

Ralph Nader Radio Hour

Episode 515

Conscientious Objector/Israel Agents

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Steve Skrovan: Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. My name is Steve Skrovan along with my cohost David Feldman and the rest of the crew. Hello, David.

David Feldman: Morning.

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

Ralph Nader: Hello. This program features a candid whistleblower from the State Department who resigned and a great investigative reporter on what's happening to our civil liberties because of the Israeli conflict.

Steve Skrovan: That's right, Ralph. As we record this program, it's been well over 100 days since the State of Israel started its relentless siege on Gaza (Strip) in response to the Hamas attacks on October 7th. This campaign has been enthusiastically supported by the Biden administration, which continues to provide Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's government with the means to carry out their genocide of the Palestinian people. As taxpayers, our money is funding all of this death and destruction, making us complicit.

Our first guest today is former State Department official, Josh Paul. Mr. Paul was a member of the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, which he describes as the U.S. government entity most responsible for the transfer of arms to allies, including Israel. In protest, Mr. Paul tendered his resignation 10 days into the conflict. He explained that “This administration's response, and much of Congress as well, is an impulsive reaction built on confirmation bias, political convenience, intellectual bankruptcy, and bureaucratic inertia. That is to say, it is immensely disappointing and entirely unsurprising.”

In the second half of the show, we're going to pivot to the second front of the war on Palestine, America's college campuses. We've previously covered Congress's dubious investigation into anti-Semitism on college campuses and the moral panic conflating anti-Zionism or any slight criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. What if we told you that most of this fearmongering and accusations of anti-Semitism wasn't organic? Instead, it's actually the product of decades of illegal anti-Palestinian espionage, covert action, and blacklisting of Americans within the U.S. by the Israeli government and a network of domestic collaborators.

Investigative reporter James Bamford will be joining us to explain the “massive operation to spy on and crush pro-Palestinian students throughout the country, to establishing a secret Israeli-run

troll farm across the U.S., to harass anyone critical of Israel, to hiring Americans to secretly spy on American students and report back to Israeli intelligence.”

As always, somewhere along the line, we'll check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, let's talk to a State Department insider who could no longer be part of sending arms to Israel. David?

David Feldman: Josh Paul served 11 years in the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs at the U.S. Department of State before his resignation on October 17th, 2023. Mr. Paul previously worked on security sector reform in both Iraq and the West Bank with additional roles in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, U.S. Army staff, and as a congressional staffer. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Josh Paul.

Josh Paul: Thank you very much indeed. It's an honor for me to join you.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much, Josh. You, so far, are the only quasi-high official of the State Department to resign in protest. What's your read about others resigning as a matter of conscience from the State Department? Is there a lot of upset and dissent that reflects your concern that this issue of the Israeli-Hamas conflict is not being fully and fairly debated in the State Department?

Josh Paul: Yes, I think there are a lot of people, and I've heard from very many of them, who are immensely frustrated, disappointed, and troubled by the stance that the Biden administration is taking, particularly within the State Department, where people, I think understand not only the moral failings of our current policy, but also the practical failings and the impact that our current approach is having on our relations across the world and our ability to rally America's allies and partners around the issues that we care about.

A lot of people are very deeply troubled and are taking actions within their roles to try and address this, including through the formalized dissent channel, where many people have expressed concerns and recommendations to Secretary of State Blinken on a change of course, and as well through more public channels. We've seen public letters. We've seen a vigil outside the White House of executive branch staff, and in the last 24 hours here as we speak, on Wednesday, (January 17) we saw a day of grieving, a day of mourning, in which many public civil servants took part, including not going to work as they mourned the losses of the last few months.

There is an immense amount of frustration and effort being made to change the course. Unfortunately, it does not seem to be registering yet with the Biden administration.

Ralph Nader: The State Department's original charter back in [Benjamin] Ben Franklin days was diplomacy and customs. Now it seems to be more a Secretary of War than a Secretary of State.

Josh Paul: Well, I think that's right. To be fair, and in the State Department's defense, and in a structural defense, it is interesting that the United States places control of arms transfers and security assistance within the State Department. That is a different model than most of our allies follow, in which those functions are in the Department of Defense or Ministry of Defense or Ministry of Trade. And there is an advantage to putting them in the State Department, so that they

can be considered as tools of foreign policy, along with other diplomatic tools, such as economic assistance and diplomatic engagement.

So, there is an advantage there. But there is also, inherently by doing so, a militarization of foreign policy, particularly when we look at the massive amount of funding that is provided for military assistance, and of course, the way that providing that assistance then links us to the actions of our partners, whether we want to be complicit in those actions or not.

There is a bit to unpack there. But you're right. We have seen increasingly, and particularly since September 11th, a militarization of our foreign policy and an increasing reliance on tools such as arms transfers and security cooperation, to pursue diplomatic objectives. And that is a problem.

Ralph Nader: Before we get to that, let's talk about Congress. What do you make of this overwhelming defeat of Bernie Sanders's proposal regarding weapons aid to Israel? Just now, there were only 11 senators who voted with him, and his proposal on the floor of the Senate was turned down. What's your take on that?

