

## RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 415 TRANSCRIPT

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

**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. We've got a great show.

**Steve Skrovan:** Indeed we do. And one of the things that makes it great is the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** Hello, everybody.

**Steve Skrovan:** We're gonna start today's show with our continuing analysis of the Ukraine crisis. Our first guest will be Colonel Lawrence [Larry] Wilkerson. He joined us last September to walk us through the United States' illegal war Afghanistan, our war crimes, corruption, and disastrous withdrawal. Rather than enjoying peace for the first time in 20 years, are we about to spend trillions of dollars on another criminal war? Events are moving quickly as we record this, but we'll ask Colonel Wilkerson to shed some light.

Our second guest will be Howard University Professor Clarence Lusane. For more than four decades, Professor Lusane has studied human rights, anti-racism, politics, and Black social movements. He has consulted on Capitol Hill and as a scholar, researcher, policy advocate and activist, he has traveled to over 70 nations. In his new book, *Twenty Dollars and Change[  
Harriet Tubman vs. Andrew Jackson, and the Future of American Democracy]*, Professor Lusane examines something closer to home: the \$20 bill. We'll ask him about his book, the campaign to replace Andrew Jackson with Harriet Tubman on our currency and what that ongoing debate reveals about America's relationship to race and history.

Then if we have time, Ralph will answer a listener question. As always, somewhere in the middle, we'll check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, as the news about this situation in Ukraine changes minute to minute, what are the more longstanding principles that can be applied to resolving this conflict, David?

**David Feldman:** Lawrence Wilkerson is a retired US Army Colonel, distinguished adjunct professor of government and public policy at the College of William & Mary and former chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson.

**Lawrence Wilkerson:** Thank you. Good to be with you.

**Ralph Nader:** Yes. Welcome indeed, Larry. We're gonna start with Ukraine because our listeners have heard some of our guests talk about Ukraine, they have some familiarity. I always point out that the Western frontier of Russia has been invaded three major times by Napoleon and by the Kaiser in World War I, and by [Adolph] Hitler with tens of millions of fatalities, casualties, and destruction. I think the casualty toll in the siege of Leningrad itself was 750,000 people which compares with what the US lost in World War II of some 450,000 people in both the Pacific and European theaters.

So the suffering of Russians from their Western frontier can frame something of what's going on here in the dispute regarding Ukraine. Ukraine was, as we all know, part of the Soviet Union until the Soviet Union broke up. And the memories of the Russian people are very deep here about security on the Western frontier, which is why [Vladimir] Putin can feel comfortable in doing what he's been doing. So give us your take, Larry, about both this so-called dispute and the US government's response along with NATO's [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] so far.

**Lawrence Wilkerson:** I go back even further than you, Ralph. I wrote a poem about it once when I was in university, when Prince [Alexander] Nevsky defeated the Huns and others, mercenaries mostly, on Lake Peipus, when the ice broke on the lake and swallowed all the opposition. So Russia has been fearful of those borders for many, many years. And Ukraine has been since, as I recall, Catherine the Great, a part of "Russia".

Indeed today some of his most important tank foundries and also artillery cannon foundries are in Ukraine. The Ukrainians today probably regret the decision, but there was no real fight over it at all when Russia, then the USSR [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics] decided under [Mikhail] Gorbachev to let us begin to help them destroy their nuclear weapons and to indeed come down from some 30,000 weapons they had. Ukraine, of course, having many of those weapons, turned them back over to Mother Moscow with no real argument about it. Today they would probably say, that's something we shouldn't have done, but that's one leadership in Kiev that might say that. Perhaps Ukrainians in general wouldn't say that.

It's a long history. And I certainly understand. I don't support Putin. I don't think Putin is a very good leader. I don't think his way of wiping out his opposition is particularly savory, but I do understand his strategic grasp and I do understand the fact that his military leaders are very frightened by the creep of NATO. I shouldn't say the creep [but rather] the onslaught of NATO. Indeed, my President, George W. Bush, went to Tbilisi and standing by the Georgia president declared Georgia would be a member of NATO in the future. What a colossally stupid thing to do and yet we did it and we've been doing it ever since largely so Lockheed Martin and others could sell their wares to more and more countries in the world. And I don't blame Putin for what he has done in standing up to our expansion of NATO.

**Ralph Nader:** Yeah, this was a military alliance formed after World War II directed at the Soviet Union. And it was in Western Europe and the US. And after the fall of the Soviet Union, contrary to, as you say, assurances from the US during the unification of Germany, which Russia agreed to and didn't try to dispute.

