

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 427 TRANSCRIPT

Tom Morello: I'm Tom Morello and you're listening to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour.

[Music] Stand up, stand up, you've been sitting way too long.

Steve Skrovan: Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. My name is Steve Skrovan along with my co-host Hannah Feldman. David Feldman is still out but we're so glad to have Hannah here. Hello, Hannah.

Hannah Feldman: Hello, Steve.

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

Ralph Nader: Hello, everybody.

Steve Skrovan: Before we kick off the show - and we've got a great one here with Andrew Cockburn - Ralph, there were a couple of items in the news that you wanted to elaborate on. What have you got for us?

Ralph Nader: The first one was a spectacular 30-page insert with no advertising in Tuesday, April 26 *New York Times*. It's called "Olmsted's Enduring Gift." It's a tribute to Frederick Law Olmsted and his 200th anniversary. He was born 200 years ago. And he was the leader in creating national parks and urban parks like Central Park. It's such a beautifully done job, with no advertisements, photography with quotes from Frederick Law Olmsted, and the contributions he made to tranquility, communion with nature, a peaceful respite in busy lives. And I thought that people should know about this and try to get copies of it from the *New York Times*. It's called "Olmsted's Enduring Gift", the man behind many of the nation's beloved parks. His creations are more essential to modern American life than ever.

The second is a very sobering story. The first person has immolated himself, set himself on fire right in front of the United States Supreme Court, protesting government inaction on climate violence. He's a 50-year-old Buddhist from California, and he died on the way to the hospital. His colleague said it was not a suicide. It was an expression of compassion and concern over global inaction against climate catastrophe. We may be seeing more of this.

Steve Skrovan: This is what we saw - those of us who are old enough to remember the Vietnam War - Buddhist monks setting themselves on fire and immolating themselves in the same way, which is quite the sacrifice and quite dramatic. But this is an existential threat.

We have another fascinating show per usual, and for obvious reasons, we've had to spend the past couple of months talking a lot about war. We've tried to put in historical perspective what's going on in Ukraine. And given our own history of waging war, most recently in Afghanistan and Iraq, we've certainly highlighted the hypocrisy of the United States government expressing

outrage at Russia's pre-emptive attack in Ukraine, and the inevitable atrocities and crimes that lie in its wake. So today, we are once again going to take a hard look in the mirror and focus our attention on our own militaristic culture. The individual people who enlist in the military may do it for any number of reasons. Maybe it's a family tradition, maybe it's a way to pay for college, maybe they were drafted, maybe they believed that they'll be defending their country. But what drives the policy makers? Many wars in recent history from Vietnam to Afghanistan have, in the cold light of history, been admitted as mistakes, but all "well-intentioned mistakes." In his new book, *Spoils of War*, journalist Andrew Cockburn comes to the conclusion that it's no mistake. The decision makers who send Americans off to kill and die are largely driven by self-interest and, yes, profit.

If we have time, Ralph will answer some more of your listener questions. As always, somewhere in the middle, we'll check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber.

But first, our great grinding American war machine couldn't possibly be driven by petty squabbles among bureaucrats, egos of politicians. and greed. Could it? Hannah?

Hannah Feldman: Andrew Cockburn is a Washington editor of *Harper's Magazine* and has been reporting and commenting about the politics of war and national security for over 40 years. He is the author of several books, including *Rumsfeld: An American Disaster* and *The Spoils of War: Power, Profit, and the American War Machine*, as well as the Substack newsletter, *Spoils of War*. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Andrew Cockburn.

Andrew Cockburn: Great to be with you.

Ralph Nader: Welcome, Andrew. You described the military-industrial complex as self-perpetuating, always expanding organism. I might call it a sub-government because it gets its way. It's almost never lost. All constant new weapons, constant escalating contract clause, constant putting their own people in the Pentagon, in the Washington military-industrial complex merry-go-round. John Kenneth Galbraith, the famous progressive economist from Harvard, once called for the nationalization of these defense companies when they were far more numerous than they are now. They've merged into five or six giant companies, like Lockheed Martin, and he said, "Let's get rid of the charade here. Most of their money comes from the Pentagon. They produce these weapons. They overcharge. They want more warfare because that means more money. Why don't we just nationalize them?" Do you agree?

Andrew Cockburn: Well, yeah. In a way, they've been — they should be nationalized and severely shrunk. The way you've described, or Galbraith described, they are a leech on society. As you mentioned, I described the whole complex as a single-celled organism that exists only to secure and expand its food supply, so it gets bigger. And I said that because, notice if you analyzed the defense budgets and the way it's grown over the years, every time it shows a danger of shrinking or even just the rate of growth declining, by magic, another threat appears, then we're off to the races again. I feel a more organic analogy applies. Yeah, we could nationalize them. To nationalize them implies they might be used for some social benefit, which I doubt would actually happen. It wouldn't really do away with this compulsion to grow and feed off the rest of us that exists now. I think we need to do something more drastic.

Ralph Nader: Well, one reason given for nationalizing these companies is the drive for maximizing profit and sales is the drive to constantly expand unneeded redundant weapons systems like the F-35, for example, or aircraft carriers that are sitting ducks for missiles, that are only there to project force in the Far East or in the Middle East.

But don't you agree that Congress has lost complete control? There used to be Senator Proxmire investigating. There used to be an excess profits group that was abolished to return money to the taxpayer. And now, it's completely taboo. The Democrats don't raise it in their campaigns, and of course the Republicans want ever more. Have you ever seen it worse in terms of congressional accountability? They don't even provide an auditable budget to Congress. The Pentagon's been violating federal law since 1992 on that score.

Andrew Cockburn: Well, no, you're quite right. It has never been worse. And by the way, the defense budget's never been higher either. It's not just bad in terms of — they don't take it on. A progressive faction in the House did put in a resolution to cut the defense budget, and that got a third of the House Democrats. I think that was about it. And that's as high as they're going to go. Because I think there's another problem. It's not just there's this supine attitude to the military-industrial complex, and now with war fever over Ukraine - that's made it worse than ever - but no one really bothers to understand the defense system. And it used to be you'd have even people who supported the machine — the idea of hawks, would be able to ask a question or two to — would put these guys on the stand. Now, if you watch a hearing, no one, left or right, ever bothers to ask a decent question, which is out of ignorance, fear and laziness, I think. So it's a very terrible state of affairs.

Ralph Nader: Well, you've been up on Capitol Hill a lot. You've talked to a lot of members and staff. You remember the time when there used to be rather specific appropriation hearings for the military budget, and now they have this overseas contingency fund which can be 50 to 100 billion a year that the Pentagon sends over with no hearings. It's just ratified right on the floor, virtually no debate.

Andrew Cockburn: Yeah, that's right. They did finally trim that back, the overseas contingency operations which I said that was like extra — they're bonding extra to go to war, for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. And that is like the police department demanding an extra supplementary budget for catching criminals. It showed up a very essential point that the Pentagon, the military-industrial complex, it's not about defense really, at all. It's about, what you said, it's about maximizing profit and huge gobs of money for the interested parties.

Ralph Nader: But it gets us into war. I think you quoted once Madeleine Albright, who told *60 Minutes* that it was worth it when she was asked whether half a million Iraqi children dying during the sanctions on Saddam Hussein. She said, "It was worth it." Lesley Stahl asked that question. But she once said, "We have all these weapons, what good are they if we don't use them?" Well, don't you think that the weapons in the military-industrial complex actually are forces for war, for more bases, more provocation, more drones, more special forces, more invading unconstitutionally, illegally other lands. It's not just money.

Andrew Cockburn: Well, I'm saying it is first and foremost about money. And actually, when you talk to the military, war is nice particularly for defense contractors to show off their weapons. They're quite happy with the permanent state of tension, I believe, so there's a need, they can justify the need to get ever more money to buy ever more weapons. It's when you get idiots like Albright who, in administrations and like particularly this crew we've got now, my god, they almost make Madeleine Albright look smart. They're handed this machine and they think out of just share a responsibility, they do want to use it. I don't think the professionals are so interested in using it. But certainly, when you got this unholy marriage of the professional, deeply self-interested, and greedy military machine, military-industrial complex, and the political agenda of people like Bill Clinton. For example, in my book I talk a lot about the expansion of NATO, how it happened. And there were two main impulses for that in the '90s. One was the deep desire of the military-industrial complex, led by the Lockheed Martin Corporation to jack up spending again after the Soviet Union had inconveniently disappeared. So, they wanted to expand into Eastern Europe, create new markets and actually provoke Russia, which they did very well.

But the other thing that really drove it was domestic politics, which I believe is what foreign policy is *always* about. And in this case, it was Bill Clinton who was assured by Zbigniew Brzezinski that he would lose the Polish vote in Milwaukee - and this literally happened - unless he said he was going to have Poland into NATO. So he went ahead, fine, who cares about breaking a promise to the Russians? Who cares about lighting the fuse for starting up a Cold War? Bill Clinton wanted to get reelected. It wasn't even that vital. What Brzezinski was telling him was BS. He didn't need to win the Polish vote in Milwaukee, which he probably would have won anyway. It was just like a little extra — let's make this extra little gesture just to sew up those few thousand votes. And that really set the trail for what this disaster we're in now with Ukraine.

Ralph Nader: Well, before we get to that - we're talking with Andrew Cockburn, the author of "The Spoils of War: Power, Profit and the American War Machine" - I was once walking down the corridor in the House of Representatives complex and there was an office reserved for Pentagon officials. In other words, they're lobbying is so intensive, it was once said they had somebody at the rank of major or higher assigned to each member of Congress. They actually had their own office there. And what they do is they tell all these members, even ones who have doubts about this trillion-dollar military budget, "You know how many jobs are back home because of the F-35 or the F-16 or this tank or this ship?" They have it all broken down by congressional district. And it affects all of them, the most progressive people in Congress. Give the example of how it's affected Bernie Sanders, F-35.

Andrew Cockburn: Exactly. Bernie Sanders who, if you stick a pin into him, he'll tell you how much he hates the military-industrial complex, and how he votes against the defense budget, and how he's against the F-35 even, this trillion-plus useless fighter plane. But, Bernie lobbied very hard and along with the rest of the very progressive Vermont Democratic caucus, i.e., Patrick Leahy and the other senator, particularly Patrick Leahy and Peter Welch, the congressman, to get the Air Force to give the Vermont Air National Guard one of the first squadrons of F-35s, because it was supposedly going to generate jobs, which it didn't, by the way. They had a Air National Guard unit there already which employed about 1000 people. And so I think the F-35

actually employs slightly fewer, so it actually lost jobs. But they were so mesmerized by this thing, big dangle, "Oh, you're going to get jobs. You can tell the people that you've gotten jobs for the district." So Bernie Sanders — it's disgusting, because not only was he lobbying for this bring this new plane to be based in Burlington Airport, the capital main airport in Vermont, but what it's done is rendered the lives of the people around it — poor people, the people who live around Burlington Airport, they're low-income communities. And actually, a lot of them are immigrants. And because the F-35 is four times as noisy as the F-16 it replaces, it's rendered these people's lives absolute misery. Children are traumatized. Everyone who goes outside has to carry extra ear protection in case these planes are taking off.

So, it just shows the evil influence of the military-industrial complex, that they've gotten the leftist champion, Bernie Sanders, cave like a piece of wet cardboard once they wiggle their finger and say, "Hey, we're going to get you a few jobs." And there he is, he'd stoutly defend this disgusting —

Ralph Nader: Yeah. Not to mention, the boondoggle of boondoggles is the F-35, about a \$1.3 trillion operation. They keep cutting the numbers they're producing because the Lockheed Martin price to the taxpayer keeps going sky high. They twist Canada's arm to buy these F-35s, which Canada has no real purpose. And I think they backed off on that. They're trying to twist countries in Eastern Europe now and other places, of course Saudi Arabia, buying F-35. And what you say, there's a simple A-10 Warthog plane that's been around for decades that performs one of the major functions of the F-35 much better, much cheaper. And by the way, the F-35 itself is full of deficiencies, defects, and doesn't fulfill its purposes. Why don't you give us the capsule on that?

Andrew Cockburn: Sure. The F-35 has been under development now for 20 years. Years later, it's \$1.3 trillion. As far as we can figure out, the actual price per copy of an F-35 now is around \$130 million, but you don't want to buy one because they've admitted, and the test reports, they had this out, that it doesn't work. It has six major deficiencies which, in the words of the official Pentagon testing report, says "could lead to loss of life or serious injury," i.e., it would kill the pilot, and something upwards of around 800 other deficiencies. Basically, it's a useless piece of junk.

Ralph Nader: Isn't it really up to 300 million, 400 million now, in the cost overruns per plane?

Andrew Cockburn: Well, yeah, if you add everything else in. The whole total cost and development costs, yeah, you could say up to 400 million. They bury the — like they've conned the Finns and the Swiss, and the Germans have just signed up for it. And they give them — 130 million was the price they were charging them, but they're going to find out there's going to be a lot of add-ons for that. But the other part, as you mentioned, one of the missions it's replacing or taking over is "close support." The only really important function the Air Force actually has, which makes any real difference to a war is supporting troops on the ground. And as you say, we've had for years a very capable plane which, A: does the job very well, the A-10, because it was designed so that the pilot could really see with his own two eyes what's going on on the ground as opposed to having to rely on all sorts of electronic doodads and radars and infrareds and all the rest. You can actually see it. So naturally enough, the Air Force has hated this plane ever since it entered service, because it's cheap and because it isn't something that can go and

drop nuclear bombs far behind the lines, which is what they really like. So, they've been doing their best to kill the one plane — one of the very few planes that actually can perform its assigned mission in favor of this piece of junk.

Ralph Nader: We don't have Admiral [Hyman] Rickover anymore. Rickover, who's called the Father of the Nuclear Navy, when he had his final testimony before the Joint Economic Committee after he'd been fired by [President Ronald] Reagan, 60-some years in the Navy, he said he wished he could sink every nuclear sub. He actually said that. And then he went into a real diatribe against the vast expense, way over contracts by these weapons systems, and he always said the US government should have its own Navy yard, its own factories, so that they can be a yard stick for that. Did you ever meet Rickover? What do you think of Rickover? There's no person like him anymore. He would go up and beat up on the military-industrial complex and he would challenge a lot of the taboos.

Andrew Cockburn: Right. No, I've never met him, unfortunately, but he's certainly one of my heroes. I would say I would support his view of having government shipyards and government plants if Rickover was running them, because he really did carry out his mission. One of my favorite sayings of his is that he said you should go to the Pentagon, and you tell everyone to go outside and form two circles, an inner circle and an outer circle. And then you'd fire the outer circle. He really thought the whole place was overrun with irrelevant bureaucrats. And he had no compunction about calling out the contractors as well. No, he's a sad loss. And there is no one like that. Not only is there no one like that but I feel there's no possibility of there anyone like that because the system is now geared to spitting out anyone who shows a sign of independence. It used to be they'd say the smartest people in the Pentagon were the colonels who never made general. Then it became the majors who never made colonel. Now you find the odd, smart captain, but they'll be spit out soon too, because the system doesn't really tolerate anyone who is prepared to call it out, to call a spade a spade or talk about what's going on.

Ralph Nader: Let's say the US is a dictatorship — formally - let's say there was a coup d'état and some dictator took over. Would the military-industrial complex have more leeway than it has now? It seems to be completely invulnerable. Taxpayers can't sue because they don't have standing to sue, so they're out. The Congress is in their pocket, they're out. The media, which I want you to talk about, covering the Pentagon is really a farce. If we had a formal dictatorship, would the people have any less impact on this sub-government, called the military-industrial complex, a phrase coined by President Eisenhower in his farewell speech, formerly five-star general, who knew what he was talking about. Would they have any less influence than they have now?

Andrew Cockburn: No, they wouldn't. They might have even more since the dictator would really want to make sure he or she had their support in maintaining their power, but there certainly wouldn't be less of any kind of dictator we're likely to have. If we had a peace dictator who wanted to cut back their power, they'd quickly overthrow him.

Ralph Nader: Tell our people the over-armament here. They're just piling up bombs, weapons, destroyers, aircraft carriers, missiles. As Seymour Melman once said - the industrial engineering professor at Columbia University - he once equated them with TNT. It could blow up the world

300 times. Give our listeners an idea of how many Triton submarines there are. And with their multiple warheads, how many cities could one Trident submarine destroy in a matter of hours around the world?

Andrew Cockburn: Somewhere around about 50, I believe. Sorry, I haven't actually bothered to do that calculation lately, but it'd be about 50. And we've got 12 of them, so we could really destroy most of the planet in a matter of minutes, not a problem. And then, of course, we've got the ICBMs. But I really want to emphasize something, Ralph, to make my point. These, as you say and we're just saying with the nuclear weapons, they've made it possible, given themselves the power to destroy the planet and the human race and everything else too. But what is the aim is clearly to me not conquering territory - though they don't mind doing that. But the end, the objective is more money. I'll give you an example. The Navy, as a whole string of completely useless initiatives of vast expense, the most obvious one is the — or one of the most obvious ones is the Zumwalt-class destroyer, which is this 3-billion-a-copy ship which was designed to be stealthy, invisible on radar. Whether it is or not, it's open to doubt. But its weapons was going to have this magic giant canon that could fire a shell 70 miles and change its course in flight. That was this wonder weapon this ship was going to carry. Then they discovered that each shell, each piece of ammunition that this ship or this canon would fire, would cost just under \$1 million. And even with the defense budget we have today, they couldn't really afford to stock up or have rounds of ammunition costing \$1 million each.

So, they canceled, which means that the ship has no weapon. It has a few defensive weapons, but it can't do damage to the enemy. So you'd think they'd just so quietly take it off into some area of deep water and sink it or send it to the museum or cut it up for spare parts or something. No. Raytheon Corporation has just secured a \$1.6 billion contract to overhaul and tinker with the three Zumwalt-class destroyers which can't do any damage to the enemy that we have. It's a perfect example of how corrupt the whole system is. If it was just about invading the world, fair — well, not fair enough, but that would be one thing. But it's not about that. It's about profit.

Ralph Nader: Well, your book has a lot of information about accidental launches of nuclear weapons between the Russians and the U S. And it also has good history in it. We talk a lot about North Korea and the dictatorship there and he's launching missiles, and we forget what happened in the Korean War. When the North Koreans invaded South Korea and then we went to help South Korea, we abandoned all the rules of warfare, all the rules of warfare. And the North Koreans don't forget this. And in your book on page 10, you have this statement. "Heavy bombers soon succeeded in incinerating every city, town and village in North Korea with little effect on the course of the war, which was once again decided by armies fighting it out on the ground." There never was any real public education in the US about what we did to the civilians in North Korea. It's arguably the most complete devastation of civilian infrastructure – homes, buildings, healthcare facilities – that the US has ever carried out. And that's saying something, given Iraq, Afghanistan and Vietnam. But let's get to — a good part of your book is encapsulated in the warnings of a man who really knew what he was talking about, Bruce Blair. Tell us about him and tell us about Lee Butler.

Andrew Cockburn: Okay. Yeah, two very, very important and interesting people. Great Americans. Bruce Blair, who was a good friend of mine, he started life, he was a launch control

officer in a — and he was an Air Force officer and he had this job, he was a launch control officer in a silo underneath Montana. And he controlled launching, he was meant to be there when the order came through to launch the missiles. He and another guy in the silo would launch the missiles. He figured out that it was actually entirely possible, entirely possible for him to override the so-called safety system and launch the missiles himself. Furthermore, he figured out that if he got control — if he was able to suborn or recruit the crew of another silo, a particular command silo, which was also not too far away under Montana, they could launch the entire US nuclear arsenal, except for the bombers. The missiles, the ground missiles, the submarines, they could basically blow up the planet. And the safeguards against this were very slipshod and very ineffective. Because he's sitting there underground day after day, he figured get out how to get around them.

When he got out, he was so alarmed by this. He went to the Congress and said, "Look, there's a situation. Here's why the system, the safety system is full of faults." And the Congress then demanded that the Air Force do a report on this, which the Air Force did, and refused to give it to the Congress. So Bruce spent the rest of his life trying to explain to people how incredibly dangerous the situation is, because they don't really care about safety. It doesn't bring in enough money or whatever. How accidental nuclear war is entirely possible. That's Bruce, and he was very effective and then he certainly influenced a lot of people. One of the people who he found common ground with was Lee Butler who, in a way, is an even more extraordinary character because Lee Butler was a — still alive — was a professional army, the Air Force officer, very successful, very highly thought of, kept getting promoted until he was eventually made commander of STRATCOM. Well, first of all, the Strategic Air Command which then changed into STRATCOM, which has control of all the US nuclear arsenal.

And Butler, having seen the real target list and the real plans for nuclear war, concluded this was completely heinous and madness and that nuclear weapons had to be abolished. He ridiculed the whole idea of deterrence. He said, "We've got to get away from this. We've got to abolish nuclear weapons." And unfortunately, he's now quite sick, and so he doesn't do it anymore. But he campaigned quite hard for a number of years to say — and with the credentials of not just someone like you or me — well, even you, but someone who'd come from inside the system who'd seen, who knew the system as well as anyone could. And of course, he got nowhere. He influenced a lot of people, but the system itself paid no attention. As I talk a lot about in the book, Barack Obama, in 2010, authorized a wholesale -- they called it an upgrade, a modernization — actually the rebuilding of an entirely new nuclear arsenal. We're getting a new missile, new bomber, new sub missile, new warheads, new bombs that's going to cost — who knows what it'll cost. They say just over a trillion. I think that really translates into 2 trillion. And it's incredibly dangerous. And thank God we had Blair and Butler. And what worries me is I don't see any new Blairs and Butlers with that level of information that they carried with them.

Ralph Nader: We've had our warnings. You quote General Douglas MacArthur as far back as 1957. He's not known as a peacenik, and here's what he said, "Always, there has been some terrible evil at home or some monstrous foreign power that was going to gobble us up if we did not blindly rally behind it by furnishing the exorbitant sums demanded. Yet, in retrospect, these disasters never seemed to have happened, never seemed to have been quite real." That's Douglas MacArthur, and in fact, echoing a lot of what President Dwight Eisenhower has said. But we

don't have presidents like that anymore. They don't talk like that anymore. This is why this Ukraine war with Russian invasion is so dangerous, don't you think? Because as the New York Times pointed out that Biden is going to get more aggressive with Russia, he's going to have more of a confrontation. No soldiers yet, no no-fly zone, but he wants to make sure that he dismantles the ability of Russia to have a war machine that they have now. Now, that kind of talk drives a humiliated Putin into very dangerous territory, because he's got his finger on more nuclear missiles that exist in Russia than exist in the US. And this accidental launch then comes into view because the Russian system is based on ground-based radar to detect what they think is coming at them, our system can detect anywhere in the world the release of ballistic missile. And so they can get the wrong signal and then launching. And you've written a lot about that in your book. Why don't you educate our listening audience about all this in the context of the Ukraine war?

Andrew Cockburn: Well, yes. The Russians, their early warning system is not up to the level of ours at all. As you just said, they rely on ground-based radars. With the fall of the Soviet Union, their whole warning system fell apart. They had no money, no satellites. Putin's been slowly trying to rebuild it, but still, exactly — I'm glad you raised this because this really speaks to the irresponsibility, that sort of criminal irresponsibility of this administration, who are letting themselves being pushed by this wave of hysteria that they themselves have helped generate over Ukraine by the press, by the Congress, particularly by the Democrats in Congress. Initially, they said, well, when Putin started talking about nuclear weapons, they paid attention and that was influencing their behavior or certain amount of restraint. Now they've concluded that, “Oh, he's just bluffing. He'll never use them so we don't need to worry about that, and we can push forward.” So the possibility of — as our now stated official objective is to weaken Russia, not about just saving Ukraine or saving the [Volodymyr] Zelensky regime in Ukraine, but to weaken Russia. Basically, we have declared war on Russia. We've already declared economic war, and now we're declaring really military war. What else do they mean by “weaken Russia” in the context of military action?

So within that, now they've created that environment. So as you say, [President Vladimir] Putin could see a missile coming. Remember, in 1994, the Norwegians launched a weather rocket to check the weather in the upper atmosphere. The Russian early warning system labeled this an American attack. This is at a time when Russia was more or less in our pocket, the old drunk [Premier Boris] Yeltsin was our friend, there was no tension between the countries. And yet, at that point, the Russians went on alert. So, imagine now, in this state of affairs, in this current atmosphere when we're already, really as I just said, at war, if the Russians perceive something they think could be an American nuclear attack, an American missile - or more than one missile - launched at them, how are they going to react? Their doctrine says one nuclear attack on us and that's it, we launch everything. So, I think the situation is hair-raisingly dangerous at the moment. And certainly, I have no desire to let Vladimir Putin off the hook with his invasion of Ukraine, but I think the slippery slope we're on with regards to this administration is getting steeper all the time. Initially they said we're not going to intervene, then we're not going to — there's been no-fly zone, and we're edging closer and closer to full out involvement in a war.

Ralph Nader: The signs are not good. Two specifics on this, Andrew. About a month ago, it was reported that the Russian generals were not returning the calls to the US generals. They have

this hotline where they're constantly in touch with each other. That's a bad sign. Number two, about a month or so into the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, a war crime, Russians and Ukrainians met in Turkey to start negotiations. And they were on the verge of an agreement that, one: Ukraine would be neutral, no NATO membership; two: Russia would have certain security guarantees; and three: that there would be constant negotiations, it wouldn't just wrap up. Well, it did wrap up and nothing ever happened. That's because the US was not waging peace. They were not really pushing for negotiations. It's like they want to teach Russia a lesson apart from the Ukraine war but using the Ukraine war as an excuse. And so the Russians see all these neighboring countries have been signed up to be members of NATO under Clinton and other administrations, missiles 100 miles away from the Russian border. You've got a paranoid regime to begin with in Moscow, this feeds that paranoia. So we're not waging peace. And what do you see coming up here? What's the exit strategy for Putin? What's the exit strategy for the US? What's the exit strategy for Zelensky and the Ukrainians?

Andrew Cockburn: Well, if you take it apart the question would President Zelensky, who presumably cares about seeing his country destroyed, if he wanted to make an agreement tomorrow with Putin, would he be allowed to? It doesn't get much comment here, but two members of the Ukrainian negotiating team — I think two, it's certainly one, have been executed by the Ukrainian intelligence service because they were thought to be too dovish in their negotiating with the Russians, when they were posthumously labeled as Russian spies. But it seems to be that they were thought to be being insufficiently hawkish — they were prepared to negotiate. So, people ought to remember that. Would the US allow Zelensky to make a deal? I don't think so, because now we're committed to weakening Russia. If he makes a deal, then the main objective won't have been achieved. Russia will have had some sort of a success the Putin would claim. Putin, in a way, is gaining something already out of this, as I had written in my Substack, because his political position in Russia depends on being the champion of — the defender of Russia. “Russia is under threat, and therefore you got to have a strong man,” i.e., Vladimir Putin, in charge. So the more Russia is threatened, you can say it's threatened, in a way, the better politically for him.

I noticed this when Finland and Sweden were getting together to talk about joining NATO when you'd think if he didn't want them to join NATO, he'd say, "We love Finland and Sweden and we have no desire to go anywhere near them." Instead, he immediately moved military forces and even nuclear weapons on alert close to the border. I just took that as him giving them an encouraging shove, because more countries joining NATO, in a way, politically, is the better for Putin. Of course, it's also highly dangerous for all the reasons we've been discussing.

Ralph Nader: The other thing, Andrew, we've pointed out in this program is the Russians have a long memory of losing 50 million Russians in two world wars where the Germans went into Russia from the western frontier. I said, “What if we had the situation here with Canada, we would not be so restrained.” So, we don't have good leadership in Washington here. We don't have savvy diplomatic peace negotiating leadership. We're pouring a lot of defensive weapons into Ukraine and showing that we're going to continue to provoke Putin. And we know a lot about where Putin's coming from, and you don't provoke somebody like that and turn them into a giant North Korea. We're going to strip him of the bases for his military machine. After all, our military is reliant on some very rare metals that largely come from Russia. And our computer

industry relies on that. And our automotive industry now, with electric cars, relies on that. So this escalation is not good.

And we're running out of time, but I want to ask two personal questions. One is, you've been digging all this material up, you have parts in your book that are really fascinating about this inspector general in Afghanistan and what he's come up with and all kinds of corruption and waste, and one area of the military-industrial empire complex after another is in this book, listeners. It's called *The Spoils of War* by Andrew Cockburn, C-O-C-K-B-U-R-N. There's one vulnerability that great reporters like you have. I call it the satiety of exposés. That is, you expose so much compared to other reporters that you feel so satisfied in what you're doing compared to other reporters, that you don't become an advocate, an advocate trying to push for congressional hearings, wanting to even testify the way some authors have of muckraking books. You don't move it into action. I'm saying “you” collectively. The satiety of exposés. Reflect a bit about that.

Andrew Cockburn: Well, you mean, rather than sitting back with a smug smile once I publish something, I should actually be heading down to Capitol Hill to take further action?

Ralph Nader: In other words, to move from journalism into action. How can you resist it, given what you know?

Andrew Cockburn: Well, you're asking a lot. But I did — I'm part of various groups. I do talk a lot to congressional aides. I'm sure I might fail various sort of conflict of interest tests by — rather than just exposing, I do sort of urge people to do things. Maybe I should do more. Anyway, I'll take your urgings to heart, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: You speak with great credibility. Very few people have reached a depth of understanding of this empire in this military-industrial complex. When I did the book on *Unsafe at Any Speed*, I was so outraged that I didn't care whether people said you're no longer a journalist. I wanted to regulate GM. I wanted to get safer cars. And I'm not boasting. I'm just saying, emotionally, how do you put the brakes on what you know and the sense of urgency that you've wrapped around it?

Andrew Cockburn: Well, yeah, I quite agree. You can't sit back and just let all this go on. I don't know. I do what I can. Maybe I should try harder.

Ralph Nader: Well, Steve, what about — you must be looking for a comment or a question.

Steve Skrovan: Yeah. I wanted, Andrew, to ask you every time I turn on CNN in the last few weeks with regards to the Ukraine war, I just see generals talking, or retired national security figures, James Clapper, retired generals. Talk a little bit about the role of that particular revolving door: from general to lucrative pundit jobs.

Andrew Cockburn: Well, most of them — in fact, these old hacks who get trotted out, Petraeus, Wesley Clark, Panetta, former Secretary of Defense, they'd put them on, they say, "Now we turn for an informed view of the war, to Leon Panetta, Former Secretary of Defense." What they don't say is he's a lobbyist. He works for a defense contractor, as they all do. It's

absolutely shameless that the media puts these people on like they're just there for their expertise, and they're all shilling for the military-industrial complex directly. And just like well, we got our present Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin, who made a lot of money out of Raytheon. It's so squalid, the whole thing. And you don't see any dissident voices. In fact, I made a joke on my Substack the other day. I said, "If Dwight Eisenhower were to make his military-industrial complex speech today, he'd be kicked off Twitter." Probably accused of being a Russian-supported Russian supervisor or something. The suffocation of debate is so much worse than it ever was. It was bad enough with the invasion of Iraq where dissident voices didn't get on, but this is like ten times worse.

Ralph Nader: You also described the slaughter in Yemen by the Saudis backed up by US military arms and political cover. This book will get you motivated, listeners, because the trajectory of this empire will devour our country. It's already starving trillions of dollars over the years. They could have rebuilt, modernized, upgraded all the public facilities, schools, public transit, drinking water systems, land erosion recovery, not only highways and bridges. We're paying a real price here, and I think it's about time we listen to some of our returning veterans who belong to groups like Veterans for Peace, or just returning veterans who are now free to talk. They'll tell you something about the glory of war in a very satire, bitter manner. And the hundreds of thousands of veterans who did survive these wars, not to mention the millions of natives who died in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Somalia, Yemen, you name it, but they were scarred for life. Not only the burn pits contamination that (President) Biden properly paid attention to, finally, but they were scarred, traumatized for life, moral trauma as to what they did. Innocent people under orders from the top brass, as well as physical trauma. Hannah, do you have a comment or question before we leave?

Hannah Feldman: I do. Thank you, Mr. Cockburn. I wanted to build on Ralph's question from the point of taking action. I think the story you tell in your book presents kind of the soft underbelly of the military-industrial complex, which is the human egos involved and the human greed involved. So I'm curious if you see an opportunity to kind of pick away at the military-industrial complex through that personal motivation.

Andrew Cockburn: Yeah. I think it is. I think it should be — more and more we should highlight who these particular people are and what they're like. And I was just talking about the flacks that are put on TV all the time now and what their actual interests are, which is they're doing it for the dollar. But beyond that, it's not just the personal thing. I think it's important for the progressives, people being expressed by everyone in this discussion today, is to really learn about defense, to point out this thing I keep — I hope I'm not boring everyone, saying "defense" should be in quotation marks. They're not that interested. And then, unless the US is facing imminent defeat in a war, they never get that interested. I give an example in the book of the soldiers in Korea who were all getting frostbite, who were raiding enemy trenches to steal boots because the enemy in Korea had much better boots, whereas the Americans were all getting frostbite because the high command hadn't bothered to give them decent boots. The most recent wars you had working class families going into debt to supply their sons, daughters, brothers, husbands, whatever, with essential pieces of equipment — body armor and night vision goggles because, again, the military couldn't be bothered to give them that, because they were spending the money on very much more profitable toys.

So maybe I'm repeating myself, but I think people should pay much more attention to the soft underbelly, not just to say, and which we should say, "it's all bad and we shouldn't be pissing away all our national treasure on the military-industrial complex," but to point out that it has feet of clay, legs of clay, whole bodies of clay, because people have to understand that. People have to understand they're being had, and what the whole game is about, and then we might get some sanity back into discussion.

Ralph Nader: One thing you point out in your book is no one 's held accountable. The war criminals retire, and they get big speeches and book advances and are given awards, like Hillary Clinton and Condoleezza Rice and George W. Bush and Dick Cheney and Paul Wolfowitz. And in your chapter on the corruption in Afghanistan, with the inspector general who you interviewed, John Sopko, he told you that all these criminal exposés that he has documented, not one person was fired.

Andrew Cockburn: He said not only was not one person fired, he said "No one missed a promotion." He said he doesn't think anyone even missed a bonus. We're pissing away God knows how much, certainly \$100 billion of our money.

Ralph Nader: Well, we've been speaking with Andrew Cockburn, the author of the new book, *The Spoils of War: Power, Profit and the American War Machine*, one of many books that he's written. Clearly the premier investigative reporter of the military-industrial complex and the empire that it spawns without limit, tell us how people can access your Substack and then we'll let you go.

Andrew Cockburn: Okay. My Substack is spoilsowar, all one word, dot substack dot com. It's pretty easy.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much, Andrew Cockburn.

Andrew Cockburn: Thank you, Ralph. It's a pleasure and honor to be on with you.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with Andrew Cockburn. We have a link to his book, *Spoils of War*, at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Up next, Ralph is going to answer some of your listener questions, 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 Tuesday, May 3, 2022. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Johnson & Johnson is seeking to execute a corporate bankruptcy shell game, known as "The Texas two-step," to avoid facing claims from cancer-stricken customers. The "Texas two-step" is the name given to a highly controversial legal strategy that some of the biggest companies are now using to shield their assets from accountability. It allows massively wealthy corporations whose products cause harm to avoid paying damages to the victims of that harm. And it denies the victims their right to make their case in court and be judged by a jury of their peers. "There's

a justice system for rich people and powerful corporation, and there's a system for everyone else," said Senator Dick Durbin, who has introduced legislation to outlaw the practice.

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

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russell. Welcome back to the Ralph Nader Radio Hour. I'm Steve Skrovan along with Hannah Feldman and Ralph. Let's do some listener questions. Ralph, this is from a listener who gives us just his last name, I assume, "Nicholson." He wants to know, "So what's the story with New York's unelected governor using her power to extort the Seminole Nation out of \$600 million-plus for a fracking billionaire's trophy stadium project in Buffalo? Your perspective." He's talking about the publicly financed new football stadium in Buffalo for the Bills.

Ralph Nader: We received a number of questions on that, including from Roger Hogue. It's all you say about it. It was negotiated with the Pegula family in Buffalo, which owns the Buffalo Bills and is worth \$5.8 billion with a B, according to Forbes. But they want the taxpayer to pay for the new stadium, which would nominally be owned by Erie County but rented for a song by the Buffalo Bills who control all the concessions, the parking fees and the naming rights. And Governor Hochul negotiated this in secret, sprung it on the state legislature, saying the Buffalo Bills will move somewhere to Austin, Texas or elsewhere if they don't subsidize it. And it was part of the overall annual New York State budget, and she signed it into law. And I sent her an email saying, "If you think it's over, you're mistaken, Governor, because there's going to be a lot of conflict when the details are known and when the extortion is elaborated," like we're going to move if you don't give us \$1.3 billion package, 800 million from the taxpayer. And they used a settlement with the Native American tribe there to put the money in that kitty. And the Native American leaders are very upset and criticized her publicly. So, it's going to be continuously contentious. I suggested that they name the new stadium, if it's built, Taxpayer Stadium. That's what they should name it, taxpayer stadium.

Steve Skrovan: Yeah, because they paid for the naming rights. It might as well be. That's the other thing. They'll make a lot of money having some corporations slap their name on it and the taxpayers won't get any of that back.

Ralph Nader: Sure. And the idea of creating jobs has been denounced by dozens of economists who specialize in sports economics. They're going to have 10 games a year, 2 exhibition, 8 regular games. What kind of jobs are going to be created, compared to that kind of money being put into neighborhood recreation facilities so people, and young people, and people of all ages can get exercise and develop a sense of community throughout the greater Buffalo area. That would create not only better jobs but more health as well.

Steve Skrovan: I want to thank our guest again, Andrew Cockburn. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up". A transcript of this program will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website soon after the episode is posted.

Hannah Feldman: To order your copy of the *Capitol Hill Citizen*, the pilot issue is only \$5 to cover shipping, go to capitolhillcitizen.com. 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.

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

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody. And everybody needs to pay attention to what Andrew Cockburn is writing about. There really is no alternative other than the people taking charge again.