

# US & EU Nuclear ESCALATION Is Insane | Profs. I. Hughes & P. Kuznick

Pascal Lottaz speaks with Ivana Nikolić Hughes of Columbia University and Peter Kuznick of American University about the NPT review conference, nuclear deterrence, first strike thinking, Trump and launch power, pressure for more states to seek nuclear weapons, the role of US allies in the Gulf, Europe and Japan, and the small but real hope offered by the nuclear ban treaty and public action. Links: Nuclear Age Peace Foundation: <https://www.wagingpeace.org/> Nuclear Insanity Substack: <https://nuclearinsanity.substack.com/> The Untold History of the United States by Oliver Stone and Peter Kuznick: <https://www.simonandschuster.net/books/The-Untold-History-of-the-United-States/Oliver-Stone/9781982102531> Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com/s/academic> (Opt in for Academic Section from your profile settings: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com/s/academic>) Merch: <https://neutralitystudies-shop.fourthwall.com> Donation: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Timestamps: 00:00:00 Introduction 00:00:24 Global danger and NPT review 00:05:05 Proliferation pressures rise 00:08:38 Deterrence and first strike risk 00:17:26 Disarmament failure and collapse 00:23:19 Iran and the limits of war 00:29:28 Trump and nuclear launch power 00:43:42 US allies and security shifts 00:56:17 Nuclear ban treaty and final hope

## #Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies. My name is Pascal Lottaz, and I am joined today by Dr. Ivana Nikolic-Hughes, the Director of the Frontiers of Science Program at Columbia University, and Dr. Peter Kacnik, Professor of History at the American University in Washington, D.C. Ivana, Peter, welcome. Glad to be with you.

## #Hughes

Thank you, Pascal. Thanks for having me.

## #Pascal

Glad to have you again. We were in an exchange recently about your experiences at the NPT conference where you were, and also several articles that you wrote about Japan, but also other U.S. allies and this relentless drive toward militarization. Ivana, can you maybe get us started a little bit with militarization—let's say the place that worries you the most at the moment in terms of the mindset that you're perceiving from the U.S. or these U.S. allies?

## #Hughes

I mean, I think everything worries me at this moment, Pascal. I think the situation is really quite dire. Obviously, what's going on in the Middle East is absolutely terrifying, and it continues. You know, we might have had some reprieves here and there, but that conflict is by no means over. Ukraine continues through this war, you know, four-plus years on. Maybe there are some signs of a possibility of an agreement or at the very least a ceasefire, but it's still obviously very shaky. You mentioned the NPT—just for the audience, this is the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. It's a very longstanding, decades-long treaty. It was negotiated in the 60s, signed in '68, entered into force in 1970. So it's been around for 56 years.

And it's meeting right now, right here in New York City, where I'm sitting in my home. It's meeting for its 11th review conference, and it's a very, very contentious conference. Peter and I have been there for almost the entire two and a half weeks that it's been going on. It's going to finish at the end of next week, so May 22nd. Peter and I were there together for a side event last Friday. Dealing with civil society colleagues and like-minded diplomats has been very joyful for me. Everything else has been very difficult. I think you might just be able to imagine that the first week was basically spent in this general debate.

And what was happening, much more than anything else, was different sides blaming each other for—you know, you can kind of imagine—who's blaming the U.S. for what's going on in Iran, who's blaming Iran, who's blaming Russia, who's blaming China, right? And it's just been this kind of back-and-forth bickering rather than really actually thinking about what they have in common, what they want to accomplish together, how they might bridge those differences together. And in particular, how they might set a path for this Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which, by the way, also includes obligations on nuclear disarmament.

And those are the main ones that have not been met in terms of nonproliferation. The states that had joined this treaty decades ago have not proliferated. The only one that ever actually was in the treaty and then left it and developed nuclear weapons was North Korea. So in that sense, the treaty has been a success. On the disarmament side, which is that the five states that are recognized as nuclear weapon states—the U.S., Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and China—have clearly not disarmed and are, in fact, pulling away from any efforts that would resemble a path toward disarmament. So I'll stop there and maybe give Peter a chance to add some more to the current context.

## **#Pascal**

Yeah, Peter, like, how are you perceiving the NPT Review Conference? And just for everybody listening, I mean, the NPT is probably the most important, one of the last remaining actual nuclear treaties we've got. And it's a multilateral treaty, and almost everybody is part of it. And it is the key

pillar of, you know, maintaining, of keeping the nuclear weapon states down to one digit. At the moment, we have nine. The United States keeps claiming that Iran wants one—that would be number 10—but Iran keeps saying, no, we don't want it.

