

RALPH NADER RADIO HOUR EP 246 TRANSCRIPT

David Feldman: Welcome to the “Ralph Nader Radio Hour”. I’m David Feldman. Steve Skrovan is back East visiting family. But we have as always the man of the hour, Ralph Nader. Hello, Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Hello David, Jimmy.

David Feldman: Japanese prosecutors, Ralph, arrested Carlos Ghosn, Chairman of Nissan Motors, earlier this week. They got on his private jet in Tokyo, and he could spend up to ten days in prison. Ralph, when Douglas MacArthur rebuilt Japan, didn’t he teach them to respect our corporate elders? Arresting the chairman of Nissan Motors, isn’t that offensive?

Ralph Nader: Well, an internal Nissan investigation apparently saw that he and an associate underestimated their income in Japan by several millions of dollars and the internal investigators sent it to the prosecutor. In Japan, they can detain you--unlike in the US where you can get out on bail--they can detain you for ten days. It’s part of their procedure. When I read about this, it occurred to me, this powerful auto executive was charged and Donald Trump still has his tax return secret; so he better not go to Japan, eh David?

David Feldman: I read that and thought, if one corporate CEO spent one night in prison, this would be a different country.

Ralph Nader: The food would be better, too. We have a great international law expert, and advocate, Professor Richard Falk. Why don’t you introduce him, David?

David Feldman: Yes. We have a globally themed show as we turn our attention away from the midterms. First up we’re gonna discuss international law, and its impact on genocide as well as famine with scholar and activist Professor Richard Falk. That’s the first half. During the second half, did you know that eight men have as much wealth as half the world? That’s according to Oxfam International. As regular listeners know, Ralph has always warned that too much power in too few hands is not healthy for democracies or our economy. We’ve done a number of shows that have highlighted this issue. We have spoken to experts Anand Giridharadas and David Callahan, who have written extensively about the real power dynamics of philanthropy, and how it’s not always what it appears. We have spoken to experts like Scott Galloway and Nomi Prins, who warn about the dangers of monopoly in big tech and in finance. Today, we will continue on that theme with author Peter Philips, who has written a book entitled *Giants: The Global Power Elite*. Hopefully we’ll find out who those eight men are, and what they’re up to. And it wouldn’t be a show if we also didn’t check in with our Corporate Crime Reporter, Russell Mokhiber. But first, let’s find out if international law can protect the weak from the powerful.

Richard Falk is Professor Emeritus of International Law at Princeton University and Visiting Distinguished Professor in Global and International Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Professor Falk is the former United Nations Human Rights Rapporteur in the Occupied Territories and the author of many books including *Chaos and Counterrevolution: After the Arab Spring*. Welcome to the “Ralph Nader Radio Hour” Professor Richard Falk.

Richard Falk: Thank you. Happy to be here.

Ralph Nader: Thank you very much Richard, I'm a graduate of Princeton so I'm very familiar with your work there and over in the Middle East. Let's start with a real puzzle. At least it's one to me; every day there's violations of international law by countries all over the world. And some of them quite blamed, including the US, who invaded Iraq without a constitutional declaration of war, and without being threatened by Iraq. So that's a criminal war of aggression, which is a violation of the U.N. Charter, which is a treaty that we were very important in sponsoring back in 1946 period. It occurs to me where are the international law professors? Why aren't they speaking out? Israel seems to see no reason why it cannot bomb, or invade, or attack neighboring countries. We have violations in the Far East, we have violations in Central America. Why aren't international law experts at Harvard, Princeton, Stanford--you know, the usual group--why aren't they taking stands? Why aren't they signing letters? Why aren't they writing more op-eds? Because apart from the commercial international law, or what used to be called The Law Merchant, which goes on every day in terms of trading between countries and companies, international law, as it relates to the preservation of peace and conflict avoidance, seems to be shriveling to almost a state of nothingness.

Richard Falk: Well, that's ... you put it very provocatively. I think a fundamental question about the viability of international law under current world conditions, and as you say, it works quite well for routine interactions, not only commercial ones, and trade, but also maritime safety, public order of the oceans, things like that. But when you get to peace and security issues, it is no better and no worse than the geopolitics of the dominant countries in the world. That's been true for a long time. It's accentuated these days because you have these ultra-nationalist leaders like our own. But the structural reality has been there ever since international law was born. It's inscribed in the constitutional order of the U.N. that gives the five victorious countries in World War II, veto power, which in effect is saying they have an exemption from obeying international law whenever they see fit and they can protect their friends also from any kind of accountability under international law, which the US has been doing with respect to Israel, rather shamelessly now for decades.

