

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 471 TRANSCRIPT

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

David Feldman: Hello, Steve.

Steve Skrovan: Good to have you here as always. And it's also good to have the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hello. And it's the hour of the 20th anniversary of the criminal invasion by Bush and Cheney of Iraq.

Steve Skrovan: That's right. Twenty years ago, the United States invaded Iraq. It wasn't the first time the US invaded a sovereign nation. It wasn't the first time the US lied to its global allies and sacrificed diplomacy at the altar of the military-industrial complex. It wasn't the first time a US president subverted Congress and the Constitution to wage war. It wasn't the first time the US government allied with the American press to lie to the public about why we were killing and dying overseas. It wasn't the first time the American people were manipulated into giving up their civil liberties and embracing xenophobia in the service of a war on boogeyman. And it wouldn't be the last time.

Today we're looking back at the US invasion of Iraq, a war that the George W. Bush administration started by lying to Congress, the public and NATO to start, a war that caused the US nearly \$3 trillion, killed more than 4400 US military personnel and wounded another 32,000, and killed between 275,000 and 306,000 Iraqi civilians. It destroyed the government and infrastructure of Iraq, increased global terrorism, and exposed the United States as untrustworthy hypocrites in international diplomacy.

Our guests today will be Dahr Jamail and Matthew Hoh. Dahr Jamail was an unembedded reporter in Iraq during the war and has written about the profound trauma and political rage of frontline reporting. Matthew Hoh is a veteran of the US Marine Corps and US State Department and was deployed during Iraq's occupation. We'll speak to Mr. Jamail and Mr. Hoh about their thoughts and the enduring legacy of the United States' invasion of Iraq. As always, somewhere in the middle we'll check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, it was 20 years ago this week, when a country that possesses and has used weapons of mass destruction, preemptively attacked another nation they claimed was developing weapons of mass destruction. Even though that turned out to be a lie, a tremendous amount of mass destruction ensued. David?

David Feldman: Dahr Jamail is an award-winning independent journalist who went to Iraq to report on the war and occupation. In 2007, he was awarded the Martha Gellhorn Award for his Iraq war reporting, and in 2018, he won an Izzy Award for excellence in independent media for his climate crisis reporting. He is co-editor with Stan Rushworth of *We Are the Middle of Forever: Indigenous Voices from Turtle Island on the Changing Earth* and the author of *The End of Ice: Bearing Witness and Finding Meaning in the Path of Climate Disruption*, as well as *Beyond the Green Zone: Dispatches from an Unembedded Journalist in Occupied Iraq*. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Dahr Jamail.

Dahr Jamail: Thanks a lot, David. Great to be back.

David Feldman: And Matthew Hoh is a Senior Fellow with the Center for International Policy. Mr. Hoh took part in the American occupation of Iraq, first with a State Department reconstruction and governance team and then as a Marine Corps company commander. When not deployed, he worked on Afghanistan and Iraq war policy and operations issues at the Pentagon and State Department. In 2009, he resigned in protest from his post in Afghanistan with the State Department over the American escalation of the war. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Matthew Hoh.

Matthew Hoh: Thank you so much for having me with you, and thank you for having this conversation.

Ralph Nader: Welcome indeed, both of you. And both of you are very knowledgeable of this criminal history by the Bush-Cheney administration. We had on recently a retired judge, Andrew Napolitano, who was, for over 20 years, a legal commentator on Fox News, and who called years ago, as well as renewed his call that the Justice Department should criminally prosecute George W. Bush and Dick Cheney for war crimes. This was an invasion based on lies. Republican Congressman Ron Paul from Texas said that Bush and Cheney lied their way into the Iraq war. There were no weapons of mass destruction. The claims were based on lies, misleading witnesses that had an axe to grind, and terrible reporting by newspapers such as the *New York Times*, one of the darkest chapters in its long history.

Before the invasion on March 20, called "shock and awe" — imagine a phrase like that, so befitting of an empire — one group after another desperately tried to reach and speak with George W. Bush in the White House. Some of these groups had come back from Iraq and had firsthand information. These groups wrote letters. They're all on nader.org for you to peruse. These letters were by veterans' groups, church groups, physician groups, business groups, labor groups, consumer groups, political scientists, local public officials, women's groups, student groups and even retired intelligence officials' groups. And none of them found the White House even acknowledging their letters, much less having a meeting. So, this was a criminal operation from day one. Bush later admitted that oil had been an important factor, but they justified that overturning the dictator Saddam Hussein, who was our dictator for many years, because he was anticommunist and he was against the clerical regime in Iran; we gave him all kinds of weapons, intelligence, even the materials that were made into chemical weapons. That's been documented by a hearing in the US Congress.