Josh Paul: It's obviously very disappointing, but I don't think it's surprising. One of the things that stood out to me several months ago when I resigned, was that typically, when we are talking about human rights issues connected to arms transfers, Congress is an ally in terms of raising those concerns, in terms of speaking up, holding hearings, and pressing for delays while we figure out and understand what is happening.

That was not the case here. In this context, Congress was pushing as hard, if not harder, than the Biden administration itself, to rush arms to Israel to assail Gaza. There is a blind spot in our foreign policy, including when it comes to Congress's consideration of these issues and of the humanity of the Palestinian people. So it's not surprising.

A lot of people in Congress, first of all, are uneducated on this issue, frankly, or are educated just by one side, and second of all, who are paying very close attention to what their networks are telling them to do and how they're being told to vote, rather than to what their constituents are telling them to do. I've heard from many congressional staff who say they are getting calls in favor of a ceasefire at a 10 to 1 ratio from constituents. Yet, this is not translating into a member position, which is reason for concern in our democracy.

Ralph Nader: Jim Zogby, the head of the Arab American Institute, gave an address years ago to an Israeli university audience talking about the other anti-Semitism. By that, he meant that apart from anti-Semitism against Jews, there's a virulent anti-Semitism against Arabs backed by military power and destructive weaponry. What do you think of that?

You've served in the Arab world. You've been in Iraq and elsewhere in your career at the State Department. Why is anti-Semitism against Arabs viewed as permissible? Especially with the mass slaughter going on in Gaza at present against civilians, of which 70% of the dying are children and women.

Josh Paul: That's right. And it is very evident in current statements, including those coming out of this administration and President Biden. On the 100-day anniversary of the October 7th attacks, that were followed by thousands, as you say, of civilian casualties in Gaza, the president's message made no reference to Palestinians.

Whenever he or other officials talk at the White House about the events of and since October 7th, they humanize the Israeli suffering quite rightly and talk about individual stories and the suffering that has happened, but when it comes to the suffering in Gaza, which is numerically of a scope and scale so much larger, it is mentioned in an offhand manner—we require or we would like to see fewer civilian deaths—without any of that storytelling and humanization that accompanies talking about the Israelis.

A blind spot has been there, as we know, for many years when it comes to American foreign policy, dating back well before 9/11, dating back to the '90s, to the time of Madeleine Albright, where she was able to dismiss the death of half a million Iraqi children through starvation as a necessary part of U.S. policy. This is a very deep vein, I'm afraid, in our foreign policy, one that has ultimately harmed us as a nation, very much indeed, in the sense that in creating this blind spot, we have also lost a part of our souls and part of our values.

It is incumbent on us to turn back to the Arab-American community and to the Muslim-American community to find those values, because they are the ones who are currently expressing American values when it comes to ending civilian suffering in Gaza and calling for peace. You don't see that in mainstream America right now. By advancing the bigotries of our society, we have also lost a big part of ourselves.

Ralph Nader: Let's talk about the gross undercount of the fatalities in Gaza. They're still talking about 24,000 fatalities, and they cite the Hamas Health Ministry.

Look at the reality here. Imagine if Philadelphia, which has 1.5 million people and is about the size of Gaza geographically, was subjected under siege to no food, no water, no medicine, no electricity, no fuel, and no health care, as an official policy of the attacker, and over 33,000 bombs and missiles were dropped on defenseless people in Philadelphia. Would anybody think that 99% of the people in Philadelphia would have still survived after 100 days?

Hamas seems to have an interest in lowballing its own fatalities, because it doesn't want to be criticized more by Gazans for not protecting them at all. What's your view of this undercount? And what do you think is the real minimal estimated casualty toll in terms of dead and injured?

Josh Paul: It's not just you who is saying there's an undercount. It's the Biden administration as well. Assistant Secretary of State for Middle East Affairs in the State Department (Near Eastern Affairs – NEA, Congresswoman Barbara Lee actually testified to Congress in November that she believes that the count being put out by the Hamas-controlled Ministry of Health in Gaza is an undercount. The Biden administration agrees with you that we are not capturing as many deaths as are occurring.

I fear that we are just at the very beginning of this humanitarian crisis., that as many as have been killed by Israeli or rather by American bombs, frankly, in the last few months, there could be many times that number who will succumb to disease and starvation in the rest of this year. I don't know that the world is prepared for that. I certainly know that the humanitarian community is not being allowed to prepare for that in terms of their access to Gaza that would be needed to prevent this. We are at the start of a very dark period, unfortunately.

Ralph Nader: It might be added that 80% or more of Gazans have been displaced and they're living exposed to the elements or under tents, mostly in the southern part of this tiny enclave, which is only twice the size of the District of Columbia.

Let's go to the core of your expertise, Josh Paul. Over the years, there was an embargo on Gaza by Israel, which is considered illegal under international law. Given the Israeli surveillance technology of the Palestinians—considered by experts as the most advanced technological surveillance in the history of the world—how did Hamas get these weapons and the ammunition ready to use? Where did they come from? How did they get through?