Ralph Nader: Well, as you know, we have overthrown over 50 governments. Some of them duly elected like in 1953, overthrew the duly elected government in Iran and about the same time in Guatemala, and it just keeps going on and on. After a while, the norm becomes intervention. Other countries say, you know, the US does it, we can do it. It seems like a double standard here, that is if our embassy has taken over in Tehran, as it was, by the Khomeini revolution, then we invoke international law. But when it comes to our invasions of countries, or other violations, we ignore or violate it with impunity. So doesn't this raise a question--is there any enforcement arm for international law under treaties or by the U.N.?

Richard Falk: Yeah, well you put your finger on several key issues. The reality is there's enforcement, but only when it has geopolitical muscle behind it. So if the US, for instance, wants to punish Khadafy's Libya, it could produce something that at least was called enforcement. And there is a pervasive double standard, even after World War II, when German and Japanese leaders were held accountable for war crimes, the crimes of the victors including the use of atomic bombs against Hiroshima and Nagasaki, were accorded impunity. So there's been this double standard throughout. A Mexican delegate, when the UN was first established said, "We've created an organization that holds the mice accountable, while the tigers roam free." There's a lot of truth to that. As you say, when the embassy was seized by Iran in 1979, we called it a barbaric act of violating international law. But when we do equally flagrant acts that

depart from international law, we invoke American exceptionalism and other ways of explaining away our responsibility.

Ralph Nader: Well most of the time, when countries violate international law clearly with military action, they say it's defense, it's for national defense. There isn't anything that Israel has ever done to the surrounding countries bombing just recently many times Syria, which certainly doesn't threaten them; they're involved in the civil war. It's always, well, "it's national defense". Well there's a federal statute, as you know, says no US Military aid to any country can be used for offense purposes. And so all the US military aid to Israel over the last 50/60 years, has never been viewed as used for anything but defensive purposes. What's your comment on that? I mean it seems so fallacious--like the invasion of Lebanon and the constant incursions and bombings--what's your analysis of the lack of any boundaries for the concept under international law of self-defense?

Richard Falk: Well, I think, again, it's a key issue. You have to distinguish legal rationalizations from legality, and what has been done in relation to Israel, is to make rationalizations that there's no political motivation to question within our own domestic, political system. So they're accepted on face value, but any kind of third-party examination of those rationalizations would dismiss them, almost all of them, because they were not, clearly not using force defensively; they were violating the charter. But there's no third-party mechanism that can override these legal rationalizations that rest on nothing more than an attempt to cover illegality.

Ralph Nader: Not even the International Court?

Richard Falk: Well the International Court (of Justice) depends on the voluntary acceptance of its jurisdiction by states. You remember the Nicaragua case, which was brought by Nicaraguan protest against the mining of their harbors and teaching torture to the Contras, the US backed out of the Court, renounced its acceptance of any kind of jurisdiction by the Court, and refused to be bound by the judgement that resulted. In the end, it did, supposedly by its own unilateral action, decide to stop mining the harbors. But it did it without any acknowledgement that it was a legal obligation to do what it was doing.

Ralph Nader: If U.N. has the authority to impose sanctions or peacekeeping groups. But the veto of the United States or any of the other four countries that have the veto precludes that. So really, the U.N. is powerless in this particular area?

Richard Falk: What I think it's best to understand is that the U.N., as an organization, was created to give primacy to geopolitics, when it comes to any kind of decisions, or enforcement, or implementation. So when the geopolitical actors that have the veto can agree as they did in the first Iraq War back in '92, I think it was, then the U.N. can be very effective, because it has geopolitical muscle behind it. But throughout the whole cold war, and in recent years, it has no capacity to form a consensus, and therefore no capacity to implement its preferences, or its judgments about who is responsible for what.

Ralph Nader: Well let's take a look at the Saudi attack on Yemen, which is producing a major humanitarian crisis. Tens of thousand of Yemins have been killed. The Saudis are very sensitive about their southern border. In fact, some of the tribes now are in the ruling part of Saudi Arabia came from Yemen, many, many generations ago. What's the status of international law there? Does the Saudi regime have a claim of self-defense against the Houthis? And if so, does that exonerate the United

States from violating international law by supporting with logistics and fueling and equipment, the Saudi periodic attacks, very often on civilian targets, hospitals, schools?

Richard Falk: No. The short answer is no, the Saudis have no convincing legal rationale for what they've been doing to Yemen. Then the specific acts of bombing hospitals and other civilian targets are separate violations of the Law of War and the United States is complicit in both the aggression by Saudi Arabia against Yemen and the specific violations to the extent that it has knowledge, and continues to contribute materially to the Saudi policies of aggressive war.

Ralph Nader: You mentioned the Law of War; where is that rooted in?

Richard Falk: There's a basic division between the Law of War that is what states supposedly can do in the course of war, which goes back to the Hague Conventions of the early 20th Century, especially the Hague Convention on Land Warfare in 1907. Then there's the International Humanitarian Law, which was basically developed in the four Geneva Conventions that were adopted in 1949 after World War II, and tried to fill the gap in the Law of War that existed because prisoners of war were not being protected, and a situation where a civilian population is subject to belligerent occupation, was not covered by the Law of War. So International Humanitarian Law is an attempt to reconcile the conduct of war with a maximum effort to protect those that are innocent.

