

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EPISODE 462 TRANSCRIPT

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

David Feldman: Happy New Year to you.

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

Ralph Nader: Hello, everybody. You're going to want to send this program to your friends.

Steve Skrovan: Just before the end of 2022, Congress passed and President Biden signed the NDAA, the National Defense Authorization Act. It set a new record for defense spending, sending \$816.7 billion to the Pentagon. That's a lot of money. In fact, it's a lot more than the Pentagon actually requested. It also contains a number of provisions unrelated to the military. The NDAA has passed every year since 1961, so it's become a reliable vehicle for Congress. There's been a few other goodies.

Well, to break it all down for us, we've invited Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson back to the program. As many of you know, Lawrence Wilkerson is a retired U.S. Army Colonel. He's the former chief of staff to the late Secretary of State Colin Powell. And most importantly for our purposes, he is an outspoken critic of the military establishment. So we look forward to getting his take on all of that. And that's just the first half of the show. In the second half, we're going to entertain your questions and comments about past episodes. And that should be some lively commentary from Ralph. And as always, somewhere in the middle we'll check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber.

But first, Congress played sneaky Santa and just gave the Pentagon a Christmas present worth \$816.7 billion. All David got me was a \$20 iTunes gift card. David?

David Feldman: Lawrence Wilkerson is a retired U.S. Army colonel and former chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson.

Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson: Thank you. Good to be on.

Ralph Nader: Listeners, since that tour of duty, Lawrence Wilkerson has been the truth teller about the military budget and American empire almost without peer. He has a networker par excellence around the country with veterans at whatever rank who want to speak up and to try to turn around the self-devouring course of American empire and its military industrial complex budget that is totally out of control. So welcome, Larry.

I'd like to start with the military budget. What's happened in recent years is really worthy of the phrase "out of control." In less than three years, they've added over \$100 billion to the military budget. And both Democrats and Republicans received President Biden's military budget and "hoopla"-ed another \$45 billion more than the general's asked for. Now I remember the time when the Senate and House Appropriations committees in the '60s, '70s, '80s, would go over the military budget almost line by line in public hearings. Now describe to us what kind of

committee evaluation is conducted right now for the military budget in terms of witnesses, in terms of detail, in terms of days of hearing, and what was that \$45 billion allegedly for?

Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson: Ralph, I think you have to look back over the history of the National Defense Authorization Act, the so-called NDAA as we now term it, from roughly the time of 9/11 forward. You can go back even further than that and find the proclivities. But from that moment on, you can find that the Congress of the United States has become a fountain of money for not only what is called the military industrial complex, but also for so many other things that are funded by that money directly or indirectly. It's all about money, in other words. And that includes their political careers. Because if you look at the chairman of the House and the Senate Armed Services committees and associated committees like the Senate Budget Committee, like the House Budget Committee, appropriations committees, and so forth, you will find people on each of them who are listed in the Quincy Institute's - or whatever other list you want to find - of those who get the most money from Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, (Northrup) Grumman, --the Big Six (including Boeing, General Dynamics, L3Harris) and all the rest of the defense contractors. That's how they secure the money to stay in the Congress. 90% incumbency now. That's what happens in our Congress. You get money, you stay in and you stay in forever, and you build even more power. And nowhere is it more true than on the two Armed Services committees.

I know the Democrat most well on the Armed Services Committee, who's a West Point graduate, an Army guy, Jack Reed, whom I knew when I was working for Powell. And Jack Reed is a different person today. He's a totally different person. I recently met with him to talk about everything from the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan Of Action or Iran nuclear deal) to the defense budget. And I met a new man, a new man entirely. He is now a creature of the beast. He lives, breathes, and exists to support these kinds of budgets for the military. And he's a Democrat, not a Republican. He's a Rhode Islander to boot. But that's what he is today. And I'm sad to say most of them are from a cut from the same cloth.

Ralph Nader: I was going to ask you about Senator Jack Reed. He's a Harvard Law School grad. When he first came to the Senate, he cast a reflective eye on the military budget, sometimes a skeptical eye. But just recently, he was the lead champion of this \$45 billion extra. Can you tell us what that \$45 billion was allegedly for? We're talking at a time when the antiquated air traffic control system is holding planes on the ground now until they fix a computer problem. We know that the public transit system is one of the worst in the Western world and needs investment. We know that programs for children are some of the worst in the Western world in terms of the social safety net. And Senator Jack Reed is fairly good on those issues. Doesn't he realize that \$45 billion could have gone to a long way toward saving lives and protecting health and safety in this country? Exactly what did he say to justify supporting more funds than the generals asked for--45 billion with the B, dollars? It's four times the annual Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) budget.

Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson: Yeah, you put your finger on what is the immediate catalyst and that's Ukraine and the war there. A lot of that money is aimed at that war, either directly or indirectly, or it's aimed at more or less specious things the Pentagon has created to attract that money least of which is its attempts to "recover from COVID." It needs all these vast sums to do so. You've also got a problem right now in the army in particular, but all the services in general. We got a huge problem. We've started up McNamara's 100,000 again in the army with a special

training program at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and now one small unit of it at Fort Benning, Georgia, where we are taking people, like McNamara did, who can't read their name on a guard roster. These people were slaughtered when they got to Vietnam. Their death rate and casualty rate was far higher than other soldiers and marines. And we're trying to meet what is a goal that can't be met. The army can't even attract enough people to recruit sufficient numbers for its existence. It was so far short last year that if it has another year like that, it will be a real populating the military disaster for the army. And so it's taking all measure of what I call untoward practices to try and attract people.

The propensity to serve has fallen off amongst young people in America dramatically. In 2009, for example, it was about 15%; it's 9% now. So, if you look at the books of the Defense budget, 50% or better of that money is going to be used for the Pentagon budget, not the national security budget; it's 50% of that budget just to support the people. We are paying huge bonuses now, \$45,000, \$50,000 to sign up for the Army, \$115,000 to sign up for the Navy. We're paying enormous amounts of money just to attract the people to serve in the military that is more and more mercenary and more and more separated from the body politic of this country. That's what a lot of this money is for.

But Ukraine is the immediate catalyst and what Ukraine has become, and one of the things that's keeping us from negotiations I fear, which is the only way to end this thing and needs to happen immediately/needed to happen yesterday is the cash cow it has become for Lockheed Martin, Raytheon and others like that, as well as the cash cow it's become for the Congress. Because the Congress gets that feedback from the defense contractors and all that they represent. I'm not just talking about the big six; I'm talking about all the others out there too, the personal security contractors and so forth. Almost everything in the federal government now, Ralph, including United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is contractors. That's what the Republicans have done to us and the Democrats have aided and abetted it in some cases. Jesse Helms started it when he was in the Senate. And now USAID is just contractors in the field. It's contractors here, contractors there, and a few management people at the State Department. That's what we've done to the federal government. That costs money, especially when those contractors charge you about six times what a civil service person would charge you to do the same job.

So it's become astronomically expensive to be an empire. And it's much bigger than the military. The military might be some \$800 billion, almost a trillion now, but it's almost 1.6 to two trillion when you throw everything else into it (the national security and other related agencies). And by that, I mean the now 245, approaching a quarter of a billion dollars for the Veterans Administration. This is up from about 40 billion just 15 years ago, including the nuclear weapons budget, which now is another trillion plus thrown at it for new weapons.

Ralph Nader: Let's talk about that and the F-35. This has nothing to do with National Defense, listeners. I mean, as Larry and others have said, we have enough ready nuclear power to blow up the world several times over. There are far more Trident submarines, each one of which can destroy about 200 cities in less than an hour.

Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson: One Trident submarine could destroy the world.

Ralph Nader: Well, there it is. And they're pouring out of Groton, Connecticut, arguing that it's a jobs program when there are far more jobs for X number of federal dollars in the civilian

economy--that's been shown again and again--than to put it in military weapons manufacturing. Let's talk about this problem is now both Democrat and Republican. You can hardly find a dissenter anymore on Capitol Hill. There's no Dennis Kucinich. There's no Wayne Morse. There's no William Proxmire.

Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson: It's one of the major issues that both parties are very, very eye to eye on and guilty as charged when it comes to over providing funds for the defense establishment.

Ralph Nader: Let's talk about the Obama-Bush-Trump push to renovate our nuclear weapons over one and a half trillion dollars and growing. Describe that.

Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson: It's absurd. It is absolutely absurd. It includes such blatant absurdities as keeping that leg of the triad called ballistic missiles that are land based. These are deadly things that are dangerous in the sense that if someone is going to attack you, especially with the first strike, they know where they are with geometric precision and they will put six or seven of their best weapons and that means most deadly on top of each one of those. So if you live in Montana or in the Dakotas or anywhere in that vicinity, you are toast really quick. You'll be the first to die. These weapons are not anything but provocations to nuclear Holocaust. That's all they are. They are vulnerable as heck. The only way you salvage them is if you launch first. And a first launch proclivity for the United States, which is very much there now, would be a disaster for the world as it would if Moscow had one. That's the most dangerous thing about these nuclear weapons right now. So you could eliminate that whole class. What are we going to do? We're going to build a new one. We're going to build a new class and we're going to put them in the same silos. This is absurd. Now I have to back up and say I would not say that about the submarines - as long as others in the world have nuclear weapons. The submarine is the most invulnerable platform left in the military's repertoire. The submarine can go almost anywhere at any time, undetected, and do its job. You don't need as much as we have as much throw weight and power as we have, but you do need to keep the submarines. The bombs and the bombers, nah, that's still something that probably affords some flexibility. And again, I say this: as long as the rest of the world has nuclear weapons, or at least eight other nations have nuclear weapons, particularly the Russians, then you've got to have some on hand. But I would go quickly to the fact that as we negotiated the Moscow Treaty in 2002 and really reduced stockpiles of about 30,000 on both sides - Soviets, Russians and us - to somewhere around, we thought in the Treaty, 2200 - actually the Treaty said 1200 to 2200 - we got stopped at about 6000 each, and that's another story. We thought we had gotten to the point where we could get it down to a reasonable amount that would make the world a far less dangerous place. And that was one of Colin Powell's principal objectives, as it was HW Bush's when he was chairman for him, and I must say, as it was for Gorbachev too.