**Lawrence Wilkerson:** And Ralph, those assurances were powerful. I just had a debate literally with one of my old friends over Jim Baker supposedly having come back and recanted and said that no, when he got back to Washington, the assurances that [Helmut] Kohl had been given in Germany and [Eduard] Shevardnadze and Gorbachev had been given in Moscow, were not acceptable to George H. W. Bush. Well, my man, Colin Powell, my boss at the time, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, due to Goldwater-Nichols [Act], attended all the NSC [National Security Council] meetings. He was the principal by Goldwater-Nichols, the change to the 1947 National Security Act, the penultimate amendment. He was the principal advisor, the principal military advisor to the president of the NSC and the Secretary of Defense. So he went to the meetings and he never came back and told me anything about that and he debriefed me on all the meetings. So as far as I was concerned, Powell's euphoria; he was ecstatic even about what was happening, that Russia was possibly going to be an observer at NATO and maybe even eventually a member of NATO. And where did we go astray in that history? Where did we go

from that halcyon time when the Cold War was over and H. W. Bush to his inestimable credit did not want to beat his chest, did not want to trump it, did not want to claim victory and so forth. He just wanted to get on with, as he called it, the new world order, a peaceful world order. What happened to all of that? What happened to all that happiness and joy [chuckle], if you will, at the end of the Cold War and the prospect of peace?

Well, Bill Clinton largely happened to it when in 1994, he decided that he needed some more foreign policy bona fides. And oh, by the way, he needed some more contributions from corporations like Lockheed Martin and Raytheon and [Northrop] Grumman and so forth and more bona fides in the national security field. So he began a very rapid expansion of NATO with no consideration whatsoever for what the other side, in this case, Russia might think.

**Ralph Nader:** Larry, exactly what's the nature of the expansion? They put out feelers to Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia asking them to join? What was the nature of the expansion? And was there a quid pro quo where they had to buy F-16s [aircraft] and other US weapons?

**Lawrence Wilkerson:** It was always considered to be a progress that would go slowly. And over time, I remember Bill Perry, one of Bill Clinton's secretaries of defense, telling me as I visited him with my Marine Corps while in seminar and he'd just come back from Moscow. He'd just come back from several days in Moscow. And he was as euphoric as Powell had been before about what was happening. There was a plan that we would march very slowly with all the former Warsaw Pact countries, considering not just NATO membership but EU [European Union] membership. And that plan would unfold very, very slowly, methodically and it would unfold only as they came to be able to meet the requirements of both EU and NATO. And, by the way, NATO's were more rigorous than the EU's. And it would unfold only as Russia said, Okay, that's good; okay, that's good; okay, that's good. And we all nodded our heads in accordance with that initial agreement.

What happened was that you have – I was just on a webinar with the Quincy Institute [for Responsible Statecraft] on this very thing. You had the CEOs and other people working for these now global – they're not just US, they're global arms manufacturers and arms merchants. You had them insinuating themselves into their equivalents, incipient though they were, within these new countries. And they become embedded with one another. And then you start getting, I need this; I need that, and you make this and you make that. And so very soon you have the kind of relationship we have with Saudi Arabia today, where you don't know the difference between the Saudi side and the US side because they're linked; they're joined at the hip and they share in the profits and they share in the ventures and they share in the weapons building and the weapons used. We've done this all over the world. And we were salivating at the prospect because some of the lines, the cruise missile line, for example, the F-16 line, for example, were going into low-rate production or they were going coal, like the tank line recently did. And the Congress stepped in and we made tanks that are now stored up in the mountains that we'll never use, but that cost the American taxpayer a huge amount of money. So these industries all work together to build the kind of “need” and Ukraine is a perfect example of that today. Not for nothing do the *New York Times* report on some of the CEOs actually talking in meetings about how their shareholders and potential stock buyers ought to pay attention to Ukraine because Lockheed and Raytheon and all the rest of these guys, their stocks were just gonna skyrocket because of what was happening in Ukraine. This is a war industry. And what happened in 1994 and the years following was the war industry got a hold of the process of NATO expansion along with other

interests. And it was 'Katy bar the door'; let's go, let's go right up to the steps of Moscow, if we want to.

**Ralph Nader:** How prescient [Dwight] Eisenhower was when he coined the phrase military-industrial complex. Originally, I understand in the speech where he referred to it as...

**Lawrence Wilkerson:** Military, industrial, congressional, university, think tank, research, you name it. They are everywhere now. They're all over my campus at William & Mary now. They're all over my campus with new proposals, new money. It's very hard for these schools to turn this money down, especially a public university like William & Mary/

**Ralph Nader:** Let's go right to the current situation. If you were Joe Biden and Secretary of State [Tony] Blinken, what would you be doing about this Ukraine situation?

**Lawrence Wilkerson:** First thing I'd do is walk into the closet and say, Please God --if I believed in God--I'd say, Please, God, give me some imagination and give me some diplomatic skill. I'd do that before I did anything else because we are totally devoid of diplomatic skill and we have no imagination at all. And with imagination goes something called empathy. That is to say the ability to put yourself in the other fellow's shoes or the other woman's shoes and see it the way they see it. We can't do that. Blinken and [John] Sullivan are such amateurs against someone like Sergey Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, who is one of the best diplomats I've ever met. Maybe equaled only on the global stage right now by Wang Yi, the counselor for foreign minister for Xi Jinping in China. So, we're up against some pretty formidable foes, and we're playing amateurs.

They need to start thinking, and they are, thank God. I hope I've been debriefed carefully yesterday about what they can concede under the table if they need to. The best diplomacy is conducted under the table, not in the Klieg lights. And what they concede is exactly what has got Putin's military leaders so concerned, so fearful, and that is ballistic missile defense launchers, which can double as Tomahawk missiles with nuclear warhead launchers, and other things like that that they fear. They see them creeping into places like Poland, maybe into the Baltics and they fear they're gonna get even closer and reduce their warning time and reduce such things as their ability to respond to an attack.

