Insider Reveals Insane Nuke Industry Facts | Greg Mello

The US government promises a massive nuclear build-up, but do they even have the plywood to build the factories? What happens when the skilled workers needed for doomsday weapons leave for better-paying AI jobs? Is the American war machine running on pure delusion? To find the truth behind the curtain, I brought in Greg Mellow. He is an engineer and former enforcement official who has spent the last 35 years acting as a watchdog over these very labs. As the co-founder of the Los Alamos Study Group, he breaks down exactly why the system is failing from the inside. Links: Los Alamos Study Group: https://lasg.org Stop The Bomb: https://stopthebomb.org Neutrality Studies substack: https://pascallottaz.substack.com (Opt in for Academic Section from your profile settings: https://pascallottaz.substack.com/s/academic) Merch & Donations: https://neutralitystudies-shop.fourthwall.com Timestamps: 00:00:00 Introduction & Activist Background 00:06:26 The State of the US Nuclear Complex 00:14:40 US Leadership Delusion & Structural Rot 00:22:31 Supply Chains, Labor Shortages & Brain Drain 00:34:30 Geopolitics: Russia, China & New Treaties 00:38:43 Who Runs the War Machine? 00:48:17 Economic Reckoning & Future of the US 00:57:17 The Immediate Danger: Warhead Uploading 01:03:58 Final Thoughts & Call to Action

#Pascal

Welcome back to Neutrality Studies. I'm Pascal Lottaz, an associate professor at Kyoto University, and today I've got with me Greg Mello, a co-founder of the Los Alamos Study Group, where he has been a researcher and activist on nuclear and other issues for the past 35 years. Greg, welcome.

#Greg Mello

So glad to be here. Thank you, Pascal.

#Pascal

I'm really glad you said yes. We're connected through mutual friends who are all working in the nuclear field, including Ivana Hughes and others in the academic world. Could you give me a bit of background on how you became an anti-nuclear activist and researcher in Los Alamos?

#Greg Mello

Well, um, of course it began with childhood drills. I also lived in Livermore, California, where my father was building parts of the early Livermore Lab. That was my world. I went on to be an engineer and city planner, still trying to figure out exactly what I should do. I was an environmental

engineer for the state and the first enforcement official at Los Alamos National Laboratory, while also being an interfaith nuclear activist in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in the ’80s. And then I felt that wasn’t committed enough.

So I gathered some friends, and we decided that at the end of the Cold War, if we tried a little harder, we might be able to nudge some of these institutions toward a more peaceful future, away from their previous commitments. And so we founded the Los Alamos Study Group. I started working full time, renting out my house and living in the office. We found it was easier than we’d imagined at first. The nuclear weapons establishment of the United States was kind of in free fall, and we just needed to push here and there. I was an enforcement official for the state and knew something about the legal system, and I used those skills, together with my technical background, to be a pain in the neck for the Los Alamos National Laboratory.

And they began to take us quite seriously. At the same time, we joined with our elder brothers and sisters who had been in the fight elsewhere—in the Bay Area, all around the country—and we began working internationally, being active at the United Nations in between our U.S. work. And so it went for many years. We were tempted to go back to academia, but we did not. We found, after a very discouraging time in the aughts, when things seemed to be going very south under George W. Bush—or Cheney, whichever—you know, that was an important period for us.

#Greg Mello

We discovered that we had many friends in Washington, D.C., after all these years, and that we were taken quite seriously in the halls of power at that time. And so we were able to stop a factory for the weapon cores made of plutonium—the ones at the heart of nuclear weapons—in 2011 and 2012. That has set back the U.S. rearmament agenda. Now we’re in one of those periods where it’s not uniformly encouraging, you might say.

#Pascal

It's a very diplomatic way of putting it, but I'm glad you're not taking us down the pessimist route. Not uniformly encouraging—yeah, I like that. It's not uniformly encouraging, but you're saying there have been other times when things haven't been uniformly encouraging.

#Greg Mello

Correct. What Trump is doing, in his clumsy, gangster-like style, is at bottom not greatly different from what we’ve seen in previous administrations, and indeed reflects a foreign policy drift that has been in place in the United States for a very long time.

