uncle, all the siblings, his grandfather, everybody had died. Then Hamza himself died a day later just because the situation in the hospital was so terrible. They didn't have the resources to keep him alive.

A couple of days after that, it started to hit my father's side of the family too. They were in Gaza City. November 2nd, my first cousin Hani, and my first cousins, siblings Huda and Wafaa, all got killed along with my cousin Hani's Croatian wife, Vera, and my aunt, their mother.

Huda and Wafaa were teachers. Hani was an interior designer. The tragic part is not just the brutality of it—a missile strike that hit them when they were all in the hallway basically together. It was very clear they were targeted at a time when they were all together because the missile strike happened as soon as they all walked into a corridor together.

My cousin Hani initially survived with, what I know as a physician, was quite a minor leg injury. And then the very next day, he bled to death because he had no access to any functional medical facilities. Every hospital near them in northern Gaza had been destroyed.

Hani's brother, Wael, my other cousin, survived initially. And then he had to deal with a nightmare of watching his mother, seeing his mother buried from the neck up in the rubble, dead. And then he saw his sister Wafaa, who he described to me in gruesome detail. He had to see her shredded into multiple pieces from the Israeli bombing.

My other cousin, Nael, had to bury all these family members in a makeshift grave because they couldn't even reach a gravesite. He had to bury them near his house wherever he could. Nael, since that time, my cousin, the one who survived, he's sending me messages, telling me he goes 24 hours at a time with no food, no water. That's just become routine for him.

Even after that, a lot of my family at that point, by November, were having to flee because of lack of water, because of paper flyers that were being dropped on them by the Israeli military, saying that if they do not move, they will be considered terrorists and will be targeted as such. And they even sent me pictures of these kinds of flyers that they received.

So, they all moved to supposed safe areas, and then that wasn't enough. Samar El-Farra, one of my cousins, then died in a refugee camp in a supposed safe area in Rafah, right on the same day that she completed her doctorate for her PhD. We were about to congratulate her.

Many of them then started dying from poor medical care and inability to access medical care. My cousin, Abdul Raheem El-Farra, died because he could not reach a functional hospital after he was injured from the Israeli military strikes. Then four of my family members on my father's side of the family, ironically, were killed while they were in their car, literally going to the Gaza European Hospital for shelter. They were targeted and killed in their car as they were about to head to the hospital for shelter.

A few weeks ago, my cousin, Sabry El-Farra, was killed with seven of his sons, and most recently, just in late January, another member of my family, a baby, 20 days old, Saber El-Farra, died from hypothermia from cold weather. He was 20 days old. And this is after nine of his siblings had been killed and his father had been killed in a late December Israeli military strike. So he was the only one, other than his mother, who had survived. And then he (the baby) died from hypothermia.

There's many, many more stories like this. It's 100 family members. It's hard to describe them all, but these are just the ones that kind of give your listeners an idea. And we're not special. We're no different than any other family in Gaza. Every single family you talk about, every large family like ours, has experienced what we have.

Ralph Nader: Dr. Haddad, anybody who thinks that this all started October 7th doesn't know the history of the terror that has been inflicted on the Palestinian people. Give us an idea of what happened in 2014, 2009, and when you were living in Gaza, about what life was like also in the West Bank.

Tariq Haddad: My family and I have been experiencing violence for our whole lives. It stretches even before I was born. My grandmother was the head of the United Nations schools in the Gaza Strip in the late '60s and early '70s after the occupation of the Gaza Strip began. Routinely, she would get beaten for telling/educating her students on where her parents were from. That was her crime. She also educated her students who were asking, what's Haifa like, what's Jaffa like? What are these towns that my parents keep telling us that we're from? Because almost everybody in Gaza is a refugee from somewhere else in what's in Israel proper currently.

I grew up there from the time I was two months old. The stories that would happen, just that I could recount, violence was just a part of life. I had cologne, my grandmother had cologne in every single room in our house. The reason we had cologne is because we would get tear-gassed randomly at various times and we couldn't predict it. My grandmother had to have cologne around so that she could douse our faces, the children's faces, with the cologne so that the tear gas wouldn't just absolutely torture us and sting us.

I had days where I'd wake up and there were soldiers in our kitchen, eating out of our kitchen. We were on the third floor, and they would use our balcony as a scouting area to snipe at children in the street. This was routine. We just had to accept it. This was just part of occupation. You can't do anything about soldiers going into your home.