Josh Paul: The best analysis coming out of the U.S. is that for the most part, these are weapons of Iranian origin and sometimes of North Korean origin and elsewhere from around the world. How they got through is a very good question, that speaks to the issue of Israel's siege on Gaza, which was intended to prevent this sort of flow of arms into the Gaza Strip.

What that tells you at the end of the day, is that what you need here is a political solution, because there is no military solution both to Hamas's capabilities and to the ingenuity of mankind in being able to build, smuggle, and construct, the arms that they have on hand. The bottom line of the answer here, is that there is no military solution. There is no military capability that can keep 2.3 million people cooped up with no ability to build an arms cache. We need a political solution.

Ralph Nader: Before a political solution, some people have spoken of a two-state solution, which Muslim countries have been proposing since 2002, in an open letter, and Israelis have been ignoring it. What do you make of Prime Minister Netanyahu's statements over time, including to his own Likud party in 2019, that the Israeli government is supporting and facilitating the funding of Hamas because Hamas doesn't believe in a two-state solution and can stop the Palestinian Authority from moving in that direction? This is an astounding position given Netanyahu's recent denunciation of Hamas. It seems like he enabled Hamas over the years. What's your reaction?

Josh Paul: That's exactly right. He has, and I think Israel has often played Hamas off against the Palestinian Authority (PA), while at the same time undermining the PA in every way it can, by withholding salaries and using the PA to pursue Israeli security objectives rather than Palestinian security objectives. That's a game that we, the United States, have played our part in.

There has been, in parallel with the expansion of settlements, with the continuation of the siege of Gaza, an effort to essentially deconstruct and divide, the State of Palestine, before one can even be established, to make it impossible to establish. That has been very much at the core of Prime Minister Netanyahu's policy, and it has blown back on him in some respects. And yet, it is hard to see how we go forward from here politically.

Ralph Nader: Let's talk about humanitarian aid. We've been listening to Joe Biden saying he wants more humanitarian aid, and it's already funded by the U.S., and there are hundreds of trucks ready to come in with food, medicine, shelter, and other necessities of life. But the Israelis are only letting in anywhere from 50 to 100 trucks. Those trucks can't get to their destination because of the bombing and the broken-up roads, and most of the hospitals are not around operating to receive this aid.

Is Biden talking with a forked tongue here? He's shipping all kinds of arms unconditionally, as you know better than most, to the Israelis. Can he turn the screws on them and say, "I want 600/ 700 trucks a day going into Gaza," which was the case before October 7th, "because people are dying, being injured, sick, babies dying without this humanitarian aid hour by hour." What would you say to the president that he must do right now? Every day, hundreds are dying.

Josh Paul: Biden could be doing a lot more, and he's choosing not to. His policy and America's policy continues to prioritize Netanyahu's explicit policy, which is "the destruction of Hamas" over and against the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people.

It took three months of negotiations with Israel to get them to open the Kerem Shalom crossing into the south of Gaza from Israel. There is still the Erez Crossing in the north of Gaza, where thousands of Palestinians still remain stranded, trying to survive, and opening the Erez Crossing, which Israel has not opened, is another option.

There are also options. For example, I think there is a significant concern that the only option for Palestinian people in Gaza to get humanitarian assistance might be to leave Gaza. If that is the case, of course, not only are we essentially talking about another Nakba, but that doesn't have to be the case if they were able to proceed into, for example, the Negev, but that is not something that people are even talking about. But that would keep people on the land.

There are any number of options that President Biden could be pursuing, but the proof that he is not is that he is not using any of the leverage that he has with the government of Israel to pursue those options. He is not making military assistance conditional upon the provision of humanitarian support. He is not making military assistance balanced against, for example, action in the United Nations (UN) to call for a ceasefire, or to at least get out of the way of those in the U.N. who are calling for a ceasefire. He is simply asking nicely and then saying that he is all out of options.

There is a lot more the United States and President Biden could be doing here. My concern is that he just doesn't seem particularly to want to.

Ralph Nader: You think it's the election?

Josh Paul: It's a number of factors. One of them may be the election, but if you look at the electoral math for President Biden, particularly as he hits record-low numbers in polling, I don't see the logic there. He is losing a lot of support rather than gaining it through this approach.

Many people in this country will not turn out to vote for him as a result of the steps that he has taken in the last few months. Yet rather than turning around and trying to appeal to those people,

he is doubling down, while those who are very strongly on the side of Israel, whether it be the Christian evangelical community, or the American religious Zionist community, will go and vote for the Republican. So, I don't know what President Biden is getting electorally or politically out of this. For him, it's a deeply held position. He is frozen in his 1970s perspective where they were formed. But the reality on the ground is very different now than it was then. The politics of Israel, for that matter, is very different now than then. There is an unwillingness on his part to budge due to a personally held belief, which is unfortunate.

Ralph Nader: Let's look at the extraordinary abdication of Congress under its constitutional duties. Congress should be having oversight hearings now. There are no oversight hearings about the position of the White House vis-a-vis the Israeli war in Gaza, neither in the House, under the Republicans, nor in the Senate. There's no unofficial hearing by Democrats in the Progressive Caucus who would like to see a hearing.