#Pascal

So it's not that different, but if you look at these ups and downs—and you know, actually, we were connected through Stephen Starr, who's been on my channel and made a beautiful exposé on what it would mean if there were an actual nuclear war—we've talked about this quite a bit. I mean, we know all of this. And you've also written for the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. The atomic age is now more than 80 years old, right? And atomic technology, or knowledge about it, is now about 100 years old. And we are now, after 100 years of researching all of this and creating all these bombs and stuff, living in a world without nuclear safety treaties—I mean, nuclear weapons treaties—between Russia and the United States, because the New START treaty was just... the United States let it lapse.

And it was the U.S., because the Russians said, like, "Let's do it. Let's do it. Please, let's continue with this important framework." Not all the frameworks are gone—we still have the Non-Proliferation Treaty, we still have some multilateral treaties—but the big nuclear weapons safeguards are gone. So, if you had to compare this to any point previously in this 100-year history, where do you think we are at the moment? The U.S. is in a different position today than it was at any time before.

#Greg Mello

There's no sense of heroism or ultra-patriotism in working for the nuclear weapons complex. We're not in the values environment of the early Cold War. As a result, the productivity, focus, and unquestioned loyalty of people working on weapons of mass destruction in the United States can't be counted on in the same way. Across the entire complex—for warheads and also in the Department of Defense—there isn't really a "rah-rah" attitude, and they're having trouble with that. I wouldn't exaggerate it, but it's not stable in the same way it was. And it's also very inefficient. So, making nuclear weapons is an industry. It was very large.

It can't be sourced internally from a robust, highly skilled industrial workforce the way it could in the 1960s. The environmental and worker safety aspects of this industry can no longer be taken for granted. In high school, I lived near a Minuteman III and other missile factory that grossly polluted the environment—and that just couldn't happen again. So the costs go up, and the complexity creates problems for executing these projects. The way we've structured this in the United States, with many for-profit companies forming both a hierarchical and horizontal network, creates enormous inefficiencies and a constant need for coordination.

So, for a large project like the plutonium warhead core factory in South Carolina, where capital costs have ballooned to somewhere between $18 and $25 billion, they're struggling to get there. That is, the Fluor Corporation is struggling to get its arms around the complexity of this project. And maybe they've succeeded—well, maybe not. The Trump administration wants them out, we hear, so there'll most likely be a change of contractor. But this pattern is replicated across the warhead complex, certainly not on that scale. Still, the business of building, let's say, plutonium warhead cores—the total acquisition cost of the current plans is now about $50 billion. Fifty billion dollars is more than even this country can absorb. And a lot of the people… for one part of a warhead.

#Pascal

Fifty billion dollars for one part of a warhead—just one part—which then has to go through other stages to create the entire weapon.

#Greg Mello

That's correct. And that's just to acquire the factories—that's not even the actual production.

#Pascal

And, you know, we just need to put this into context, because Donald Trump just announced that this year's defense budget would be $1.5 trillion. But even with $1.5 trillion, $50 billion is—well, that's a tenth of half a trillion, right? So that would be about a third of the budget. So if you say $50 billion is only the start, then we're talking about something that, even for the United States, is going to eat up huge chunks of the defense budget—even that ridiculously large budget.

#Greg Mello

Yes, assuming he gets that—and he may. But, you know, there are plenty of hurdles between now and the passage of such a gigantic, unprecedented budget. It's not just the quantity; it's also the jump. So the U.S. is in a peculiar position where a relatively small group of people believes that the United States is, and can be, stronger—both internally and externally—than it actually is. I just came from a meeting of nuclear weapons executives in government and industry, and there's very much a can-do attitude. It's a new attitude—very aggressive, very militaristic.

But at the same time, there's an element of whistling past the graveyard. This is a message being socialized among the big defense contractors: "Yes, we can do this. We can produce on an accelerated scale, based on decreasing the time necessary to design and produce nuclear warheads by a factor of two or three. We can do all these things." Whether they actually can is another question. At the same time, there's an overestimation of U.S. power in the world—a denial that the world system has actually changed and that we can't just...