And people say, I've had these debates ongoing for the past six months, Well, why are they fearful of NATO attacking them? Come on, put yourself in their shoes. Wait until you see a Chinese battle fleet steaming in the Gulf of Mexico 12 miles and one inch off Corpus Christi, Texas. Wait until you see that. It is China's every right under international law to do that. They could do that 24/7 all year long. What do you think Washington would say about that? Well, reverse the situation and put yourself in Putin's shoes. We are the most arrogant empire, I think, that's been around for at least a couple hundred years. And that includes the British, so that's arrogant.

**Ralph Nader:** Let's reverse the question here. What do you think Putin would settle for?

**Lawrence Wilkerson:** I think he has let it be known what he'd settle for. And I think that's what we're working on now. And that is, as I said, the most dangerous weaponry not being in Ukraine. And attached the understanding that Ukraine won't be a member of NATO, not in the foreseeable future, anyway. It's kinda like when Colin Powell worked out the deal with his chief, actually Tang Jiaxuan in China, when our EP-3 [aircraft] went down on Hainan Island and it had 24 sailors aboard, as I recall, and they captured them and they captured the plane and some very delicate equipment. And we were in a crisis mode. This was April 2001. And Powell took over

immediately. He didn't even let [Donald] Rumsfeld or [Dick] Cheney or even the president get in it. He took over immediately. He resolved the situation.

And what we did in essence was we apologized in English in America and the Chinese apologized in Chinese in China. [chuckle] And that's all that happened. And that's diplomacy. We essentially said, Okay, you were in error. And the other side said, No, you were in error. Well, I accept that you were in error. I accept that I was in error. You do that and you agree to it and then the crisis is over. Well, I think that's the way it's gonna be handled with regard to Ukraine and the future and NATO. Everyone will know that it's been settled that way, but neither capital is gonna crow about it.

Now I worry about us, though. Because unlike H. W. Bush, as I told you at the beginning of the end of the Cold War, not wanting to beat his chest over it and everything, not wanting to stand over his enemy and hoot and holler about how he'd beaten him, we tend to be that way more and more these days. And Joe Biden has a particular proclivity for that sort of thing, especially when his polls are slipping. So I hope that domestic politics and the Republicans, of course, make it impossible for Biden to be this diplomatic.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, it seems this is a very clear path to settling this in Ukraine. One is that Ukraine is not part of NATO and NATO itself admits that it will be many years before Ukraine meets the criteria to join NATO. So Ukraine becomes a neutral area like Austria was given neutrality after World War II.

**Lawrence Wilkerson:** Exactly.

**Ralph Nader:** And the US and NATO pulled back on the missile launchers, which have no business being that close to the Russian border. So when that's settled, we can look back and say, maybe what Biden was doing, playing tough, is a message to China and Taiwan. You think so?

**Lawrence Wilkerson:** That might be the case and that might be the way they're looking at it. I don't think that's the right approach to China either. That's another story altogether. And I do think that Taiwan and China, South China Sea and all that's associated with China and a possible war with her, is more serious than this business with Russia. Not least because Russia is basically losing population. It has less population than Pakistan. Russia's economy is essentially characterized, as one person in Russia put it to me yesterday, as a gas station with a capital city. So Russia is not the formidable opponent that China is. China has surpassed us in economic power, certainly in purchasing power parity and industrial output has surpassed us majorly and is rapidly, if not already, surpassing us in many areas of high technology. Unlike we say all the time. So China presents us with a much more formidable foe than Russia and is therefore a much more dangerous situation. But at the end of the day is, again, yesterday and another webinar, we talked about why is everyone concerned about all these cruise missiles and other armaments on their borders when those submarines are cruising out there with enough nuclear weaponry to destroy us all in about, oh, maybe 24 hours? And that's the real thing we ought to be talking about. And I'm hearing hints that these talks with regard to Ukraine and NATO expansion in general and so forth with Russia are going to lead to a much more serious discussion of nuclear armaments because there, other than the climate crisis, is the most serious threat confronting the human race.

**Ralph Nader:** You believe that'll be the silver lining coming out of Ukraine?

**Lawrence Wilkerson:** I certainly hope so, because we have just unraveled arms control starting with George Bush and the ABM [Anti-Ballistic Missile] Treaty moving on to the Intermediate[-

Range] Nuclear Forces Treaty onto the Open Skies Treaty and almost the New START. We almost let that go too. Donald Trump almost let that go. We need desperately to get back to a good, solid, manageable arms control regime. And we need to drag kicking and screaming if necessary countries like Israel and North Korea into that regime.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, who do you think is gonna make the call from the United States for that kind of global embrace of serious arms control treaties--bringing up to date, bringing in more countries and enforcing the Non-Proliferation [Treaty] act, which is now not enforced? Who's gonna make the call in the US?