There's never been a hearing since 1948 in the U.S. Congress featuring Israeli peace advocates, many of them former generals, mayors, ministers of justice, and former heads of security agencies. There was a documentary on the latter a few years ago, where the retired people from Shin Bet and Mossad were criticizing the Netanyahu regime vis-a-vis the Palestinian issue.

What's your take on Congress here? It's been said that in the last three months, the pro-Palestinian people in the United States have controlled the *streets*, but the pro-Netanyahu people in the United States have controlled the *suites* in Congress and the executive branch.

Josh Paul: You're right. There are a lot of credible voices on the Israeli side, calling out the Netanyahu government for its current approach. Unfortunately, if you look at the polling, they are also in a significant minority right now in Israel, but they are nevertheless important voices.

Congress has a key role to play here that it is abdicating, not only in terms of hearings, not only in terms of, for example, the resolution that Senator Sanders brought to the floor yesterday, not only in terms of speaking out more publicly, calling for a ceasefire. It's interesting. I have spoken with many members of Congress in the last few months, and even for those who haven't publicly called for a ceasefire, many are willing to acknowledge behind closed doors that they believe that Israel is committing war crimes, but they will not say it publicly.

To me that's such a moral abdication of the purposes for which they elected. If you know something to be a fact, if you know the U.S. to be complicit in facilitating war crimes, but are unwilling to say it because you are afraid of how your donors might react or how your next election might go, why are you even in Congress? So, there is a significant gap there. It is an important note because it is not just Congress where this debate is being silenced or where people are being censored or are self-censoring. We're seeing it in the American public, too. I've heard from many doctors, lawyers, and engineers who say, "I would like to stand with you, but if I am too vocal, I will lose my job."

The result of all this, when you do not have free debate in society, when you do not have free debate in Congress, when you do not have free debate in government, is that you get bad policies.

We know that's how autocracies fail, because they do not have free debate and they get bad policies as a result.

That's happening here specifically in the context of Israel and Palestine. But it also makes me afraid for the future of our democracy more broadly, because if there is one issue where you cannot speak up on, if there is one issue where you are shouted down and condemned for voicing an opinion on the side of humanitarian issues, there will be other issues, I guarantee you, where the same becomes true.

Ralph Nader: We're going to have, after our interview, James Bamford, who's written a book and two articles in *The Nation* on the organized pressure to suppress dissent on campuses and to call out the students who are supporting the ceasefire and the Palestinian two-state cause by name, by picture, trying to get them to have their job offers rescinded, extremely well organized. And James Bamford, of course, is famous for writing the first book of any kind on the National Security Agency (NSA). He has a sterling record of accuracy.

Would you come out publicly for congressional hearings of prominent Israeli and Palestinian peace advocates who have been at it over the years, but have been blocked from any voice in the U.S. Congress by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and other similar lobbies? Don't you think that's the beginning of providing voices of dissent from Israel before the U.S. Congress?

Josh Paul: Of course. And if the administration, if President Biden is sincere in wanting to do more to press Israel to reduce civilian casualties, the administration should support that as should Congress. Because that is one of those tools that does not involve cutting off military assistance and does not involve backing Israel at the UN. It simply involves demonstrations of concern from Congress and therefore gives some amount of added pressure without actually changing anything.

So for those in the administration and in Congress who believe that we should be doing more to support, and to be concerned about Palestinian lives, about humanitarian suffering, and yet are not willing to take any solid steps, there is no reason whatsoever that they should not support that sort of hearing.

Ralph Nader: As you say, the calls are pouring into the switchboard in Congress at 10 to 1, demanding a ceasefire, and that President Biden stand up for America's prime interest here, which you have described in your interviews since you left the State Department.

But I'm curious about one thing that you have expertise on. Why is the Biden administration sending 2,000-pound bombs to Israel when it hardly used the 2,000-pound bombs in the war in Iraq? For those who don't know about this, 2,000-pound bombs have extraordinarily increased devastation on civilians. Can you enlighten us on this?

Josh Paul: Yes. We also know from public reporting, including from CNN, *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, and others, that Israel is using many of these 2,000-pound bombs in an unguided capacity. So rather than, for example, attaching a precision guidance kit to these, it is simply dropping them on Gaza.

As to why the Biden administration is providing these to Israel, the answer is very simple. Israel is asking for them and no one has the guts to question that. No one has the guts to say no. This is very much part of the dynamic that I saw before leaving government—that Israel was coming in and making these extensive, expansive requests for weapons, many of which were not applicable in the context of Gaza, and yet no one was willing to say, “Let’s talk about this. This doesn't make sense. How are you going to use this?”

Ralph Nader: Do Israelis pay for these weapons, or is that part of the \$4 billion that comes every year from the U.S. to Israel?

Josh Paul: That is yet to be determined for many of the current arms transfers. We do provide Israel, as you say, just under \$4 billion a year in ground military assistance. That's about 20% of the Israeli defense budget. They spend their own money as well, procuring arms from the U.S., and of course, President Biden's supplemental request would provide them with several billion dollars more in military grant assistance. So if that were to not pass, I suspect that Israel would have to spend its own money on these. But in the meantime, we can assume that a lot of this is courtesy of the U.S. taxpayer.