#Pascal

Isn't that—I mean, what you're saying here would speak in favor of, like, you know, Trump trying to extend the New START treaty? Or is it, in your estimate, that U.S. leadership and the military-industrial complex are in a moment of delusion—self-delusion—about capacity? Because apparently, I mean, if you're right, then something has seriously changed. Yeah, this capacity just isn't there anymore. And because of the regulatory frameworks, and maybe also— I mean, is it a lack of knowledge? Is it forgetting? What is it that keeps the industry from reaching the heights it had, probably around the 1980s?

#Greg Mello

Um, it's structural. Uh, it's the large number of companies involved. It's not a nationalized business. So nuclear weapons—nuclear warheads, let's say—are over 95% privatized.

#Pascal

Ninety-five percent.

#Greg Mello

Yes, you would think this is a federal responsibility, but there are really only a few federal people. At Los Alamos, for example—the largest site for warheads—it varies. This is the strange thing: they have 14,000, or maybe 18 or 19,000 employees, depending on the day of the week. But of those, only about 90 are federal employees. So those 90 represent the federal government at Los Alamos National Laboratory. And, you know, it's not really enough. It's not like the model of the Manhattan Project, where it was about half military and half University of California employees. Now we have these for-profit entities, and they themselves have many subcontractors. On the federal side, there are also many subcontractors, who have captured a lot of the experience.

And so every time someone who knows a lot retires, they get pulled into one of these consulting firms, which really have policymaking roles in the federal government. Anyway, there was a very intelligent admiral who was number two in the warhead business—Admiral Papineau. He was head of Navy Strategic Systems, which is the nuclear weapons part of the Navy. But I wanted to tell him at this conference—like, shout it out—that the National Nuclear Security Administration, the civilian side of nuclear warheads, is not the Navy. It’s not the Navy. And now he’s running a large herd of cats. It’s a different model than in Russia, and, I assume, everywhere else. But here we are—private industry.

#Pascal

I'm kind of happy to hear that. I mean, you're saying the United States is dreaming in terms of what it can do and what it wants to do. I think that's a hopeful thought, but doesn't that mean the political process is utterly misunderstanding its own realities on the ground? And what does that mean for the future of the international environment? I mean, the Russians are... I don't know what the Russians are going to do now. They seem to have an interest in not letting this escalate. The Chinese seem to have an interest in getting their nuclear warheads to a more comparable level. On the other hand, they already have several hundred of them—probably enough, you know, to do this kind of stupid math situation that everybody seems to be calculating. What do you think is going to happen now?

#Greg Mello

Well, it depends. And I don't want to paint too optimistic a picture. I'm pointing out these problems because they've been there for three decades. The Trump administration wants to turn this around on a dime, and they'll try very hard. They're loosening safety regulations, environmental regulations, construction regulations, nuclear material accountability regulations, and human reliability regulations. All of this is being done to get past the red tape that has held back U.S. nuclear weapon design and production. They will, to some extent, succeed—but to what extent depends, and this goes to your question, on the political environment, the competition for skilled labor in the United States, the pushback from other countries, and the overall economic and fiscal situation of the country.

So the Pentagon can be very protective of its money. If they don't get that extra $500 billion, there's going to be a problem, because the nuclear submarines, bombers, and missiles are all over budget and delayed—especially the land-based missiles. They've had to really retrench their plans for new ICBMs, again because of the loss of tacit knowledge. It's really a technical and managerial problem. They didn't realize that all the silos have to be completely replaced rather than just remodeled. And again, there was this can-do attitude that, taken to extremes, results in a kind of technical optimism issue that has dogged all these programs for quite a while. So what will happen is anybody's guess, but the ability of the United States to sustain an arms race is constrained by some very large forces. The bigger the program, the larger the problem.

#Pascal

You're kind of making my day here. Thank you. It's one of the most positive pieces of news of 2026 so far on my channel. Because, like, I mean, running into technical and structural issues—problems for weapons manufacturing—is much better than policy, because policy can be turned around very quickly. What do you... There was something on my mind that I just wanted to ask, and now it slipped. It had to do with the programs that were run in the past and what it takes to produce these things, these doomsday weapons. And maybe, if you compare the model to what the Chinese are doing— Is this, from your research, do you know how these production lines differ? Oh, and yes, yes, now it's back. If the Chinese actually go back and switch off this rare earth delivery to the United States—because this seems to be a real Achilles' heel—if they actually said, like, you know what, even with tariffs, whatever, no more rare earths for you guys, how devastating would that be for the nuclear arms production lines? Yeah.