Ralph Nader: And, it turns out, as you've written, more countries are using intervention under the cover of humanitarian intervention. Can you discuss that? Why do they do that?

Richard Falk: Well, because the U.N. doesn't have an effective, persuasive power to determine when the use of force is justified, unless the Security Council mandates the use of force as it did against Iraq back in 1992, each country basically can call whatever it does, a name that mobilizes public support. Humanitarian intervention is what Noam Chomsky, for instance, has called "military humanism". It's an attempt to paper over the use of force in very controversial, non-defensive situations. Kosovo was an example back in 1999, where NATO intervened, supposedly to protect the Kosovo majority from Serbian atrocities. But there was no legal mandate given by the U.N.; therefore the only legal use of force would have been self-defense and Kosovo and Serbia were not in any way engaged in attacking any other country.

Ralph Nader: It seems to me, just looking over the decades that there were bursts of energy in establishing international treaties, back several decades ago. For whatever they're worth, they are porous, but we do have nuclear arms control agreements. We do have the anti-proliferation agreement with many countries. We have international treaties on biological and chemical warfare. But there's almost nothing going on right now on cyber security war or cyber warfare, which is being conducted by everybody--not just the so-called Russian intrusion. We're embedded in their infrastructure and China is embedded in ours, and we're embedded in China. There's war going on--cyber war. No one is taking any leadership to initiate negotiations for an international treaty, is that correct?

Richard Falk: You're quite right, Ralph. But you have to examine treaty by treaty. For instance, you mentioned non-proliferation treaty, which is probably the most important treaty in the nuclear domain. But that's a treaty that serves the interest of these geopolitical actors, because it's really saying, the danger of nuclear weapons comes not from the countries that possess them, but from the countries that don't, who might want them. These treaties, especially in the peace and security area, are treaties

that reflect the interests at the time of the governments that sponsor them. The US had an interest after World War II, in creating this liberal, international order, which they wanted to be rule based. So they did a lot to generate international agreements that were comprehensive, and to a large extent benefited the international community as a whole. But in recent years, and particularly since the end of the Cold War, the US has pursued a kind of unilateral diplomacy, in which it has not wanted to be in any way constrained by international law. That comes not just from the White House, and executive office, but it's also embedded in this shift to the right, domestically, that's reflected in Congress; for instance, the Kyoto Protocol, which was an early attempt to limit carbon emissions that were causing global warming. No presidents, including Clinton, were able even to submit that to the Senate for ratification, there was so much opposition. So the domestic, political climate is very hostile to relying on international law as a way to uphold American foreign policy objectives and that explains the weakness in this current period.

Ralph Nader: Even worse, today we have this prospect where the national security adviser to Donald Trump is John Bolton, graduate of Yale Law School. He wrote articles before he assumed his post, - which actually, should be confirmable, but it wasn't - saying we should bomb North Korea; we should overthrow the regime in Iran. He has no sensitivity whatsoever to international, legal restraints, or treaties, or anything of that sort. The new Secretary of State, Michael Pompeo, the same way, graduate of Harvard Law School, you wonder what they learned. The rumors in Washington is that if Trump is cornered by the Mueller investigation, and he doesn't see a way out, that he puts Pompeo as Secretary of Defense, replaces Mattis, and replaces his chief of staff, retired General Kelly, and puts another John Bolton type there, and starts a war against Iran, in order to distract attention from his domestic troubles. Are there any legal restraints here? I mean, other than the nominal impeachment?

Richard Falk: The only really legal restraints are dependent on the political will of those that have the legal authority. So far there's been, in my view, a very disappointing dereliction of constitutional responsibility by Congress, in not calling Trump to account for any number of things. But you're right, John Bolton has attacked the International Criminal Court (of Justice) recently, as a(n) illegitimate institution, and it should be abolished, and it has no authority, and lots of other things. So that there's a consistent pattern now of saying international law serves the weak and should not be adhered to by countries that pursue their interest for their own benefit. So national interest under Trump presidency, consistently overrides the claims of international law.

Ralph Nader: You know I can hear our listeners saying, well, if the people are sovereign, why can't people sue in federal court, to stop this illegality by the government that they have delegated their sovereign power to. Why don't you explain how the courts have ducked, in the doctrines they used to duck citizen suits?

Richard Falk: During the Vietnam war, particularly, lots of citizens tried to hold the government to account under international law. And the courts did two main things to prevent that from ever happening. One was to say, citizens had no, what they called, justiciable interest, and therefore they had no standing to make such a legal complaint. The second thing was to say, that the questions being raised by the citizen complaints, were "political questions" and therefore exclusively subject to executive or presidential authority.