We just want the benefits of the NPT, which is the right to have a nuclear program for civilian purposes—for energy and for medicine mostly. Absolutely. And they are claiming that, right, Peter? But it's not the case that the NPT was always like a cakewalk. It took 10 years to negotiate the thing, and also getting to review conferences was very difficult. If you compare the current situation with what you know from the history of it, where do you think it is at currently—the NPT as a regime, a global system?

## **#Kuznick**

Pascal, I just finished an interview with Iran's Press TV. It was a written interview, not an oral interview. Tomorrow, in a few days, with them. But this was a written interview, and they asked me five big questions about the NPT and Iran's role and responsibility, and U.S. demands that they give up enrichment completely and send out all of their enriched uranium, highly enriched uranium. You know, Iran clearly—both morally and legally—is in a much stronger position on all of this than the United States is.

But you ask where the NPT is historically, and it's hanging on by a thread, really. We've got so many countries on the verge of developing nuclear weapons, or at least thinking they have a right to and thinking they have a need to. Just to give you some examples, 73% of the people of South Korea say that South Korea should have its own nuclear weapons. Recently, the president of Poland, Duda, said Poland needs its own nuclear weapons. Zelensky has said, either let us join NATO or give us nuclear weapons. There's a strong faction in Japan who have been saying for years that Japan should have its own nuclear weapons.

We know Japan has a massive stockpile of plutonium and has the capability, scientifically and technologically, to develop nuclear weapons quickly. We sometimes say that Japan is a screwdriver twist away from having its own nuclear weapons. If Iran did move toward testing or developing a nuclear weapon, then Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates would all develop nuclear weapons immediately—probably other countries too. So the nuclear control, nuclear nonproliferation regime is very, very shaky at the moment. And then you've got countries like France offering to extend the nuclear umbrella over the rest of Europe.

## **#Pascal**

Hey, very brief intermission because I was recently banned from YouTube. And although I'm back, this can happen anytime again. So please consider subscribing not only here, but to my mailing list on Substack. That's [pascallottaz.substack.com](https://pascallottaz.substack.com). The link's going to be in the description below. And now, back to the video.

## #Kuznick

What we don't see at this point in history is people valuing diplomacy. We don't see negotiations. We don't see looking for peaceful off-ramps. What we've seen in recent years is diplomacy becoming a four-letter word. It happened under Biden. You know, Biden, instead of thinking about how we can try to resolve things diplomatically, kept giving Ukraine one advanced weapons system after another, even though he said that he didn't want to do anything that was going to provoke Russia into using nuclear weapons. When he gave permission to Ukraine to use the ATACMS missiles that the U.S. had given them to strike deep inside Russia, that was so dangerous. It was two years earlier before that that the CIA said it thought there was a 50-50 chance that Russia would use nuclear weapons. But nobody's respecting anybody else's red lines anymore.

People are resorting to military means to solve diplomatic issues. And we're just going the wrong direction as a planet and as a species right now. And it doesn't take much. You know, one of the most intelligent refutations of deterrence theory that I ever heard came from none other than Fred Astaire. Sorry, what is deterrence theory? What is deterrence theory? Deterrence theory, we see this now. On August 20th, 2024, there were two crucial articles published that same day. One in the New York Times by their chief security expert, David Sanger, saying the U.S. is preparing to fight a simultaneous three-front nuclear war against Russia, China, and North Korea. But that same day, the scarier article was in the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, which said that there are two schools of nuclear strategists.

One, the traditional school that believes in deterrence theory—maintaining a strong capability to retaliate with nuclear weapons, second-strike capability, and enough to wipe out your adversary—means that nobody's going to attack each other, so it'll serve as a deterrent. But the second school was a school that believed nuclear war can be fought and won. And they said with modern technology, artificial intelligence, new seismic technology, and cyber technology, the United States can now pinpoint the location of not only all the fighter jets and the bombers and the intercontinental ballistic missiles, but the United States can pinpoint the location of all Russian and Chinese submarines.

And the subs were always a stable part of the triad. So as long as you had nuclear subs, you could wipe out your adversary. But now these people are arguing that we can actually knock out all of Russia's and China's nuclear subs in a way that they would not be able to retaliate against the United States for a preemptive first nuclear strike. Now, we've had these kind of lunatics around since the dawn of the nuclear age. Leslie Groves talked in December of 1945 about a preemptive nuclear strike against the Soviet Union then, if they were making any effort to develop nuclear weapons. You had these people around during the Reagan years.