Listening to Gorbachev's conversation, understanding what he was talking about, and Jim Baker and Eduard Shevardnadze at the time, Gorbachev's foreign Minister were very much interested in reducing these stockpiles of human life-ending weapons. Now we are spending countless dollars, over a trillion as you pointed out, to modernize, securitized and otherwise expand the nuclear problem. And we're doing it in a very stupid fashion as far as I'm concerned. Look at the Air Force's desire for an air-launched cruise missile that would be nuclear tipped. They put it on a bomber that they claim - and it, as you've seen, cost astronomically - will penetrate and do whatever it needs to do with its onboard bombs. And yet they want to standoff cruise missile

nuclear tip to shoot from a standoff distance. Well, why do you need both things? Especially at that cost? Apparently, there are some sane people in Congress who are looking hard at that one.

Then we come to the submarines and the dangerous development there. We want to build a submarine-launched cruise missile, nuclear. Now, you tell me how anybody sitting in Moscow and watching all of the devices that they watch, just like we do, is going to know that you're launching a tactical range ballistic missile, nuclear missile, instead of a ballistic missile when the door opens on that submarine to launch. My goodness, if I saw that and I was in Moscow, I'd probably launch all morning or at least there's a possibility of it. This is insanity to develop a weapon for this essentially strategic platform – a nuclear submarine, a Trident submarine, Ohio-class submarine, whatever, with ballistic missiles on it – to put on it a missile that'll just go a few miles with a small nuclear warhead. It's absurd. It's dangerous as hell. It's supposedly a reaction to the Russian published doctrine that they will use tactical nuclear weapons and their development of them, but that's silly. We did that by eliminating the INF (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty). We have taken all nuclear arms control off the table. We've now taken probably new START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) off the table with our attitude towards this war in Ukraine. And Putin's attitude in return. So we will have no nuclear weapons arms control. Period. None.

Ralph Nader: Now listeners should remember that these nuclear arms deals, including under Ronald Reagan with Gorbachev and others, were pushed by massive rallies in New York City and Washington, D.C. And Reagan looked over the pictures and he saw some well-dressed Republicans marching down the street. And a lot of this was started by two women in New England who never were active. And that's another story. But I think we need to recognize, Larry, that there isn't that kind of citizen demonstration movement at all anymore. You just don't see these mass rallies. What do you think the problem is?

Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson: There's no recognition amongst the generation that I was teaching, and amongst people in general who are, say 50 and below; there's no memory of it. Even if there was a real vivid experience, there's still no memory of what the Cold War really represented in terms of tension and disaster--the Doomsday Clock, the doomsday machine, the end of the world. There was at least a visceral recognition of that. LBJ put out a pamphlet. I used to show it to my students. I think it was in '69, '68, '67, somewhere in there. It was towards the end of his presidency. He put out an official government pamphlet about how to build a bomb shelter in your backyard. Yeah, it was serious. No one thinks about that today. No one believes that this backdrop that is so deadly, so dangerous, lurking over us all could possibly end things tomorrow morning. That's not what they think about. That's not what they care about. What they care about is other things entirely, mostly surviving in this very difficult world now.

Ralph Nader: Let's move to Ukraine. We have a divided audience on Ukraine. Some of them think it's outrageous even to talk about the expansion of NATO to Eastern Europe, signing up all these countries that are on the border of Russia.--a border that was invaded twice in the 20th century by the German military causing tens of millions of deaths in Russia, something they don't forget. We don't forget 9/11 with 3100 deaths.

Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson: The Russians don't even forget Napoleon.

Ralph Nader: Yeah, of course. You go back to Napoleon. They don't want to hear about it. They just say Putin is evil. He criminally invaded Ukraine and he's got to be rolled back and taught a lesson. Well, that is an ahistorical analysis. You have to understand, the only way he sells this criminal war in Ukraine to the Russian people is because of the history that they do not forget and the U.S. weaponry that's just a few miles from the border in Russia in places like Romania and Poland, and with 4,000 U.S. soldiers already in Romania sent over recently from the 101 airborne division. So let's talk about this, Larry, and I want to fortify this point because one of the greatest experts on the Soviet Union was George Kennan, and he was a former ambassador of the U.S. to the Soviet Union. People remember his historical analysis. He lived to be slightly over 100, and in his later years he said the following: "A war regarded as inevitable or even probable, and therefore much prepared for, has a very good chance of eventually being fought." And this was in the context of him saying that the NATO expansion, the military alliance, which was formed for the Soviet Union, expansion to Romania, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, etc., was a provocation that merited it being called one of the worst decisions in American military and foreign policy. So take it from there, Larry. Bring us up to date on Ukraine.

Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson: Well, I was in the room when former ambassador Kennan, very lucid despite his age, told Colin Powell that it was a tragic mistake to expand NATO the way we were doing it. The discussion went downhill from there. But it was a tragic mistake. I'm beyond John Mearsheimer and that group now. I understand, as a military professional, what a tragic mistake the expansion of NATO was. My President, George W. Bush, when I was chief of staff for Colin Powell, went to Tbilisi, Georgia, and publicly announced to the Georgian people that they would be a member of NATO one day. What a provocation. What did Putin do? He took two of the oblast (administrative territorial division within Russia and other former Soviet republics) in the northeastern part of Georgia. As far as I know, he still more or less controls them. That should have been a warning for us with regard to Ukraine and for that matter, a wider expansion of NATO, but it wasn't. So John Mearsheimer is absolutely right on that. It was a stupid, colossally stupid move, unless you understand the reason it was made was to generate a new Cold War and generate more and more profits and more and more political people gaining from those profits. And if you look at it from that perspective, it was a pretty sane move, and it's still a sane move. I don't look at it from that perspective. What perspective do I look at it from now? The perspective of stopping it, because we are building the road to World War III, and World War III will be nuclear and that will be--forget about the climate change--the end of human civilization as we know it and maybe altogether. So that's the way I'm looking at it now.

And my position on Ukraine now is: Shut up and start talking to both sides. I'm convinced, from my contacts in Moscow, the Russians would do that. If we even seemed to be serious. We're the impediment. And when I say we, throw the British in there too. If we were to say in private, as we did with Iran, for the JCPOA, for example, using the good offices of Oman with Bill Burns in secret, if we were to say, okay, there are concessions both sides are going to have to make. One is we're going to have to say Ukraine will never be a member of NATO, period. End of conversation. That's one concession we're going to have to make. But you're going to have to make some too, Putin. And one of those you're going to have to make is I'm going to divest myself of any gains I've gotten beyond what I had before the invasion, and I'm going to accept the votes and referenda, whatever they want to call them, observed by international observers in those portions of Ukraine where genuinely Russians actually live and who want to continue to be

affiliated with Russia and to determine the disposition of that land or those regions, those oblast, whatever. All of these things are going to have to be done. But that's what diplomacy is all about. And we need diplomacy, not more bombs, not more bullets. We need to sit down and talk and end this thing, because the inevitable ending otherwise is going to be pure disaster.

Ralph Nader: So let's talk about some of your inside knowledge here that listeners might want to learn about. Is there any dissent or disagreement about U.S. military policy in the Pentagon or the State Department right now, silent as it may be?

Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson: I don't find that there is. There may be, but it's being carefully hidden, if there is by, on the one hand, Mark Milley (Defense Department), and on the other hand, the service chiefs and the joint chiefs in general; and on the other hand, by Blinken (U.S. Secretary of State). I'm not convinced that the combination of Blinken and Jake Sullivan (U.S. National Security Advisor), which seems to be a harmonious combination, unlike most National Security Council (NSC) advisors and State Department people, secretaries of state and national security advisors in particular. That harmony might be dangerous because I see them both essentially first wanting a Cold War with China, which inevitably you just said it yourself. You described the process. Kennan described the process. inevitably will be a hot war, and at the same time using Ukraine to establish more or less a Cold War with Russia and thus forcing those two parties together, which they are becoming increasingly attuned to do.

Beijing and Moscow have more common interests now forged by us and to a certain extent by NATO, although NATO's been a reluctant partner in that, especially Germany and France not wanting to make such a huge enemy of China. But we've pushed them into it now. And they're going to be in for a penny, in for a pound. So you've got these two spears aligning in the world now, Russia-China on the one hand and NATO-US on the other hand, which are looking at each other through a Cold War prism that could very easily be hot sooner than later.

Ralph Nader: What about the veterans that you've worked with around the country, ranking officers and noncommissioned soldiers, what's going on there? Veterans for Peace, Iraq and Afghanistan soldiers, Veterans Against the War, and there are a whole variety of smaller veterans associations that see the world in a more realistic waging peace mode than the American Legion or the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Give us your take. Are they increasing their activities or what?

Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson: You just described it rather well. I think the VFW, American Legion, and the beer-bending--I call them the beer-bending, elbow-bending, beer-drinking veterans groups--because the young people I know do not want to be members of those traditional groups. They're forming their own groups and so forth. Lots of veterans at the College of William and Mary where I was the faculty advisor for the student veterans and other places too; the Ivy League Council of veterans at Princeton, Harvard, Dartmouth, and so forth--different breed of cat there. By and large, I think Ukraine is the fly in the ointment here, though. There is a lot of discussion and dissension in that discussion amongst veterans groups that would otherwise be Afghan veterans, Iraq War veterans, Second Iraq war veterans, who understand how stupid and idiotic those wars were. They lost people, lost friends in those wars to nothing except, as one veteran said to me, increasing the profits of Halliburton. They are torn over Ukraine. On the one hand, it's a white Christian nation fundamentally, and they might not feel that way about Yemen, and I sometimes bring this up. They might not feel that way about Eritrea and Ethiopia where

incidentally more people have died than have died in Ukraine, but we don't seem to be concerned about that. But it does tear them up, this Ukraine business. They don't know which side to be on. Many of them have opted for being for the Ukraine war and for the effort to support Ukraine so it can stand up to Russia. Others are carrying their antiwar views into that conflict too and it's caused dissension in these so-called veterans for peace groups, and I use that in little letters because there are quite a few little groups like that, as well as big ones. Veterans For Peace (VFP), for example, a group with which I'm very familiar, and I spoke at their convention in Chicago a few years ago.