Ralph Nader: Have you spoken out against this \$14.3 billion request from Biden to the Congress to send aid to Israel, tied up in a bill for military aid to Ukraine and Taiwan? Have you spoken out publicly against this? It's been called the genocide tax that outraged so many people to further kill more innocents.

Josh Paul: Yes, and I have some specific concerns beyond the simple provision of further funding, which I think we should all question. There provisions/new authorities in the president's request would expand the scope and the speed of arms transfers while reducing congressional oversight.

As little as Congress has done on this issue set, we should be concerned about that as Americans. Congress is our overseer of the executive branch, and reductions in that transparency, particularly while expanding and expediting the capability to provide arms into this context and into this conflict, is problematic and should be so, from a perspective of concern about American democracy.

Ralph Nader: What's interesting is there aren't even any public hearings on this scheduled. Congress has aborted its public hearing function. And it's given over the years, the power to declare war, to the presidency under very vague standards. However, Congress has that exclusive power - as James Madison pointed out in the Constitution - to declare war. There are all kinds of violations of law here. It seems like the U.S. empire and the micro-empire of Israel don't feel like they have to adhere to any international laws—the Geneva Conventions nor the Genocide Convention. What's your view of the State Department not ever raising these issues, not saying to the White House, “I think you should go to Congress on this, given our interpretation by the legal advisor of the U.S. Constitution.”

Josh Paul: Let me first say that I have an immense amount of respect for the State Department lawyers. They are hardworking, thoughtful, insightful people. The problem is that for any legal team within government, any legal institution within government, within the executive branch,

their job often becomes to interpret the law as broadly as possible in favor of the presidency. In many of these cases, what we have is a problem of how the executive branch interprets the law so that it does not bind the hands of the president. And that leads to all sorts of difficult consequences when it comes to, for example, the application of human rights vetting that is in law under the Leahy Laws for Israel or for other countries for that matter, when it comes to determining whether a country is engaged in a continuous practice of gross human rights abuses.

So, these are all sorts of questions of interpretation, where the problem is that the lawyers in the department and across government tend to say, what is the narrowest interpretation that will give the president the broadest scope? And the problem here is that you then create a massive accountability gap that you have an absence of ability to bind the executive who, both the American laws or for that matter, to international law, which of course is much less binding and much more consensus based, which is then further advanced when you have courts that defer deeply to the executive on a lot of these issues, such as questions of foreign policy, questions of defense policy.

So, there are really very few hooks in the current structure that provide a means of accountability, a means of holding people to account, a means of questioning decisions. This is in Congress's hands to fix. Congress has the ability to write stronger laws, to write laws that have actual hooks, that have actual triggers that bring them into effect. So I would throw that back into Congress's court, but for now, that's where we are.

Ralph Nader: Do you see a wider war occurring? The papers are full of projections that this war is widening. It may involve neighboring countries. It may involve Iran. Biden keeps saying that he's working vigorously to make sure that doesn't happen, but the U.S. has bombed in Syria recently, Iraq, and the Red Sea. And what's your view here? Is it going to get out of control?

Josh Paul: Look, I hope not, but the longer the conflict in Gaza continues, the greater the risks of that sort of escalation becomes. That is another reason why it should be in the U.S. interest to press Israel to end its bombardment of Gaza, to end its invasion of Gaza, as quickly as possible, because the longer this lasts, the more the risks increase.

Ralph Nader: Let's go to Steve and David and Hannah. They want to ask you a couple of questions or make a comment. Steve?

Steve Skrovan: Josh, the stated goal of the Netanyahu government is to eliminate Hamas. Is that even possible? It's not like they're wearing uniforms. It's a small fundamentalist philosophy. It's an idea. Is that just PR that they can eliminate Hamas?

Josh Paul: So, I don't know what the thinking was at the start of this operation on the part of the government of Israel, but it is not a feasible goal. They might be able to significantly, and for a significant amount of time, degrade the military capabilities of Hamas. I'm sure they've already done that. But you cannot go to war against a political movement, and you cannot go to war against an ideology. This is a political problem that requires a political solution.

This creates some significant challenges when you start wondering about what comes in the post-conflict space. If we are talking about Palestinian self-determination, there is inevitably going to be some support for Hamas, given particularly the events of the last three months and how Hamas looks compared to the fecklessness, frankly, of the Palestinian Authority. I don't know how you go forward from here, from this situation that has been created with neither a military solution nor a political solution that is workable for people. But the short answer to your question is “no.”

What I fear will happen is that there will not be a ceasefire, that Israel will keep this an open-ended conflict, and feel free to strike at whoever it says is Hamas or Hamas linked. Israel has painted a very broad swath, including through the comments of its president who has said that it is a whole nation that is at fault here or that is involved here. But even assuming that that is not the case, we will still see Israel feeling that it has a free hand to bomb, to strike Gaza, Palestinians in the West Bank, which we've seen increasingly in the last few weeks--for years to come. That is a recipe for a continued humanitarian and political disaster.