Ralph Nader: Would you call those ruses?

Richard Falk: Well, they represented a Hamiltonian view of government, that you need a strong executive for foreign policy that the Congress doesn't really understand. I mean, it represents an idea of government that doesn't fit the realities of the 20th, much less, the 21st century. But I wouldn't say it's purely a ruse. It's an anachronistic view of how states, including powerful ones like our own, should operate in the world. I've long held the view that the US and the American people would be better off if our leaders felt constrained by international law and that when we violated it, it's usually done damage to our own interests as well as our capacity to exert positive leadership in the world; the Vietnam War being a classic instance of this.

Ralph Nader: Your observation raises the hypocritical issue of our judiciary, which is the conservatives on the Supreme Court have been spectacular judicial activists, overturning congressionally enacted statutes, blocking people with the lacking standing to sue and going back to the 1880's, actually, giving artificial entities called corporations, personhood, qualifying them for rights under the 14th Amendment. It's like our attitude towards the law, when it serves our purpose, we invoke it and when it doesn't serve our purpose, we find reasons to ignore or violate it. I want to get into the Israeli Middle East area very quickly, with some questions you may have never been asked. But they're very constructive--two in particular. One is, why haven't the leaders of the peace movement in Israel, or the opposition to Netanyahu and his treatment of Palestinians, which involved, as the movie, The Gatekeepers showed, former retired heads of the Mossad, and heads of the Shin Bet, and ministers of justice, mayors of Haifa, very prominent people. Why have they not demanded to be heard at a congressional hearing? In the last 60 years, the opposing view to AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) and the Israeli military regime, has never had a congressional hearing. The pro-Palestinian groups in the US including Jewish Voices for Peace, should they be asking? What's the problem here? It's very hard for Congress to turn down these former leaders in Israel, as they might turn down some citizen advocates here because of AIPAC's pressure. Isn't that a good idea?

Richard Falk: Yeah, I think it's an excellent idea. But you have to mobilize those people to step outside their own national frame of reference to do that. It would take a major campaign, I think, to motivate them to do that. But it would be quite an effective initiative. As far as within the country is concerned, you mentioned Jewish Voice for Peace and there are other groups, too, there's no sufficient countervailing force to AIPAC, to give congressional people the incentive to hear both sides. Where a pressure group is not neutralized, at least to some degree by a countervailing force, there's no upside for the politician to take a balanced view. That's Israel's classic example of that interplay of power and law, where law is completely suppressed by the primacy of politics.

Ralph Nader: There's more than one sign in the Haaretz newspaper that these former heads of powerful institutions in Israel would be eager to come and testify before the Senate Foreign Relations or House Foreign Relations committee. That would of course generate a lot of news coverage, and perhaps begin to dilute some of the opposition. I mean it's pretty hard to turn these people down. They're very prominent people in the national security area. They support the Iran Nuclear deal against the erosive impact of Prime Minister Netanyahu, as you've pointed out in your articles. Well, anyway, the next question I wanted to ask is, the attacks on Gaza by the Israelis, not only the major invasions, but the periodic skirmishes, are entirely justified by the rockets fired from the garages in Gaza. These are crude rockets, that fortunately, 98% of them fall on the desert floor. Whatever injuries occurred, it's far less than what the Israelis have suffered from friendly fire in their war in Gaza. Yet, it's quite clear that the Israelis know where these garages are. National security experts have said, the minute the rocket is

fired, it takes three to four seconds for the Israelis to know the source, and they can fire a missile at it. They know everything about Gaza, down to the DNA of some of these families. They know who's going to weddings, who's going to be in what homes for gatherings. They have informants everywhere. It's the most explicit surveillance state in the history of the world, with modern electronic technology. The question is, why hasn't this been exposed--that if you eliminate the rocket self-defense issue, you eliminate the only pretext they really have left for bombarding Gaza, and inflicting horrific casualties on children and innocents.

Richard Falk: There are several points in your assessment of the situation. The first is that these rockets are not really the provocation for the Israeli attacks. These demonstrations near the Gaza fence, were initiated largely by civil society--almost totally by civil society. They were unarmed and Israel used excessive force and collective punishment, which both are unlawful tactics, to inflict huge casualties on these demonstrators, when they had all the technique and capabilities of controlling the demonstrations without inflicting lethal injuries. They know better than probably any country in the world, how to manage crowd control and demonstrations. So they deliberately chose to engage in these kind of tactics of excessive force, because their objective at this point is to make the Palestinians feel that they are pursuing a lost cause, and should politically surrender. That's the Trump policy and that's the Netanyahu policy. These various dramas that cause great suffering, have to be understood and interpreted in light of this broader context. In that sense, what has been happening on the Gaza border is an extraordinary demonstration of the Palestinian desperation to show that their resistance is still a living reality.