We had a beautiful orchard between Khan Yunis and Gaza. I used to play there every summer. And it got completely and utterly destroyed by Israeli tanks. Every tree was uprooted, turned essentially into a desert. We had hundreds of olive trees and fruit trees, and it was all destroyed, again, for no good reason. It was an orchard that we survived with, we ate from, we played in. That's all it was. That's just life under occupation.

I played chess in the street all the time with my cousins because we lived in a packed neighborhood. When I was 13 years old and around 1987, soldiers came up to the beginning of the street and just saw a couple of kids playing chess, and they ran towards us. They grabbed my cousin and broke his arm. I had to run. They shot rubber bullets at me. I had to hide in a chicken coop in my neighbor and uncle's yard to be able to escape being arrested for just playing chess.

I would go through 18 hours of checkpoints just to go from Amman in Jordan to Gaza. We'd wake up at 3 in the morning. We wouldn't get there until about 9 p.m. at night. And this was after being

strip-searched and humiliated. Our clothes would be packed into baskets with five other children's families and then dumped on a big table, and we'd have to sort through them among five other families to get our clothes. This was just routine. This was just life under occupation.

Ralph Nader: How about the seizure of land and water?

Tariq Haddad: First of all, water was such an incredibly rare resource that we couldn't wash our dishes, wash our clothes, and take a normal, what your readers would consider an American type shower. We couldn't do all three on the same day. It was impossible because there wasn't enough water. And that was even before the 2000s.

Once the blockade of Gaza began, it became even worse. My parents would have four hours of electricity a day, maximum. And they had to do everything they could in those four hours. The winters were terrible because it would get cold and you didn't have ability, any electricity. Electricity was rare, but water was even more rare. Often people had to recycle water. 97% of the water supply in Gaza during those days was not fit for human consumption, according to studies conducted by the United Nations. All this was before October 7th.

In 2014, during one of the previous Israeli strikes on Gaza, was a dark time. My youngest son, Ramzi, was born, but we couldn't celebrate it because the day he was born, 67 people were killed where some of my family live in the Shujaiya neighborhood in Gaza. Then I had ten members of my family killed during that time on August 1st, including multiple kids--a 4-year-old, a 15-year-old, an 11-year-old who was top of his class in school, two 8-year-olds. The last missile strike that hit the eight-year-olds was as they were running away from the home in plain sight of anybody who could see it from an airplane. Two eight-year-olds were targeted and killed. This was back on August 1st, well before this October time.

Ralph Nader: And what can you say about the very recent invitation by Secretary of State Blinken with Palestinian-Americans? Where was the invitation? Who attended? How long was Secretary Blinken going to be with you, which led you to reject the invitation and issue a 12-page letter that included many pictures of your dead relatives over in Gaza that we can talk about in a moment? What was the nature of this invitation and why did you reject it?

Tariq Haddad: The invitation was titled as a roundtable on the situation in Gaza. I'm quoting the actual email invitation, and it came from the Secretary of State, in the State Department.

I was not told who else was invited in the invitation, but my understanding is it was sent to prominent members of the Palestinian-American community, particularly those who have family in Gaza or whoever connection to Gaza. That's what I'm aware of. It was meant to be a small roundtable with six to eight people, and I was one of the ones invited. I was told it would be around a half-hour meeting. And doing the math, each of about eight people, would likely have 3 minutes to speak of what we wanted to say to Secretary of state Blinken. Three minutes.

Ralph Nader: And you turned it down. Why?

Tariq Haddad: I turned it down because of what I've witnessed over the past four months. I'm a physician, and as I'm a physician, every day I have to empathize with people, and I do empathize with people. I always try to put myself in other people's shoes, and I believe actions speak louder than words. As a physician, I can't just tell my patients what they should do and not treat them. It has to be followed with action.

What I saw was four months of actions that were murdering my family, and that murdered the 15,000 children in Gaza, and that murdered 30,000 civilians. Specific actions—refusal to call for a ceasefire, vetoes in the United Nations for other countries to try to call for a ceasefire, multiple actions of transferring military equipment from our strategic military reserve to be used for this genocide, for this killing of children, and of my family members.

Most recently, right before the invitation, literally within 48 hours of when I got this invitation, humanitarian aid was withdrawn—the withdrawal of humanitarian aid to 2 million people who were displaced, homeless, hungry, have no access to water, minimal access to food, going through a famine, withdrawing funding, humanitarian assistance for these poor people who were going through this is the most cruel behavior of all, And that's what I witnessed.