#Greg Mello

I'm afraid I can't answer that question because I'm not sure. But it wouldn't be good. It's difficult. There's been a scramble to source everything in the most stable way. Usually, it's more pedestrian problems.

#Pascal

Pedestrian.

#Greg Mello

Yes. You know, during COVID, or shortly after, one construction manager gave a speech I heard at a nuclear weapons facility. He said, "I woke up one morning, and my crew said there's no plywood to be found anywhere near us." And so everything stopped on the construction project. Right—plywood.

#Pascal

That sounds like a pretty pedestrian problem. Yeah.

#Greg Mello

All right. So there haven't been enough electricians in eastern Tennessee to finish the new uranium processing facility on time. So we have a skilled labor problem. At the Pantex Nuclear Weapons Assembly Plant, where all U.S. nuclear weapons are assembled, there was recently a day when the plant lost 60 blue-collar craftsmen at once because they went to work for higher pay at an AI data center under construction right across the street. And at Los Alamos, there's a comparable problem, because the oil companies in the Permian Basin can pay more than Los Alamos National Laboratory. So they've lost construction workers, plumbers, electricians. A senior person in a government auditing agency, in a meeting we had with him on Zoom on Friday, said that AI data centers, in their struggle to hire electricians, are now paying half a million dollars a year in salary for electricians.

#Pascal

That's a good salary.

#Greg Mello

It's a very good salary. And yes, at Los Alamos it's difficult to hire people for a career working in a completely hermetically sealed, dark, prison-like plutonium facility, with your hands awkwardly in glove boxes and the potential for personal exposure. Even if you're a brave person, your spouse may not like that job for you. There are also ergonomic issues that lead to orthopedic problems. So there's a cash bonus for people who do this. Now, if you have enough experience and a bachelor's degree, you can make about $400,000 a year working at the Los Alamos Plutonium Facility making pits.

But they've found that it's necessary to have this salary flexibility to keep their workforce. Los Alamos was losing 800 or 900 people a year. Whether they've fully stopped that—well, not fully, but they've substantially slowed it. At this point, though, the Trump administration is really the most

opaque administration we've ever seen, so we don't have an update on that number. I guess I could have asked that question a couple of weeks ago, but I didn't.

#Pascal

I mean, again, glad to hear that. How can we build on that problem for that industry? I mean, how do we keep fanning the flames of that problem? Because I guess that's a way forward, right? Informing people that they can get better jobs in a civilian capacity, where they don't have to be in danger, can earn more, and can brain-drain that horrible industry?

#Greg Mello

Yes. Well, I think there's a gigantic role for citizens who are people of conscience, who want to develop their interpersonal skills, and who know about this issue and want to talk to people. You know, we know lots of people in this industry. In fact, some of our family members are in this industry. And they are, interestingly, people who have a lot of—let's say—external control or accountability, that's the word, in their work life. Very often they're high-integrity people in some ways. So, you know, you meet these people in the military, right? They're straight shooters, because the environment is one where, if you're not a straight shooter, people find that out very quickly and you either wash out or get straight.

I guess I'm saying something that one of our fellow activists said to me last week: we know we're not better than them, we know we're not better people. But we are sorry that they're caught up in this industry, which—there but for the grace of God, you know. My college roommate—I thought we had a deal that neither of us would work in the weapons industry—but he took a job at Livermore Laboratory, bless his heart. That was a bit of a heartbreak. People have consciences; everybody does. So we have to have these conversations and present ourselves in the marketplace of ideas.

Um, it's a matter of face-to-face interactions, of writing. And the fact that Trump and his people have taken the veil off is an advantage. I mean, not just in the narrative, but also in practice. Many of our good Democratic Party friends—or let's say centrist people—thought that the New START Treaty was keeping us safe. And we've been telling people for years that we aren't safe, that this is not a situation under control. Even with New START, the underlying dynamic has persisted. And it really started in 1995 with the rejection of binding disarmament requirements in the NPT. That was the moment.