Ralph Nader: What does that mean?

Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson: Veterans for Peace is probably the largest group. I have a plaque on the wall right there from them. There's some contention amongst them as to whether they should be for Ukraine or not. There are some good wars, they will say, and Ukraine is one of them, comparing it to our effort against the Nazis in the '40s. So it's a divisive issue within the veterans groups that's causing them to not have the entire focus on peace like some of them hoped to have but now don't have.

Ralph Nader: Part of the jingoism on Capitol Hill and around the country is that we've got the biggest, most powerful military in world. And we can kick ass, as they say, as Bush used to say, and they better realize that because if they make a move, we're going to pummel them. But in one of your recent articles, Larry--we're talking with retired Colonel Larry Wilkerson--you differ with that. You say, "China does not want a war with us, but if provoked, Beijing would hand us our rear end quite swiftly. Americans would be confronted with sunken aircraft carriers, massive losses of air power and tens of thousands of casualties in the first 30 days, so would China. But theirs is far greater strategic depth than ours, manpower, industry, and armaments wise. We could go nuclear when we started to lose badly, and then, well, it's the end of the road for human civilization." Meaning that it wouldn't be restricted to the South China Sea and China's desired sphere of influence. Elaborate that a minute.

Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson: I'd say the same thing about two antagonists. I might even say it about Iran ultimately. But it'd be a different unfolding of a scenario--Russia and China, Moscow and Beijing. Beijing has the capacity to do it much more broadly speaking than Moscow. But let's just take a scenario: let's say we put ourselves down on the ground in Ukraine. Let's say we put our army, which is smaller than the army of Bangladesh, on the ground in Ukraine, with the purpose of fighting the Russians. We would have 10,000 casualties a day for the first 30 days. And you'd say that's 300,000 casualties. How could you do that with an army that only has 240,000? Well, we'd put other people in there too, marines and so forth, as we started to realize the gravity of what we had done, fighting on exterior lines while he fights on interior lines--unh-unh. Number 1, it's a military mistake. Number 2, it's a mistake fighting against someone who is going to absorb the casualties until they reach Vladivostok with someone who is going to absorb those 10,000 casualties a day on the front page of the *New York Times* like you would absorb cancer down your throat. That's the American people. They've never had these kinds of casualties—never, never. Not in any of their lives have they had these kinds of casualties. And they're going to have them. That's what it's all about. You talk about a nation that's roiled quickly and suddenly its political leaders say we can't have this, how do we stop this? I'll show you how we stop this. We nuke them. That's the scenario.

Ralph Nader: As if we can't be nuked back. You see, that's the hubris that has coursed its way through the jingoism in our country's history. It's not like we prevailed in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq and those countries that didn't have any Navy, Air Force, or any of the weapons we had. But they had one thing going for them, they're fighting against the invaders. We never understand that we invade countries that don't threaten us, we will never prevail, because getting their invader out of their homeland is the ultimate motivation for civilian and military opposition to our armed forces in those countries. Without constitutional authority by the way, undeclared wars have been the U.S. military practice since World War II, the last declared war by Congress. What do you see coming up here? I like your idea of using the word insanity because it's actually extremely evidential. As I told the annual convention of American psychologists many years ago, they should not only concentrate on individual mental health, they should concentrate on the mental health of conglomerates like the drug industry, the auto industry, the chemical industry, the Pentagon. There's such a thing as institutional insanity. One yardstick is if a family in this country allocated its budget the way the U.S. budget is allocated, with over half of it going for military to no discernible peaceful end, the children would be taken away from the parents if the parents weren't committed to mental institutions in the first place. They would be starving some of their children, they'd be neglecting the family, and they'd be building up all this armed force. So institutional insanity, I think, is a good yardstick to start evaluating the Congress, which on the military issue is institutionally insane by any mental health standard. What's your take?

Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson: Well, I think of institutional insanity as a short-term description of empire at its last stage would be accurate and truthful. If you look at the Roman Empire, you the Ottoman Empire, the Austro-Hungarian empire, even the Mughal Empire, or at any empire that perished precipitously or perished in a way that's in historical terms, analyzable, definable, that's part of it. Insanity at the end, particularly amongst the leadership class, and that insanity can take economic and financial form; it can take military overuse form; it can take all kinds of forms. But we seem to be guilty of all those forms history has demonstrated in the past, particularly the we want to bomb everybody to death. An otherwise very gifted diplomat, said to me the other day, "We don't know how to do diplomacy anymore. We don't do diplomacy anymore because our diplomacy has been replaced by bombs, bullets, and bayonets." He's absolutely right. That's what we've done. That's the kind no diplomacy insanity I'm talking about.