I'm asked to meet with Secretary Blinken and in three minutes to tell him what those actions have done, what they've caused, the suffering they've caused my family. The messages I'm getting, hearing that they can't eat or drink for 24 hours, the messages I'm getting from my uncle saying that he's getting diarrhea over and over because they have to keep recycling water. And knowing that my Secretary of State was one of the people primarily responsible for their suffering and their death and of this unnecessary death of civilians, and I could not bring myself knowing that this was political grandstanding, that this was in all likelihood a photo-op to basically say that the administration is listening to Palestinians when actions speak louder than words.

I know that they were not doing anything from an action standpoint to actually help my family survive and end the suffering, so I couldn't bring myself as a human being, forget as a physician, couldn't bring myself to meet with somebody for a photo op as a grandstanding opportunity, knowing full-well what this administration has done to cause suffering and death in my family. I just couldn't bring myself to do it. And especially given three minutes, how am I in three minutes going to describe everything that's happened to my family and all my fellow Palestinians in Gaza?

Ralph Nader: And you explained this in a 12-page letter. Is the letter available for the public? And if so, how can they get it?

Tariq Haddad: It is available for the public. It has been posted. I was asked to be able to provide it publicly and it is available on a website. It's accessible on the website:
<https://Here4theKids@substack.com>

Ralph Nader: David?

David Feldman: Could you speak to the happy memories you have of living in Gaza?

Tariq Haddad: Gaza, I wish I could adequately and eloquently describe to you how wonderful and how kind and how incredibly giving the average person in Gaza is. To say it's a disservice is sort of minimizing it.

I mean, these are people who have suffered probably almost more than any other people in the whole world. They have lived their average life with four hours of electricity a day. Their average life is not having enough water for everybody in the family to drink and to do their wash every day. That's their average life—they live like that. And yet, they are positive. I grew up there. They are some of the most kind people. They will do anything to help a neighbor. You don't even have to ask. We were all one family in our neighborhood, nobody differentiating between one another. And so I think it's a beautiful area. It's gorgeous coastline. I have memories going to the beach, and beautiful orchards and just the family atmosphere.

The thing that sticks out, is there's not a hateful bone in their bodies. It's so tragic to me how Gaza gets painted as if *they are Hamas* and *they are this* and *they are hateful people*, which is so ironic because our people have every right to feel bitter. Yet they aren't. They're the most patient and inspiring people I've ever met in my work and in my life.

Although they live with four hours of electricity, they'll literally talk about how happy they are that they have their family. Anybody else in the world would be feeling sorry for themselves, and they don't. All they worry about, all they care about are the basics—having their life, having their health, and having their family. It's incredibly inspiring. As a physician, as a person, it's just they are the most inspiring people I've ever met in my work... in my life.

Ralph Nader: Well, we've been talking with Dr. Tariq Haddad, who is a cardiologist and member of the Virginia Coalition for Human Rights, who grew up in Gaza. He laid out his reasoning in a 12-page letter to Secretary of State Blinken, for not meeting with him recently.

Thank you very much, Dr. Haddad. Is there any final thing you want to say that we haven't asked about you'd like to convey in a limited time?

Tariq Haddad: I just would like to ask your listeners to just treat everybody like human beings and not as people of a certain religion or ethnicity. I look at myself in the shoes of somebody who is a hostage, who's a family member of a hostage. I can care about that and everybody else on a side that you may not understand can also put yourself in the shoes of a Palestinian who has lived under blockade and occupation and now genocide. And you can put yourself in their shoes in the same way, as a way around this. And I just ask people to see each other as human beings and with more empathy.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much, Dr. Haddad. I hope your voice of humanity will reach larger audiences in the coming weeks. Thank you for your courage and your compassion.

Tariq Haddad: You're welcome. Thank you for having me. And I appreciate all of your kindness and your kind thoughts as well.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking to Dr. Tariq Haddad. We will link to his letter to Antony Blinken at ralphnaderradiohour.com.

I want to thank our guests again, Janine Jackson and Dr. Tariq Haddad. 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", featuring Francesco DeSantis with "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.

The American Museum of Tort Law has an event coming up this week on Thursday, February 15th, about injuries to fans at baseball games. Go to tortmuseum.org for more details.

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* when our guest will be historian Rick Perlstein talking about the MAGA movement. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody. And in about a week, we'll have the new issue of *Capitol Hill Citizen*. If you want to reserve your print-only copy, go to capitolhillcitizen.com. Thank you.