So with that background, Dahr, I want to ask you to back up a bit because you witnessed the results of a horrible crime under George Herbert Walker Bush, in the so-called first Gulf War, which was easily preventable, because some 20 or more years before, a dictator in Iraq had his tanks rumbling toward Kuwait and the British sent a team of paratroopers to Kuwait and the dictator rolled his tanks back to Baghdad. That could have been done to avoid the first Gulf War, but the regime of George Herbert Walker Bush, hailing from oil-rich Texas, had other reasons for not preventing that war. And he bragged about precision missiles because he wanted to tell the American people that the missiles were not going to blow up civilians. And deep in his shelter in Baghdad, over 600 women, children and men were huddling in an air raid shelter when the 'shock and awe' campaign was underway. Could you describe that?

Dahr Jamail: Thanks, Ralph. Yeah, the Amiriyah bomb shelter is what it was called, and it was back during the so-called first Gulf War when all of the media was beside itself with excitement in the so-called precision weapons. And it was one of these dark, dark parts of US history that when I was educating myself doing background on US policy on Iraq over the decades, that was one of the things that jumped out and really underscored how intensely the Iraqi people had been suffering as a result of US policy there over the decades. And, there were between 400 and 500 people — men, women, children, elderly — who were sheltering in there during the air attacks of the first Gulf War. And Bush clearly used it to make a statement by launching a guided missile literally straight down the roof of the bomb shelter. So, when I went into Iraq on my first trip, I was

very, very moved by this and wanted to see it with my own eyes and felt it was something that people needed to know more about. And it was the first place I went once I got myself landed in Baghdad in late 2003. And when you walked into the place you could feel the loss of life and there was literally a bomb crater coming through the roof, almost like an upside-down flower where the rebar is spread out in a perfectly circular symmetry from where the weapon punched through the roof and then a giant crater in the concrete floor underneath it. There were flowers and pictures of the deceased spread all around the inside of the area. There are parts of the walls where people's flesh were literally seared into the wall, smooth parts of the wall where you can run your hand across and feel the difference in the smoothness of the wall from where parts of people's bodies and their flesh were burned into the wall.

And it's something that the American people absolutely need to understand, just like the rest of this war, the deep, deep permanent impacts on the Iraqi people and the American soldiers that went there, and the aftermath. As horrific as this story is, the American people need to know that this is what the government of this country has done and continues to do in various ways today. It was one of those occurrences that impacted me deeply enough that I felt the truth of what was being done in their name needed to be known by Americans.

Ralph Nader: Name it again.

Dahr Jamail: The Amiriyah bomb shelter.

Ralph Nader: Seared in the memory of the Iraqi people, almost totally forgotten by the American people, in whose name the first George Herbert Walker crimes were committed, the US military ordered by George Herbert Walker Bush also blew out the drinking water systems, the electrical systems. It was an attack on the civil infrastructure, which led to a lot of collateral human damage, as the phrase goes — deaths, refugees, families without water, electricity in one of the hottest places in the world, and much more. Well, not to be outdone, his son, George W. Bush, with Dick Cheney goading, launched a long-planned invasion of Iraq. In fact, right after George W. Bush reacted to 9/11, the planning started with Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld and other military officials, to take down Saddam Hussein, who they accused was involved in the 9/11 attack, another lie that was proven to be the case, both at the time and subsequently.

Now, Matthew Hoh, you were very much involved in this and I think our listeners would like to know about the evolution of your thinking as you spent one month after another, both in Afghanistan and in Iraq. Could you describe your experience and what led to the position that you finally took?

Matthew Hoh: Yeah. Thanks for having me with you, Ralph. It's a real honor to be with you and to be with Dahr. The evolution I think was one where, like a lot of people, we deny our current generation's role in history. We think that somehow we are exempt from what came before us. So, you can understand the fine details or the broad contours of American history, you can understand things — how the Doctrine of Discovery led to Manifest Destiny; you can understand the genocide of the first peoples here, the African slavery, the conquest of Hawaii and the Philippines and Puerto Rico, leads into what happens in Central America. You can understand all that but you then say to yourself, but my generation is different. And so when I looked at the lineage, the denied line of history and what was occurring with me, I understood these things but I thought that we were somehow going to be different.

We saw this; it wasn't just me. When I went in the Marine Corps in the late '90s, January 1998, we had plenty of colonels, generals and sergeants major who had been in Vietnam. And to a man, they all said things like, we are never going to do another Vietnam, and then of course we had two Vietnams within a few years — Afghanistan and Iraq. One of the things we do is compartmentalize periods of history or assign arbitrary start

dates. Chris Hedges reminded me – maybe I didn't know it, maybe I'd forgotten it – that in 1972 the United States was providing weapons to the Kurds in Iraq at the behest of the Shah of Iran to try and overthrow the government in Iraq. I was born in 1973, so for my whole life, the United States has utilized violence to try and achieve its political objectives in Iraq and in the larger Gulf region at the expense of the Iraqi people. So my whole life, the Iraqi people have been through suffering. The '70s were incredibly turbulent the coups and such, but then of course the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, which was a proxy war for the Americans that killed over a million people. You have the first Gulf War we talked about. Then of course in the Clinton administration were those murderous, horrendous sanctions that killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, as well as the fact that the United States, from roughly 1992/1993 through 2003 before the invasion, was dropping bombs on Iraq two or three times a week. This consistent line of violence directed against the Iraqi people to achieve American political aims had been established for decades. And I went into it thinking that somehow we were different. I believe that one of the things people think, or ideas people have is that somehow they/we can be moral agents and that one's own agency will overpower and help one do good things in our lifetime. So if I thought that if I go to this war, I can affect the people around me because I am going to be good, I'm going to be moral, and I'm not going to do bad things. And that's a complete fallacy and an incredible mistake.