Ralph Nader: David?

David Feldman: What would happen if we had a real isolationist government here in the United States that said, “No more foreign aid for Israel, no cooperation on Iron Dome, we're just protecting our own interests,” to basically neglect, abandon Israel?

Josh Paul: First of all, I'm not personally advocating for an isolationist approach writ large by the U.S. I think we do have an important role to play in the world. I wish we played it better and with more humanity. But when it comes to Israel's ability to stand alone, I think it would succeed. It has.

Let's talk about the defense sector. We provide Israel with \$3.3 billion a year in foreign military financing. Israel is allowed to use a significant portion of that on its own defense industrial base. Over the years, over the tens of billions of dollars, what that means is that Israel is now a top exporter of weapons.

Israel has a strong defense industrial base. Israel has the means to support the military operations it wants to do, if it is willing to pay the cost in terms of raising taxes, and if it is willing to take those sorts of approaches. Israel also has burgeoning partnerships with many countries in the region, including through the Trump administration's Abraham Accords, which connected it with the United Arab Emirates, with Morocco, and with others.

Israel is not entirely dependent on the United States in the way that it would have been 20 or 30 years ago. That said, a complete cutoff now, or significant conditioning of our arms, would force Israel to make some much tougher decisions about where its actual defense requirements lie and where it wants to use the weaponry that it has.

Ralph Nader: Hannah?

Hannah Feldman: You've served under different presidents. Why now? What about this situation just snapped it for you?

Josh Paul: I think it was two main factors, one of which was the scale and the scope of the Israeli operations in Gaza, which we have seen in just over three months now more destruction of houses than the firebombing of Dresden, have killed more journalists than in any conflict since World War II, have killed more children in three months than have died in Ukraine in two years. And this is all being done with our bombs, with our money, with our weaponry, with our support.

So that was the first factor, the sense that we were a part of this absolute horror that is unfolding on the ground. And the second, is this lack of debate. I've been involved in many morally perilous, you might even say morally torturous decisions in the State Department, in the security assistance, in the arms transfer business with many countries that the United States has relationships with that are autocracies or that are human rights abusers.

In all of those previous situations, I and others in the Department had been able to raise concerns, and had those concerns addressed in some way or form in a way that made me feel that I was doing more good by being there than what I would be able to do if I was not there. The difference here, in addition to the scale of what is happening, was that there was no space whatsoever for that raising of concerns—for those questions of how to mitigate some of these outcomes, or how to stop some of these or reduce some of these civilian casualties—there was simply this rush to arms.

Given that lack of space, many people who I'm talking to now in government who are thinking about resigning raise the question of, well, if they're not there, who will be doing their job? Will it be someone who is going to care about the issues I care about, or will it be someone who is just going to rush forward on whatever they're told to do? In my situation, it didn't make any difference who was going to be doing the job because this was the policy and there was no space to address, debate, or raise concerns about it.

Ralph Nader: We've come to the end of our interview. Is there anything you want to say that we haven't asked you about? And has the media treated you well and given you a voice?

Josh Paul: I have been fortunate in that respect, at a time when there is a lot of censorship around this issue, to have been given a voice by the media. Part of the reason for that is what I look like., i.e., I am a middle-aged white guy who is therefore able to say things and to speak about the truth that many people who do not look like me would be shouted down for.

I want to say to many of your listeners that if you are in a situation like mine where you have privilege, it is very important to use that privilege for good. That is what enables others to speak up and creates the space in which policy change can actually happen by building that sort of critical mass and momentum. But it needs to be enabled to some extent by those of us who are in a position to do so.

Ralph Nader: Any recommendations to our listeners as to what they should do as citizens right now?

Josh Paul: Keep speaking up. And that involves both speaking to members of Congress, as well as members of local government. There have been a number of efforts. For example, Ferguson,

Missouri recently passed in its council a ceasefire resolution, one of few city councils around the country that has done so. And that matters.

And of course, there's building things with local communities, speaking to local media, writing letters to the newspaper, and ultimately organizing on a broader scale. That's something many of us are looking at and trying to figure out: how to harness this energy and to move things forward in the longer term.

Ralph Nader: Well, thank you very much for the time you've given us and the insights and the profile of courage that you've exhibited by resigning in protest as a matter of conscience, Josh Paul. And we wish you good luck and the best in terms of communicating more and more why you left the State Department in this turbulent time of massive destruction in Gaza.

Josh Paul: Thank you very much for having me. I really appreciate it.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Josh Paul. We will link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Up next, we'll uncover the vast espionage network that aims to stifle dissent on college campuses. But first, let's check 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, January 19, 2024, I'm Russell Mokhiber. eBay will pay a \$3 million criminal penalty for an August 2019 harassment and intimidation campaign targeting a Massachusetts couple in retaliation for their online coverage of eBay and for its obstruction of the investigation that followed.

eBay executed a harassment campaign intended to intimidate the victims and to change the content of the newsletter's reporting. The campaign included sending anonymous and disturbing deliveries to the couple's home, including a book on surviving the death of a spouse, a bloody pig mask, a fetal pig, a funeral wreath and live insects, sending private Twitter messages and public tweets criticizing the newsletter's content, and threatening to visit the victims in Natick, Massachusetts. For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russel. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan, along with David Feldman, Hannah, Ralph. Our government has spent a lot of time, money, and energy resisting Russian and Chinese spy operations. But what do we do when the spying is being done by our ally, in this case, Israel? David?