**Lawrence Wilkerson:** It has to go slowly and methodically. It can't go Oh, everybody tomorrow morning is gonna do this. The first thing, the first step I would take is to bring China in in a serious way before they start acting on what is a gestating decision right now to build far more nuclear weapons so they can ride out a first strike, changing Mao's [Zedong] philosophy of we only need as many as necessary to deter. They only have a couple hundred, 300 right now. They could build 10,000 overnight virtually. They have such powerful economy. But your question is who is gonna do it. And my answer is I'm looking at the midterms. The Republicans are gonna take both houses of Congress. I'm looking at 2024. We may have another coup or we may have an insurrection depending on who wins, who loses. I don't see the United States leading it. So my answer is to you, I'm very pessimistic about anyone in the west leading this necessary move to get nuclear weapons under control once again.

**Ralph Nader:** What interest does China have in taking the lead? They like to be number one. Why don't they take the lead?

**Lawrence Wilkerson:** Well, that's a good question. And if you put it to Xi Jinping and you had a decent conversation about it with him, I'm not so sure it wouldn't be productive. I don't think that Chinese having been very close to their central party school now three or four times and listening their strategic palaver, if you will, I don't think the Chinese like nuclear weapons very much--much the way the Iranians don't like nuclear weapons very much if you read their fatwas. It's religious with them. But with the Chinese, it's a matter of 5,000 years of civilization. And you might say a little more astute look at things like nuclear weapons than America is capable of. And so we need to take advantage of that and we need to sit down and we need to talk seriously -- all of us, eventually, all of nuclear weapons states about how we save the human race from this scourge. Looking at what's coming after that or at what's already here, it's here. 28 February, The UN [United Nations] group is gonna release the report on climate change and it's gonna blow some people's socks off. We are way behind; we are terribly behind. If we get to 1.5 degree rise, which we are inevitably going to, it is going to be a different way of life for every human being on this planet. If we get to 2, we're gonna lose a lot of human beings on this planet. So this is a huge crisis that we need cooperation to tackle, not this antagonistic approach to international relations we're seeing demonstrated right now with regard to Ukraine.

**Ralph Nader:** Let's ask you for a short-term prediction. How do you think in the next two months the Ukraine situation is gonna be resolved?

**Lawrence Wilkerson:** Well, I think it will resolve itself in what we were just talking about. It - might be a little nasty and a little messy because Ukraine is one of those corrupt governments and government structures in the world. That's saying something. But it'll resolve itself in what I call for now six years a studied neutrality for Ukraine. And that neutrality may have features as some of those that were in some of the agreements that have been achieved already. It might

have a sort of autonomy in one particular part of it. Maybe it'll have a different arrangement in give in terms of Russian influence, US influence, European influence in general. But it'll be a neutral country and there'll be a dying down of the talk about it being a member of NATO, maybe even an elimination of that talk after a few years. And things will go on. And we'll have probably more brouhaha over the Baltics. Or look at what's happening in the Balkans right now, the Serbs are getting rested again, looking at Bosnia Herzegovina with jealous eyes again. They've already pretty much occupied the northern part on the other side of the river of Kosovo. So, the Balkans are always a place to watch.

Here's something that happened the other day that I think is a very prescient remark. It was this Russian journalist, Fyodor Lukyanov. And he said, "This Ukraine crisis and the other little crises surrounding it just might be a mark of the third change of Euro-Atlantic security since 1940." And he started talking about the Paris [Charter] Accord and the Helsinki Final Act. I remember people poo-pooing it when it occurred, especially Republicans saying, "This doesn't mean much. It's not about real power." So, that's part of what empowered Gorbachev to implement glasnost and perestroika and it brought down the Soviet Union. So that Helsinki Final Act was more formidable than people predicted at the time.

Well, Lukyanov said, "We need something like that today." He didn't say this, but I thought this afterwards--what I'd make the three fundamental precepts, knowing that they weren't gonna be accomplishable 100% just like Helsinki, but I'd make the three fundamental precepts of a new accord something like this. One, the US denounces any desire further in the future to dominate Western Europe economically, commercially, militarily and so forth. Second, Moscow gives up the dream of resurrecting the Soviet Union's domination of Eastern Europe. And three, and extremely important, the now 750 million Europeans get their political act together, Brexit notwithstanding, and form something that makes sense politically and otherwise. Now that's the most difficult one. And just my citing of the Balkans and the recent rumblings there is a case in point. But Europe needs to get its act together. [They've] been trying to ever since the end of the Cold War, but they've been unable to do so.

I had a conversation with a Danish newspaperman yesterday, telling me about how alarmed he was that his country/his leaders, were kowtowing to Washington over Ukraine. And I said, "You have a right to be that way, to feel that way. You need to stop doing that. All of you need to stop doing that and you need to stand up and do the things that you can do if you are roughly unified and you apply your muscle to the task." Look at Germany, look at France, look at all the power that you have in the combination that you geographically possess [with] almost three quarters of a billion people now.

I know you got problems. You've got basket cases like Albania and so forth, but you should be able to generate enough power to make a balancing mechanism between the duo on the right (China and Russia) and the single power on the left (the United States), especially since the United States' power is receding majorly every day. Let's get something going here and then let's get what we get going pointed at the two disasters on the horizon – nuclear weapons and climate.

**Ralph Nader:** We're speaking with retired Colonel Larry Wilkerson, major peace advocate, arms control advocate with many years of experience in the US government. Larry, tell us about the veterans groups like Veterans for Peace or Iraq Veterans Against War. How effective are they? And to what degree do you work with the Friends Committee [on National Legislation] and the traditional peace groups?

