

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 375 TRANSCRIPT

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

David Feldman: Hello. Hello. [chuckles] Did my voice crack?

Steve Skrovan: Your voice cracked. I think you're very excited to be here. I'm not sure. And we also have the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hello, everybody. This one will affect all listeners. It's on the IRS.

Steve Skrovan: That's right. We're going to be talking about taxes. And today the taxes that sit uncollected by the IRS is equal to the amount paid by the lower 90% of individual taxpayers. That's \$574 billion. Billion with a B. Budget cuts have hobbled the agency. The IRS has fewer auditors today than at any time since World War II. Fewer than 2% of millionaires were audited last year and nearly two thirds of the country's largest corporations escaped an audit. The Biden administration has proposed a tax plan that might be the lifeboat the IRS desperately needs. That's according to five former IRS commissioners who have published an op-ed in *the Washington Post*.

As former commissioners, they know what the agency needs to effectively and fairly collect taxes. They also know that the agency doesn't have what it needs. It hasn't for a while. So what is it about Biden's tax plan that would restore the IRS, enabling it to make good on its commitments? That's what we'll be asking our first guest today, John Koskinen. He is one of the former IRS commissioners who authored that op-ed.

Our second guest will be Rashid Khalidi, Professor of Modern Arab Studies at Columbia University, to discuss the escalating violence in Gaza. Hundreds of worshippers in the Al-Aqsa Mosque were injured when Israeli forces fired on them with tear gas, rubber-coated steel bullets, and stun grenades. This followed weeks of increased tensions over Israeli restrictions on Palestinians gathering to break the Ramadan fast and the forced evictions of Palestinians by Israeli settlers in East Jerusalem.

Hamas leadership in Gaza launched rockets in retaliation for the violence at Al-Aqsa. And Israeli forces launched hundreds of airstrikes on Gaza. As of this recording, there at least 53 Palestinians and six Israelis dead and more than 300 Palestinians injured in Gaza. We'll ask Professor Khalidi to provide us with some perspective.

Then if we have time, Ralph will answer some more of your listener questions. As always, we'll check in with our corporate crime reporter Russell Mokhiber. But first, the IRS may be one of the less popular agencies in America but is quite possibly the most important. David?

David Feldman: John Koskinen served as the Commissioner of the Internal Revenue Service from 2013 to 2017. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Commissioner John Koskinen.

John Koskinen: Thanks for having me.

Ralph Nader: Thank you, John. Welcome. You may not remember, but it's now 50 years since we met when you were the staff director at the Ribicoff Committee, Senator Ribicoff's Committee in the US Senate. [chuckle] And since then you've gone on to an illustrious career of bringing opposing groups together, whether in the business community or in government, right all the way to your work in the Office of the Mayor of the District of Columbia.

My first question is since the IRS itself over the years has had estimates of annual uncollected taxes between 400 and 600 billion, with a B, dollars a year, and a majority of those uncollected taxes come from the upper 1% of the wealthy and the multinational corporations, what caused this starvation of the IRS budget, which seemed to have started in 2011? What caused it, who caused it, what's the motivation, and obviously, the answer starts with Congress.

John Koskinen: Well, it certainly does. There was a theory while I was the commissioner that it was all related to the so-called targeting by the IRS of conservative groups that wanted to become tax-free entities even though they're going to be involved in political activities. But you're correct. Budget cuts started after 2010. Budget then was about \$12 billion. And also in 2010, the Affordable Care Act passed. And a major part of the implementation of the backend of the act was the responsibility of the IRS. And there was a significant IT expenditure required and there were going to be significant personnel costs.

So starting in 2011, the Republicans in control of the Congress began to cut the budget. And by the time I started, the budget had been cut from \$12 billion down to about a \$11 billion, a billion dollar cut over a five-year period. And the only way the IRS could respond to cuts in its budget was simply not to replace people when they left. So even while I was there from 2013 to 2017, we started with about 100,000 employees and had fewer than 80,000 when I left. And at the same time from 2010 to the time I left in 2017, there were 15 million more taxpayers who needed and deserved to have appropriate taxpayer service, which was increasingly difficult if not impossible to provide as a result of the budget cuts.

Ralph Nader: And then of course there's the issue of more burden on the IRS because of the Obamacare legislation, right?

John Koskinen: Right. So, all of the backend processing of benefits and credits and eligibility fall on the IRS. And it did a marvelous job of implementing the backend without any major flaws. You may recall the frontend had a lot of troubles when it was first set up. But the result was, there was about a billion dollars, another B in front of that billion, of information technology changes that needed to be made. And over a three-year period, again, the Republicans in Congress zeroed out all of that money. So the IRS had to find the billion dollars of IT expenditures out of the normal IT budget, which was another difficult situation for the agency.

Ralph Nader: And the Republicans, with whom I've had some conversations on Capitol Hill, knew exactly what they were doing. They knew exactly what the consequences were, that there'd be fewer auditors of wealthy taxpayers and big corporations, precipitous drop. There'd be more noncompliance. There'd be more loopholes. They actually structured more loopholes in the Internal Revenue Code to take advantage of. And so I thought a fair accusation that I made against them was that they are aiding and abetting tax evasion; not tax avoidance, tax evasion. And the Democrats seemed unwilling to really take them on because they feared that the polls showed that

anything defending the IRS was unpopular among the general public because it's one of the least liked agencies, because as you pointed out, it's a tax collector. Who likes a tax collector?