In 2006, Lieber and Press had an article in Foreign Affairs, the publication of the Council on Foreign Relations, saying the U.S. had developed a first-strike capability and we could wipe out Russia and

China without them being able to respond. The Washington Post reported that heads were spinning in the Kremlin because they thought this was official U.S. policy, and so it was in Foreign Affairs. So we've had this kind of thing. People are willing to gamble with the future existence of life on our planet on some crazy bet that this is going to work when it's so immoral, so illegal, so insane, but that we're up against madmen now with nuclear weapons. And Pascal Lottaz, in Israel and elsewhere. And Pascal Lottaz refuted that one? How did he refute it?

## **#Pascal**

The great dancer, Fred Astaire?

## **#Kuznick**

In the wonderful 1959 movie *\*On the Beach\**, Fred Astaire plays an Australian scientist named Julian. And what happens in this movie is a massive nuclear war in which cobalt bombs are used, and the radiation falls everywhere on the planet. And the only pocket of survivors is in Melbourne, Australia, the southernmost major city. So Gregory Peck comes down there with his submarine. He's a submarine commander on a U.S. submarine, and they're looking for the last pocket of survivors. And Fred is there on board the ship. Somebody asks him, "How did this happen? How did we wipe ourselves out?"

And he said, who would ever think human beings were so insane as to develop a theory that they could only defend themselves by using weapons that would lead to the end of life on the planet? And that's what the deterrence theory does. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy, when he was being pressured by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to execute, bomb the missile sites in Cuba, and then to invade, he turned to his aides afterward and said, if we listen to what these brass hats want us to do, then none of us will be alive to tell them they were wrong. And that's the thing about deterrence theory. It works to the point where it doesn't work. And then there's nobody left alive to tell them it was flawed from the beginning.

## **#Pascal**

Well, it's kind of nice for the people who do deterrence theory because they will die thinking they were right, right? But no, it's absolutely dumb. And, you know, I'm trying to understand how it is that intelligent people, highly intelligent people who are in the same circles as we are and, you know, go to the White House and whatnot, that they believe such nonsense. And, you know, I had on my channel just yesterday, I published a video where I talked with Rainer Rupp. Rainer Rupp was a chief NATO analyst and intelligence officer, and he actually spied for East Germany. He was a spy, and he relayed information straight to East Germany and through that route to the Kremlin back in the 70s and 80s.

And he's the man who forwarded, in 1983, the information to the Soviets that Able Archer, which was just as dangerous as the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Soviets believed that Able Archer was used as a cover in order to actually attack and decapitate their leadership. And they believed it. They were under the impression that Able Archer would be used to decapitate them because these lunatics that you're talking about were speaking in such terms before that. And he relayed the information that, no, actually, they're not doing that. I know for sure from inside NATO that this is not what it is. And the Soviets stood down and didn't launch the preemptive attack. He actually went to prison for seven years in the 1990s for having basically helped to save the world.

But he made the point, together with Ola Thunander from Sweden, that the nuclear umbrella, the one that you just talked about, Ivana, the nuclear umbrella was always the plan not to span an umbrella over all of Germany, over all of Europe. It was the plan to use nuclear weapons on German and European soil to stave off advancing Soviet troops. The nuclear umbrella was the plan to nuke Europe. And today, I cannot imagine it any differently. France would never risk a nuclear attack on Paris in order to defend Berlin or Warsaw, right? So all you would do is try to use tactical nukes on the territory of those states. Are the people who are spouting out such theories aware of the fact that what we are talking about is the actual, you know, nuclear escalation on all levels and actually the destruction of a lot of the planet? Maybe, Ivana, you can talk to that.

## **#Hughes**

Yeah, no, no. Just as Peter was talking about nuclear deterrence more generally, I wanted to share the quote by JFK: "If we do what they want us to do, none of us will be around to tell them they were wrong." It's such a perfect quote to sort of describe all of this insanity. I'll say one thing about what you're asking, like the people who are doing this—the interesting thing, and I was literally just at the UN earlier today, even with some former people from the US State Department—it's like they're all so passionate after they retire, you know? And it's the military generals, too. It's Annie Jacobsen. We were with her on Friday as well.

You know, she talks to all these retired people who tell her that this is like the biggest fear of their life. But they weren't saying it when they were in their jobs, right? When they were in their jobs, they were following protocol. They were defending nuclear deterrence. Some of the best critique of nuclear deterrence comes from General Lee Butler, you know, who was essentially head of our nuclear forces in the '90s and has written a searing critique of really the lunacy and the idiocy of it all. Because even if you accept, which I don't, that nuclear deterrence could work, could work, could work.