**Lawrence Wilkerson:** I've really been impressed with some of the veterans groups in what they're doing. There are a lot of vets in America who are very concerned with what they call endless stupid wars, and what they understand they did in their roles in some of these endless stupid wars. I think one of the reasons we have such a high post-traumatic stress quotient and such a high, unprecedented degree of suicides in the armed forces, is in part produced by the fact that in 2-3 tours in Iraq or Afghanistan or wherever, they did some things that they wouldn't have been proud of even if they had done them for peace, freedom, liberty in America. And now they realize they didn't do them for any of those things. They did them for the military-industrial complex; they did them for George W. Bush and his reelection or whatever. And that's very traumatic with them. It causes some second, third, and fourth level thoughts that often lead to suicide, I think. But many of them have taken to the hustings, as you suggested, and either politically or in some other way helping veterans are doing some pretty powerful work across the country. Vote Vets is one of the organizations that I would single out for that. They back candidates who basically are restraint politicians, using Quincy terms. They are more for diplomacy and peace than they are for bombs, bullets, bayonets, war and making the empire great again. So I'm very heartened by what's happening with them. I'm very disheartened by what I'm seeing with regard to what we call Christian nationalism in the ranks. I think Christian nationalism had a lot to do the 6th of January insurrection. And I'm seeing it across the board in all the services with regard to a very vivid example, vaccinations, where we had thousands in each of the services who refused to get vaccinations, many alleging religious grounds and so forth. And we even have the Secretary of Defense now having said and has started in some of the services, throwing these people out of the service. Now, the Congress came in, of course, and said they had to get honorable discharges. And when you think about why that's the case, it's very worrisome. They have to get honorable discharges because the military services are having such a hard time recruiting under the all-volunteer force concept that they're afraid these people will go home to places like West Virginia, Oklahoma, Alabama, Mississippi, and pollute the ground. They'll badmouth the services. And so they'll pollute the ground and they won't be able to recruit in one of their richest recruiting areas. But this is a very worrisome feature of Christian nationalism in this country right now--what it's doing to the armed forces, and generally speaking, what it means across America when you have some of them turning into people like those who marched on the capital on the 6th of January.

But basically, veterans, I think, are doing a lot of positive things in the country, politically helping their fellow veterans and so forth. We are not treating them all that well. I learned the other day that the number of homeless veterans has skyrocketed; the suicides are off the charts. We have veterans without work as well as veterans without homes. In the Tidewater area alone in Virginia, I'm told there are some 40,000 homeless veterans. It's a mixed bag. It's a mixed picture, but I'm very happy with what some of them are doing to try and militate against this business of forever wars, endless wars, stupid wars.

**Ralph Nader:** And they speak with credibility because they've been over there and they've been deceived. Even in 2005, two years after invasion of Iraq, there was a professional poll that the Pentagon allowed of US soldiers, including Marines, in Iraq and over 70% said they wanted US to get out of Iraq. That was in 2005. Let's go to Steve and David.

**Steve Skrovan:** Yeah, very quickly, Colonel Wilkerson, because I know you're on a tight schedule and our next guest has actually arrived. I wanted to know, do we even need NATO at all?



**Lawrence Wilkerson:** No, no. As a matter of fact, in 1989, Powell turned to me at Fort McPherson in Atlanta, Georgia. And he said, “When Kohl goes and [François] Mitterand goes and all the other European leaders who don't have their feed in World War II, the transatlantic link is gone and NATO will go with it.” And I said, “Well, maybe it should since it was formed primarily to combat communism and the Soviet Union and they're gone.” And he smiled and said, “Yeah, maybe you're right.” What have we done in order to change that equation? We have put it into out-of-area operations--Afghanistan, Syria, Libya. NATO led the action in Libya. How does that square with Article V, the most important part of NATO--an attack on one is an attack on all? That's the distinguishing feature of NATO. We have adulterated that. We've murdered it. We're putting NATO all over the world in order to try and give it relevance and to save it. We should let it go.

**Steve Skrovan:** David?

**David Feldman:** Yes. Thank you, Colonel. The United States has frozen \$7 billion of Afghanistan's assets. Last Friday, President Biden issued an executive order that would split those assets. \$3.5 billion would go towards humanitarian aid for the Afghanistan people, the Afghan people, and \$3.5 billion would go towards potential legal claims brought by American families who lost loved ones on September 11th. Should the people of Afghanistan be forced to pay restitution to the victims of 9/11?

**Lawrence Wilkerson:** That's a difficult question to answer. On the one hand, most of that money is probably US taxpayer money given all the corruption in Afghanistan. Read Sarah Chayes' book, *Thieves of State*, if you wanna know how filthy Afghanistan was in terms of corruption. And most of the money that was wasted and lost there was US taxpayer dollars. The second point I would make is that Biden has a political problem. His polls are slipping and so forth and is grasping for things that might put a little patina on his political problem that would be positive. I understand that. But I also understand the implication in your question that we're really putting the Afghan people in trouble here. The purpose of course is to put the Taliban government in trouble.