But look at all the necessities that have to be met in our country, and if we don't have the tax revenue, we either have lower services, more deficits for our children and grandchildren, or higher taxes on the middle class. There is no alternative when that occurs, if one of those or more of those is going to kick in. So why do you think the Democrats were and still are, with few exceptions, reluctant to say the IRS is a critical linchpin in the entire process of making the federal government operationally functional?

John Koskinen: Well, I think it's important to note that the Obama administration provided in its budget increases for the IRS. But the Democrats were not in control of the House or the Senate and those budgetary increases turned many years into budgetary decreases. So, the problem, I talked with Shaun Donovan while he was the OMB Director, noting that I needed somebody besides me making the case. And he was very good about being supportive, but the difficulty was they were in the minority. And the Republicans had made a major issue out of the so-called targeting, which turned out to be pretty much baseless. It was an inefficient and unnecessary, unwarranted management problem, but it affected liberal organizations as well as conservative ones. But I think that background noise then made it difficult for people to say that while the agency really is going to go under.

But I spent a lot of time, I was concerned as I told appropriators in testimony in both the House and the Senate that I didn't want them after the fact to say, "Gee, we didn't know the impact of these budget cuts." So, I told them that if they kept cutting the budget, taxpayer service would suffer, auditing and collections would suffer, and that as I became very popular, I said, you know, to your point, Ralph; I said, "When you cut the budget, what you're really doing is giving a tax cut to tax cheats."

And nobody ever disagreed with the fact that if you give more money to the IRS, the government collects more money. So, at one appropriation hearing, I said, "You know, we're the only agency in the government where if you give us money, we'll give you four, six, eight, 10 times as much back." Nobody ever disagreed with that but they continued to cut the budget.

Ralph Nader: Well, what happened under the Trump years to the IRS budget?

John Koskinen: Well, the Trump years weren't much better, although Secretary [Steven] Mnuchin, who had been in charge of information technology at Goldman Sachs when he was there, himself was personally supportive. But the first proposed budget out of Trump was to cut the budget along with everybody else by 15% to 25%. And Mnuchin was successful at least getting them not to cut the budget by 15%, but it was barely hold your own. Once the Democrats got in control, it helped. So the budget today is just about \$12 billion about where it was 12 years ago. And we're taking inflation into account [so] even at 1% and 2%, it means that the IRS is a couple billion dollars underfunded.

Ralph Nader: And in 2018, the Democrats took control of the House and Trump was still president. Did they manage to push any increase at all between 2018 and 2020?

John Koskinen: Yes, that's when the budget . . . when I was there, we fought to keep the budget at 11 billion or 11 billion one. Thanks to the democratic control of the Congress, the budget has increased from about 11-one to, give or take, a little 11.9 billion, just a little less than 12 billion. So the Democrats in control have made an important change. As I keep telling people, even if it's only 100 or 200 million a year, that's a lot better than a cut. But still when you look at the budget today compared to 2010, and with the increased costs for personnel and other inflationary items, the IRS is a billion and a half to two billion underfunded [from] where it was 12 years ago. And your point, Ralph, is important. It now has significantly more responsibilities, including during COVID, they're in the process of completing their third payment to over 150 million people of the stimulus checks. And then somebody had the interesting idea that in addition to increasing the child tax credit, starting on July 1, "periodic payments", they hoped it would be monthly, would be made of the child tax credit. And the IRS has never paid anybody anything monthly or periodically in its history, so there's another major IT challenge ahead of them.

Ralph Nader: Well, a lot of people don't know what I'm going to ask you right now. Because you pointed it out in I thought a very comprehensive speech at the National Press Club on March 24, 2016, that one of the major functions of the IRS is to be a refund agency.

John Koskinen: Yes, most people don't understand. I used to say we ought to be viewed as an anti-poverty program. The IRS, before the present proposed an increase in the child tax credit, provides about \$100 billion a year of support for educational credits, child credits, and the earned income tax credit, which is close to 70 billion of that \$100 billion. So, the IRS not only collects three and a half trillion dollars to, as you know, fund basically all of the government, but it's providing a significant part of the social safety net to poor- and middle-class working people with the credits that it puts out every year.

Ralph Nader: But even more than that, people send in their tax return because most people have their taxes withheld. But a lot of these people get refunds, right, every year?

John Koskinen: Yes, yes. Hundreds of billions of dollars go out in refunds. And in fact, one of the challenges now with the understaffing in the IRS and the additional requirements for it to do things like issue stimulus checks is its way behind in processing refund claims. And so you can read in newspaper articles people saying "Where's my refund?" And I think it's important to note that these problems aren't because the IRS workforce and the personnel don't care. I've never dealt with a more dedicated group of people or a better workforce than the people at the IRS. They care greatly about making sure that taxpayers get the refunds they deserve [and] that they can talk to people on the phone. But if you understaff them and underfund them, there are just aren't enough people to respond quickly and appropriately. And the people who care most about that are the IRS employees.

Ralph Nader: And they're very upset when they can't answer the phone. I mean, people are on the phones day after day, they can't get through, busy signal or whatever, and they get very frustrated and they just give up. Not everything can be conducted through email. You have to have a live person on the other end talking about the questions you ask about your tax returns.

But let's go to the interesting aspect of all this, which is collecting more taxes. In the op-ed that you and four other former IRS commissioners wrote for *the Washington Post* on May 4th of 2021. And I want to name them because this is extraordinary bipartisan defense of the IRS. Lawrence

Gibbs, Fred Goldberg, Margaret Richardson, Charles Rossotti, and John Koskinen, under Republican and Democratic presidents. They all signed this. And it was quite clear how determined they were that the IRS get an adequate budget. They said, "The IRS has fewer auditors today than any time since World War II."