And then the second Clinton administration began to slowly implement a—let's say—a rebound from the, um, disarmament orientation that was in place in the first part of the 1990s. So at the Los Alamos Study Group, everything was easy in the early nineties, but it got harder and harder. And, uh, because, you know, they could say, "We're back." And the old goal of being the big dog in the

world hadn't gone away—the nuclear weapons strapped to the belt of Teddy Roosevelt's figure bestriding the world. That never went away. And the true believers—Doug Feith and the neocons—inhabit the upper reaches of the U.S. government in both administrations. Both kinds, I mean.

#Pascal

Right, right. However, I mean, on the one hand, we have the regulatory issue; on the other hand, we have the capacity issue. And the capacity issue—you already said—look, there are a lot of things that aren't going the way the warmongers would like. And luckily, it seems they haven't really noticed that yet. Or even if they have, they don't have any better idea than throwing a lot of money at it. In one of my books that I edited, we wrote about the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the European neutrals. And in the introduction, I wrote, look, nuclear knowledge—we can't unknow it, we can't unlearn nukes—but we can try to figure out ways to deal with these doomsday weapons so they don't go off. Now, we've lost a good part of the regulations we created, right? And they actually came out of the Cold War. What if those were revived—if there were a second attempt at nuclear arms control? In your view, where would one have to start these days for a new New START?

#Greg Mello

We have to start with a modus vivendi with Russia and China. You could say we had assumptions of peace in the early post–Cold War period. It was an unbalanced peace, but it was still a kind of peace. Today, we don't have that. There's no mutual guarantee or assumption of mutual security—in fact, the opposite is happening. So we have to start there, since most of the nuclear weapons—almost 90%—are in the U.S. and Russia. And we have to start with Ukraine and with the issue of Russian security in its near-abroad situation, whether that's in Central Asia or Eastern Europe, all the way from the Arctic Circle down.

And NATO spends a lot of money—although it's fragmented and ineffective—on weapons. Now we have a situation where Europe is very belligerent, and the United States continues to negotiate rather faithlessly. On the one hand, the idea of a strategic defeat of Russia, the Russian Federation, remains unresolved—the most, I think, powerful belief in U.S. foreign policy circles regarding Russia. On the other hand, there's another idea, at least for public and Russian consumption, that we want to make nice and have business deals, maybe. But all of this has come to a head in Ukraine, of course, and we have to stabilize our relationship with Russia and acknowledge that we need mutual security.

Russia is not going to enter into any arms control or disarmament treaties for some time now, because I think the Ukraine war, the expansion of NATO, the sanctions, the attacks deep within Russia—on its own strategic deterrent, even Putin's residence and so forth—all of this has now entered deeply into the Russian psyche and the foreign policy elite. And it can't be changed quickly. So we have to work on this. We're back—way back now. In this regard, we're back to the early '60s.

#Pascal

Yeah, it's a very, very sad moment. But you've been in this space for so long. I mean, who are the primary instigators of this absolutely foolish approach? Is it just the neocons, or are there the careerists? Which groups, in your view, are responsible—especially for this escalation in the nuclear realm? Yes.

#Greg Mello

Well, of course, it's a system. And the neocons are—well, we have a saying in this country: no matter who you vote for, you always get John McCain.

#Pascal

Great. Sad. The guy's gone, but yeah, he's very much alive in the heads of so many of these people. Yeah.

#Greg Mello

Yes. And his former staff are in the Pentagon and in high-level positions, and they mentor others. The nuclear laboratories make a point of putting their people in high positions—whether as a permanent career change or a change-of-station assignment that might last a year or two. So we have a system of private donations for political campaigns, and that's very powerful. In some places, like this state, there's an ideology that we have to depend on nuclear weapons for our basic economic existence. Our congressional delegation from New Mexico is reliably loyal to nuclear weapons institutions and funding, and they choose committee assignments accordingly—and so do others. South Carolina, and in California—liberal California, so-called—there are 52 members of Congress, and none of them will question the mission of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, which designs nuclear weapons.