And if you go back and check my remarks earlier as Kabul fell, I said, “I hope we react this way.” And one of the this is was we give the Taliban all manner of assistance in attempting to run the country if they will be at least reasonable in that effort. And that means not returning to the past and keeping women out of schools and so forth and so on. And I had every reason to believe from my insight into the talks that the Taliban would be amenable to that – just to get the money and just to be able to run the country. So you're killing that also. You're being harsh. You're trying to bring them down and you're trying to bring them down on the backs of the people who are basically innocent. So it's a mixed bag. I don't know what the right answer is. I probably wouldn't have done it.

**David Feldman:** Colonel, did the Taliban attack us?

**Lawrence Wilkerson:** How do you mean?

**David Feldman:** 9/11. Were the Taliban behind 9/11?

**Lawrence Wilkerson:** No, but Mullah Omar at least was untalkable out of his protection of Osama bin Laden. So, in that respect, I understand why most Americans would probably not understand the distinction and would probably support punishing the Taliban. They're not very savory people either.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, on that point, we have to conclude. We've been talking with retired Colonel Larry Wilkerson who teaches at William & Mary College in Virginia, who is very active in peace movements, arms control movements, enlightenment on foreign policy, drawing on his immense experience in the military and diplomatic departments of the US government over the years, including being chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell. Thank you very much, Larry. And before we leave, what's the best way for people connect with you?

**Lawrence Wilkerson:** Oh, my William & Mary email is on William & Mary's website. It's lbwilk@wm.edu.

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you again, Larry. Thank you for your work and how you bring conscience to your work and connect it to experience and you never give up. You represent the best of the retired military in my judgment and you're networking more and more of these veterans who have to start speaking up more and getting more members in all these groups like Veterans for Peace and others that you mentioned today. To be continued. Thank you very much, Larry.

**Lawrence Wilkerson:** Thank you, Ralph. And thank you for all you've done too.

**Steve Skrovan:** We've been speaking with Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson. We will link to his work at [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com). Up next, we're gonna talk about Harriet Tubman and the \$20 bill. But first, let's check in with our corporate crime reporter, Russell Mokhiber.

**Russell Mokhiber:** From the National Press Building in Washington, D.C., this is your *Corporate Crime Reporter* "Morning Minute" for Friday, February 18, 2022; I'm Russell Mokhiber. The congressman who collected the most corporate campaign money last year is the chairman of the committee that writes the tax code, Congressman Richard Neal, Democrat of Massachusetts. In 2019, Neal received more than 1.4 million dollars from PACs that represent corporations and business interests. That's according to a report from *Sludge*. As chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, Neal has more power than any other member of the House of Representatives to address corporate tax avoidance. But in his first year as committee chairman, Neal did nothing to bring any substantial legislation on corporate taxes before his committee for a vote. Several of Neal's political action committee donors are affiliated with profitable Fortune 500 companies that paid an effective tax rate of zero or less in 2018. 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. With our next guest, we're gonna discuss the important historic symbolism in the debate over whose picture deserves to be on our most commonly used paper currency, the \$20 bill. David?

**David Feldman:** Clarence Lusane is a professor and former chairman of Howard University's Department of Political Science. He's an activist, scholar, journalist, and author. His latest book is coming out in November, published by City Lights Books. It's called *Twenty Dollars and Change: Harriet Tubman vs. Andrew Jackson, and the Future of American Democracy*. Welcome to the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*, Professor Clarence Lusane.

**Clarence Lusane:** Thank you, David. Thank you for having me.

**Ralph Nader:** Welcome indeed, Clarence. We're seeing in a wonderful emergence of information in the schools around our country on Black history. I remember in my education, the only figure that we even mildly referred to was Frederick Douglass. And now you're researching and have written about the life of Harriet Tubman who had an extraordinary career between

sometime, I guess, 1840 and 1913, and is now being proposed during the [Barack] Obama administration of having her visage on the \$20 bill in place of Andrew Jackson.

You know, there's a reason why Donald Trump admires Andrew Jackson because he was a precursor of violating and challenging the laws of the land and destroying thousands of Cherokee natives and other bigoted actions during his area of power. And so the symbol was to replace him with Harriet Tubman. But before we talk about her remarkable career, I want you just to give our audience a little description of this remarkable book that you put out a few years ago called *The Black History of the White House*.

**Clarence Lusane:** Yep. So thank you for mentioning that. So when Obama was running for president, I received a number of requests to write about Obama. And at the time, there were dozens of books coming out including [what] Obama had written about himself. But one of the things that struck me was that for many people in the country, White Americans, but other people as well, there was no real sense of history and what had been the experience of Black people in the White House, both from the staff side, but also from what happened before the [American] Civil War. And so, *City Lights*, which has a long and really honorable history of pulling together these experiences that other publishers often don't look at. It would be great if I write a book about what happened before Obama in terms of the Black experience. And in the process of writing that book, I began to uncover these stories of Black people who had been in the White House who had been enslaved, Black people who had escaped from the White House, the first African American who was on the [US] Secret Service, who was driven out by racism, to all of these untold narratives that give a fuller picture of what the White House actually is and how it's been a prism for race in the country makes up what I tried to do with that book.