David Feldman: James Bamford is a best-selling author, Emmy-nominated filmmaker for PBS, award-winning investigative producer for *ABC News*, and winner of the National Magazine Award for Reporting for his writing in *Rolling Stone* on the war in Iraq. He is the author of the first book ever written on the National Security Agency (NSA), as well as other books, including *Spy Fail: Foreign Spies, Moles, Saboteurs, and the Collapse of America's Counterintelligence*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, James Bamford.

James Bamford: Great. Thanks for having me on your show. Appreciate it.

Ralph Nader: James Bamford, for years, has been one of the most proficient, accurate, important investigative reporters and authors in our country. He wrote the first full-length report on the secretive, gigantic national security agency known as the NSA, which doesn't even have a congressional charter. He has had a sterling record of accuracy, and he has published two articles recently in *The Nation* magazine. One of them is titled *Israel's War on American Student Activists*.

For years, the Israel on Campus Coalition (ICC), a little-known organization with links to Israeli intelligence, has used student informants to spy on pro-Palestinian campus groups. And in the second article, he goes into more detail on how organized this is, who's paying for it in the U.S., and its connections to similar groups in Israel. What's your thesis here?

James Bamford: The thesis is that Israel has been doing a lot of spying, covert operations, troll farms, doxing, all kinds of things in the United States for not just years, but decades. And the FBI (The Federal Bureau of Investigation) never does anything about it. They put a secret agent in the Trump campaign. The FBI went after Russia, but it never went after Israel.

One of the key themes of the book I wrote, *Spy Fail*, was the fact that these spies come over here, especially **from** Israel, and nothing happens. The FBI, with regard to Israel, turns its eyes away, and nobody gets arrested, and it just goes on and on.

Ralph Nader: Do you think some of these groups should be filing under the Foreign Agents Registration Act of the U.S. Treasury? Tell us about that.

James Bamford: Some of these groups should be arrested for being agents of a foreign government. If you're an American and you're contributing money and support to a clandestine foreign operation, a clandestine foreign agency of a foreign government, that's pretty much the definition of being an agent of a foreign government.

So the FBI has gone after the Senator Bob Menendez from New Jersey for his connections to Qatar and Egypt and it went after the mayor of New York for foreign connections, but it's never gone after anybody for foreign connections to Israel. And that's where really most of these foreign connections are.

Ralph Nader: Tell us what happened at Harvard University when the Harvard Palestine Solidarity Committee issued a public letter with students signing on, as students have done throughout the years on civil rights, pro-peace, closing the Vietnam War, Iraq War, and so forth. But this time, something different happened. Can you explain?

James Bamford: Yeah. This time, there was huge action against them. There was a doxing truck that showed up at Harvard, a truck that had electric signs on the sides of the truck that listed the names and addresses and detailed information about the signers of letter, and the truck then went to the houses of some of these people. The whole idea was to dox them, to intimidate them, to expose who they were, and cause havoc in their lives. That was one of the things the FBI did.

The other thing is that there's a very secretive group or very secretive organization known as the Canary Mission. It is an organization that creates a blacklist that goes all over the internet. It shows

people's names, pictures, and bio information, and then those people are basically derided for what they've said against Israel. They're called anti-Semitic and different things like that. It's done to discourage these people from criticizing what's happening in Israel, particularly the war in Gaza. These are acts to intimidate the people who signed the public letter.

Ralph Nader: And this is a very well-funded collection of organizations. Can you go into that? In your article, one of the participants revealed that the budget for one year was \$9 million.

James Bamford: It gets a lot of money, and its money comes from U.S. supporters. Canary Mission, for example, contributors are secret, largely. They don't have to declare who they are. Because of a mistake on a tax form at one point, it was discovered that one of the major contributors was Sanford Diller, a very wealthy Californian, who donated \$100,000 to the front organization for the Canary Mission in Israel.

The way it worked is that he would donate it to a Jewish foundation. The foundation would then donate the money to another, basically a front company in New York. That way he'd get a tax deduction on it, but if the money went right to Israel, he wouldn't get any tax deduction. So they sent it through a front company, the Central Fund for Israel in New York.

From there it went to a front in Israel, which turned out to be just an old, padlocked building, not a real organization. Then it ran someplace else in Israel. It was tracked down to a rabbi who was in charge of it at one point. So, this mysterious money went to front companies and it was hidden. The U.S. government has plenty of power to stop these kinds of things, but it doesn't. It allows it to go on and on.