Ralph Nader: Well, you've been on Capitol Hill a lot. You've met a lot of senators and representatives. You've testified. We know that politicians basically have a public persona on issues and have a private persona on issues. For example, many members of Congress don't like the way the Israeli lobby operates on them, but they don't say it publicly; they just say it privately. When you go up there, what's the private concerns of these members about this sprawling empire and this out-of-control military budget and the militarization of foreign policy?

Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson: Let me give you an anecdote that will describe how I would answer that question. I'm in the room with Tim Kaine and Bob Menendez and a couple of other senators.

Ralph Nader: Now Kaine is chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee from New Jersey, right?

Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson: Right. Democrat from Virginia, member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. There were a couple of others there, too, one Republican. Most of them were Democrats. And we were being briefed by the UN Special Rapporteur, I think was the title they gave her, on Journalist Jamal Khashoggi's murder. And she is in no uncertain terms told us who did the murder and how it was done. And I hear Menendez and Kaine, and Senator Chris Murphy from Connecticut saying to her and to the assembled people in that room, including me, that this will not stand. "This will not stand." They will get to this. "MBS will be punished." That's Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia. "He will be punished" etc. Nothing was done! Absolutely nothing! That's their private motivation and feeling and expression. And their public motivation, feeling and expression is the same. Nothing.

Ralph Nader: Okay, on that score, do you ever have any of them say we're being told to change things by irate citizens back home? And we better pay attention because we're getting letters, emails, visits, whatever on the hustings by people clamoring to come back home America to wage peace abroad instead of war, to put trillions of dollars back into rebuilding, renovating our necessities in the area of public works, and enforcement of laws protecting consumers and labor? Do you ever hear that?

Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson: Very seldom. And largely it's the opposite and that's primarily because of Ukraine. There are other reasons too, but it's primarily because of Ukraine. The one issue, Ralph, that I have seen change on, and members have told me, have told me they went back to town hall meetings in places like Houston, for example, 10th District, and they heard from their constituents in a way that they had to change their minds. So they came back and became members, for example, of the Climate Caucus in the Congress, because the people in the hustings are very concerned about the hurricane that almost flooded them out, or they're very concerned about the rain that fell for 20 straight days and flooded them out. They're very concerned about the climate crisis. And so you see them coming back and taking some action they wouldn't have otherwise taken. That's the only issue, and that's not happening fast enough.

Ralph Nader: I think it's the lack of connection. The media is neglectful here. The lack of connection between the deprivations here--we're not ready for the next pandemic; we're not ready for the next national disaster, climate related or not; we're not ready for the necessities of life of our children. And that's because a huge portion of the public budget and the taxpayer money is going to military empire blowing countries up abroad and provoking more resistance. I think if that so often called by scholars an intermodal analysis that they have to say, oh, you tell us we don't have enough money to fix our drinking water systems that are contaminated with lead and cadmium and our children are drinking it. You don't have enough money? We have \$45 billion to add to the military budget than the generals asked for. I think that will get a more dynamic resistance from people back home. It's got to be done that way. And you've spoken about this all over the country, but there aren't enough people speaking out.

You know Erik Edstrom who wrote that book, *Un-American: A Soldier's Reckoning of Our Longest War*. And he was talking about Afghanistan. And he was an Iraq war veteran. These people who walk in your steps, Larry, and are young. Are they burned out? I mean, do they just write their books and articles and go to their demonstrations and then a few years later they've returned to routine daily life? Am I mistaken?

Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson: I think several of them that I know, anyway, are still at it. I think they are becoming depressed because they realize they aren't having much impact. And that's very depressing when you've seen what they've seen, done what they've done in some cases, and you understand why all this is happening, viscerally understand it. And yet you can't seem to have any impact on what is supposed to be a democracy wherein the people once well informed or even somewhat informed take some sort of ameliorative action. It doesn't happen that way. We don't have a democracy, Ralph. We do not have a democracy. We have a deep-state oligarchical corporatocracy. And the American people are on the outside. And the American people –intuitively and, in some cases, intellectually – understand that and go about their business and do what they have to do – raise their kids, get them educated to live, to survive and so forth – but they don't participate in the government.

Why did Donald Trump get elected? That was an upswelling of some 70-plus million Americans who said I'm sick and tired of this; I'm going to elect somebody who will change it. Unfortunately they were duped, completely duped. And that turned them off even more so, I think, except for that fringe, which is still out there like the Marjorie Taylor Greenes, and so forth. And we're going to have to live with them for a while now, Ralph, so watch this Congress really closely. And if we get a DeSantis in 2024, I'm moving out of this country.

Ralph Nader: Before we go to Steve and David, I know there's going to be some letters or emails from our listeners who are going to say, oh yeah, Larry Wilkerson makes a lot of sense, but he was once part of the problem. He was a chief of staff to Colin Powell and was with Powell when he testified before the UN and said that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. And they were lied to – Powell and Wilkerson – by the CIA, but he was part of the problem. I thought that you answered that question once very, very candidly. Please do.

Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson: Yeah, I was asked on BBC's HARDtalk. I was presented with a similar iteration of my sins and crimes and ravages by the lead commentator on BBC HARDtalk, who was much like Chris Matthews on CNBC's Hardball. And when he finished, almost out of breath, and I could feel the spittle on my face from his exchange with me, I looked at him and I said, "guilty as charged."