And there are lots of problems with that. The moment it doesn't work, we are all, you know, the planet is quite literally destroyed. And, you know, people have, even when I've been on your podcast or even other podcasts, sometimes I look at comments, and people say things like, "What is she talking about? Hiroshima and Nagasaki are just fine." And that's missing this really, really key

point, which is that it's not 1945. It's not one country having three nuclear weapons. It's nine countries possessing over 12,000 nuclear weapons, most of which are far more powerful than Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

And the consequences would be unthinkable, absolutely unthinkable. You know, the number of deaths from just the detonations themselves, the environmental conditions, the ozone layer destruction, the radiation spread, the nuclear winter, all of that. Absolutely. This is like the end of human civilization. And I'm not exaggerating. Right? Like, really listen to what I'm saying, because I'm not exaggerating. But just to go back to this point of nuclear deterrence, the other problem with it is, on the one hand, it could fail. And I think, you know, we can sort of acknowledge that. On the other hand, as long as the states that have nuclear weapons currently claim to have them as a way of ensuring their own security, then of course others are going to get the idea that maybe they should have nuclear weapons too.

I mean, the only logical thing then would be to say, oh yes, let's give nuclear weapons to all 193 UN member states, and then everyone will be really safe, right? Like, if that's your logic, then, you know, and as long as they keep not actually meeting—just back to the treaty for a moment, because it's so topical right now—as long as they're not at least making efforts, let alone really disarming and eliminating their nuclear arsenals, then other states will have these ideas to, you know, develop nuclear weapons, just as Peter was sharing, or develop, acquire, do whatever it takes to keep themselves safe.

And, um, at the moment, these proliferation pressures are really real. On the disarmament side, one of the themes—and this has really been a theme over the last 10 to 15 years—is that the nuclear weapon states will say that the geopolitical conditions are not right now conducive to disarmament, which, of course, they would never accept for a state to say, oh, the political conditions right now are not conducive to us not proliferating, right? So, like, if a state, Iran or anybody else, came and said, actually, given the geopolitical situation, we're going to proliferate, sort of forget about our obligations of non-proliferation, and we're going to develop nuclear weapons.

It's the same thing that they're saying on disarmament. We're forgetting our disarmament obligations because the geopolitical conditions are not conducive to them. And so I think until we sort of recognize that this non-proliferation and disarmament have to go hand in hand, otherwise it's really a recipe for disaster. And in fact, the treaty owes its origins to none other than President John F. Kennedy, who in 1963 spoke about 15 or 20 or 25 states acquiring nuclear weapons and was really, really worried about it and essentially set up the intellectual framework for this. And, you know, thank goodness others carried it forward.

## **#Pascal**

Peter, can I maybe ask you, there is a long history, of course, of disarmament conferences. They go back to 1899, the first Hague Peace Conference, then the second one in 1907. And these

conferences produced a lot, among others, the written and codified law of neutrality, but the disarmament aspect always failed. The NPT, of course, is also a disarmament treaty. And the part of it that worked is really making sure that the nukes don't proliferate as much as they could have. But on the other hand, the disarmament aspect, I mean, it worked a little bit. I mean, the U.S. and the Soviet Union both actually started reducing their stockpiles quite significantly, but it stopped at a certain level. And then it increased again, also with the ballistic missile programs and so on and so forth.

And a lot of what we hear today is then based upon the idea, oh, we need second-strike capability. We must maintain the ability to destroy the other one. But the one state at the moment that is kind of proposing a new paradigm is actually Iran, because Iran is now a non-nuclear-weapon state that defended itself against two nuclear-weapon states without nuclear weapons, and actually kind of made the point that there are conventional ways of second-strike capabilities that are just as frightening. I mean, this to me is actually kind of good news, because it's kind of a non-nuclear second-strike doctrine that they've built up. Do you think that that is going to have any kind of impact? And how do you see the disarmament aspect of all of these treaties?

## **#Kuznick**

Well, you mentioned that we've cut the nuclear arsenals. In 1986, there were 70,000 nuclear weapons in the world. Now we're down to a little more than 12,000. That's progress. But during Trump's first term, when he discovered how much we had slashed our nuclear arsenal, Trump's response was, we should increase our arsenal tenfold, which Secretary of State Rex Tillerson called him an effing moron — which was a compliment under the circumstances. But, you know, it's not just Iran that is teaching us this lesson. When was the last time that a quote-unquote superpower won a war? World War II, really. We've had some military operations — Operation Urgent Fury, when the United States was able to go into Grenada in 1983 and fight a couple dozen Cuban construction workers there.

You know, we could do that. But you look at Vietnam. Well, Korea was a stalemate. Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Ukraine. We have powerful countries who are being neutralized or defeated, in most cases, by much smaller countries. War is obsolete. War should be obsolete in any age. It should especially be obsolete in the nuclear age. But now, in an age of asymmetrical warfare, it is so much easier to defend a country than it is to attack a country. And so we haven't seen countries win. I mean, Russia has been involved; it hasn't even taken Donbas yet. It's been trying to do this for more than four years already. The U.S. is humiliated. Friedrich Merz says Iran has humiliated the United States.