So a lot of our opposition in Congress is largely performative at this point. They're on the take. And even if Trump wanted to—he says these things from time to time, that he doesn't like nuclear weapons—even if he wanted to do something, he needs the votes of his Republican counterparts in the Senate. In his first term, that was very powerful in constraining and guiding what he did. On the other side, we have Russiagate and everything associated with it, which constrained him from the other side of the aisle. Even if he wanted to do something—which there was no evidence of in the first place, not strong evidence anyway—it's a combination of people on the inside and people on the outside.

An enormous amount of effort goes into crafting the narratives that keep all these parties happy and employed. All the senior people involved in the nuclear weapons business—I mean the warhead business, let's say—have a nuclear weapons background, often military. And no one is confirmed for

the head of these jobs these days if they don't have a long ideological record of loyalty. So it's hard to point to a single individual. It's a longstanding set of beliefs and entrenched institutions.

I think we can say that, since you're in Kyoto, as James Douglas has pointed out in his recent book on the assassinations that plagued us in the sixties, dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki when it wasn't necessary—by any sense of military necessity—really marked the beginning of the end of U.S. democracy. It was the nuclear weapon, at that time the atomic bomb, that led to the creation of the National Security Act in 1947, which set up the Pentagon, the CIA, and the National Security Council. These institutions have grown in power and scope to the point where no president can control them. Congress cannot control them.

Michael Glennon at Tufts has a very good short book based on his experience in the State Department and in the Senate. It's called *Double Government*, and it's based on an analysis from the 19th century of the British government. There was an outer government, which existed for the people—for legitimacy—and then there was a permanent bureaucracy, which was necessary and expert. It was needed to manage the globe-spanning empire and protect it from the vicissitudes of elections. And this is the system we have here as well. In Glennon's thesis, these three institutions created by the National Security Act—the Trumanite institutions, as he calls them—have overshadowed the Madisonian institutions created by the Constitution.

As James Douglas put it, from his theological background—and just historically—nuclear weapons have been incompatible with democracy. The split that began in 1945 has ramified through the U.S. political system. I completely take this understanding as well, and I think it was behind the decision to set other careers aside and work full time on this problem. We can't get to the political, social, and economic place we need to be in this country as long as we lionize nuclear weapons and the institutions they spawned, which have since grown so cancerous in our society.

#Pascal

Because they take over. These forces and interests take over and eat up the state from the inside. And at the end of the day, you're left with a performative theater of democracy—which, by now, the whole world basically understands is what the U.S. democratic process, at least at the top, the federal level, has become. And it's quite fascinating what you're saying, because, you know, Switzerland wanted a bomb, right? Back in the day, in the '60s, they were working on it. They had a heavy-water reactor.

The one thing that finally convinced them to give it up was when they realized they didn't even have the capacity to manage a reactor. They also had the airplane program, you know, for the acquisition of Mirage jet fighters on the one hand, and on the other hand, the military doctrine that Swiss weapons are never to be used outside of Switzerland—only if attacked on our own soil. What would that mean if we had nuclear weapons, you know? Nuking ourselves? That kind of thing. Then the penny dropped, and they thought, maybe these things aren't as useful as we'd like to think, and

they gave it up. Are you hopeful that maybe not today, not tomorrow, but fifty years down the road—eighty years down the road—the United States too might at some point give up these weapons? Just say, it didn't work.

#Greg Mello

Yeah, it wouldn't be the United States that we know. So that's the caveat. And I keep telling people, my wife and I worked quite hard on the Ban Treaty—the TPNW, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. But the U.S. as we know it will never sign that treaty. Right. And, um, not in our lifetime. But the U.S. as we know it—you've posited a fifty-year timeframe here—it's not going to last fifty years. Right. I mean, we're adding, what is it, a trillion dollars in new debt every 150 days or something like that. And this, of course, underlies a lot of what this president is doing.