I mean, that's a staggering statement given that the tax code is so horrendously more complicated than it was right after World War II. And you've got global corporations using tax savings and shifting profits here and there, and of course, a lot of clever tax lawyers and accountants representing the superrich. Now what do you think would happen, I mean, you have very conservative figures in this op-ed...

By the way, we're talking to John Koskinen who was the IRS Commissioner under President Obama for about four years. And anyway, you say that the career staff estimates that they could collect \$700 billion in revenue over a decade. Some believe the revenue potential is substantially larger, "two of us," that is two of the former IRS commissioners signing this op-ed at *the Washington Post*, "Two of us have conservatively estimated the possibility of raising twice as much, that is \$1.4 trillion," but even that is conservative. The usual figure is [for] every dollar you add to the IRS budget they can raise six. That's very, very conservative when you consider what IRS auditors can do on these super-rich and big corporations. But it's multiplied because the very activity of increased auditing creates more voluntary compliance by the super-rich and the corporate lawyers who advise them and the big corporations. So, don't you think it's fair to say that even though four to 600 billion is uncollected taxes, you can't collect most of that easily? You can collect some of it easily--the low hanging fruit. But isn't it fair to say that they could probably bring in \$300 billion more a year if they were fully staffed, using modern technology, technology that deters, technology that signals greater voluntary compliance?

John Koskinen: Well, I think most people feel that if you had appropriate staffing and increased third-party reporting, which two of the commissioners have been working on for some time trying to figure out how to deal with the tax gap; even if you only got 20% to 25% of the gap, that would get you to a trillion and a half dollars over 10 years. And that, as they say, as [Senator] Everett Dirksen used to say, "would be real money."

And so some of the tax gap can't be collected because people just don't have the money. They're bankrupt or poor and otherwise, but there is, as you say, low-hanging fruit. And what's important for people to understand, first the basic principle to understand, is we're not talking about raising taxes here. Nobody would have their taxes raised by these proposals.

This is talking about collecting the taxes people owe. And one of things that's intriguing to me when I was a commissioner, we have this theory that everybody automatically pays their appropriate taxes because we're an honest group. And if the IRS has third-party reporting like W-2s, 1099s, K-1s, the compliance rate is indeed above 90%. But if the IRS does not have third-party reporting, which is the case for a lot of wealthy people and large corporations, the compliance rate drops into the 50% range.

So one of the key parts of the Biden proposal, based on the research that Charles Rossotti and Fred Goldberg have been doing over the last couple years, is the increase for wealthy taxpayers and pass-through organizations and large corporations, make reporting on cash flow through their accounts. And their analysis shows that your point, just having the third-party information would

increase compliance in that area from 50% to 65% to 70%. And then as you note, the fact that you would actually be audited or subject to an audit will drive that compliance rate back closer to the appropriate 90%, 95%.

And so I think that it's critical, a) for the IRS to have appropriate funding, b) for the IRS to have increased third-party reporting and information that will trigger increased voluntary compliance, but also increased sightlines into where the audits ought to be and in a context where all we're doing is trying to say everybody ought to pay their fair share. And I've always said the most corrosive thing to tax enforcement is if people begin to think that everybody else isn't paying their fair share. So when you track down people hiding their money in Switzerland as the government has been doing a good job over the last five or six years, it's important for the money you collect. But I think [it's] even more important for the average taxpayer in Des Moines or Charlotte, North Carolina, which as we know, even if I had a fancy tax lawyer, I couldn't hide my money abroad anymore because the IRS is going after those people.

Ralph Nader: Well, what's interesting is that if the government does its job and collects these taxes, it will also go beyond the income tax, John. For example, Taxpayers for Common Sense had a report recently that said that if the royalty rate for oil and gas drilling on land was as high as it is for oil and gas drilling offshore, there'd be another \$12 billion collected over a few years. So there are a lot of other revenue streams, although the income tax is the biggest one, that more auditors and more investigators to catch cheating on royalties. I mean, the mineral companies cheated Indian tribes for years on royalties extracting minerals from Indian reservations.

Well, we've just got a few more minutes; Steve, David, you want to weigh in here?

David Feldman: I'd be curious to know about TurboTax. I try doing my taxes two years ago using TurboTax and it was inexpensive, it was perfect, and it hardly cost me anything. But I didn't trust it and I went to an accountant and I was told, "Yeah, this is correct." Isn't that the dirty dark secret that all Americans could go to TurboTax and pretty much get their taxes done for absolutely nothing?

John Koskinen: Well, there's even a better story than that. For those making, I think now it's under \$60,000 or \$65,000 a year, you can go in the IRS website and there's an area called Free File and you don't even have to pay the TurboTax fee, which as you know is very modest; you can file your returns for free electronically with the Free File provided by, to their credit, TurboTax and H&R Block and the other commercial providers for low . . .

David Feldman: But they're keeping that secret from us, aren't they?

John Koskinen: Well, it hasn't been as well advertised. There was a big issue a couple years ago about how difficult it was for people to find that part of the website. But since then, we used to, when I was commissioner, every time I gave a speech, I talked about don't overlook the ability to file for free. Yeah, go to the IRS website. And so, yeah, I do think it's important for people to understand. It's a great benefit. The reason that companies provide it is there's been some push that the IRS ought to fill out your return for free. You know, if you got . . . for most people, the IRS has your information with W-2s and 1099s and K-1s and a lot of people don't take anything beyond the standard deduction. They don't itemize expenses and charitable contributions. So, the Dutch and a number of other countries basically send taxpayers, "Here's your tax return. If it looks okay

sign it and send it back." And so to avoid that, these private companies have banded together and there is this wonderful service called Free File.

But you're right, TurboTax does a good job; H&R Block and a number of other private sector companies for a very modest price will make it easy for you to file your returns and file electronically so you don't get delayed by paper processing.

Ralph Nader: It just reminds me of your question. Under Trump, they hired more private tax collectors, didn't they? You didn't like that.

John Koskinen: As part of paying for I think the Highway Trust Fund, they've tried two or three times, they were going to use private debt collectors to collect what otherwise was being uncollected by the IRS for lack of personnel. And they never, the IRS had never accurately looked at the cost. And I said, okay, we're going to do our best to make sure this runs efficiently and effectively. And then if it's still not cost effective, at least nobody will be able to argue with it. Because technically you would think that private companies have to have a profit margin so our government agency and many cost comparisons across the government are showing that government employees and agencies are more efficient because they don't have that 10% to 20% profit margin. So by definition, they're more efficient than the private sector.

But thus far, the private debt collection process with four companies has generated a reasonable amount of funding whether it's more efficient than giving the IRS more money, still hasn't been established. I was concerned because the IRS can't directly control private debt collectors and the IRS is concerned to make sure that if you owe taxes and you haven't paid that you'd still be treated fairly and nobody is out there making life more difficult for you than it needs to be.

Ralph Nader: Thank you for coming on, John, and I hope you will work with prior IRS commissioners to push the measures to make the IRS capable of collecting all those uncollected taxes especially among the super-rich and the global corporations a reality. Thank you very much for staying with it even after you left office.

John Koskinen: Well, it's always a pleasure talking with you. Thanks for having me.

Ralph Nader: You're welcome.

Steve Skrovan: We have been speaking with John Koskinen and we will link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. Coming up, we're going to discuss recent events in Gaza. But first, let's check in with our corporate crime reporter Russell Mokhiber.

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press Building in Washington, DC, this is your *Corporate Crime Reporter* "Morning Minute" for Friday, May 14, 2021. I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Corporate impunity increased to record levels during President Trump's last year in office, when federal prosecutions of corporate criminals fell to just 94, the lowest on record since the government started tracking corporate criminal prosecutions in 1996; while corporate leniency agreements increased to 45, the highest in Trump's four years. That's according to a report from Public Citizen. "As profit-maximizing, risk-calculating organizations, big corporations are highly responsive to incentives and punishments," said Robert Weissman, President of Public Citizen. "If corporations know they can commit crimes and, if caught, be required to do little more than

promise not to violate the law in the future, it's a virtual certainty they will break the law regularly and routinely. For the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

Steve Skrovan: Thank you, Russell. Welcome back to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. I'm Steve Skrovan along with David Feldman and Ralph. Let's get an expert's perspective on recent events in Gaza. David?

David Feldman: Dr. Rashid Khalidi is the Edward Said Professor of Modern Arab Studies at Columbia University. He's the author of *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917-2017*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Professor Rashid Khalidi.

Rashid Khalidi: Thanks, David.

Ralph Nader: Welcome indeed. Well, I guess the phrase is "here we go again." The violence has erupted; the disparity in military capability is staggering in favor of the Israelis, internal domestic politics of Netanyahu, are very much involved. Where would you start to try to explain this, which seems to be escalating and may become much worse with huge casualties predominantly on the side of the Palestinians?

Rashid Khalidi: Well, I think it's worth looking at the casualties; it's worth paying attention to this, the horrible escalation that's ongoing--attacks on Gaza [and] the rocket fire into Israel. But I think it's probably useful to look a little deeper. And I would go back to the subtitle of my book, *Settler Colonialism and Resistance*. This started over several sets of issues in Jerusalem that are directly rooted in an attempt to displace and dispossess Palestinians, whether residents of the neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah or Palestinians worshipping in the Al-Aqsa Mosque by a very heavy-handed, right-wing Israeli government that is following through on imperatives that have really driven the Israeli state and the Zionist project since the beginning.

The trigger for all of this was this attempt to displace a number of families in Sheikh Jarrah.

Ralph Nader: This is in East Jerusalem which is predominantly Arab.

Rashid Khalidi: It's an Arab neighborhood . . . exactly, an Arab neighborhood in East Jerusalem on the basis of old property claims that supposedly entitle the settlers who purchased these deeds from others the right to expel the residents who are set up there by the Jordanian government many decades ago after being driven from their own homes and property inside Israel in 1948. And the irony here, of course, is that well, property claims to property that was Jewish or supposedly was owned by Jews before 1948, are being enforced by the might, the repressive might of the Israeli state claims of Palestinians to their property in West Jerusalem which had large Arab neighborhoods before 1948 or in Jaffa or Haifa where many of the residents of this Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood come from. Those property claims are inadmissible under Israeli law. Similarly, the right of militant, heavily armed nationalist religious settlers to march through Arab neighborhoods and break into people's property with the protection of the Israeli security forces as part of a policy of intimidation is routinely carried out in Jerusalem. Whereas any attempts to do something similar would of course be brutally repressed. So we're seeing, I think . . . and then this in turn has led to the escalation out of Gaza and the Israeli attacks on Gaza. So I think that what we're seeing, whether in Jerusalem, in Gaza, or in towns and cities with Arab populations across Israel, where there's been a great deal of unrest and several people killed and a clear disturbance [wherein]

people are deeply disturbed and angered, shows that we're talking about something that is bigger than just yet another round of escalation as between Hamas and Israel as part of it. But I think we have to look at the triggers and have to look at the root causes.

Ralph Nader: Given that, what's the internal politics here between Netanyahu and forming a coalition and trying to avoid a fifth election and the struggle between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority?

Rashid Khalidi: Yeah, I think that both of those dynamics are actually at work. In the Israeli case, Netanyahu is desperately trying to pull together. He failed in an initial attempt to pull together a coalition. Well, right-wing parties around his Likud Party which won the largest share of votes in the last Israeli election, the fourth in two years. And it's notable that what he's trying to do is to woo some of the most extreme religious nationalists, including a party that was inspired by Meir Kahane of Jewish Defense League fame or notoriety I should say. Trying to keep those people in his coalition, in a perspective coalition, and catering to the extreme settlers who are located in several of the major parties, including his own Likud Party, is part of the reason that this escalation has taken place. Israel has been pushing the Palestinians and squeezing them for decades. This is not new. Properties have been taken over in Sheikh Jarrah in the past. But the push in Jerusalem, whether shutting down celebrations outside the Damascus Gate on Ramadan nights by young Palestinians; whether it's offensive in Sheikh Jarrah to evict people with the support of the security forces, or whether attacks on worshippers in the Haram al-Sharif, the sanctuary, the esplanade around the Al-Aqsa Mosque, including attacks by Israeli forces on the mosque itself throwing grenades, sound grenades and tear gas grenades into the mosque while people are trying to worship. I think all of this is an attempt to cater to the extreme right- wingers whom Netanyahu is desperate to bring into a coalition with him. So that's the Israeli side.

On the Palestinian side, I think that the postponement of elections by Mahmoud Abbas, which was greeted with universal dismay by Palestinians on the pretext that Israel would not allow voting in Jerusalem, which while true, should not have prevented the elections from taking place, is one of the triggers of this as is the ongoing rivalry between Fatah and Hamas. And it's pretty clear that while the unrest in Jerusalem was grassroots, spontaneous local responses to what's happening in the mosque, around the mosque, and what's happening in Sheikh Jarrah, very clearly the politicians were caught unawares by this and were not prepared for it in both cases whether in Ramallah or in Gaza are responding--Abbas, with his usual ineffectual attempts at diplomacy, and Hamas with their tried and true policy of firing rockets. So Palestinian internal politics and, I think more importantly, Israeli internal politics and the incredible pressure that Israel has been putting on Palestinians in the last few weeks, in Jerusalem in particular, are what started this.

Ralph Nader: Well, the latest reports in that area until this eruption started was that the Palestinians were not being given vaccines for the COVID-19 epidemic. They were trying to get some from Russia. And under international law, you occupy a territory, you've got to protect the safety and health of the people. Now it's become the usual asymmetric warfare and two points here. One is, the story of the rockets has never been told, Professor Khalidi. Let me explain. These are garage built, homemade rockets. They fired thousands of them over the years into Israel. And fortunately, 99.9% have dropped on hard desert floors. There's been very, very few casualties. There've been more friendly fire casualties in the Israeli Army than these rockets. But the rockets give the Israelis the excuse for massive counterattacks, huge disproportionate killings, 400 to one in terms of deaths and injuries of innocents with the Palestinians taking the brunt. Now, the Israeli

reporters and Israeli human rights groups have long pointed out that Gaza is under the greatest surveillance technologically in world history. The Israelis know every street, every home; in fact, they just attacked militants and they knew exactly what houses they were living in. They have informants. They have spies. They have DNA samples. And, of course, they have electronic surveillance and they know everything that's going on. [So] how do they allow these rockets to be built and fired? I was once talking to a technical specialist and I said, "How many seconds does it take for the Israeli Air Force to find out where the rocket was fired from to fire back? He said, "between three and five seconds." So the argument is, Hamas needs the rockets to show that they have a pulse and they're defending their people and they're not totally powerless, but Israel desperately needs these rockets in order to say to the world we're retaliating and we have a right to defend ourselves.

Now, there are a lot of reporters in Israel who know this story; there are a lot of ordinary people who know this story; the human rights groups know this story [yet] it's never hit the US press. It's never gotten here. It's never gotten into the European press as far as known. And yet it is the key linchpin for the Israeli attacks on two million people in Gaza crowded into an area not that much bigger than the District of Columbia.

Rashid Khalidi: Well, I mean, I think that's right.

Ralph Nader: Let me back up and put the question to you. Don't you think the Israelis know where the materials are coming from for these crude rockets, who is assembling them, where they're being assembled in this tiny enclave in Gaza, and who's firing them, and when they're being fired?

Rashid Khalidi: I don't know the answer to that question, Ralph. I really can't tell you the answer to that question. I would suspect that they know a lot of that and I would suspect that they often refrain from acting on what they know. But I think that the essential thing to understand here is, first of all, that when you do to the Palestinians what Israel has been doing systematically for over 73 years, you are going to get resistance. You're going to get a push back. And that push back will take various forms whether it's stone throwing, whether it's peaceful demonstrations, whether it's violent action like the firing of rockets. And I think that what the dynamic that you've talked about has helped to skew what should be an understanding of settler colonials and dispossession and displacement will necessarily and inevitably provoke resistance. Two, this flat, superficial narrative of terrorism and of poor Israelis coming under rocket fire... Now obviously, I am not in favor of any civilian target being attacked by anybody, whether it's Israel or whether it's Hamas or it's anybody else, United States, anybody. And I think that that's not the way to wage war. War should be waged within the laws of war and that forbids indiscriminate targeting of civilians. But the two things that are constantly alighted from the picture and the way the media presents it, is that first of all, the population of Gaza didn't originate most of it in Gaza. They are refugees driven out of their homes and forbidden from returning to them or from regaining possession of their property by Israeli policies over all the years since 1948. And secondly, as you yourself, as you pointed out, the incredible imbalance in casualties. The last time that Israel engaged in a war on Gaza in 2014, close to 2200 Palestinians were killed; well over half of them were women and children and the overwhelming bulk were civilians, old people, people who are not involved in any way in combat, as against a number in the low double digits, I think it was 13 or 12 civilians killed inside Israel. When you have that kind of imbalance, which you just mentioned actually, I

think 20 or more than 20 to one, or 30 to one, or whatever the number is, 2,000 plus to 13, this is what should be talked about. I mean, the terrorism, in terms of targeting of civilians, can be ascribed if you choose to use that term to both sides. But what about proportions? What about the use of force that's completely disproportionate? And this is not a coincidence or an accident. One listens to Israeli military spokesmen who say, "We do everything possible to avoid targeting civilians." Well, go to the doctrine, the so-called Dahiya Doctrine, which was adopted by the Israeli armed forces and which specifically talks about disproportionate and excessive use of force as a means of imposing what the Israelis call deterrence. So you do actually have the targeting of civilians even though Israeli spokesmen constantly reiterate that they're not and with these proportions.

Ralph Nader: But they have the most precision instruments of warfare and how come these precision instruments are finding schools, hospitals, clinics, homes being blown up? So this is what you say is just propaganda. The Israeli government is losing public opinion in the US even among the Jewish-American population; that's been going on for some time. And J Street has been gaining strength going for a two-state solution. But just yesterday, the fervent Pro-Israeli government, head of public radio in Albany, WMAC, said that Israel should not be taking Arab homes. He said it twice. That is an extraordinary reversal for this man because he gives a lot of regular political opinion. And so why is the Biden administration still parroting the Clinton and Obama administrations with this phrase, "Israel has the right to defend themselves," as if the Palestinians don't have a right to defend themselves. And they're standing there in the State Department like hapless, indifferent people even though US weapons and US funds are being used to power this military and technological superpower called Israel.

Rashid Khalidi: Well, I'll give you one reason. If they didn't do that they would be admitting that they're in violation of US law because US law mandates that American weapons can only be used for self-defense. If those weapons are being used in an indiscriminate way or in a way that violates international law, that is not consonant with self-defense, then everybody responsible-- the Congress and the administration, for sending these weapons to Israel, is liable under US law. So one reason that you get this absurd statement that the killing of 2200 people in 2014 was self-defense, is because if they were not to say that, they would admit that the United States is criminally liable under US law for the transfer of these weapons.

The other thing that I would say is that this administration I think illustrates . . . I agree with you by the way. I think that there is a big change going on in American public opinion in the Jewish community among young people, in particular, and many other communities of color and other communities, which have moral concerns and have a conscience, you're seeing a big shift. And you can see this in all the polling especially as it concerns the base of the Democratic Party. People are changing. And the person you cited is only one of many, many, many people who shifted considerably in their view of Israel-Palestine. And I think that the extreme right-wing religious nationalist, unconstitutional, semi-autocratic nature of the Netanyahu government is something that's partly driven this change.

But I think that the Biden administration illustrates a serious problem in the Democratic Party, which is that the leadership of the party, which is mainly made up of much older people who are mainly concerned with things like fundraising and big, big donors to the party, and alienating the Israel lobby, is divorced from the base of the party, which is younger, which is not restricted to looking at the mainstream corporate media, but listens to an enormous variety of sources of

information through social media and through its access to things like podcasts, which just didn't exist 20 years ago. Twenty years ago, cable news, [the] *New York Times*, [the] *Washington Post*, the news agencies, that was it. And the older generation of party leadership, the older generation of this country generally including the Republican Party, which is mainly made up of older White people, and largely made up of older White people, are in another world than most younger people are concerned. And I think the Biden administration faithfully reflects a view that's in fact only, only held by mainly this generation, that generation. I mean, look at Speaker Pelosi; look at President Biden himself; look at Chuck Schumer. You're talking about people from a generation for which 1967 and the way in which the war was completely misinterpreted as a war of annihilation against Israel. Or for that matter, the 1948 war or the Holocaust or the foundational elements.

And with younger people, they see Israel as a nuclear superpower that has acted as a bully against the Palestinians for decades, which is the time the people in their 20s, 30s, and 40s have been alive. So I think that there's a big change underway among major segments of American public opinion. And I think that Israel has furthered this by its missteps in Jerusalem and by its heavy-handed brutality, whether in bombarding Gaza, or in crushing the protests against the dispossession of the residents of Sheikh Jarrah or at the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Ralph Nader: This escalation here is probably the most dangerous ever for the simple reason that the Netanyahu regime is coming off the Trump "you can do whatever you want to the Palestinians" policy. And now their eruptions among Israeli-Arabs, who are protesting the treatment of their fellow Palestinians in East Jerusalem, and the more extreme ascension of right-wing Israeli politicians and colonials who make no ambiguity in their desire to eventually create such an eruption as to drive the Palestinians into the desert and there is recorded statements in that direction. I mean, this is a much more dangerous escalation than prior Israeli-Gaza. And listeners should know, the Hamas was founded with the full support of the Israeli and US governments to counteract the secular Palestine Liberation Organization, isn't that correct?

Rashid Khalidi: The Israeli Intelligence Services supported Hamas from the time it was created and helped to foster the people who eventually founded Hamas and continued to do that for many years thereafter. This is attested by Israeli authors by independent reporting that eventually the Hamas got out of their control. But they were very, very happy exactly, as you said, to divide the Palestinians and they have always tried to divide the Palestinians. And it's a basic principle of colonial policy, divide and rule.

Ralph Nader: Do you think that the Biden administration is going to change at all? Do you think there's going to be more activity in Congress with people like AOC and some of the more progressive leaders and Rashida Tlaib? Or do you think the dominance of AIPAC [American Israel Public Affairs Committee] will continue?

Rashid Khalidi: Well, I think that we're going to see the beginning of a change. I don't think that the dominance of the kinds of views represented by AIPAC is going to end overnight. The Republican Party is solidly pro-Israel from top to bottom. And in this case, the leadership and the base are marching in lockstep. On the Democratic side, the leadership and many, many Democrats are still very, very wary of crossing the lobby, very, very wary of taking positions that they think will make them vulnerable to their own donors or just some of their own voters and to the kind of pressure that the lobby can exert with smears and with underhanded attacks on them, the kinds of

things that have driven a number of people out of Congress in the past. However, on the other side, in addition to the people you mentioned, you have several senators speaking. You have Senator Van Hollen of Maryland. You have Senator Warren of Massachusetts. Of course you have Bernie Sanders of Vermont. And you have had a couple of dozen members of Congress, in the last Congress, willing to support a bill that would make American aid to Israel conditional on Israel ceasing to detain Palestinian minors. Betty McCollum of Minnesota was the sponsor of this and she had 24 co-sponsors in the last session of Congress. Every single one of them was re-elected in November. And she has a new bill, which would ban US aid from being used, not only for the detention of minors, but also for the demolition of Palestinian homes and for Israeli annexation of Palestinian territory. And she's collecting co-sponsors on this new version of the bill. And I think this is unprecedented that you had that large a block of congress people, congressmen and women.

Ralph Nader: The problem is the urgency of the escalating conflict, because Netanyahu and his military general said these airstrikes are just the beginning. So this could go completely out of control and, of course, the Syrians are convulsed in around. And Israel has, by its own admission, bombed Syria hundreds of times in recent years. And Iraq is demobilized and the Biden administration has the priority of restoring the nuclear accord with Iran as its top Middle East policy. And the Gulf Arabs are making good with Israel. This thing could blow sky high for the Palestinians because of the internal politics of Netanyahu forming a coalition in the next few weeks. What must the US do here in the United Nations as well?

Rashid Khalidi: Well, I think it's finally time for the United States to allow the international community to actually not just say things critical of Israel, but to do things that would inflict a price on Israel for its behavior. I think it's time to stop talking about the UN resolutions regarding settlement, for example, or regarding annexation or regarding Jerusalem, and to start to implement sanctions. That's a steep ask, but I don't think anything else will do. They may or may not be able to bring about a ceasefire. But every day that this continues, and hopefully it will not escalate as you're suggesting, Ralph. But every day that this continues, it's not just that the Palestinians become more unified and mobilized; it's not just that people the world over are horrified and support for Israel will continue to ebb, but it is also the case that in the Arab world, the autocratic and unrepresentative, the undemocratic governments that began a rapprochement with Israel are running scared of their own people. You should see the statements being issued by the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, countries that have normalized with Israel. They are petrified by the storm on social media in their own countries in support of the Palestinians. These are countries that don't allow any expression of public opinion and that's how they were able to get away with what they did. But they are going to have to reckon sooner or later with the wave of anger that's going over the Arab world. What was done in the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Al-Aqsa Mosque is an 8th century structure. It's the first direction of prayer for Muslims before it shifted back to Mecca. It's the third holiest place in Israel.

This is the Holy Month of Ramadan. People are praying in this mosque. Think of St. Peter's Basilica; think of the Great Synagogue in Jerusalem or the Hurva Synagogue. And imagine security forces firing tear gas into a mosque while worshippers are praying. And imagine the impact of that on co-religionists, of people who are praying in a synagogue or a church or, in this case, in the mosque. That's something that the Biden administration is going to have to contend with. Israel is creating enemies for itself, the world over, by its actions. They think that they have a lock hold on the United States. And as long as they have that, they can get away with this. I think

that lock hold is beginning to slip, but in any case, they are creating for themselves endless problems and there are Israeli security analysts saying the same thing. Former Israeli national security adviser said the same thing, [i.e.] they have totally mishandled this. This is going to harm us and they're right.

Ralph Nader: And you know, we have some Israeli partisans in our audience; not many, but they let us know. And they should know that in 2002, 19 Islamic nations in the Middle East and Central Asia appealed to the Israeli government for a peace accord based on return to the 1967 borders, a two-state solution and diplomatic and trade relations will resume. They repeated that proposal again and again, put full-page ads in *the New York Times*, these 19 Islamic nations, and the Israeli government rebuffed them. That's often forgotten.

Rashid Khalidi: Right. No, you're absolutely right. Ironically, the Emirates . . . one of the chief Emirates spokesman for the United Arab Emirates just repeated that peace plan that you mentioned

Ralph Nader: We're almost out of time. We've been talking with Professor Khalidi. How about some input from David and Steve?

David Feldman: You were talking earlier about how isolated the Palestinians are. Is there anybody who's stepping up, any country in the Middle East now? It feels like Saudi Arabia has abandoned the Palestinian cause? And which country in the Arab League is protecting the Palestinians?

Rashid Khalidi: Well, no country is protecting the Palestinians. I think that's part of the problem. You have an Arab world which is a black hole as far as democracy and a popular representation in constitutions are concerned. And among these autocratic regimes where public opinion is very supportive of the Palestinians.

David Feldman: Is Iran the only country that is supporting the Palestinians in a full-throated way in . . .

Rashid Khalidi: I would question how effective that support is. There are other countries. I mean, Algeria, Turkey, at least, are outspoken in their support. But in practice, I don't think that that is terribly effective. At this stage, I think it's really very much more up to the Palestinians themselves frankly. I think that what they're doing is having an enormous effect on international public opinion, on public opinion in the Arab world. And there are deep divisions among the Palestinians. I mean, I mentioned that in response to Ralph's question that it's not just Netanyahu who is operating on the basis of political calculations. I think that's also true for Hamas and it's true certainly for Abbas.

David Feldman: If Israel keeps killing the Hamas leadership, who speaks for the Palestinians, at least in Gaza?

Rashid Khalidi: This is not new. There's an extraordinary book entitled *Rise and Kill First* about Israel's assassination policy. They have been systematically murdering Palestinian leaders for decades and decades and decades and decades. Most notably starting in the 1970s, but ever since for the last 50 years and more, they have been doing this, murdering or imprisoning the most important, most effective Palestinian leadership. That's characteristic of every colonial regime fighting every national liberation movement. The French did this in Algeria; the South Africans

did this in Southwest Africa, and the Portuguese did this in Mozambique. It is what they do and you have to just go on. The Palestinians will just have to figure out how to find new leaders. There's nothing-

David Feldman: Is Abu Mazen a legitimate leader of the Palestinians or is he being propped up by the Israelis?

Rashid Khalidi: Well, I think he's being propped up by the United States and Europe most significantly. And I think that he's lost his legitimacy and that he was elected so long ago that his term ran out a decade and a half ago, and I think his legitimacy is really quite limited.

Ralph Nader: Thank you. To be continued. Thank you, Professor Khalidi.

Rashid Khalidi: Very much appreciated. Take care.

Steve Skrovan: We have been speaking with Professor Rashid Khalidi. We will link to his work at ralphnaderradiohour.com. And now we're going to do a little shift here. Ralph, Apple just recorded record earnings this past quarter and I think you probably got some comment on that, I think?

Ralph Nader: Well, there were staggering earnings, but they also announced another staggering \$90 billion stock back. So most of its profits are going either to stock buybacks and much less to a sliver of dividends. This is a company that overprices its phones and computers, makes huge profits, has very little effective competition, Samsung being about the only one, and doesn't know what to do with its money other than to vastly overcompensate Tim Cook and his crew of executives. This is the most stingy big company in America and Tim Cook is the stingiest CEO in America. And I say that because there are two desperate needs that for a sliver of Apple's profits, he can double the pay of a million Chinese workers in serf-like conditions under contract with another Chinese company making the iPhones and the computers. For about \$2.5 billion, he can double the pay annually of these workers who are so desperate that the company has nets on the various story levels to catch people jumping and committing suicide. The second thing Apple can do is the vast waste of its discarded computers and iPhones when people throw them away have to be dismantled by serf paid workers [who handle] very toxic material, and they can develop a complete return policy, return to manufacturers the way they do in Germany for various products when they're used up, and disassemble them and recycle them safely. That would cost no more than a billion or two billion a year. But this company has already spent \$350 billion on stock buybacks and another 90 billion coming in the next year or two. It's time to send Tim Cook and Apple Corporation a message, listeners.

Steve, can you tell our listeners how they can contact Apple Corporation and CEO Tim Cook with their opinions?

Steve Skrovan: Yeah, Ralph. Corporate headquarters for Apple is at 1 Apple Park Way, Cupertino, California 95014. That's 1 Apple Park Way, Cupertino, California 95014. And the number is 408-996-1010. That's 408-996-1010. We will link to this at the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* webpage. Well, that's our show. I want to thank our guests again, John Koskinen and Professor Rashid Khalidi. For you who's listening on the radio, we're going to cut out right now, but for you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material. We've got some great stuff coming up in

“The Wrap-Up.” A transcript of the show will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website soon after the episode is posted.

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

Steve Skrovan: And Ralph has provided two separate form letters to send to your [congressional] representatives demanding they take action on corporate crime and also taxing the rich. Just click on the clearly marked boxes on the right hand corner of the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* landing page and it's all laid out there for you to fill in and personalize anyway you want. Go to ralphnaderradiohour.com and take action.

David Feldman: To support Whirlwind Wheelchair, visit whirlwindwheelchair.org. They do great work showing people in the United States and around the world how to build sturdy, economical wheelchairs from local materials. whirlwindwheelchair.org.

Steve Skrovan: And for an independent news source that believes people are more important than corporations, go to populist.com to read or subscribe to *the Progressive Populist*. And it's special offer if you email populist@usa.net or call 1-800-205-7067, they'll send you your first issue for free. That's 1-800-205-7067 for your first free issue of *the Progressive Populist*.

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

Steve Skrovan: Our theme music "Stand Up, Rise Up" was written and performed by Kemp Harris. Our proofreader is Elisabeth Solomon. Our associate producer is Hannah Feldman.

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

Ralph Nader: Thank you everybody. Whirlwind Wheelchair gets things done. Help them out.