Trump is desperate to get out of this war. His approval ratings are plummeting. As low as they are, they're going lower. American discontent rises by the day. The world economy is suffering. And maybe Netanyahu is happy about this because he's been trying to find an American president stupid enough and ignorant enough to go to war with Iran for more than three decades. And he finally

found his stooge. But nobody else, including in the United States, is happy about what's going on. So, you know, they don't need nuclear weapons. In effect, Iran has the equivalent of two nuclear weapons. One is the control of the Strait of Hormuz, which is more powerful than a nuclear weapon right now.

The second is if Iran swarms drones and missiles at Dimona, the Israeli nuclear facility, and pierces the containment there, then that is more powerful than a nuclear bomb. It would make large parts of Israel uninhabitable for decades, if not hundreds or thousands of years. And then you've got Israel and the U.S. bombing the Iranian nuclear plant at Bushehr, which is also madness, because that would make not only large—if there's a containment there—make not only large parts of Iran uninhabitable for the foreseeable future, but also other Gulf states as well, neighboring states. So, you know, we just have got to figure out ways to resolve our differences and get together peacefully now more than ever, because it's more dangerous and more insane, the things that we're doing on a planetary basis.

## **#Pascal**

I absolutely agree. It's just this word "insanity" really bothers me. And of course, during the Nixon era, we had this madman theory that Nixon was pretending to be a madman in order to be unpredictable and use this as a strategy to then negotiate with the Soviets and the Chinese. But Ivana, Peter, both of you—Trump, I mean, the guy just seems... it's really weird. I mean, we now seem to have had two U.S. presidents, one after another, with really dementia to quite a degree. Why? And can these people be stopped? And Donald Trump is not one man. Donald Trump in the White House is a whole system, right? And how do you make sense out of the madness that is coming from the executive branch at the moment? Not that the legislative is like a perfect thing, but at the moment, the executive worries me the most.

## **#Hughes**

For the most part, yeah. The Congress and the legislative branch here in the U.S. is a very sad affair. But Trump has really brought this to a whole new level. I would say that no American president since John F. Kennedy has been good on nuclear weapons. Reagan did make some progress, and obviously that came after a real sort of change of heart in that he was very much a, you know, Cold Warrior. But he did get to the point of, you know, ending the Cold War, getting together with Gorbachev, even almost agreeing with Gorbachev to eliminate nuclear weapons. So it hasn't been good for decades, really for the entirety of the nuclear age in some sense, with a couple of exceptions.

But Trump has really brought all of this to a new level. And of course, he started the presidency by talking about denuclearization and has, in some sense, demonstrated just a completely different range of possibilities. This is the same guy that you could envision, just because he's so, you know, kind of going against the system and so on, you could have envisioned some progress, maybe even

in the, you know, kind of following the legacy of Reagan. You could have imagined some progress on, say, call it denuclearization, since he likes that term, all the way to you could literally imagine him deliberately using a nuclear weapon, using it on Tehran.

I mean, those statements, I took those statements very, very seriously. You know, multiple times referring to bombing Iran into the Stone Age, and then, of course, April 7th was just absolutely scary when he wrote, "A whole civilization will die tonight." You know, I felt sick the entire time. I mean, it was just—I just felt physically ill. We ended up, my organization, the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, actually had a lecture by Professor Richard Falk that very night. The ceasefire was announced about an hour, two hours before the lecture began. So I was with other people, but I was just physically ill all day.

And I don't think that we can just discount that as, you know, Trump just writing whatever on Truth Social when he actually does—when we do know that he has the nuclear codes. So it's very, very scary. I think I've spoken about this before, and I think it was in regards to Trump, in that I am not one to criticize the American people for electing him—not because I think that he was the better option, I obviously don't—but just because I understand where some of the impulse was to go with what they perceived as the non-establishment candidate, where Trump really fooled people. And I do think that many people who voted for him genuinely saw him as the peace candidate.

And he clearly has turned out to be anything but the peace candidate. I mean, um, Peter and I have written about this—you know, bombing seven countries in his first year in office, not exactly a peace agenda. But from my perspective, I'm a little bit less in the circles where, oh, you know, the stupid Americans who voted for him. I think the American people were really fooled. And I think the polls that Peter is referring to demonstrate that, you know, this is part of what they didn't think they were voting for. They thought they were voting to end the forever wars. And instead, you know, Trump brought us into, in some sense, the biggest of the forever wars.

## **#Pascal**

You know, the choice between Trump and Harris was an utterly horrible one. So, you know, Trump had a peace speech. He was the peace candidate, he kept saying. And, you know, his inauguration speech actually was—and I will not forget that—"This administration will be remembered not only for the wars we got out of, but also the wars we never started." That's such a good thing. He does exactly the opposite. So, okay, fine.

But Peter, like, how are you perceiving then how the political establishment now in Washington and New York and so on actually is now thinking about the, you know, the future of U.S. military capacities? Because on the one hand, yes, these lunatics, especially the neocons, they still think a nuclear war can be won—and the faster, the better. On the other hand, again, around the U.S., it's

running out of weaponry. The U.S. is running out of capacity. I mean, and for everybody to see, and the very people who claim that, oh, we can now pinpoint every submarine and every bomber and first strike, and they're gone.

## **#Pascal**

Weren't able to do that with Iran. I mean, so far away from it.

## **#Pascal**

It's now trickling, you know, coming out that Iran probably doesn't have like 10% left of its arsenal, but more like 60 to 70. And they keep building it, and they figured out how to keep building even while being bombed. So, um, even nukes can't get to it. So what is the, um, doesn't, shouldn't that have an actual impact just on the assessment of the realities of war? Because we see them in Ukraine, we see them in Iran. And are these people, some of these people, still able to just delude themselves into thinking the United States is still almighty, which it never was, but that seems to be their thought.

## **#Kuznick**

Good question. Um, we know that Trump is surrounded by some dimwits. And you look at his top advisors—Stephen Miller. Stephen Miller says might makes right, force is the only thing that people understand, it's the law of the jungle out there. You know, he tries to focus mostly on immigrants and people of color in the United States, but he's giving Trump this advice globally. You got Pete Hegseth—what a character this guy is. I mean, he's got a body covered with crusader tattoos and Christian nationalist tattoos and neo-Nazi tattoos. He says, we negotiate with bombs. He wants to show how tough he is. What's his background?

He's a former weekend Fox News host. And Trump liked the way he looked on Fox News, so he chose him to be Secretary of Defense. And he immediately calls himself the Secretary of War. Well, maybe when the U.S. changed in 1947 from calling it the War Department to the Defense Department, they shouldn't have, because it's been a War Department, you know, more than a Defense Department. I don't use the term "defense contractors." I think that's wrong. I mean, in the 1930s, these people were called the merchants of death, and that's what we should refer to them as—the merchants of death. They profit every time somebody's arm or leg gets blown off.

They hear the cash register going—this is money in their pockets. You know, and so... so clearly, people are realizing that the military strategy is not working. We look at it—the craziness of Iran shooting hundreds and potentially thousands of drones and missiles. Those drones cost \$30,000, maybe \$35,000 each. The U.S., Israel, and their allies in the Gulf are shooting them down with

interceptors that sometimes cost \$1 million, \$3 million. There are some Patriot and THAAD interceptors that cost \$10 million each. You do the math. It makes no sense. And so, as you suggest, they're running out.

Israel started off with, we think, about 150 Arrow 2 and Arrow 3 interceptors. Now they're down to single digits. Part of the reason why Trump threatened—even I mentioned Trump's threat to wipe out a civilization in 24 hours—you know, what obscenity that was to even say that. But Trump threatened to bomb and destroy Iran's infrastructure, its bridges, its energy supplies and holdings. And Iran said, if they do that, we will retaliate against everybody else in the Gulf. And people knew what that meant because they've been doing it. As the Washington Post has reported, based on intelligence sources, Iran's striking throughout Israel and the Gulf has been so much more effective than the U.S. or Israel has been willing to let on.

They've done much more. They've wreaked much more havoc there, done much more damage, and their missiles and drones are getting through. And so, when they threatened to go after the energy supplies and the infrastructure throughout the region, people took that very, very literally. So the United States could, in its obscenity, resort to using nuclear weapons. And Donald Trump is caught in a very, very compromised position now, and he's desperate. And a desperate Donald Trump is at least potentially capable of resorting to anything at this point. That's what happens when you've got a narcissistic personality.

If you're a pathological narcissist, nobody else exists for you. Right. He doesn't have friends. He doesn't have people he cares about. He doesn't care about the American people. He doesn't care about his MAGA supporters. Those are the people being hurt the most by his policies right now. They're the ones he betrayed over the Epstein files, over the costs of everything, over going to war. One thing after another, he cares about himself and his own survival. And so a person like that should not have access to nuclear codes, even those said. And the reality is, nobody's standing between him and the order to deploy those nuclear weapons. Nobody.

That's the way it's structured in the United States. Is it possible that he would give the order and somebody would be brave enough to resist? Yeah, it's possible. But I don't want to base the future of life on the planet on the chances that that would happen. So, you know, that's why even I, the first article he wrote for Al Jazeera was called "Breaking the Nuclear Taboo." Because we both feared that Donald Trump, when he's got the Hagans, the Millers, the Netanyahus, and the Murdochs whispering in his ear, that he's broken every norm, custom, tradition, most international laws, U.S. laws. But the one thing he hasn't broken is the nuclear taboo.

**#Hughes**

Yeah.

**#Kuznick**

And if they tell him this is going to make you the greatest and most powerful man in history if you do this, how do we know how Donald Trump is going to respond to that? I don't. It scares us a lot.

## **#Pascal**

There are talks about people within the administration actually being the ones to keep this from happening, but we don't know. It's still a black box. I just wonder how long it will take Iran to actually offer the one thing that Donald Trump will probably not be able to resist in terms of an offer, which is to build a huge golden Trump Tower in downtown Tehran. I think that would secure Iran much more against a nuclear attack than anything else. Plus an arch.

## **#Hughes**

Plus an archway.

## **#Pascal**

A Trump arch, right?

## **#Kuznick**

It was a golf course.

## **#Pascal**

Why not? Why not throw in a golf course, you know?

## **#Kuznick**

Kushner can go there and build the luxury hotel.

## **#Pascal**

Yeah, just offer that. Part of the peace deal: control of Hormuz to Iran, all of the U.S. military troops gone, reparations, but he gets a Trump Tower. I mean, it would be a good deal. Anyhow, let's talk a little bit about these allies. And maybe, Ivana, let's start with the Gulf states, because we've seen now something. I think it seems to me that the allies in the Gulf are actually learning the lesson that A, the United States cannot defend them; B, the United States uses them as bargaining chips; and C, the United States actually actively throws them under the bus, knowing that they cannot be defended and knowing that they will be hit. The United States still took the decision to do this. And actually, both Saudi Arabia and Qatar said, no, you cannot use our airspace, and no, you cannot use our bases in order to implement your stupid Operation Freedom.

And the U.S. was forced within 24 hours to stop that, because they said, like, no, no, no, no, no, no, we are ending this. Which is basically, at this point, a form of neutralization of these countries, right? This alliance and the agreements, the stationing agreements, and the use of this territory have been restricted. And Mr. Marandi from the University of Tehran told me, "Pascal, if these states tomorrow declare their neutrality and close all of this access to the U.S., the war would be over, because the U.S. would literally not have the capacity to attack us anymore. Therefore, it will be done." So do you think that this—the Gulf—has an impact on the allies? And maybe then let's take it further to the others, like to the Europeans and maybe also the Japanese.

## **#Hughes**

Yeah, I mean, I think the latest developments that you just described are definitely a step in the right direction. I want to just bring us for a moment back to the NPT, just to say something historical that pertains to the region that's very relevant and important. So in 1995, after 25 years of this NPT treaty being in force, the states parties met for a review conference like the one that they're having now. And at that time, they actually made the decision to extend the treaty indefinitely. That was a very big deal. And as part of that indefinite extension, there was a special resolution on the Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone. It was going to be modeled after existing nuclear weapons-free zones, the first one having been in Latin America and the Caribbean, and afterwards the South Pacific, and so on.

But this idea that this particular part of the world needed to be free of weapons of mass destruction—obviously nuclear weapons, in some sense, first and foremost there. And we know who has nuclear weapons in the Middle East in this very distinct, you know, ambiguous way of an undeclared arsenal. That's, of course, Israel. And what's happened since, in just the last several years at the UN, there have been these conferences on this Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone that everybody from the Middle East participates in, except for Israel, and then the United States, which was one of the co-sponsors, also doesn't come to these meetings. And this is really, I mean... I personally think that the GCC countries should have figured out where the U.S. loyalties were lying all this time. Why wasn't the U.S. supporting this?

I mean, this is what, in fact, JFK wanted in the early 60s. He really wanted to prevent Israel from acquiring a nuclear weapon because he was worried about proliferation. He was worried about a world with, as I said already, 15, 20, 25 nuclear-armed states. And he saw that if a good ally of the United States ignores this, you know, basically the policy or request for non-proliferation, it's going to be much harder to get those who are not as friendly with the United States to do the same. And so I think the GCC countries over these decades should have figured out that the U.S. was really not a very good ally of theirs and that, in fact, this region really is aching for, you know, to be a weapons of mass destruction-free zone.