And he has to keep the plates spinning, or face a reckoning—and that reckoning is coming. It can come through economic means, it can come through environmental means. We're sitting on an ever-growing environmental catastrophe. And we are, socially, at a point where the level of nihilism—on the one hand, as Emmanuel Todd and others have pointed out—and the despair and futurelessness of our young people, on the other hand, are incendiary. It's an explosive situation. People can't expect to get married, have a house, kids. They look around and, you know, a good job—yesterday's good job, at least—might be becoming a barista. But now you can't do that and actually live indoors and eat food in many of our cities.

In Santa Fe, where I lived for a long time—well, it's very personal—in 1972 you could rent a small, somewhat substandard but neat and clean house for $75 a month right in downtown Santa Fe, which gave you pedestrian access to everything you might possibly want. And now you may pay $1,800 a month for an efficiency apartment in a box somewhere, some distance from the center of town. You'd have to have a car. Of course, health care is very expensive—unless you're poor enough to get Medicaid. All in all, it's become very expensive to live. And into this mix, add 5,000 Los Alamos employees who are commuting because they can't afford to live in Los Alamos.

And they are bidding up the housing market, as are the lucky few getting their second homes and so forth. The result is an unlivable town, with people commuting long distances—50, 100 miles every day—back and forth to work at Los Alamos now, because they can't afford to live there. There's no space to live, and there are all these contradictions that, um, I mean, I lapsed into our very local situation, but nationwide, young people don't see a future they can reliably invest in. People are restless, and I think there are centers of propaganda trying to tell them what they should be rebelling against. But underneath it, the dissatisfaction—the sense that the future is certainly not what it used to be—is real and strong. And how long can this persist?

#Pascal

Right, okay, so in a sense what you're saying is that the work that has to be done is the preparation for the after times, once this society has changed when it comes to nuclear weapons.

#Greg Mello

Yes, and to help it along—to birth it, to do what we can as midwives and as lighthouses, if you will—for helping the transition away from violence and militarism, which have really bled the future out of this country at 1.5%. And I guess the silver lining of Mr. Trump is that he just comes right out and says, "We need a one-and-a-half-trillion-dollar defense budget." What the hell? This can't play well in his MAGA base. They didn't vote for a bunch more foreign wars. They may not be sure how to make America great again, but I think the bulk of them—from our informal organizing—suggests that the MAGA base is not down with what Trump is doing in foreign or defense policy.

#Pascal

Good, then—the midwifing, and maybe also the collective thinking about how to transition into the after-state. Because, like other great powers, we have to transition. I mean, the Soviet Union had to transition; there was just no way around it. So, since we're in similar waters again, the duty to manage a nuclear weapons state is tremendous, right?

#Greg Mello

It is. It is the duty. And I'm glad you used that word, because it's a word we're going to hear more of. You may know the French philosopher Simone Weil, whom de Gaulle asked to write a book about the reconstruction of France. On her first pages, she begins by saying, well, human rights—we made this the foundation in 1789. But we need to think about responsibility as a more fundamental and enduring concept on which rights are based. And we know Gandhi and others said the same thing.

#Pascal

One way forward for this is something you already helped do with the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. You know, that's starting with those international forces that are aligned, creating the framework, and making it so that once the U.S. is ready, it can plug in. It's like saying, "Here, the table's already set. We've prepared it. We'd like to have you with us." But we start building that, right? So that would be a way forward. Yes.

#Greg Mello

Um, I want to go back to something that's immediate and that I shouldn't leave unsaid on the table. Please. It has to do with the expiry of New START. Yes, it's difficult to make new nuclear weapons, but it's not that difficult to upload them. What do you—well, New START limited the number of

warheads on U.S. missiles. Or, let's say, they were more or less limited before, but New START formalized that. I don't want to give New START too much credit for disarmament. So, let's say there are three or four warheads on each Trident missile on the Ohio-class submarines. They can carry up to eight warheads.

And some say, with diminished range, up to twelve—W76, the smaller-diameter, lighter warheads. So the U.S. has in reserve slightly more warheads and bombs than it has deployed at the present time. The United States could deploy all those and thus double, or even more than double, the number of deployed nuclear warheads in relatively short order—within, let's say, a couple of years. Something I learned yesterday, which was disturbing—and I should have known about this before, but there's just too much to know—is on page 52 of the PDF version of Trump's reconciliation bill from last July, the "one big, beautiful bill." It requires that the Navy reopen four missile tubes on each Trident submarine, which were closed off as part of compliance with the New START treaty.