Ralph Nader: When you go into the military, you get a lecture on military justice and the rule of law, and they do mention the Constitution. There was no declaration of war in the first Gulf War or the second; these so-called anemic resolutions didn't even apply. They applied to the Afghan scene after 9/11, but even so, they did not qualify to be a declaration of war. The government in both wars violated the UN Charter. That's a treaty we belong to and actually launched right after World War II. There are all kinds of Geneva Conventions that were violated. Did any of that occur to you? Before you became a truth seeker and a dissenter, didn't that ever occur to you even though you're not a lawyer? Because all people who go into the armed services are given those kinds of lectures.

Matthew Hoh: It did, but you lie to yourself, you rationalize it, you excuse it. You'll never meet a band of men and women like the US military who excuse away their own responsibilities by saying things such as, that's above my pay grade, or I'm not a policymaker, I'm a policy executer. That's not my job/responsibility, etc. So, you excuse it yourself. You make rationalizations. You lie to yourself. Like I said, I thought that I could do good in the midst of this massive force, but you become an agent of the immorality of the war. There's no escaping that. Or you're used for the war's purposes no matter what you think you personally are going to do. And then you tell yourself other lies. You tell yourself, Well, I'm a good officer. If I don't bring this company of marines over to Iraq, some other guy is going to do it and he's going to get them killed. So you make those lies or you tell yourself, I'm just a junior guy, I'm a mid-level guy. When I become a senior guy, I won't make these mistakes. I won't do these things. And you won't even let yourself say "crime". You further lie by calling it a mistake. So, you see over and over again, this use of language to hide the reality of what we did there, which absolutely was a crime for which no one has ever been held accountable.

Ralph Nader: I want to turn to Dahr. Dahr, there hasn't been enough attention to the perfidious role of the media here. Not only did all these groups that I mentioned that together had millions of members around the country. The National Council of Churches, for example, was one of the letter writers to George W. Bush, pleading to meet with him and other groups in the White House before the invasion and were not even acknowledged, much less invited there. The media was so disgraceful. None of these groups got any coverage whatsoever. A lot of the media was looking to the *New York Times*, which was listening to Judith Miller who had all kinds of fabricated stories on page one. This was a really shameful, disgraceful chapter in the *Times*, and the *Washington Post* wasn't much better, but at least the *Washington Post* did a mea culpa later. The TV anchors for the major networks had right next to them a retired admiral or general who were spouting the Bush-Cheney line. And Phil Donahue, who was on MSNBC at the time, was trying to get the other critical truth-seeking view on the run-up to the war in Iraq, and his NBC superiors ordered him to have three guests promoting the war to

every guest criticizing the war. Then suddenly he was told that he had a week to vacate his offices and his staff and threw them off the air. This was Bob Wright of the NBC hierarchy, which obviously was connected with General Electric at that time.

So give me your view because you saw it from the field and you were essentially a freelancer that broke one story after another in Iraq, Dahr. So you saw the embedded nature of them. Pat Sloyan of *Newsweek* refused to be embedded, which is one reason he won the Pulitzer Prize. Give us the scene of how did the media, free speech seeking truth, become just a total toady of the prevaricating Bush-Cheney war machine?

Dahr Jamail: Well, you said it, Ralph. It was the media's role in this — we have to go back to what's taught in public schools as far as what Matthew pointed out at the very beginning, which is we do not have accurate history being taught about the foundations of this country being built on genocide of the Native American population and slavery, nor have we seen any truth and reconciliation or anything around any of that. So given that that's the foundation of this country, there's not been adequate justice brought around that, let alone bringing truth into history as it's being taught in the public school system, for example, here. So, Iraq and Afghanistan are a continuation of this mythos of the US being the beacon of democracy in the world, when in reality, we are citizens of the most brutal empire on the planet. If you look at how many bases we continue to have around the planet, the US military is basically being used as an economic sledgehammer to bring people into alignment. And Iraq is a perfect example of that.

And I deployed myself to Iraq in a very naïve, overly idealistic way, because I was absolutely outraged at the blatant propaganda in the media; it was off the charts. People here are aghast at the kind of propaganda that we see in, say, North Korea, yet if you look at the media coverage during the lead-up and the selling of the war to Iraq, I don't think we really can stand on any firm ground in pointing the finger at a regime like North Korea for having propaganda. Everybody can remember seeing the graphics on TV of Saddam Hussein's head with a big target over it or a bull's eye as though he's the only human being in Iraq. The propaganda was designed for a two-year-old and it was extremely effective on up to Colin Powell's dog and pony show at the UN of holding the vial of whatever the white powdered sugar they had and claiming Iraq's weapons of mass destruction to the Judith Miller amazing *New York Times* dance with getting anonymous quotes from anonymous sources in the Bush administration, which was Dick Cheney feeding her information and her willfully putting it out, and then him going on the Sunday news shows and proclaiming, even the *New York Times* reported this.