He was totally deflated. I didn't say it to totally deflate him, but he was. He couldn't find his words for about 10 seconds after that. Guilty as charged.

But you can change.

Ralph Nader: And that's the great thing about you, Larry, and that you did change and you changed with the past that gives you greater credibility because you know what it was like when you were part of the military empire. Steve, David?

Steve Skrovan: Yeah, this is an amazing conversation. Thank you so much, Colonel Wilkerson. I just wanted to bring up, in this recent kerfuffle for the House speakership, the rebels, the right-wingers, one of the things they were calling for was a decrease in the military budget, which made me think, "Well, that doesn't sound too bad." What is your take on the sincerity of that claim?

Ralph Nader: Seventy-five billion, I recall, they wanted to cut the military budget.

Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson: I looked at each individual from Matt Gaetz to the other individual whose name escapes me right now, but I think that's a dangerous, dangerous development in the sense that what they really want to do - and remember, I've been in this Republican Party for 50 freaking years - is cut social spending. And so what they're after with that challenge to the defense money is not actually reducing the defense money. Some of them in closeted chambers are worse warmongers than some of the Democrats, whom we call warmongers, like Jack Reed. But what they want to do is use that to get a commensurate reduction. And ultimately what they want is double or triple that reduction in the social budget.

I'm hearing right now, for example, in my party's chambers, they're talking about how they're going to eliminate Social Security altogether, how they're going to eliminate Medicare altogether. Those are two of the most successful programs this country has ever come up with, given that our population was increasing and we couldn't possibly support everyone through the "I'm an individual, I'm tough, I'm rough, I'm a Republican. If I can't make my own way in this world, by God, something's wrong with the world. Kill all those other people." What did Scrooge say? Let them die; are there not prisons are there not work camps; let them die and decrease the surplus population. That was and still is the Republican mantra. And what they're doing with this is trying to get the camel's nose under the tent to destroy the social program money, which they really feel is the dangerous money.

Ralph Nader: Unfortunately, we're out of time. Listeners, I hope that you'll send your comments to us so we can forward them to Larry. Send your comments whether they're plus, minus, whether they're extending with your knowledge, your background. Some of you may be veterans who have got important stories to tell. Let's hear from you and we will send them to Larry and talk about some of them on the program. Thank you very much, Larry.

Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson: Thanks for having me, Ralph. Thanks to all of you.

Steve Skrovan: We have been speaking with Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson. We will link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Up next, Ralph is going to respond to some of your listener feedback. 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, January 13, 2023. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

An executive at Wells Fargo's operations in India was fired and is being held following allegations that he urinated on an elderly woman during a flight from New York to New Delhi. That's according to a report in the *Washington Post*. The man, Shankar Mishra, was arrested in Bangalore by New Delhi police. A judge in New Delhi ordered him to be held in prison for 14 days because he was considered a flight risk.

On an Air India flight, Mishra was "completely inebriated" and urinated on another passenger, according to a police report, which cited a letter from the alleged victim. The woman said in the letter, "He unzipped his pants and urinated on me and kept standing there until the person sitting next to me tapped him and told him to go back to his seat." The woman, who identified herself as a senior citizen, told the crew that she wanted Mishra arrested. But he came back and apologized and begged her not to press charges, she said.

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 Ralph, you wanted to respond to some listener feedback.

Ralph Nader: Well, a question from Andrew said, "The healthcare industry is the largest employer in the U.S., 25% bigger than retail or food service, the second third largest employer categories. If the healthcare industry becomes optimized by Medicare for All, or what we call single-payer, and shrunk to 25% of its current blow, that would mean 15 million people would lose their jobs or their income. What would they do when there is no alternative industry to gobble up these workers? Until this problem is solved, I can't even consider any discussion about Medicare for All to be taken seriously."

Andrew, several comments. First of all, when you have Medicare for All, you have tens of millions of people who don't get healthcare now, who would get healthcare. So that sustains the staff in the healthcare industry considerably. And second, no one I know agrees with your percent that it would shrink to 25%, three out of four workers would lose their job. It doesn't come close to that. And thirdly, Senator Bernie Sanders has addressed that very point you were making. And in the genuine single-payer legislation in the House and Senate in recent years, they have addressed the transition problems of unemployed accountants, unemployed healthcare workers and finding ways to get them employment opportunities. You never want to make this argument Andrew, because like the argument says, if we cut the military budget in half, we're going to lose a lot of jobs. There are always more jobs in mass transit and the civilian economy and the healthcare industry. A lot of jobs in preventive healthcare and self-help exercises, providing recreation facilities for people in neighborhoods, improving the expansion of nutrition programs, etc. I hope you don't repeat this kind of argument because it's very self-destructive in terms of the overall goal of saving hundreds of thousands of lives. And when people cease getting medical care because they can't afford the insurance premiums to get diagnosed and treated in time.

Steve Skrovan: I would offer another angle because the Physicians for a National Health Program have cited statistics that say for every million people who are not covered, a thousand people die a year, annually. So that thousand people dying per year, annually, is the price that you would pay for those jobs. I don't think when you put it in that perspective, what's a job over a life?