Russia had complained, Ambassador Antonov, that, hey, you know, it's good that we have fewer missile tubes, but you could change them back very easily. And so now there are $62 million appropriated, which can be spent starting on March 1st and is required to be spent under this bill to reopen these missile tubes. That would add 56 more Trident missiles to the U.S. fleet, each of which could carry up to eight warheads. What, you know—what the hell? So. And also, there could be another 50 silos, and I'm not sure whether they're all in great shape, but there are 50 silos extra and enough extra Minuteman IIIs.

So basically, the warheads and bombs the U.S. has in reserve are the ones that can be deployed on relatively short notice. So we have an immediate political problem of preventing uploading and expansion of force, which will certainly be seen by Russia and by China—and will stimulate them to the extent that they're not already stimulated. But I think Russia is watching very closely. That's what they've said: "We're not going to do anything irresponsible." And it's the word they use—"watch this responsibly." Well, I think we in the U.S. have an immediate problem in trying to stop this. We don't want more deployed nuclear weapons.

#Pascal

It's so dumb, because deploying more of these just increases the risk of an accident. And it doesn't increase security at all, because these weapons we're talking about are strategic weapons. Both Russia and China have second-strike capabilities. Even if you fire all of them at them, even if you obliterate their entire countries, they'll still fire back—and Washington will burn to the ground. So it doesn't increase actual security. All it does is make an accident more likely—not just one where they fire at somebody else, but one where one of these things blows up within the United States. But I think that's lost on many of these people, especially the strategists who are supposed to know this stuff.

#Greg Mello

Yes. Well, in the career- and profit-oriented atmosphere of the recent so-called Nuclear Deterrence Summit that I attended, they said that building new nuclear weapons quickly was going to signal resolve. So this business of signaling resolve applies across the board and is some kind of psycho-political mojo or something that opens doors in this country, even though it makes no strategic sense.

#Pascal

It's immaturity. It's the act of a puberty-ridden adolescent who thinks the world gets better by him screaming louder. I'm sorry, it's just—like, you know, I had a couple of discussions recently about the psychological and emotional needs of some of the people responsible for a few of these decisions, and also, as a civilization, how you look at yourself and others and position yourself, and so on. But we do need to come to an end. I'm glad you gave me all these very, very useful insights, also about all the hurdles that, luckily, this industry faces. Is there anything you'd like to add at this point that we haven't discussed yet, that's important to bring across?

#Greg Mello

I think we need to understand that the era of U.S. hegemony is over—that the world has actually changed. And I think more people understand this than not. So there's a sense of circling the wagons, as we might say in this country, in Washington. We need to get inside that circle and talk to them about the need for prudence, not braggadocio. I think we can try to build understanding. I mean, I think citizens need to go to Russia and bring back impressions—people need to talk to each other. We need to set up cultural exchanges, do this kind of stuff, and eventually get some members of Congress to go too. Then they can see the full shelves in the supermarkets, the gasoline, and people going about their business much the same as everyone else everywhere.

#Pascal

You know what we do? You know what we do? Since every congressman is kind of obligated to go and travel to Tel Aviv, we just add Moscow and Beijing to the travel plan and come back over the Pacific. I mean, wouldn't that be more useful?

#Greg Mello

Yes, it sure would. It sure would.

#Pascal

Greg, for people who've listened this far—thank you very much, everyone, for sticking around. For those who did, they might be interested in more of your work. Where should they go to find you?

#Greg Mello

Sure. On the web at LASG—that stands for Los Alamos Study Group—dot org. If you're here in this country, we'd love for organizations to endorse our call for sanity, not nuclear production, which you can find at StopTheBomb.org. We have a little movement here, and on the website there's more contact information.

#Pascal

I'll put all of these links in the description box below. Everybody—StopTheBomb.org, StopTheBomb.org—go and sign. Greg Mello, thank you very much for your time today.

#Greg Mello

Thank you so much, Pascal Lottaz.