So, the media was not only just being used as a tool but was willingly used as a tool by the empire, by the government to make the case to the American public for war, because the people had to be brought along. And despite the protests, despite all the facts being out there, the UN weapons inspectors, despite everything — all of the history of what the US had been doing in Iraq for decades, was completely framed by: we're at year zero right now, history starts now, this is how it is because this is how we say it is. And against that backdrop going in, that continued in the occupation up until around 2006 or so when things had been going so bad for so long for both the Iraqi people and US soldiers deployed there — public opinion finally turned, and the media basically was forced to start reporting on it.

Ralph Nader: This is a very important juncture you just pointed out because right after the invasion of Iraq and the toppling of the Saddam Hussein regime, George W. Bush sent his most trusted investigator to come back and declare that we found weapons of mass destruction. Well, he went there in April and spent several weeks there, searching, penetrating, exposing, and he comes back to the White House and says, Sorry, boss, no weapons of mass destruction. Do you think George W. Bush and Dick Cheney and his cohorts, Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle and other neocons say, Let's pull back here? No, they kept blowing apart Iraq in what sociologists called the ultimate sociocide of this society that never threatened us. Iraqis would meet US soldiers, and ask Why are you doing this to us? What have we done to you? And the soldiers started asking themselves,

“Why are we here when they don't want us?” And so, there was a poll commissioned in 2005, Dahr — I don't know if you know about that, Matthew — by Zogby, public opinion poll. They got cleared to do a poll of US soldiers, Army, and Marines in Iraq, by the Pentagon. The Pentagon said, this is going to be a very representative, professional poll. And this was in 2005. The soldiers were polled and slightly over 70%, including a slight majority of Marines, said the US should pull out of Iraq within 6 to 12 months, which is the logistical period for being able to do that. Do you think that would have got publicity? You got a tiny article in the Associated Press. It was blacked out or by the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. So, we have to go into this history because it's going to happen again and again and again. The war mongers are active again on the Ukraine war now. More and more, we're moving toward a conflict with Russia. There will be an incident; there will be fighter planes. Who knows what will happen because there's no brake on our government. It's as if it was a dictatorship when it comes to foreign policy. The people are not organized to do much about it. There are groups that you all know, Veterans for Peace and others to try to pull it together, but it seems like we never learn from history. And as one person once said years ago, if you don't learn from history, you'll be condemned to repeat it.

But I want the listeners to hear from you, Dahr, about your experience in Fallujah, which was quite a sizeable city in Iraq and the US military was surrounding it. This is one of the darkest chapters of the dark history of our invasion of Iraq, and you were one of the only people there. I don't know how you escaped, but indicate the weaponry that was applied, including the phosphorous bombs. What was it like?

Dahr Jamail: Well, a brief history of Fallujah under US occupation was this was a city that Saddam Hussein always struggled to control, so he basically left it alone. And when US military rolled into Fallujah in the early days of the occupation, there was no resistance. I wouldn't say they welcomed them, but they did say, things hopefully can't be much worse than they were under Saddam, so let's give them a shot. And they left them alone, but then soldiers started occupying a particular school. People were protesting it. They wanted the school to be available for their kids. The military did not leave. There was another protest where shots were fired into the protest by some soldiers. And that basically started animosity in Fallujah between the military and the people living there. And so resistance escalated rapidly and Fallujah became a very regular hot spot for the military. There were always consistent attacks happening. And it became really a symbol of resistance to the point where, by April 2004, the city was — we had the incident with the Blackwater mercenaries operating in the city and then several of them being caught, targeted, killed, and parts of their bodies were hung from a bridge on the outskirts of Fallujah. And that's really the incident that brought things to a head when the military encircled the city, started sniping into it regularly. And within about a week of that I went into Fallujah during that siege with a group bringing in humanitarian supplies to a small clinic. And when I was in there, there were men, women, children, older folks being brought in, either dead or who claimed they were being shot by soldiers who were surrounding the city. And they were coming from different parts of the city at different times over the couple of days I was in there, all telling the same story. And it was really shocking at the time as a cub reporter still getting up to speed on the atrocities that I was witnessing on a regular basis over there, that this is my country doing this. And it was a hard thing to watch firsthand — literally small kids dying on tables, being shot in the necks and in the heads and in the shoulders by US snipers, and bleeding out while Iraqi doctors were doing their best to try to save them and watching literally the bodies piling up in the back of this makeshift clinic. And that really set the stage where I had friends go out in an ambulance trying to pick up wounded people and bodies, and that ambulance being fired upon and people literally diving down in the back of it while bullets were going through the side of it. And this had become commonplace. Iraqi people were basically saying, welcome to the party; this is what's being done here. And then that set the stage; the city couldn't be taken during that month without what would later have to be done was full-scale assault using a lot of air power and artillery. And that of course, right after Bush won reelection that following November 2004, within days the city was essentially encircled and parts of it generally leveled. White phosphorous was used regularly around the city, which is a violation of UN protocol where that's a weapon that's not allowed to be used in an area

where there could be civilians. The Pentagon itself had admitted that at least 30,000 people in Fallujah had opted not to leave, so a direct violation of UN conventions, along with of course intentionally sniping and killing civilians as I saw firsthand in the first siege of that city.