So you get people that are at Harvard or any other school, and it doesn't even have to be a school, and it doesn't have to be a student. There are professors and people working for companies who get put on this blacklist, the Canary Mission list, and their job opportunities are extremely limited because if anybody goes for a job and their potential employer looks on the internet, one of the first things they'll see is that the person's name is on this blacklist, where they're called a variety of names, for doing something that's basically honorable.

Ralph Nader: Tell us about the experience that Tony Kleinfeld reported on in 2016, in an expose by Al Jazeera.

James Bamford: Tony Kleinfeld was Jewish. He was British, and he worked for the Al Jazeera television network as an undercover reporter. He was sent to Washington to do an undercover report on the influence of the pro-Israeli lobby in the Washington area, and he uncovered a great deal of information because he was posing as a pro-Israeli activist.

One of the things he discovered was that there was an organization called Israel on Campus, which is a coalition. It's a very secretive organization in Washington. It's a high-tech organization that spies on students all over the country. They use a lot of technology. They have human spies that pass on information about what's going on, on campuses. And they compile it all.

When Tony Kleinfeld interviewed the head of the organization and other top officials there, they told him that they send it off to Israeli intelligence and then they get instructions from Israeli intelligence. Again, all this makes them an agent of a foreign power. If you're passing information, especially confidentially, to a foreign government, and you're taking instructions from them, that's the essence of being an agent.

Ralph Nader: And Kleinfeld's exchanges were on videotapes. This isn't hearsay.

James Bamford: Yeah, anybody could go to YouTube and watch the video and watch what these people are saying in their own words to Kleinfeld. Another person he interviewed was, a woman who was a former student, University of California, I think Davis, who went to work for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), where she was a secret recruiter for AIPAC. After that she got hired by the Israeli embassy. She's fully American. She's just an American, and they used her as a spy, basically, to spy on what was going on, on college campuses. Working from the embassy, she would use phony names and try to get information on people on different campuses across the country. She would take that information, pass it on to her boss at the embassy, and that would go to Israeli intelligence. Then she would get feedback from Israeli intelligence.

Ralph Nader: What is ICC and its war room-like command center?

James Bamford: The ICC is the Israel on Campus Coalition. It's a war room set up to surveil students all over the country. I don't mean by placing hidden microphones, but by reading everything that's online, all the comments, every email, the open emails, and so forth. Whether they're doing anything clandestinely in terms of accessing data, I don't know. But they're picking up all the information, analyzing it and passing it on to Israel.

Ralph Nader: You say that they monitor online conversations in real-time from more than 650 million social media sources, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs, and other online communities. And this has grown with such a large budget that they paid over \$1 million to what you called "a high-powered Washington political consulting firm, FPI (Foreign Portfolio Investment), to promote social media posts attacking students who supported Palestinian rights." Some of this information you say in your article "flows to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL)." The ADL is not supposed to be involved in such matters. What's the story here?

James Bamford: ADL has been involved in a lot of such matters. It has a record of being arrested for espionage, been accused, and charged, basically, with using spies in the United States, using undercover people to pick up information. There was a case in California in the '90s where that happened. It's actually a topic I'm currently writing about. Yeah. So it's not surprising that the Israeli on Campus Coalition would work alongside and help the ADL, or that the ADL would get information from the ICC.

Ralph Nader: You're critical of the FBI, which has taken a pass here. They're not investigating and they're not enforcing the law. They don't have any such inhibitions against Islamic American groups. You spoke to some people who retired from the FBI, and they were a bit more candid. Tell us about that.

James Bamford: That was the point I was just trying to make, that it's not really the agent level, or the street agent level. I know a lot of FBI agents. I've dealt with FBI all my life. So, I've interviewed a lot of agents, and on the street level that's why they joined the FBI, to arrest people and catch people doing crimes.

The problem is, once it starts working its way up. I interviewed the former head of counterintelligence for the FBI. I didn't want his name mentioned, but I asked him about this whole thing. Why is there no investigations going on? And he basically said, "There are investigations going on. We have investigated." The problem is, once they send it up to the Justice Department, nothing happens. The FBI can't do anything.

All the FBI can do is recommend that action be taken. The Justice Department has to do the prosecution, and when it gets up to the Justice Department, nothing happens, and that's because the Justice Department is a political organization, basically, with the White House not wanting to create an issue that might result in a loss of votes during an election. And if you start arresting Israelis and bringing pro-Israeli groups into court, that's not going to win you a lot of votes with a lot of the people who are pro-Israeli supporters.

Ralph Nader: Well, we're out of time. Thank you very much, James Bamford. Again, you have broached the frontiers of the public's right to know about what's going on in government and its related connections, wherever they may lead you.

James Bamford: Thanks for having me on your show. It's a great platform to be on. So thanks again.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with James Bamford. We will link to his extensive body of work on this subject at ralphnaderradiohour.com. I want to thank our guests again, Josh Paul and James Bamford. 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.

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

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

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

Steve Skrovan: And remember, don't forget to continue the conversation after each show, go to the comments section at ralphnaderradiohour.com and post a comment or question on this week's episode.

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

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

David Feldman: Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* when our guest will be Stephanie Fox from Jewish Voice for Peace. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody. It's been quite a program--profiles and courage.