Ralph Nader: You know, in your writings you defined the conventional definition of terrorism is political attacks on innocent civilians with carnage. Certainly in terms of the numbers, the US has killed far more innocent civilians in places like Iraq or caused conditions by blowing up infrastructure--innocent civilians in Iraq, figures over one million. The Israelis are now inflicting at the ratio of at least 400 to 1 casualties, fatalities and injuries on Palestinians compared to what is inflicted on Israeli innocent civilians. The state terrorism is far, far greater than non-state terrorism in your judgement. Why is it that the US has designated Hamas and Hezbollah as terrorist organizations? What would be your rebuttal of that?

Richard Falk: Well, they are designated as such because they are political adversaries of the US, and both of them have sought to find ways of reaching political accommodations, particularly in recent years. The notion that they should be isolated as terrorist organizations is a purely political cover for justifying Israeli and US violence. It really has no root in the objective facts that condition the behavior of these various actors. Hamas is far from a perfect political organization, but it recognizes that its future is based on political action at this point, not on engaging in violence. These rocket attacks only occur after rather severe Israeli provocation. This provocation in this instance was not only the excessive force at the border, but also Israeli Special Forces penetrated Gaza, killed seven Palestinian militants and the rockets were fired in response to that act. So you have to look at the timeline when these rocket attacks occur. As you say, even when they occur, they're mainly symbolic gestures. The Hamas has refrained from using its more advanced munitions which could inflict real damage. It wants not to have the violence escalated.

Ralph Nader: But as you say, Hezbollah defended its territory against Israeli occupation, is now in the Lebanese Parliament, major coalition with other groups, and has protected Lebanon from the spillover from Syria, which we might want to talk about someday, but we're running out of time. But let me ask

this last question, you've questioned the Saudi-Israeli coalition against Iran. You said that the Iran Nuclear deal was one sided to the advantage of the US and Israel--the opposite of what Trump is saying. What do you think of the recent events in terms of this coalition staying together against Iran and Turkey?

Richard Falk: I think it's highly irresponsible and provocative, and could degenerate into a regional war with much suffering added to the present turmoil, and with a leader such as we have in the White House, it's a very dangerous situation that has no justification in law, morality, or in my judgement, in politics. It's purely an effort to exert hegemonic control over the Middle East and it has a sectarian dimension of the Sunni Saudis versus the Shia Iranians. Iran has acted in some of these other conflicts, but in a relatively minor way, except Syria. It's done far less to disrupt the stability of the region than Saudi Arabia or the US or Israel have done.

Ralph Nader: Well, on that note, let me ask, what are you working on next? You're a prolific writer, you travel to gatherings in Europe and elsewhere trying to uphold international law, keep the norms alive, so to speak, what are you writing?

Richard Falk: I continue to work on the sort of stuff we've been talking about. Maybe with a hubris or senility, I'm not sure which, trying to write a memoir.

Ralph Nader: Well we look forward to that. You've also written a poem, and you've got legions of students who you've taught over the years. Your integrity is impeccable. You represented the U.N. in Israel and were rather mistreated and obstructed by the Israeli government. But the international law specialists, I think need to be heard from more vigorously, whether before congressional hearings, which may be made available in the new House of Representatives, and definitely in terms of more petitions and joint letters. I think that doesn't get anything done directly, but it keeps the standards of international law alive against the brute force of military power.

Richard Falk: Let me make just one, final point about the role of international lawyers in this country. Most of them overwhelmingly, especially at these leading universities, are much more interested in being called upon to advise the US government, than to act as a source of objective assessment of whether the policies are legal or not. So you can't realistically look to these institutions, and these experts, as a source of constraint. It's unfortunate, but it's part of the reality. Hopefully, Congress now, because of its somewhat altered character, may see the opportunity to use international law, to constrain in certain ways, the Trump foreign policy, and some of his lieutenants like Bolton and Pompeo and others.

Ralph Nader: Indeed, and maybe a sub-committee of the House Judiciary Committee can start having hearings on the status of international law. Thank you very much Professor Richard Falk. I hope we can continue this discussion.

Richard Falk: Thank you Ralph. Your issues were excellent, from my point of view. You really put your finger on many of the crucial questions of world order that face the peoples of the world, not only Americans.

Ralph Nader: Thank you. And just for our listeners, Professor Falk has written a very incisive piece on Trump and Trumpism--far more detailed and insightful than most of the easy assaults on Trump's tweets. How can they get that Professor Falk?

Richard Falk: Well I guess the easiest way is through my blog which is RichardFalk.wordpress.com.

Ralph Nader: That's spelled F-A-L-K. Thank you very much Richard.

Richard Falk: Good Ralph. Great talking. Take care.

David Feldman: We have been speaking with Professor Richard Falk. We will link to his important work at the "Ralph Nader Radio Hour" website. Right now we're gonna take a short break. When we come back, we'll find out about the real-life giants who have as much wealth as half the entire world, and what that means for the rest of us. Let's go to our Corporate Crime Reporter, Russell Mokhiber. You are listening to the "Ralph Nader Radio Hour". Back in a minute.

Russell Mokhiber: From the National Press building in Washington DC, this is your Corporate Crime Reporter "Morning Minute" for Friday, November 23, 2018. I'm Russell Mokhiber. The German Chemical Industry Association, a partner of the prominent anti-corruption NGO Transparency International, has lobbied European Union officials in opposition to strengthening whistleblower rights in the EU. Berlin-based Transparency International had been advocating for improved whistleblower protection throughout Europe for the last decade. Yet, it entered into a formal partnership this year with the German Chemical Industry Association, which has lobbied against this. Mark Worth of the European Center for Whistleblower Rights, told Corporate Crime Reporter last week that Transparency International has abandoned its long-held mission to defend and protect the public interest, by allowing itself to be corrupted by some of the largest corporate interests in Germany. For the Corporate Crime Reporter, I'm Russell Mokhiber.

David Feldman: Thank you Russell. Welcome back to the "Ralph Nader Radio Hour". My name is David Feldman. Steve Skrovan is off this week and Ralph Nader of course is here. Our next guest is gonna tell us who really controls the world's wealth. Peter Philips is a Professor of Political Sociology at Sonoma State University, former Director of Project Censored, and former President of Media Freedom Foundation. He has written, or co-authored a number of books about politics and media. His most recent book is *Giants: The Global Power Elite*. Welcome to the "Ralph Nader Radio Hour" Professor Philips.

Peter Philips: Thank you very much. Glad to be here.

Ralph Nader: Indeed. Let's get one shibboleth out of the way here, the minute people of some persuasions hear about the global power elite, they say, oh, there go the conspiracy theorists again. I always react in two ways. One way is, you know, there are powerful people who work together and plan together strategically, plan, to get their way in the world. If that's a conspiracy, that's the dictionary definition. The second is, there are wild conspiracy theories that may be plausible, but they're not evidential, they're not accurate. You work, Peter Philips, is very evidence-based, and you are basically stating that the course of human history is always concentrated power in the hands of a few over thousands of years--every culture, every society. Now that we are into this age of globalism, they're operating globally. Having said that, how would you summarize this prodigious work of yours, which is 380 pages called *Giants: The Global Power Elite*, published just recently by Seven Stories Press in New York City. How would you summarize it? If someone asked you in the New York Times--you know, that column that they have by John Williams--"5 Things About Your Book". Okay, here's the first thing I want to ask you, what is this book about?

Peter Philips: It's about concentrated global capital, and who are the people that control it. We're looking at the companies—the transnational investment companies—that have over a trillion dollars worth of capital that they manage. There are seventeen of them in 2017. They collectively manage 41 trillion dollars worth of wealth. They're only controlled by 199 people on their board of directors. So we look at this list of 199 people and we examine who they are and their backgrounds, and their net worth—their public net worth. And we see some very similar patterns. There's a sociology here that's somewhat collective, in that these people have various shared interests. They know each other. They interact together off in Davos and other transnational policy groups. They're simply managing the core amount of money in global capitalism today. I mean, a trillion is a thousand billion. So if we're talking here 40 trillion; it's probably 50 trillion today. It's this massive amount of capital and they get to make the decisions as to where that's invested, what the policies would be around it. And their biggest problem is they got too much capital to invest in safe places so the result is that they're doing speculative investments, like the subprime mortgage loans that we saw almost collapse the entire economy in 2008. They got bailed out from that so they have all this money now that they're trying to invest in different places. One of the ways that they do that is to invest in public resources so they want to buy up anything they can get a return on—that could be freeways, it can be universities, it can be water rights globally. They're trying to buy up the public domain. That's one way of using excess capital. The other way of using excess capital is permanent war so we're preparing for war, we're engaged in war. The US military empire in NATO have troops all over the world at 800 bases and that's using up capital that they get a return on. So this core centerpiece of transnational capital, and I say transnational because there's people from most of the capitalist nations of the world that are in this little, tiny network. That's the sociology of it.

Ralph Nader: What's interesting is, of course money and profit, and power are what bind them together and they're quite diverse. They're from many ethnic groups, many countries, many religious backgrounds. That isn't what binds them together; it's money, power, and control, right?

Peter Philips: Correct. But they're still mostly white males from Europe or North America. But they have representatives from people all over the world.

Ralph Nader: More and more—from Asia.

Peter Philips: Increasingly, yes.

Ralph Nader: Yeah. The billionaires, know no national boundaries. Tell us how this book is organized.

Peter Philips: Well we start out by identifying the directors of the 17 transnational companies. One of the big things we talk about in that capacity is that they're all interconnected and they're all invested in each other. So these 17 giants, we call them, transnational trillion-dollar companies, they all invest in each other. That was pretty amazing. As we were looking at that through the NASDAQ investment background portfolios on these companies, I started to notice, wow, they're all invested in BlackRock; they're all invested in Chase Manhattan. So just in the NASDAQ, it's over 400 billion these 17 companies show. So they're one vast network of interconnected capital that's global. And that all governments, all intelligence agencies, all military groups and business policy groups are in support of protecting that capital growth—that capital's ability to penetrate anywhere in the world, and to make sure they have debt collection. So that is the core idea. The transnational capitalist class, 1 percent of the global, is a lot of people, millions. But this is the central core of that class. This is the 1000th of 1 percent; it's

actually far less than that. We're looking at these individuals, 389 are named in the book. Not only are they controlling the investment capital, but they're on various policy groups that are non-governmental. We all hear about the G-7 and G-20 in the World Bank and all of that. But these private policy groups, where capital people are engaged in making policy, like the Council of Thirty, as 32 people, some of the heads of various countries and banks, 31 of them are men. And when they've put out a policy position--they're totally privately funded--when they put out a policy position the World Bank sees that as instructions, not just recommendations. They have a huge amount of power. The other big one is the Trilateral Commission, originally funded Rockefeller, started in 70's, now has representatives from over 40 nations in it. They don't allow people who are in government; they only want high-level business people to advise them. They put out policy reports that are international. And they put out a policy report in 2015 that really said we had to go back to containment with Russia. And we've seen a very strong policy towards Russia and Putin ever since. The Trilateral Commission, the Council of 30; the other big one is the Atlantic Council. This is made up from organizations that are in NATO, and have representatives— it's based in Washington—they put out policy recommendations for regime changes, and how US NATO needs to protect global capital around the world. It's all private.

Ralph Nader: You have some presidents of universities here who are connected with gigantic mutual funds around the boards of different kinds of large, non-profits, while they're running the university. It isn't just multi-billionaires; it's power in its various manifestations. If listeners say, what's that got to do with them? Let's just try one example. You got millions of people who can't pay their bills. They go to these payday loan shops, and sign these contract-servitude, fine-print agreements and these payday loan businesses get their financing, often from Wall Street Banks--from big, multinational banks. Because all these money sloshing around, trillions of dollars, they don't know what to do with; they find very, very nefarious ways, not just the arms industry, military industry. You have in your book that they've bought up 30 million acres of land in Africa, these giant plantation, restoration projects that they have there with untold harm to the small African farmers and sharecroppers. That's beginning to spread also into South America. Let me put this question to you. We're talking to Peter Philips, the author of *Giants: The Global Power Elite*, just out, Seven Stories Press. Wealth is becoming more, and more concentrated in fewer hands and earlier in the program, David Feldman mentioned that you have focused on seven hyper, super-wealthy people whose wealth equals the combined wealth of the bottom three billion plus people on earth. Who are those people?

Peter Philips: Well, Jeff Bezos is the number one. He gets a lot of attention. He's the richest man in the world. He has a hundred and sixty billion dollars worth of wealth. But part of that is because the investment giants see Amazon as a place for good return. It's a massive investment—billions! I mean, some of these companies have fifty billion or more in Amazon. And that just helps; they see that by investing and raising the stock value they're getting a return, but Bezos becomes the richest man in the world. This is deliberate. And we all know about Bill Gates. They're just big trees on a forest. This book is about the sociology of the forest. It's like a redwood forest where all the trees are interconnected in their roots. Those roots—that's capitalism; that's capital—they know each other; they interact. I don't even list Bezos as one of the top 300 global elites. He certainly could be classified that way, but he's not interconnected in all of the policy councils that these people are. That's what's controlling global capital. That's the direction that it's moving. So he puts his money in one of these global giants as well--the excess capital he has--as did Obama, as does Trump. There's 2,000 plus billionaires in the world and 36 million millionaires. That's who has their excess capitals being managed, by companies like

BlackRock. BlackRock is based in New York. They control six trillion dollars worth of capital investment, and Obama's money.

Ralph Nader: They also control trillions of dollars of worker pension funds.

Peter Philips: Absolutely.

Ralph Nader: This is amazing--this split between ownership of these moneys by workers and their control is seized by these giant firms. On Chapter 7 and 8, because I want, in the remaining time, you have a chapter that says facing the juggernaut democracy movements and resistance. Then you have an interesting post script, a letter to the global power elite. Do you want to summarize both of those Peter Philips?