And this type of barbaric behavior coupled with the torture, which literally my first week in Iraq, I was walking around, talking to people that were talking about torture stories not just in Abu Ghraib but in other military detention camps around the country, and then that story, I was writing about it then, but of course it didn't break in the mainstream until Sy Hersh forced the issue. I believe it was in March 2004 when that story started to hit the mainstream. But these types of tactics were commonplace early on in the occupation and then continued all the way through it. And then later I would write a book about soldiers in Iraq and interviewed some of these people that were engaged in a lot of these actions and then later, like Matthew Hoh here, really woke up to the fact of what was being done and started to take stands for justice and to speak truth to power about what they had seen and what they had done in Iraq as well.

Ralph Nader: And back in Washington, there was rabid two-party support. You'd probably remember when John Kerry was running for president, he was asked about Iraq and he said, well, he would have put more soldiers in Iraq, there weren't enough, and then he made the infamous statement that he wouldn't have quit Fallujah. This is after the first departure before the Bush regime went in big and wiped out so many innocent people. Matthew Hoh, you were there with all kinds of soldiers. What were they thinking? The reporters don't really ask soldiers what they're thinking — whether they're in the field when they have trouble speaking freely or whether they're back home. Were there people saying, “What is this crazy nonsense? What are we doing here? We're just making more enemies?” Or did they just wake up every morning and say, “I'm just doing my job?”

Matthew Hoh: It was mainly the latter, Ralph. Occasionally you'd have a short conversation, like “Does what we're doing here make any sense; what are we doing here? If I was an Iraqi, I'd be attacking us too.” I had that realization when I commanded 153 Marines and sailors in Anbar Province that if my young men were young Iraqi men, 51 would be fighting us, 51 would be in Abu Ghraib and 51 would be dead. So as time went on, thoughts arose of putting myself in another's shoes continued to sink in. But then you go back to lying to yourself, making excuses, giving it other purposes, and it becomes about taking care of the people around you. You make up these reasons, you lie to yourself, you refuse to acknowledge, but it was known.

To give you an anecdote, we had a little satellite television dish in our company headquarters, and one of the channels we got was Fox News. I don't know why, but it was one of the few English-speaking channels we got so we had that on a lot in company headquarters. And one day in 2006 when the violence was very high, my first sergeant said, "Hey, sir, I'm not going to have that Fox News on any longer because it's upsetting the Marines." And what he meant was that it was spewing propaganda that they knew wasn't true and they were getting really upset by that. So they certainly understood it; they saw it, but they didn't talk about it; they lied to themselves to keep focused on the mission; they stayed busy, put their heads down, ignored it and claimed that they were professional warriors, and it was above their pay grade to consider anything else.

There was another aspect we have to address. When a young man joins the Marine Corps and goes into the infantry, he goes through 13 weeks of boot camp of recruit training. Then he'll go, at that point, to around seven weeks of infantry school boot camp, followed by a specialized school for seven weeks to learn to be an infantryman before going to his infantry unit. And all they do is train to kill. Those young men were scientifically conditioned for months, for years, to kill. The conditioning is based upon extensive academic research about how to best condition young men to kill. And then they're put in a bubble, in the culture of the

Marine Corps that worships violence and the history that the Marine Corps is what keeps America safe by going out and killing the bad people. And then they're sent to a war like Iraq and told that they're going to avenge 9/11, and protect their families, neighbors, and friends from another attack. It's engrained in them to call everyone over there terrorists. So you can start to see how that bloodletting, blood lust is so easy.

And one more thing I want to bring up, and Dahr was talking about this in references. The level of violence in Iraq, in the Iraq war, I don't think people appreciate. Even the numbers that we state in terms of the number of Iraqi civilians killed directly are way, way below a level estimate. The Iraq Body Count is typically the organization that's cited. Well, the Iraq Body Count gets its numbers by utilizing media reports, English-only media reports that count up how many Iraqis were killed in the war. So just on that basis alone it's a severe undercount. But the other thing too is you look at the number of Americans killed in this war. You have 4500 American soldiers killed in the Iraq war. There were 3600 contractors also killed in that war who, in any previous war before the privatization of the military and the outsourcing of war, would have been wearing a military uniform. So, you have to add that 3600 in there. But we also had medical care and body and vehicle armor that allowed us to survive things that would have killed us in the early parts of the war, let alone in previous wars.