Ralph Nader: Not only that but the treatable injuries and illnesses where people don't die but they get these ailments and injuries because they can't afford to get diagnosed and treated in time. All right, another question. We got some interesting responses on corporations being considered persons by the Supreme Court. And one listener wrote, "How could a corporation be considered a person if a Charter has to be given, that can be revoked, which is how it exists in reality? A person doesn't need a charter to exist." Good point in the debates that should be on the horizon on this issue, listener. And then there was another one who said, "The Medicare for All Show was great. How on earth could anyone vote for any politician not in favor of Medicare for All? I wonder if you could get Thomas Frank on your show. Mr. Frank's recent video, 'What the Hell, America?' really moved me. And after listening to the Medicare for All show and watching

Mr. Frank's video, I'm convinced that we people need to organize around a few issues, such as Medicare for All, that are popular with Americans, then either find politicians who will do what we say or start a new party, because I don't believe today's Republicans and Democrats are going to change." And here's one. A listener says, "It seems the best leverage against Citizens United is changing the corporate tax code. If we fully acknowledge that corporations are people, then they must be taxed at the individual tax rate. Given their sizable profits, corporations would pay the highest individual tax rate, which is 37%. I think this action would have corporations clamoring back to the Supreme Court to reverse Citizens United. Is that a viable strategy in your opinion?" Well, not if it's a tradeoff. It wouldn't be a tradeoff like that. But your point is well taken. Right now, corporations can make billions of dollars in annual profits and not pay more than 21%. The effective rate is 15% when they maneuver all the ways they can avoid. The top rate of 21% and many of them end up with their tax lawyers and accountants paying no income tax on profits made in the U.S. So there's a double standard in reverse here, which is it should be unconstitutional to tax corporate profits at the highest rate less than they tax individual income because of unequal protection of the laws. So if we make some of these reforms we talked about in prior programs, they wouldn't be able to get away with that.

By the way, there is one point listeners pointed out which is federal chartering that I neglected to describe. In the early part of the 20th century and the late 1930s, and in the middle of 1960s, there was some congressional movement to charter federally these giant corporations so they couldn't take advantage of the permissive charter laws in places like Delaware and Nevada. Unfortunately, they went nowhere. But recently, Senator Elizabeth Warren proposed federal chartering of giant corporations, where our country could rewrite the constitution of these corporations and bring it up to date in terms of the global corporate control over capital, labor, technology and just about anything that they touch these days that they want to corporatize. So thank you for pointing that out.

Steve Skrovan: Ralph, I know you've answered this question before to us basically, but there was another listener question from a listener named Riley, who I guess missed the other times we've talked about this. But Riley says, "Hi all, can't wait to listen as always. I have a question following up in Mr. Nader's column this week. Which daily print newspaper does Ralph recommend for staying with the national news if their local one is insufficient?"

Ralph Nader: You know, to say daily means you're going to be stuck with commercial newspapers. And you know what that problem entails. There used to be a *Daily Citizen* put out by none other than Russell Mokhiber for almost a year, but that got to be too much for him. If you ask what regular publication, we have to go with *Washington Monthly*, *The Nation*, *In These Times*, and the *Progressive Magazine*, and then we're left with some blogs and some websites. So I really can't point to a daily newspaper that meets the standards you seem to imply. I read the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* every day, and they have a lot of good material I didn't know about and a lot of long features. But they pulled their punches in their editorials, and they don't give anywhere near the space to the citizen groups in our country, national and local, that have been excluded from the mainstream press, including from those two newspapers.

One of the listeners says, "What's needed is a school curriculum to teach children what advertising is and how to resist it. Don't be an idiot; don't be a sucker, is an effective message, even for kids." Thank you. That's exactly what my sister, Claire Nader, tried to do in her book, *You Are Your Own Best Teacher!*, *sparkling the curiosity, imagination and intellect of tweens*,

nine- to 12-year-olds. And she has a section on how to be alert to propaganda and advertising. So thank you very much. You might want to get a copy of that by going to inspiringtwens.com.

There's another one that came in that was right on point and I want to quote. "A corporate crime database should include a record of lawsuits both levied against and levied by large corporations." Well, I think a corporate crime database would include the lawsuits, for example, by the Justice Department and State Attorney Generals against corporations. I don't know whether it would include corporations suing each other for criminal wrongdoing. But thanks for bringing that to our attention.

Steve Skrovan: Well, thank you for your questions and your feedback. I want to thank our guest again today, Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you podcast listeners, so stay tuned for that bonus material we call "The Wrap Up." A transcript to this program will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* Substack site soon after the episode is posted.

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

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

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

Steve Skrovan: And remember to continue the conversation after each show. Go to the comments section at ralphnaderradiohour.com and post a comment or question on this week's episode. We'll pick some standout comments, ask for Ralph's response, and he'll reply.

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*. Our guests will be James Damico and Mark Baidon to about their new book, *How to Confront Climate Denial*. And also, Luke Broadwater of the *New York Times* to discuss the January 6 investigation. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody.