

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 384 TRANSCRIPT

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

David Feldman: Hello, Steve Skrovan.

Steve Skrovan: I'm glad we're on a both-name basis.

David Feldman: Yes, it's a good step forward in our relationship. We've repaired the past.

Steve Skrovan: That's right. I like we're going the opposite way; we're getting more formal. And the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph?

Ralph Nader: Hello, everybody.

Steve Skrovan: Nice to have the whole gang here. And we've got a great show for you as we always do. And we're going to start off with a very interesting guest who is going to be talking about a very interesting book and it has to do with the history of violent behavior on the part of our great country, the United States of America. We were founded through colonization and genocide, built up through slavery and genocide, and made rich through more colonization and more genocide. If we look back at our world wars, our wars to take over the continent from sea to shining sea, our wars to depose leaders in other countries who we didn't like, our wars to establish military outposts and our wars to establish commercial outposts--when is the United States not at war?

That's what we're going to ask our guest today, David Vine. In the preface to his new book, *The United States of War*, he says, "According to the government's own Congressional Research Service and other sources, the US military has waged war, engaged in combat, or otherwise employed its forces aggressively in foreign lands in all but eleven years of its existence." Well, I'm looking forward to finding out if any of those years were consecutive. To close out the show, Ralph will give us an update on the Congress Club. As always, somewhere in the middle, we'll check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, let's dig into the history of America's endless wars.

David Feldman: David Vine is professor of anthropology at American University and the author of several books, including *Base Nation* and *Island of Shame*. His latest book is *The United States of War: A Global History of America's Endless Conflicts from Columbus to the Islamic State*. Welcome to *Ralph Nader Rader Hour*, David Vine.

David Vine: Thanks so much, David Feldman. And thank you, Steve and Ralph, for having me on. I'm really thrilled to get a chance to speak with you.

Ralph Nader: Welcome indeed. Well, this is a very important book, *The United States of War*, David Vine, which is I gather why it didn't get widely reviewed or you weren't on the national talk shows or NPR [National Public Radio] or PBS. Is that correct?

David Vine: The book has gotten some good coverage, but indeed, it has not gotten the publicity that, for example, a book that came out at about the same time, a book called *War[¹: How Conflict Shaped Us]* by a sort of renowned historian got a lot of fanfare from the *New York Times* and elsewhere, I would hazard to guess because it, in some ways, celebrates war and naturalizes war whereas my book casts a critical light on the long history of US wars and the long history of the past 20 years of war since the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001.

Ralph Nader: Well, you go in great detail. You're an anthropologist. You believe in field research. You've been to a lot of bases. One of your former books was on all the military bases around the world that the US has. Give us an idea of the range of these bases. Why do they keep proliferating? When do they ever close? What you found there? And how the military entertains members of [US] Congress when they go visiting these bases, including Guantanamo?

David Vine: It's true. The huge collection of US military bases abroad - now numbering about 750 US military bases outside the 50 states and Washington, D.C. - are located in about 83 countries and colonies or territories. This huge collection of bases is a perfect and sad example of the military-industrial-congressional complex in operation. And my book, *The United States of War*, tries to look in particular at the connections between US bases abroad and war. So, the book is sort of a non-traditional examination of the history of US wars. It's not really a history of the battles and the heroes as they're often portrayed in conventional history texts.

Instead, the book looks at the history of US wars through the lens of US bases abroad and tries to understand the larger pattern of why the United States has been fighting wars in almost every year of its existence, and some would arguably say in every year. But indeed, as David and Steve mentioned in the introduction, just using the government's own numbers, the US military has been fighting in all but eleven years of US history, some form of war or combat. But by looking at this history of US bases abroad, which were under construction almost immediately after US independence, initially on Native American people's lands, we see that that bases provide a kind of lens to understand the larger pattern of war. And that US bases abroad show us the ways in which the United States has been an empire since independence, born out of European empires, and has expanded over the course of US history, initially across North America, conquering [and] of course destroying the ways of life and then lives of Native American peoples and then expanding around the globe in large measure in the form of US military bases that continue to encircle the globe as they have since World War II in particular.

And US bases abroad show us how the United States is an empire that has sought expansion; US officials have sought expansion. And that these US bases abroad have not just enabled the long series of US wars but have actually made war more likely. Because when you build bases abroad—bases on other people's territories—these tend not to be defensive in nature. They tend to actually be offensive in nature. They tend to be platforms for war. And that's indeed what we've seen through the long series of US wars since independence.

Ralph Nader: Well, you have a very nice map in the center of your book that connects US military invasions and how all of a sudden up crops a military base that continues through the decades of some 242/243. I thought the designer of your book...it was really spectacular because when you open your book, before the first page, you start listing all the wars starting 1774-1783 [American Revolution] Shawnee, Delaware, and in 1843, China, in 1889, Hawai'i, in 1989, Libya, 1995, Serbia [Kosovo intervention]. Anyway, they're all listed one after the other as if anybody has any doubts about the specificity of your book, *The United States of War: A Global History of America's Endless Conflicts from Columbus to the Islamic State*. They don't even have to start reading the book before they can see the list of the wars.

During Vietnam, there was at least the Fulbright Hearings trying to reevaluate our disastrous involvement in Vietnam. But now you have two disastrous involvements in Iraq and Afghanistan, plus a disastrous consequence in Libya—just to choose three recent situations—and there are no congressional evaluative hearings. The House Foreign Relations [Committee], the Senate Foreign Relations [Committee], they just sitting there rubber stamping \$50 billion appropriations that go right to the floor of the Congress and zoom out to corruption in Afghanistan that we have fostered and slaughter in Iraq. How can anything hopeful in your book be turned around if Congress is not the major part of the equation? Can it be done without Congress being the major part of the equation and how do we make it so?

David Vine: I think it would be very difficult. One way to do it without—I mean, I think your analysis, of course, of Congress's abdication of their responsibilities in overseeing the US military, US military operations, US wars is profound and horrific, really. I think the only way might be--although I think it would spur congressional action--would be to bring back the draft. I think some of the reason we saw so much protest in the 60s and 70s against the US war in Vietnam and Laos and Cambodia was of course because so many people, except those who could buy their way out of the draft, or one way or another evade it were at risk of being drafted and sent to Vietnam and Laos and Cambodia, or they had family members who were.

So counterintuitively, I think we should think very seriously about bringing back the draft. But I think Congress needs to be involved one way or another, but there are encouraging signs. There are a growing number of mostly Democrats, but there are some Republicans who agree, which is another encouraging sign. There are a growing number of Democrats who were calling for a 10% cut in the US military budget. Now the US military budget, in my mind, should be cut by half over the next five years, but a 10% cut from one year to the next would go a long way toward dramatically scaling back the size of the military budget. So there is growing awareness in Congress and people willing to take a stand publicly to call for an end to the endless wars, to call for an end to US involvement in, for example, Yemen, where we've played such a terrible role in fueling, literally and figuratively, that war among 25 countries in which US troops have been fighting since 2001--25 countries. Most people aren't aware of this. And again, there are people across the political spectrum. It's not just a handful of sort of leftist Democrats. There are anti-imperialist Republicans, who have come to similar conclusions often for different reasons, but that don't want to see the United States invading a longer series of countries, who want to scale back the size of the military budgets. The Koch Foundation, Charles Koch's foundation, is funding people on the left and the right who are interested in scaling back the size of the US military and putting an end to this long series of US imperialist wars.

Ralph Nader: He worked with George Soros, didn't he to start a new institute called the Quincy Institute in Washington, D.C., which is headed by Andrew Bacevich, the former colonel who taught in Massachusetts, has written many books about the US penchant for war. Is that correct?

David Vine: That's exactly right. Yeah. The Quincy Institute is really at the forefront of this movement toward a new way of thinking about US foreign policy and how the US engages with the world. I would also point out that Bacevich—like you—called for Congress to investigate the post-2001 wars, which I think is much needed.

Ralph Nader: I want to bring the attention of our listeners to an article by one of your admired reporters, the famous military reporter recently retired, Walter Pincus from the *Washington Post*. And he wrote this article on March 30th, 2021, where he opens it by saying, “The United States military forces are currently engaged in undeclared warfare below the level of open armed conflict in various parts of the world, not only in cyberspace, but also on the ground and in the air. This was disclosed last Thursday, at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing that featured the chief of Special Operations Command, Army General Richard D. Clarke.” And in this opinion piece, a paragraph jumped out and here's the quote [in] Pincus's opinion piece. “In that question, Cotton,” that's Senator Tom Cotton from Arkansas, a Republican... “Cotton, a former [US] Army officer who served in Iraq, was being quite disingenuous. There has been a long, troubled history of presidents and White House staffers taking over direction of military operations. The most recent cases during the [Barack] Obama administration, where drone strikes against alleged terrorists were said to be decided by the President, himself.” And he continues, “Trump, however, had reversed that Obama policy early in his first term, when he gave Central Command broad authority to carry out strikes in Yemen at a time when there were few American troops there.”

Well, as you know, Obama had this penchant for pushing the button of destruction on various people in roads in Yemen who say they were fitting the profile of what they call signature strikes. That is, there were five or six young men talking on a road who fit a profile and they didn't even know their names. And the advisors to Obama would say, “Mr. President, we've got them targeted from Virginia and we can have a drone take them out. Yes or no?” And Obama would say “yes” or “no.” The *New York Times* had a big article on this. And the Obama people would call this “Killer Tuesday” every Tuesday. Pretty ghastly and pretty illegal for someone who supposedly teaches constitutional law. What's your reaction?

David Vine: Speaking of illegality that you brought up earlier, I think, you know, the drone program has been an abomination. And I would challenge anyone to identify a single drone assassination that one could claim was legal in any sense. But I think beyond the illegality and the inhumanity of this kind of assassination complex, that indeed as you're pointing out, has assassinated people, not just known people, but people who fit some sort of vague description of a terrorist, people who are doing calisthenics in Afghanistan or Pakistan or Yemen. Beyond that, the drone program is an example and a symbol of the way in which the entire War on Terror has been counterproductive. I actually spoke to someone in the White House, who was part of that drone killing program in the Obama administration. And it hadn't even occurred to him and others in the White House that these drone strikes might have been counterproductive, that in

killing people and often killing civilians in the process, you might've actually created more people who would take up arms against the United States.

And that's exactly what the War on Terror has largely produced. It's produced more people who would use terrorism as a tool, more militants who would take up arms against the United States and its allies. And the drone program has done that, but the entire War on Terror has done that. It has been a catastrophic failure that I don't think we've even begun to grapple with, in part, again, because Congress hasn't cast any light, any serious light, on the wars and the War on Terror writ large. But, you know, this is a disaster. The last 20 years of war are disaster that at the very least match the disaster of the US war in Vietnam and throughout Southeast Asia, but arguably, is actually a far greater catastrophe, but with far less attention.

Ralph Nader: Well, Obama was such a disappointment here, given the way he talked in his campaign, and his training as a constitutional lawyer. It was so bad that in this opinion piece, by Pincus, here's how he's described, in the words of Senator Tom Cotton, at this hearing Trump's reaction. Because after Obama left, you know, the military guys and the drone guys, they would assume, well, you know, Trump's an aggressive militarist [so] let's keep asking him who we're going to wipe out in a very different part of the world that we have targeted with these drones. So Cotton described it this way. "Early in Trump's administration, late at night, he got a call from an action officer about approving a strike and his response was, "What did they expect me to know about it? Don't they have some captain on the ground near the country that's been following this target and knows that this is a bad guy and that we should conduct this strike?"

That's quite a slam at Obama who was observed as having a great deal of interest in pushing buttons that evaporate people 6,000 miles away, who they don't have any evidence that they're conducting any imminent strike against anything called America." How would you characterize Hillary Clinton's role in the undeclared war against Libya, which is going on to this day in terms of chaos, violence, spilling into neighboring African countries and was opposed by Secretary of Defense; [Robert] Gates?

David Vine: Yeah, if you need another example of the disastrous War on Terror, look no farther than Libya. And if you need an example of why military intervention, which is really a euphemism for invasion and military attacks on another country, why it is so short-sighted and such a disastrous policy that needs be abandoned, Libya shows you how US and European intervention, invasion, and involvement in the civil war in Libya led to a failed state, led to far more deaths, led to the dissolution of the country, and again, a sort of breeding ground for militants and others who would join militant groups.

Hillary Clinton, my understanding is she was driving that train in the Obama administration, but I think it's as important to look at the administration now. And we need to be putting pressure on the [Joe] Biden administration to abandon the policies of the Obama administration, to abandon the drone program, to abandon the War on Terror fully. Now, I think we should recognize that the withdrawal from Afghanistan, I would call it a partial withdrawal, because there are going to be hundreds of US military personnel who remained in the embassy and special forces. And by all accounts, that probably continue—at least as of now to continue to use drones and other forms of bombing if they deem it necessary. We need to put pressure on the Biden administration

to abandon those policies, to fully withdraw from Afghanistan, and to bring an end to the other endless wars.

Ralph Nader: Actually, you make a good point, David, because Biden—not [in] a heavy way, but [in] a continuing way—he made direct attacks, military attacks, in Iraq and Syria, not in response to a direct attack by the adversary. And he basically is saying now he’s going to attack anywhere, regardless of whether there is something going on that’s threatening us imminently. And this completely contradicts his interview with Chris Matthews of about 12 years ago, when he basically said, “Only Congress can declare war, and this should be an impeachable offense!”

So here we go again. You’ve got this enormous pressure, regardless of whether a Republican or Democrat is in the White House, and the increasing taboo in the Congress of even challenging the military budget, except recently when some of the more progressive [members] called for a 10% cut. But the Senate and House Armed Services Committees certainly didn't take this up. So this is really serious and all empires, as you know better than most, devour themselves eventually. And ours has been devouring our country by taking huge chunks of public budgets and blowing up places around the world as our own public services and public works and infrastructure crumble around us.

When you finished this book, *The United States of War*, did you get invited to talk at the [US Army] War College because the War College prides itself on hearing all kinds of viewpoints. What was the response by people in the State Department and the Pentagon? Can you tell us a little bit about any interest in Congress? Did anybody say, Professor Vine, you really know your stuff here. You've been all over the world. We want you to testify.

David Vine: Well, I wouldn't say it's quite been “crickets” as people like to say these days, but they haven't been banging down my doors—folks at the War College or in Congress. That said, now I have had a chance to speak to the Air Force’s Air University, which I’d love that opportunity. I am seeking out more opportunities. I've spoken to veterans’ groups; I've spoken to Quakers; I've spoken to a wide range and have some connections with folks on Capitol Hill. I am committed to making my book a kind of tool that hopefully is useful to people involved in movements, again, to bring an end to the endless wars, to end the War on Terror once and for all. So my hope is that that will continue. I'm part of a transpartisan group called The Overseas Base Realignment and Closure Coalition--The Overseas Base Realignment and Closure Coalition that is calling on the Biden administration, and Congress to the extent that it wants to get involved, to close US bases abroad, unnecessary US bases abroad. The vast majority of them, if not all of them, are in my mind, unnecessary. But again, I see the growing transpartisan calls for closing bases abroad and ending the endless wars, as again, encouraging signs of progress.

Ralph Nader: Well, speaking of encouraging signs, you know, there are veterans groups, Veterans for Peace, which I belong to, is very antiwar. These are veterans from all the way from World War II to the Iraq, Afghanistan wars. They don't get much press although they have chapters around the country. How do you view the traditional veterans’ groups? I understand they're starting to wonder about this empire--wars that go on forever. Trump actually stoked that phrase “forever wars.” And we're talking about the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion and other more traditional groups. How do you read them in recent years?

David Vine: I haven't studied the traditional veterans' groups so closely, but I do think there are a growing number of veterans voices that have been speaking out against the wars for years. Veterans for Peace, of course, for very long time has been terrific, but there's a new group called Common Defense that's a great veterans' organization. And recently, I saw an article about veterans' organizations across the political spectrum, again, calling on Congress to reassert its war powers, to take back the war powers from the really imperial presidents, long series of imperial presidents. So, I think there is good movement when it comes to veterans' groups to say, you know what, the best way to serve veterans and thank veterans is to stop creating so many of us and stop sending military personnel into harm's way with new wars.

Ralph Nader: Well, let's talk about Guantanamo. You focus on Guantanamo. I think a lot of people know Guantanamo Bay, but they don't know how it arose. They don't know what's going on there, why they can't charge the so-called accused. After 15, 20 years, they're still there without charges under the hot sun. Some have been liberated. I think the number is down to less than two dozen now, and they entertain members of Congress royally, as you describe in your book, give them tours. At a meeting I had with Fidel Castro about 18 years ago, I asked him about Guantanamo, and he said every year they get a rental check from the US government, a modest rental check, and he's never cashed it. Every year he puts it in his desk drawer, making that kind of gesture as if this is our land and we want it back. So, what can you say about this endless Guantanamo quagmire that is an affront to US principles of due process and rule of law?

David Vine: Yeah, it is an affront to rule of law, to human rights, and again a terrible symbol of how misguided and counterproductive and what a failure the War on Terror has been. Because again, Guantanamo Bay has been a fantastic recruiting tool for militant groups. But indeed, the history of Guantanamo Bay goes back more than a century now to the 1898 war between the United States and Spain and was imposed on the Cuban people. Basically, US officials said, "We're going to take this plot of land in Cuba." It's about the size of Washington, D.C. It's huge. People today think of the prison when they hear Guantanamo Bay, but the United States really has a colony in Cuba. This is land held against the will of the Cuban people as your conversation with Fidel shows. There is a token payment of around \$4,000 a year that the United States sends Cuba as part of a treaty that was negotiated. But indeed, as far as I know, the Cuban government still doesn't cash that check because they want the land back. And long before the Cuban revolution, Cubans have wanted that land back. But meanwhile, the United States has held on to all of it. And this is another example of a base that doesn't need to exist. I mean the prison should never have existed, but the entire base should be closed. There are a lot of calls now of course to close the prison at Guantanamo Bay as there were during the Obama administration. But my call is that we can't just close the prison; we need to close the entire base. There's no reason to have a military base 90 miles from Florida. The United States does not need this base in any fashion. It should be closed because, again, as you pointed to, it is wasting tens of millions of dollars a year at very least, probably hundreds of millions given the cost of the prison, that could be of course better spent on addressing the human needs of people in the United States. Well, again, a symbol of really—using [Dwight] Eisenhower's words—the theft from the American people that the US military budget represents. This is money that is being stolen from taxpayers [and] diverted to the military when it could be far better spent on addressing the health and housing and educational and many other needs here in the United States.

Ralph Nader: We've been talking with Professor David Vine of American University, the author of *The United States of War*. Let's talk about the Middle East and the Israeli and Afghanistan regions. What contribution do you think has Israel made to the US empire--expanding it, legitimizing it, supporting it with their influence in Congress, et cetera?

David Vine: I think the Israeli Government has been a close ally of course and has been a kind of outpost of US empire since at least the 1950s. There was, shortly after the creation of the State of Israel, actually a fair amount of debate within the US government about whether to support the State of Israel, generally speaking, or to support its Arab neighbors. But pretty quickly, Israel became a kind of base, and now it is a literal base. It's home to US military bases, mostly secretive, at least one now not secret. And it has been a tool that the United States has used to exert its power--and I should be more specific--that the US government and US government officials have used to exert power in the greater Middle East, along with many other levers of power and many other military bases. The United States has military bases in all the countries surrounding the Persian Gulf, except Iran and maybe Yemen. There are dozens upon dozens of bases throughout the greater Middle East, and Israel has been a particularly important base, again, both literal and figurative, for the deployment of us military power largely to protect of course oil interests.

Ralph Nader: That's not generally known that US actually has bases inside Israel. Is that true?

David Vine: That's right. I have a list of bases that I've been keeping. It builds on the Pentagon's own annual list of bases they [Department of Defense] put together, what's called the *Base Structure Report*. And since about 2014, I've been using that as the basis for a list, because the Pentagon, of course - given its terrible recordkeeping and lack of transparency - omits many well-known bases and secretive bases. And there have been bases in Israel for years.

Ralph Nader: Let's go to Afghanistan. The President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani [Ahmadzai], as you know, is an anthropologist. He taught anthropology at Johns Hopkins [University]. He knows Afghanistan backwards and forwards. He's part of the Pashtun tribe. He has been to villages all over Afghanistan before he ran for election some years ago as president. He's known to be very honest, very knowledgeable. And I thought at the time when he ran and was elected, that he was going to be able to deal with the fractiousness of tribal conflicts and the US presence there. He certainly knows Washington pretty well; he's very articulate.

And it's all come crumbling down. And this withdrawal by the United States is another word for "defeat" --a perfect replica of Vietnam. We had all the modern military--air, naval, ground, regular troops, the Vietnamese army, the Afghan army police, all kinds of modern surveillance techniques, all kinds of \$100 bills being shipped on US cargo planes to Kabul and trans-shipped to Kandahar. And it's all coming crumbling down with 300,000 Afghan troops up against now 70,000 Taliban who have no air force, no navy, no real heavy equipment. They have now made peace with their Northern tribal neighbors, the Tajiks, Uzbeks, who are now becoming Taliban commanders. They're moving to take control of one district after another. Here we go again. How does this affect you as a historian and an ethnographer that unlike Vietnam, they had a real honest, knowledgeable person in charge, and they didn't really handle the kind of asset that Ashraf Ghani brought to them at the beginning. What's your view of all this?

David Vine: Well, Afghanistan is horrific. I think we have to begin by recognizing how much destruction and damage the US war has caused, the US war that began in October of 2001. I mean, in this period, we were talking at least around a million Afghans dead. I think even more with people who've died, not just directly in combat, but indirectly, many millions injured [and] more than eight million displaced. And this of course builds on a much longer history of war that dates back to at least 1979, when US involvement in Afghanistan began with funding Mujahideen rebels like Osama Bin Laden throughout the 1980s and their war against the Soviet Union, that also created untold death and destruction and displacement. And I think throughout, US officials have treated Afghanistan and Afghans as assets, have treated them in an imperial fashion, like other empires—the Soviet empire, the British empire before it—which also ended up leaving in defeat. And that is indeed what was happening to US military forces and the US government. And I think it's because of this imperial treatment that goes far beyond Ashraf Ghani, who indeed—I don't know him, but I was somewhat encouraged briefly. But you know, the fact that when there were some negotiations with the Taliban, the US officials excluded Ghani and Afghan government officials from those negotiations shows who was really the boss, that Afghanistan has been effectively a colony of the United States since 2001. The real power players have been in Washington. I mean, first, most importantly, they haven't engaged in a real peace process that is so desperately needed and is needed right now. There is, by all signs, we could see even worse destruction and displacement and death with the Taliban sweeping through much of the country. And the Biden administration can't just pull out and turn its back. It said it won't, but it needs to be deeply engaged in a multi-national peace process to make sure that we can limit the destruction and damage that has been going on for so long now.

Ralph Nader: When we pulled out of Vietnam, we allowed over 150,000 Vietnamese to come to the US—so-called Vietnamese boat people, desperate people. And we're very stingy now in providing visas for the 80,000 maybe 90,000 Afghan nationals who were interpreters, drivers, and otherwise worked with us over there, and now [are] in mortal danger. You think the Congress is going to turn around on this and allow them in?

David Vine: Well, I certainly hope so. It really is the Biden administration that largely can determine refugee policy. It needs the money to resettle refugees, and that's where Congress is involved. But the United States has resettled hundreds of thousands of refugees in past years, including in the Reagan administration. We resettled around a million Southeast Asians following the US war and throughout Southeast Asia, hundreds of thousands of Cubans, hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews, and we could do so again. The Biden administration got some applause for increasing the refugee cap above what Trump had said. He had brought it to historic lows. But Biden actually turned around and said, “I'm going to increase the cap, but actually we're not going to reach the cap. We're not going to resettle 62,000 refugees this year.” And we have to go far beyond the interpreters and people who worked for the US military. There again, displacement in Afghanistan is numbered in around eight million since the start of the US war. Some of those folks have been able to go home or settle in other parts of Afghanistan or get resettled elsewhere. But there are millions of Afghans still living in displacement. And we bear a profound responsibility for resettling, not just Afghans, but Iraqis, and others where US troops have been fighting since 2001.

Ralph Nader: Well, the slaughter in Iraq displaced millions of Iraqis, took over a million Iraqi lives, blew apart the country in chaos to this day. Let's see how far you go here. When I interviewed former Judge Andrew Napolitano, who is the legal commentator on Fox News, he said, "What is Obama's Attorney General waiting for? He should go after George W. Bush and Dick Cheney and prosecute them for war crimes." Do you agree with that? He's a conservative commentator.

David Vine: I think that many US government officials from the Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations are war criminals and should be prosecuted as such. I think that's unlikely to happen in the Biden administration, unfortunately. Part of the way that government officials, they think about covering their own asses. And if you start going after former officials, you worry about opening yourself up for later prosecution. Of course, if you went after former officials for the crimes they've committed, you might also hope that then that would encourage current officials to not break the law. I should just correct one thing. Because I have—with a group of students from American University—documented the displacement that's gone on in the War on Terror, that's gone on in the post-2001 wars for the Costs of War Project, which has done some of the work that Congress should have been doing, documenting the human and financial costs of the post-9/11 wars. There have been around 5.3 million people displaced in Afghanistan since 2001--5.3 million people. And more than 9 million [displaced] in Iraq. In total, as I mentioned before, I think 37 million people [were] displaced in the eight most violent wars that the United States has been involved in. And 37 million, just to put it in some quick perspective, is about the size of the State of California, about the population of Canada.

Ralph Nader: Well, you know, you have a very useful list of all the wars starting 1774 in your book, starting on page 337 and going all the way to page 345 with a line for each war; like you have 1912, Cuba, 1924 to 1925, Honduras, 1962, Thailand, and on and on. I think in any positive way in this program, I think we've got to go up to Congress. I think you and others, and your students should go up, go to the various members of the House and Senate Foreign Relations [Committees]. The House Foreign Relations has a new chairman, and basically say, look, it starts with you. The Congress is the reservoir of empire and it's running away from its constitutional oath and responsibilities. We have to start with hearings. We have to start with broad public hearings, putting you all to work, instead of a three-day week with huge weeks of recess. They've taken the virtual summer off--Congress in the House and the Senate. And you've got to get to work. You owe it to the American people. You owe it to the deprived needs of our country. You owe it to our veterans and their families. And you've never had these kinds of hearings. These hearings have got to be on the US empire, no fooling around with semantics here.

And so before I turn it over to Steve and David, I want to read a brief passage in your book on page 328 and it really elaborates President Eisenhower's famous phrase, "Beware of the military-industrial complex." Originally, in the draft of the statement, he had "beware of the military-congressional-industrial complex," and his assistants persuaded him to leave Congress out because to maintain good relations with Congress. And he did that. But his original intent was to focus on the triumvirate. But he had more than just that phrase, and I'm going to just read a few words from your book. "President Eisenhower's warning about the military-industrial-congressional complex"—you had it right—"applies equally to the system of endless war and empire. It is militarized," and you're quoting Eisenhower now, "the very structure of our society"

with “economic, political, even spiritual” effects “in every city, every statehouse, every office of the federal government” (and beyond).” Now, this is the words of a five-star general who was a leader in the bloody war against the Nazis in World War II and saw millions of people die.

We have to take it to the US Congress. We have to develop a foothold. We don't have Dennis Kucinich there anymore. We don't have a champion of peace. We have to show that the Chairman of the Rules Committee, Jim McGovern from liberal Massachusetts, including Amherst, has got to go back to his roots, which were one of being a vigorous peace advocate and he's got to introduce a bill to create a Department of Peace. You get the idea. Are you willing to do more of that than you've already done and try to get more colleagues going on this? There's nothing more frustrating than writing a great book of elaboration and accountability and having it not move up on Capitol Hill, so to speak.

David Vine: Yes, I'm definitely willing to do much more and thinking about how to do more. And specifically, one of my focuses is on how we roll back the power of the military-industrial-congressional complex. What would it take to roll back the power of the military-industrial-congressional complex that has really gone far beyond the worst nightmares that Eisenhower must have had of its power. Today its power is immense because of the trillions, literally trillions of dollars, that have been poured into the military-industrial-congressional complex. \$7 trillion at this point around have been spent on wars since 2001. And that's not even the whole Pentagon or military budget. \$7 trillion just on the post-2001 wars. And that money buys influence. It buys influence in Congress. It buys influence, as Eisenhower said, in statehouses and every office and every part of the country. And we need to figure out how we roll back that power.

And I, in the book, outline some ideas I have for rolling back the power of the military-industrial-congressional complex. I think part of it involves conversion, converting parts of the military into, for example, a global health and disaster response force (an unarmed one) and converting the arms manufacturers, moving them away from arms manufacturing to producing what we need to create a true green economy that would address the real threats or one of the obvious major threats facing the entire world that is global warming climate change. It's not an easy task, but it's very much the one that I am engaged in now and would encourage everyone to get engaged in. Because again, in Eisenhower's words, this money that has been plowed into this war system, that's been plowed into US Empire, has been stolen from us. It's been...

Ralph Nader: And I might add a minute, he used the very word “theft”. He called it theft, and you have a very good conclusion with a lot of good ideas. One that jumps out here on page 321, you say, “Theft”, using Eisenhower's words, “is not a strong enough word considering the \$6.4 trillion that Congress has spent and obligated to fund the post-2001 wars; “Horror” seems a more appropriate word when we consider,” and then you make a whole list: “How many have died because the US government has not spent even a small portion of this subset to provide universal health care or to improve US public health infrastructure, and pandemic preparedness. How many children and adults have gone hungry? How many students suffer every day going to deteriorated, dilapidated, unhealthy schools, where they get a substandard education? How far could the country have gone to build the green energy infrastructure to slow global warming and its catastrophic effects? How many have suffered the pain of unemployment when the country could have put millions more to work in sectors such as education, housing, healthcare, and

infrastructure that produce far more jobs per dollar spent than the military?” Well, we're coming to the end of a very interesting program, Professor Vine, author of the book, *The United States of War*, but I want to have Steve or David pitch in here.

David Feldman: This is really great. I have so much to ask you. We know that the permanent state of war is because of the military-industrial-complex and only because of the military-industrial-complex? Or is there some kind of intellectual undergirding coming out of say, the think tanks where they believe that war is a permanent state of nature--that we have to constantly be in war and keep our swords sharpened, otherwise some other country will fill the vacuum. Is that the intellectual undergirding of the permanent state of war?

David Vine: That's certainly part of it. I think that there are intellectual and ideological dimensions to the permanent state of war—assumptions indeed, about that war is inevitable, are part of it, also a kind of nationalism and the ways in which militarism has become a kind of national religion, again, reaching heights not seen before. I think, in the post-2001 period, assumptions about the role of the United States in the world as a global policeman, assumptions about masculinity; there are racist underpinnings to the permanent state of war that date to independence and racism against Native American peoples, and of course, enslaved Africans, that stretch to and connect to the kind of racism we see undergirding the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and far beyond. So, I think this is clearly a complicated--

David Feldman: I'm sorry to interrupt, but if you were to debate—Ralph has had the “taboo debates.” If you held a debate with people who believe in a permanent state of war... Senator Lindsey Graham reportedly told Donald Trump last year—Donald Trump wanted to pull out of Afghanistan and Lindsey Graham had to explain to him, “No, it never ends; we're in a permanent state of war.” He literally said that. Could you debate the other side on whether or not a permanent state of war is a good thing? Would there be people who would be willing to admit that we need to be in a permanent state of war? And again, you've touched on it, what would their defense of a permanent state of war be?

David Vine: I'd be happy to. Yeah, sadly, there are people in the Pentagon and people on Capitol Hill who now talk about “forever war” and “infinity war.” And that's a sad statement and reflection of the problems we face.

David Feldman: I don't understand why we're not seeing them on TV, but that is a truth, that there are people who believe in a permanent state of war. And maybe I'm wrong, but we never even hear their point of view. We only see the results of it.

David Vine: I think there are fewer and fewer. I think the vast majority, or let's just say a significant majority of the US public now has turned against war, and really has turned against war since the end of the George W. Bush administration. So, I think the people who believe in endless, forever war are really in a small minority. Unfortunately, some of them have a tremendous amount of power. But I think they don't reflect the country as a whole. And that's another important reason to be optimistic. But I think even just the language of endless war that people have begun to recognize that we need to bring these endless wars to an end is a good sign. Donald Trump is actually a good sign, sort of like a stop clock; I always thought twice a day, he

was right on time. His language of opposition to war and ending the endless wars and pulling us out of Afghanistan and Iraq--he didn't of course do it completely. But he said those things because he knew it was good politics. He knew there were significant part of the Republican base that had turned against the wars. So I think it's important to recognize the progress that has been made in building opposition to war. In many ways, the Pentagon, the military, has to work far harder, has to resort to more covert mechanisms to perpetuate these wars [and] we need to build on that.

Ralph Nader: Well, as you know, there are a lot of people in the Pentagon who were against these wars of empire. The US Army was against the invasion of Iraq up to the level of the four-star general, who sided with George W. Bush. Because the Pentagon asked Congress and Mr. Bush, "Okay, we're going to invade Iraq and topple Saddam [Hussein]; what's next? What do we do next? What's plan B inside Iraq? As Colin Powell once said, "You invade Iraq; you own it."

Well, we didn't own it. We just devastated it and abandoned it. What you were just saying, Professor Vine, recalls the last paragraph of your book, before we get to Steve. And here it is. And this is a book, a reference book, a debate book, not just a book to read and say, "Oh, my, how terrible the situation is." Give it to your library; give it to League of Women Voters gatherings; give it to veteran gatherings, give it to high school teachers, community colleges. They've all got to get down to the bare tacks here, because they're paying the price in a variety of ways with this war for estate. Here's what you say, David Vine. "For those who would say the status quo of permanent war is the only realistic option or that small reforms are the only realistic change possible, I would ask, 'Realistic? For whom?'" That's the way you ended your book. Steve?

Steve Skrovan: Yeah. Just a quick question because we do have to move on. David, in your opinion, and I know you're not a psychologist, but how does our penchant for militarism shape how we treat each other at home, the ethos of our own country, you know? And I'm not talking about the money and the theft and all this stuff that is lost there. I'm talking more kind of psychologically. Do you have any opinion about that?

David Vine: Yeah. I think the reason I titled my book *The United States of War*, I don't mean that just as a metaphor. I mean that in the sense that that war has defined the United States as a country, and it has defined the people who live here in profound ways. It's defined our economy. It's defined our political system. It's defined our psychology, our culture, a word I don't use often, despite being an anthropologist [and it has defined] our social life. It's part of the reason we see, you know, camouflage is so popular in contemporary fashion, why war games dominate the bestseller list of video games. In some ways, it helps explain why the United States is so violent when it comes to gun violence, of course, and then so many other forms. War has shaped our lives in profound and generally unseen ways. And part of the reason we need to end the wars abroad is because we need to make the United States itself a less violent place.

Ralph Nader: Well, we're out of time. We have been talking with Professor David Vine, anthropologist, American University in Washington, D.C., author of the book, *The United States of War: A Global History of America's Endless Conflicts from Columbus to the Islamic State*.

And it was published by the University of California Press in Berkeley, California with the help and support of the Lawrence Grauman Jr. Fund. Where do the royalties go from your book?

David Vine: The royalties for all my books are...I'm lucky enough to be able to donate them to victims of war—victims in the United States [and] victims in the countries where the United States has been fighting.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much, David. On that compassionate note, we hope we'll hear more from you on your effort on Capitol Hill and what you and other citizen groups can do to start the process of widely publicized congressional hearings.

David Vine: Thank you so much. It's really been a pleasure to talk to all of you. I really appreciate the chance.

Steve Skrovan: We've been speaking with David Vine. We will link to his new book, *The United States of War*, at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Let's check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber.

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press Building in Washington, D.C., this is your *Corporate Crime Reporter* "Morning Minute" for Friday, July 16th, 2021; I'm Russell Mokhiber. Amazon [.com, Inc.] is the country's largest e-commerce and cloud-computing company, and a dominant seller of books, videos and music. Founder and Executive Chairman Jeff Bezos owns the *Washington Post*. In their totality, then, Amazon and Bezos represent a significant concentration of economic and cultural influence. That's according to Greg Ip, writing in the *Wall Street Journal*. Last month, President Biden named 32-year-old Lina Khan as chairwoman of the Federal Trade Commission. At a confirmation hearing in April, Khan said, "Antitrust's historical role is to protect our economy and our democracy from unchecked monopoly power. Khan is channeling former [US] Supreme Court Louis Brandeis. "Size, we are told is not a crime," Brandeis wrote in 1914, "but size may, at least, become noxious by reason of the means through which it was attained and the uses to which it is put." For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russel. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan along with David Feldman and Ralph. Ralph, you want to update us on the Congress Club?

Ralph Nader: Yes. We're over the number of 100 applications filled. They're marvelous. They answer the question: Why are you interested in joining the congressional letter-writing club, which in ways that are very gratifying and very specific. And now we should get underway. That is, you look at the letters on the website on corporate crime enforcement policy and the terrible situation and lack of taxation of the super wealthy in the global corporations. You send these letters to your two senators and representatives. Send us copies; if you get responses, send them back to us. In the meantime, as we get more and more information about which senators and representatives you've contacted, we will make calls to their offices mentioning that you expect a considered reply. So, we'll help you from the Washington end as well. And we'll keep reporting back. So, let's get underway. The Congress Club 2021.

Steve Skrovan: Very good, very good. So, you have your marching orders, people. I want to thank our guest today, David Vine. For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you, podcasts listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up". A transcript of this show will appear on the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* website soon after the episode is posted.

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

Steve Skrovan: For a copy of *The Day the Rats Vetoed Congress*, go to ratsreformcongress.org. And also, check out *The Ralph Nader and Family Cookbook: Classic Recipes from Lebanon and Beyond*. We have a link to both of those at nader.org.

David Feldman: Ralph Nader wants you to join the Congress Club. Go to the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* website and in the top right margin, click on the button labeled Congress Club to get your application. The producers of the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* are Jimmy Lee Wirt and Matthew Marran. Our executive producer is Alan Minsky.

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

David Feldman: Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Rader Hour* when we'll welcome Michael Saks and Stephan Landsman to discuss their new book, *Closing Death's Door*. Thank you, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, everybody. And I hope we'll get more applications for the Congress Club so we can get it underway in more congressional districts and states.