**Ralph Nader:** Did you also indicate that Blacks helped build the White House?

**Clarence Lusane:** And built the White House, and in fact, built Washington, D.C. When the country first formed in the late 1780s, Washington, D.C. did not exist. This is where I'm at right now with jungle – rocks and trees and boulders. And so it was projected correctly that it would take about 10 years to clear the area and build the essential constructions, including Congress, the capital and the White House. And in that period, while George Washington initially wanted labor coming from Europe, that didn't happen. So, just like every major construction that took place in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries in this country, in the 19th century, slave labor was employed. And Michelle Obama mentioned this at the 2000 and I believe 16th or 12th national convention. And it created a bit of a stir because it was new information to most people, but absolutely, slave labor was critical in building the White House.

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you for that history. Let's turn to Harriet Tubman. What motivated her to do what she did in those critical years before the Civil War, during the Civil War, and after the Civil War? Can you give us a description?

**Clarence Lusane:** So, Ralph, you're raising a question that often is not raised about Harriet Tubman, which is what did she do after the Civil War? So, she's best known for having escaped slavery herself in the 1840s. She just was a determined young woman and said she was not gonna live all her life enslaved. But unlike many others, she came back and rescued other individuals [including] family members, and many people that she did not know. And as you can imagine, it was the most dangerous work possible, both in terms of just being on the road. And most of her efforts helping people escape took place in the middle of winter. So, just freezing to death, you can imagine. But, of course, the real danger was that very quickly she became number

one on the fugitive list for slave catchers. And she was never caught. And every single individual she went to get, she brought back safely. So, those heroics became pretty well known right as the Civil War was breaking out in 1861. She transitioned from being someone who went to rescue people to working with the Union Army. She was a nurse. She was a spy. She was a scout. She was the first woman to lead a military raid. This was on the Combahee River, South Carolina, where she and the soldiers she led rescued 700 people who were enslaved. So all that happened during the war. Some said that she did not sit on her hands after 1865. She continued to be engaged. She was part of the suffrage movement. She went to not only the women's organizations that were led by some of the well-known White women, but also there were Black women who were engaged in the suffrage movement around voting rights. Her last words actually before she died in 1913, as you mentioned, was to send encouragement to Black women who were participating in some of the suffrage efforts. So her entire life was one where she was dedicated to inclusion, and what I argue in the book, democracy with a small D. And to me, it's always been important to link the struggle for racial justice with the struggle for expanding democracy and Harriet Tubman had embodied that nonstop.

**Ralph Nader:** She was such a woman of action. Did she actually write down some of her observations or her beliefs, what motivated her like Frederick Douglass did in a number of books? Or was she just focusing on getting things done?

**Clarence Lusane:** So, she never fully learned to read and write unlike Frederick Douglass. And so, there's not a lot that she wrote, but she gave lots of interviews and she met with lots of journalists and researchers over her life. Now, much of what was said about her during her lifetime in fact were embellishments, not from her, but from others. There were rumors that there were thousands of dollars offered for her, that she helped a thousand people escape, and these were exaggerations, none of which she needed. Her life, in and of itself, was just remarkable. But she did give interviews and she did address some of the issues I talked about in terms of voting and suffrage. She spent time in her later years building a home for seniors and for seniors who were poor. So, in every single way she could, she saw herself serving the community and doing what she could. And again, someone who never had any formal education, but she knew more about the world than many people who had plenty of education.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, she wasn't treated very well. She struggled to get her pay when she was employed by the Union Army during the Civil War. And afterwards, she tried to get her pay and she contacted members of Congress and she didn't get much of a pension. Can you talk about that, because it really reflects the way the establishment treated her after all she did for the Union cause.

**Clarence Lusane:** So, that's exactly right. She did not just volunteer for the Union Army. She was contracted by the Union Army. And again, she played a number of roles--as a nurse, as a scout, and a spy--dangerous roles, risky roles, hardworking roles. And when it was over, she later applied for a pension because the federal government was given pensions to people who had been in the military. And she was denied. She fought for literally decades. Finally, she was able to get her husband's pension. She had remarried after the Civil War and her husband had been a veteran. When he passed, they finally were able to work it out. And that's where one of the great ironies kind of emerges is that her ultimate pension was \$20 a month, which of course fits in with this movement now and the effort to put her on the \$20 bill. At the time that Treasury Secretary [Jacob] Lew made the announcement, apparently he was unaware of that particular history, so he never mentioned that particular coincidence, but certainly that was a critical part of

her life. And there have been efforts to still get a pension for her; talked to her family members. The main problem with her getting a posthumous pension is that she did not have any direct heirs. She remarried, but she never had any children of her own. So there are plenty of relatives that she had, brothers and sisters, but no direct descendants.