Peter Philips: Well, one of the things we ended the book with is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which I think is a very vital instrument developed over 70 years after World War II, passed by all the nations in the world. It's not a treaty; it's a moral code of standards for what it means human rights are. And so we're saying that the inequality that the global elites are creating today, where 80% of the people in the world live on less than \$10 a day and half the people live on less than \$2.50 a day--that mass inequality is only increasing. And they believe that by growing capitalism, they can grow out of that, and it will trickle down to everybody in the world. But that's not happening. We're losing the world environmentally. Wealth is concentrated more among elites, and the global transnational class, the top 1%. That's a big problem. We write a letter, dear Global Power Elite, we list 389 of you on the book and you should be honored and proud of your station, but also, this means you're a key part of management, support, and protecting major portions of the world's wealth. It's not possible that you can sustain wealth concentration; it's not sustainable. That creates the difficulties both environmentally and for economic collapse that could bring about global crisis, wars, billions of people could die. I think this is fairly eminent. And we had ninety of my associates and friends and other professors sign this letter and we just simply say, it's no longer acceptable for you to believe that you can manage capitalism to grow its way out of the gross inequalities we now face. The environment cannot accept more pollution and waste. Civil unrest everywhere is inevitable at some point. Humanity needs you to step up and ensure the trickle-down becomes a river of resources that reaches every child, family and all human beings. We're saying, and we're gonna have to pressure them to do this, but elites, you know, they're people, they have grandkids; they don't want the world to end. And they're endangering the entire planet and we have to convince them that they can help stop this in addition to social movements and power of resistance by human beings.

Ralph Nader: You have to save them from themselves in order to save the globe.

Peter Philips: That's what this letter is about.

Ralph Nader: And you were understating, because the threat of global pandemics, epidemics, not enough investment. They have trillions of dollars. They don't know productively what to do with it. It's really quite interesting. They're buying stock buybacks, seven trillions dollars in the last ten years, US companies. Apple announced earlier this year they were gonna buy back a hundred billion dollars of their stock--that's billion. That's 13 years' budgets of the Centers for Disease Control (and Prevention), dealing with global pandemics that know no barrier, of course. And it's 200 years of the federal government's Occupational Safety and Health Agency (OSHA). Guess how many people made that

decision? Tell me what your best guess is. Never mind all the shareholders and mutual funds and pension funds that own stock in Apple. How many people made the decision to use a hundred billion dollars of stockholders' wealth and buy back the stock.

Peter Philips: Less than a dozen probably. About a dozen.

Ralph Nader: If that--my guess is two made the decision (that) was rubber-stamped by the board of directors. It's not just concentration of wealth; it's concentration of decisional power and control.

Peter Philips: The one fact that really gets me is 30,000 people a day die in the world from starvation and malnutrition.

Ralph Nader: Totally preventable.

Peter Phillips: That's every day. That's ten million a year. There's more than enough food to feed everybody. It's just not profitable to sell that food. So a third of all the food in the world is wasted and thrown away.

Ralph Nader: Nine million people die from air pollution in the world. I'm gonna ask you this question. Some listeners are gonna laugh. Have you had an interview on NPR or PBS for this book? There isn't one like it--Giants: The Global Power Elite.

Peter Philips: No. We've tried. We've sent books out to them. We've been pushing them to do it, but no. We haven't had any response.

Ralph Nader: Unbelievable. Have you been on the "Terry Gross Show"?

Peter Philips: No.

Ralph Nader: Unbelievable. "Joshua Johnson Show"?

Peter Philips: No, mostly Pacifica (radio) and some independent radio stations around the country, but no, nothing big like that.

Ralph Nader: Pick up the phone listeners.

Peter Philips: I'm hoping that it will start to happen. This book is, I think, extremely important and powerful, because we name all the people. And of course you're not gonna like it if you're in the book, if you get named, but it's all public information. If you're on the board of directors, then public records would show what stocks you have in your network--how much you're paid to be on that board.

Ralph Nader: That's an important point listeners. Pick up the phone. Call your local NPR station--whether it's WAMC in Albany, or the stations in California, or Florida--ask them why they don't have Peter Philips on. Ask them how they compare the importance of what he has to convey with the usual programming that they have, never mind the music. We've been talking with Peter Philips, the author of Giants: The Global Power Elite, just published. Look at the top 389 most powerful people in world capitalism. Published by Seven Stories Press. To be continued. Thank you Peter.

Peter Philips: Thank you very much Ralph.

David Feldman: For those of you listening on the radio, that's our show. For you podcast listeners, stay tuned for some bonus material we call the Wrap Up. A transcript of this show will eventually appear on the "Ralph Nader Radio Hour" website. Join us next week for another informative and provocative episode of the "Ralph Nader Radio Hour". Thank you Ralph.

Ralph Nader: Thank you David. Thank you Jimmy. Thank you listeners. TheRatReformCongress.org is not only a way to get HOW THE RATS RE-FORMED THE CONGRESS autographed, but it shows you the reason for the book, and how to form a congressional rat watchers group in your congressional district. Clear, concise, informative material to get you underway at whatever level. Thank you.