And the best way to understand how great the volume of violence was, and the numbers are conflated because you can't really pull the Iraq war apart from the Afghan war when you talk about American veterans because so many went and were involved in both wars, but VA estimates at least a quarter million American veterans have traumatic brain injury from their time in Iraq and Afghanistan. It's an outstanding number, but that's what they keep coming back to. And that's because, again, we were surviving attacks, explosions, blasts, bullets that, in previous wars, would have killed us. And so you understand the magnitude of that. I had Marines in my command who survived 10 roadside bomb attacks on their vehicles in one seven-month tour.

Ralph Nader: It's even worse, Matthew. The number of soldiers who got sick, who were injured, there was sandfly disease, there were all kinds of ailments coming their way from being in the field, they were sold contaminated water from US contractors in Kuwait in the early months of the war. And we found that the Department of Defense was not only lowballing Iraqi casualties, they were also lowballing US casualties. They couldn't lowball the fatalities, but they were lowballing the number of injuries. First, they disregarded the sickness and the disease, and then they defined injuries as only those incurred in a firefight, not going to the fighting area or injured in other ways in Iraq. And we proved this because we filed the Freedom of Information request and we got that information back. And they admitted it, and it was on *60 Minutes* for a program where they interviewed a paraplegic who went back to Illinois and he said, in a haunting segment on the *60 Minutes* program "I'm not even injured enough to be counted."

Matthew Hoh: My Marines used to go out and look for roadside bombs, Ralph, called route clearance. And when we came back to the United States in 2007, some of my Marines had been blown up 10 times, there was no standardized traumatic brain injury screening that the Marines went through. The Department of Defense had no guidance on this. So, for years American soldiers were suffering these attacks while the Department of Defense was just shrugging and saying, "Okay, we'll see what happens." Now, the important point about all this — because I don't want to center the Americans in these, I want to center the Iraqi people — is that we had our body armor, we had our vehicle armor, we had our hospitals, we had our medical care. The Iraqi people did not have that. So whatever violence we endured and survived, the Iraqi people suffered an immensely greater level. And so, the hell that they went through and continue to go through, because even if right now — and the thing about the violence in Iraq is it hasn't ended. Even now, dozens of Iraqis die every month in violence, in militant violence. And that doesn't include the Iraqi army, the Iraqi paramilitaries, the various militias out there, the

Islamic State. We're talking about dozens of Iraqi civilians are still dying every month in violence caused by these wars.

Even worse than that is say we had a magic wand and we're able to wave it all away and say, "Everything is fine now," their children are dying because we poisoned their water and their land. Fallujah has higher cancer rates than Hiroshima or Nagasaki. Every day, this is like what happened in Vietnam and in Laos and Cambodia when we poisoned those lands because of our war, every day Iraqi parents or Iraqi mothers are delivering stillborn babies. They're delivering babies who are born with the worst deformities and disabilities you can possibly imagine. So even if we had a magic wand that would wave away all the political violence that is still occurring in Iraq, their children are dying, and they will be dying for generations because we poisoned their water and their land with our war.

Dahr Jamail: Matthew brought up some really, really important points. I mean, going back the sanctions, more than a million Iraqis died during the sanctions. These were 12 years of the most brutal, harshest economic sanctions in modern history. And we have to remember the Madeleine Albright quote where she's being interviewed by Lesley Stahl when the statistic came out that at least half a million Iraqi children had died because of the sanctions because of lack of medical care, lack of supplies and lack of enough food, and Madeleine Albright infamously said, "Yeah, we think the price is worth it." So, the brutality of the sanctions leading up, that was the state the country was in when this war was launched.

And then we had all these false promises of reconstruction and Iraq's going to be the new democracy in the Middle East and the New Iraq, as Condoleezza Rice called it, well, that was the country that existed when this war was waged and then it got worse because none of this reconstruction happened. And you talk about the lack of water and electricity and adequate medical care, none of this improved during the occupation. In fact, overall, it just continued to get worse. And we do need to talk about the Lancet study when it comes to the true figure of Iraqi casualties, which the high end of that figure — and this is a grossly outdated study, but from one of the most prestigious studies available on this count, and the high-end figure when it was released was over 800,000 of Iraqis directly or indirectly had perished because of the occupation. And as I said, that's now grossly outdated, so comfortably the figure is over a million.

And then when we talk about the brutality of Fallujah, again just to add a little bit to what Matthew just shared of the amount of depleted uranium used there, and I personally spoke with several soldiers who said, "Yeah, that's what we're using right along with the WP, the Whiskey Pete, the white phosphorous." And I went in there — the most recent trip I was in to Fallujah was in 2013 when I was working for Al Jazeera and I went to where they had built a new hospital and they built it in an area where such an enormous amount of fighting had occurred and depleted uranium was used, including bombs and missiles, that that hospital was located right on that area. And a lot of the doctors I interviewed in there spoke directly to that. And this is a city where the amount of deformities in the kids was so bad from exposure to toxic chemicals and radioactivity from the DU that a very, very religiously concerted city and some of the religious sheikhs and imams had asked people to stop having kids. Because I came out of there with photos of babies, and I wrote an article for Al Jazeera and Al Jazeera would not run the photos.

And I can't say that I blame them for that because they were so atrocious, these deformities of literally Cyclops babies, these entities being born that were just — the deformities were so incredible that it did not look in any way, shape or form like it could even be a human being to the point where we couldn't run those photos because there was concern of the editors that the amount of trauma that people would see — and of course I disagreed, I think people need to see this, but it's hard to even articulate the level of suffering. And this is the country that exists today, as Matthew just said, I got to leave, the military got to leave, at least for the most part, but Iraqi people can't leave, and this is what they have to live with today.

Ralph Nader: It's not just Iraq that was aware of what was going on. The whole Arab world was witness to what was going on. And it's small wonder that the Palestinians, the Yemenis, the Libyans are terrified at what they believe the US is capable of doing to them in addition to what has already been done to them. And Dahr, you point out that right after the first Gulf War when the sanctions were imposed on Saddam Hussein and there was a lot of corruption involved in that they had a prescribed list of chlorine. For example, they couldn't sell chlorine for drinking water. They couldn't sell child catheters because it was believed they could be turned into some sort of stabbing weapon. And of course, when the US physicians went over there and estimated a half a million Iraqi children died as a result of the sanctions, and Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright thought it was worth it, that didn't make much news here. But all over the Arab Islamic world, it's all news. And they know what can happen when the brutish potential of these war mongers in Washington and their oil industry backers is unleashed.

Just in the interest of time, I want to give Steve and David a chance to pitch in here.

Steve Skrovan: Yeah, I'll start. Matthew, I want to pick up on something you touched on in the beginning when you talked about rationalization, because you worked in the State Department. We've had Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson on the program a number of times, who was chief of staff to Colin Powell, and we talked to Chris Hedges about being on the inside versus being on the outside. Is it possible, say you were Colin Powell, and I'm sure he's a good soldier, and he feels that he will be more effective doing this on the inside, and yet he does that presentation at the UN. When you're in the system, is it possible to make change or is that just a pipe dream?

Matthew Hoh: I think regrettably, it is a pipe dream. The way our brains are, the way we have been programmed through societal evolution to want to remain within the group, which goes back to our ancestors being scared to death of being told to leave the campfire and they'd have to go sleep in the woods with the wolves. So our brains have evolved, and there's been a lot of scientific research into this that explains why people stick with the group, why the mob mentality exists, why almost all whistleblowers you'll ever encounter endure severe mental and emotional health trauma. It's a very difficult process. There's not much of an incentive to speak out; there's not much of an incentive to differ because it's not going to get you anywhere. And so, it's regrettable that being on the inside, you're still not going to effect the change that you want to see.

Ralph Nader: And you don't have organized citizens out there, although there were marches. I'm sure our listeners are saying, speak of the demonstrations in the US against the upcoming Iraq war in Washington and all over the country and all over the world, millions of people. But it never reached a political critical mass in order to change any minds in Washington. David?

David Feldman: Before Colin Powell died, there was no mea culpa, Rumsfeld never apologized. Let me ask you about General Tommy Franks, Paul Bremer, George Bush, Condi Rice, Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, Douglas Feith and George Tenet. What do they owe the American people right now, 20 years after besides an apology? How could they make this right?

Matthew Hoh: And as well to the Iraqi people. And they made it right to the people that mattered to them. I'll differ with Dahr in the sense that reconstruction — I'll agree with him that reconstruction was not a success in Iraq, but it certainly was a success in Northern Virginia and Maryland. If you look at the amount of money that the United States spent on war, in the war industry, in 2001, the defense budget was \$331 billion. The budget that the president just released the other day is \$885 billion. That's an amazing 170% increase in 20 years. And if you know the Washington, D.C. area, you know where that money went to. It's been totally transformed.

The wealthiest parts of the United States used to be places like Silicon Valley and New York, Tulsa and Dallas because of the oil. But this century, the wealthiest part of the United States are the D.C. suburbs. If you look at whatever different type of ranking you have, five of the top seven, six of the top nine wealthiest counties in the United States are D.C. counties. And where did that money come from? It came from the wars. Because if we look at the federal budget over in the last two decades, you can see that non-defense discretionary spending has either remained flat or has declined over the last 20 years. You have to take out the Veterans Administration to get this number correct. So any spending other than Department of Defense or veteran spending and some militarized police spending, the entire federal discretionary budget has either remained flat or declined over the last 20 years, even as we've gained 50 million Americans over that time. So the war was a great success for certain people, and that's who these people, these Bremers, these Bushes, these Cheneys, these Wolfowitzs, owe their loyalty to. I think they're criminals and I think the same of those who populated the Obama administration. It's the same small group of foreign policy kabal that perpetuates this American empire.

I want to go back real quick to something that Ralph said though about the political aspects of this. We cannot forget that in the 2006 midterms, the Iraq war was the most important aspect of that election. In '08 you had a candidate that was viewed as an anti-war candidate. He certainly didn't perform as an anti-war president, but Barack Obama beat Hillary Clinton, and a lot of people say that was because of the Iraqi war.

David Feldman: He was pro Afghanistan.

Matthew Hoh: Yeah. By a mass amount. Let's not forget that President Obama, by 2011, had a quarter-million-man army in Afghanistan — 100,000 American troops, about 40,000 NATO troops, and 100,000 contractors. So, he was for big war. But this is one of the things too about what the Iraq war and the Afghan war does in terms of lasting effects on how the United States conducts wars now after the political consequences. And the only thing that I think saves Obama from political consequences from his Afghan surge is the fact that 10 million Americans were in the process of losing their homes because of the Great Recession. I think what occurs then is the White House and the Pentagon look at these wars and say, "we cannot politically be invested in a war where there are American troops coming home, even though we're not covering the arrival of the coffins at Dover, we cannot take these losses.

And starting in the Obama administration, you see a shift to how America fights its wars now, where the wars need to remain hidden. So, you use proxies, you use contractors, you use drones, you use special operations troops and keep these wars hidden. And that's how we can have, according to Brown University, Costs of War journalists like Nick Turse, we've had American troops in combat in 17 countries in the last decade, and almost no Americans know this. And I would venture to say almost no members of Congress know this. And so as long as you have other people doing your killing for you, the American public won't notice, and it won't have a political consequence.

Ralph Nader: We've got to break through the mass media's obeisance to the military war machine and the American empire, otherwise we're just talking to the choir. Unfortunately, we're out of time. We've been talking with Dahr Jamail and Matthew Hoh, and we want to have them tell us very quickly how people can contact them. Dahr?

Dahr Jamail: Sure. I maintain a website, it's simply my first and last name dot net, dahrjamaail.net. And thanks a lot for having me on the program, Ralph, and thank you, Matthew, and thank both of you for your ongoing work.

Ralph Nader: Matthew?

Matthew Hoh: I'm a member of the Eisenhower Media Network, so if you go to the website, Eisenhower Media Network — Lawrence Wilkerson is actually a member of that as well. And you can find me on Twitter on @MatthewPHoh, P as in Patrick, and the last name is spelled H-O-H.

Ralph Nader: Listeners, please react, give us your responses, contact these brave people who have spoken out truth to power again and again and again. They want to hear from you. Tell them what you're going to do in your community. Tell them how you're going to contact your two senators and representatives when the analysis is complete. Congress is the generic factor of complicity here and they're using your own sovereign power to do this in your name. Thank you very much, Matthew Hoh and Dahr Jamail.

Matthew Hoh: Thank you.

Dahr Jamail: Thank you.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Dahr Jamail and Matthew Hoh. We have a link to their work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Let's take a quick break to 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, March 17, 2023. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

The Biden administration has approved the \$8 billion Willow oil drilling project on the North Slope of Alaska led by ConocoPhillips despite a massive push by climate activists and environmentalists urging the White House to reject the proposal. "There's simply no justification for President Biden's decision to approve a massive new oil drilling scheme that will lead to decades of air and climate pollution," said Wenonah Hauter of Food & Water Watch. "This decision is part of a disturbing and disappointing trend with this White House. President Biden refuses to take the necessary actions to reign in climate catastrophe while issuing rhetoric that professes concern for the existential threat that we all face. He cannot have it both ways. Promoting clean energy development is meaningless if we continue to allow corporations to plunder and pollute as they wish."

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

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russell. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. My name is Steve Skrovan, along with David Feldman and Ralph. We'll close out today's show with highlights from Ralph and Patti Smith's anti-war rally and concert tour in 2005. The song is "Awake From Your Slumber," produced by the Hudson Mohawk Independent Media Center.

Patti Smith: (singing) *Awake little ones. Awake from your slumber. Get 'em with the numbers. Get 'em with the numbers... Ohhhhh.... Ahhhhhhh... Awake from your slumber. And get 'em with your numbers.*

Ralph Nader: We have a moral obligation...

Patti Smith: (singing) *Get 'em with your numbers...*

Ralph Nader: ...a citizen obligation to get out of that country.

Patti Smith: (singing) *One!*

Ralph Nader: Peace has this soft image by the war mongers.

Patti Smith: (singing) *Two!*

Ralph Nader: The rascals, the charlatans...

Patti Smith: (singing) *Three!*

Ralph Nader: ...are always ready to accuse people of undermining truths.

Patti Smith: (singing) *Four! Hundred! Thousand! Million! People! People! People! Awake from your slumber!*

Ralph Nader: But the way to respect the truths...

Patti Smith: (singing) *Awake from your slumber!*

Ralph Nader: ...is to get them out of there and bring them back here safely, not to let them die and kill in Iraq.

Patti Smith: (singing) *Awake from your slumber! Get 'em with your numbers! Long live revolution! Awake, awake...*

Steve Skrovan: That's our show. We want to thank our guests again, Dahr Jamail and Matthew Hoh. For those of you listening on the radio, we're going to cut out now. For you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up". A transcript of this program will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* Substack site soon after the episode is posted.

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

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody. We should never forget what the illegal Bush-Cheney political and military machine, backed by profiteering corporations, did to the innocent Iraqi people.