**Ralph Nader:** And what's the likelihood that she'll appear on the \$20 bill after years of struggle?

**Clarence Lusane:** Well, it should happen. The Trump administration never officially killed the deal. There were other complications beyond Trump's own reluctance to do it. One is that it was required by law. There are security procedures that require that US currency periodically be changed, often invisible to many people, but sometimes visible. For example, the image of the person may be larger than in the previous bill. But also the bills require – this was coming out of a Supreme Court case; they also have to be developed for the disabled. And so that requires some very special kind of development. So, although when Secretary Lew made the announcement, there was sort of a hit that it would take a couple of years. And in fact, he had projected that it could happen by 2020, which would be the 100-year anniversary of the Nineteenth Amendment, it actually really was not possible. And even if Trump wanted to do it, it was not gonna happen during the Trump administration. So, the projection is now probably 2029, 2030, in that area. And I should also mention that other currencies will have changes as well, including the \$5 bill and the \$10 bill, not on the front, but on the back. Now, there's still an effort to not just have Tubman on the face of the \$20 bill, but to not have Jackson on the back of the \$20 bill. That's what's being projected now--that Jackson would not be removed, he would just be put on the back of the bill.

**Ralph Nader:** For people wanting to know more about Harriet Tubman, what's the best book? And they may wanna give it to their elementary and high school libraries.

**Clarence Lusane:** Okay. So they're actually tons of books, both for young adults as well as works that are by scholars. *Bound for the Promised Land*[:*Harriet Tubman, Portrait of an American Hero*] by Kate [Clifford] Larson. It's one of the better books because it came out later. So it actually made a lot of corrections on work that had been done in the past and was able to get to some records that were not prior available. One, for example, and this is the truth, there had always been a mystery about exactly when Harriet Tubman was born. And that was because for many people who were enslaved, of course, there was not always those records. But research over the last few years actually discovered the day she was born, which was March 15th, 1822. So, her 200-year anniversary is coming up. What's even more remarkable about that is that Andrew Jackson was born on March 15th.

**Ralph Nader:** What a coincidence. Clarence, can you give the title and author of that book once more?

**Clarence Lusane:** *Bound for the Promised Land* by Kate Larson is really a great research and well-written book about Harry Tubman's life.

**Ralph Nader:** Very good. Steve, David, some comments?

**David Feldman:** Yes. Thank you. Yeah. I'm looking at a list of who is on our dollar bills and there are a lot of slaveholders. There's George Washington, [Thomas] Jefferson, [James] Madison. With the statues coming down, are we gonna get to a point where we're gonna start taking the slaveholders off our money?

**Clarence Lusane:** Maybe. So, again, I think that there are ranges. You're absolutely right. Even Benjamin Franklin, for example, at one point in his life had individuals who were enslaved to him—at least one. But I would draw somewhat of a distinction with Andrew Jackson. As Ralph mentioned, not only did Jackson – what he committed in terms of genocide, massacres relative to Native American people and set the stage for the Trail of Tears, Jackson was also a slaveholder and a slave trader and a brutal one at that. So, when you look at his record, to me, it stands out far more so than some of the others. But 12 out of the first 16 presidents were slaveholders, not something we are necessarily taught in American history, but those are the facts. If you look at the *Washington Post* just last month and it just updated, it did some research on slaveholders who have been in Congress and it's over 1700. So there's a long, long record of individuals, and given how the country evolved, who were slaveholders. And so I think it requires some measurement and clearly all of these individuals not gonna be removed, but some, I believe, are more egregious and deserve a more critical lens. And Jackson has basically been ignored. There are statues of Jackson; there are buildings named after him. And that needs to be challenged. A lot has happened, as you mentioned, David. The last few years, for example, around Woodrow Wilson.

**David Feldman:** \$100,000 dollar bill. I'm looking at \$100,000 bill right now. I'm seeing his face.

**Clarence Lusane:** Well, again, Woodrow Wilson was president during World War I and attempted to create the League of Nations and was president of Princeton [University]. So, he's kind of had those accolades, but he was also the person who reinstituted segregation in Washington, D.C., and in the US government and just had an atrocious record. And so, you're starting to see changes relative to his honorifics. Here in Washington, D.C., for example, one of the prominent high schools was named after Woodrow Wilson. And just last year, they voted to change the name. And we saw at Princeton, for example, that they changed the name of at least one building they had be named after Woodrow Wilson. So, I think that there are times when there's a sense of recognition that the honors that were given to some of these individuals upon further examination should be drawn back.

**Ralph Nader:** Well, we've reached the end of our time. We've been speak with Dr. Clarence Lusane, who is a professor and director of international affairs program at Howard University in Washington, D.C. Thank you very much, Clarence.

**Clarence Lusane:** All right. Thank you, guys. You guys have a great day.

**Steve Skrovan:** We've been speaking with Professor Clarence Lusane. We will link to his work at [ralphnaderradiohour.com](http://ralphnaderradiohour.com). That's our show. I want to thank our guests again, Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson and Professor Clarence Lusane. For those of you listening on the radio, we're gonna cut out right now. But for you, podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call "The Wrap Up." A transcript of this show will appear on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* website soon after the episode is posted and it will be a blue link just above the audio player for those of you trying to search it out.

**David Feldman:** Subscribe to us on our *Ralph Nader Radio Hour* YouTube channel. And for Ralph's weekly column, you can get it for free by going to [nader.org](http://nader.org). For more from Russell Mokhiber, go to [corporatecrimereporter.com](http://corporatecrimereporter.com). Join us next week on the *Ralph Nader Radio Hour*. Thank you, Ralph.

**Ralph Nader:** Thank you, everybody. And be active.