It's aching for Israel to actually, I don't know how, but for Israel to be sort of brought to heel on this issue and for its nuclear arsenal to, you know, be acknowledged at the very least and dealt with

effectively as well. And so, you know, where is that going to go with the GCC? I obviously don't know, but I do think that maybe this war is taking us in the right direction, that just in general, this presence of the United States in the region has obviously not been one that has led to the region doing well. We really need to get to the issue of what the United States is doing in these different parts of the world. And of course, it's not just the Middle East. It's 800 military bases around the planet that need to be dealt with.

In terms of the other alliances, what's happening with the Europeans, obviously there is a rift there in what the U.S.—the policy of the U.S.—and the conflict the U.S. has been pursuing with Iran, some rift about the Middle East in general, but certainly on Iran. And then a rift over Ukraine where, you know, Peter and I have been criticizing the Europeans on their warmongering with respect to Russia and are really, really concerned about the direction that that has been taking. It's not like I'm happy that, you know, the U.S. alliance is fraying with Europe. I don't see there being much to gain from that, but the fact that so much of the European establishment has been focused on Russophobia and preparations for a war with Russia has been really, really scary to us, as if Ukraine hadn't been scary enough. The idea that Europe would go to war with Russia is really absolutely devastating.

## **#Pascal**

Peter, how far do you think we are in that preparatory stage to turn the whole of Europe into, like, a mega Ukraine? Because on the one hand, we've seen that this proxy war did not go the way it was supposed to. Russia is neither on its knees nor broken up nor destroyed. On the other hand, we have seen that in both cases where the U.S. and its proxies, its allies, waged war against another one—against Russia and against Iran—you know, they pay for that, the Iranians and the Russians, by having to be able to tactically absorb strikes on their own territory in exchange for a long-term strategy to win. And kind of, you know, the Russians have successfully demilitarized not only Ukraine but NATO, well, militarily. But where do you see that going with the Europeans at the moment?

## **#Kuznick**

Well, as Ivan was suggesting, the Europeans are scaremongering their publics into supporting this vast rearmament, remilitarization. The message that they're conveying is that if Russia succeeds in Ukraine, then Russia is going to gobble up one piece of Europe after another. Mark Rutte, the head of NATO, said recently, "After Ukraine, they're coming after Europe." General Fabien Mandon, the leading French military official, told the French governors that France has got to be prepared to lose its children. To France, that means something very literal, because during World War I, France lost 50% of its young men between the ages of 15 and 30. Now they're saying, prepare for that again. You've got Tusk in Poland saying, "Either dollars today or blood tomorrow."

You've got Merz in Germany saying that Ukraine is the equivalent of the Sudetenland. Once Russia gets that, they're going to do like Hitler did and keep on going. Macron, Starmer, the same thing—Russia's going to keep on going. The intelligence officials throughout Europe, you know, it's... it is so

absurd to us to think that Russia, which can't even beat Ukraine after more than four years, can't even get the rest of the Donbass, is going to want to go to war with NATO. As Putin said, this is idiocy. We're not going to go to war with Europe. This is not what we have in mind. But this is what the world is facing right now—this kind of logic, this kind of illogic. But we know how fragile it is.

Last June 10th, Tulsi Gabbard, the U.S. Director of National Intelligence, in one of her increasingly rare lucid moments, released a two-and-a-half-minute video starting off in Hiroshima and saying how horrible what happened in Hiroshima was, but then saying that the world is closer to nuclear annihilation today than it's ever been. And then you've got Sergei Naryshkin, the head of the Russian SVR intelligence agency, saying on October 20th that civilization is at its most fragile moment in post-World War II history. The heads of intelligence are warning about this, but we don't see the leaders. You know, so Modi says this is not a time of war. But clearly, it's a time of war in terms of what the leaders are doing. It means it shouldn't be a time of war.

It's too dangerous for it to be a time of war. But we don't see statesmen. We don't see leaders who speak for the planet. We see people who want to make their own countries great again, whether it's Modi wanting to make India great again, or China, Xi wanting to make China great again, or Putin wanting to make Russia great again, Starmer wanting to make Britain great again. You know, all of them, this rearmament, these militarizations—who speaks for the planet today? You know, the three of us try to do that, but we're not exactly in a position to be able to enforce it. Guterres does that sometimes. The Pope is trying to do that. Sometimes Lula and Xi Jinping do sound like they understand that. The BRICS are trying to do that. The world is going a different direction.

It's going away from the Trumps and the other superpowers who wanted these military answers, and the BRICS and the SCO and the African Union, and hopefully India, China, and hopefully Russia will end the war so they can speak with some moral authority. I like what Putin and Lavrov and Peskov and Ryabkov and others say about Russia and the U.S. war in Iran. But as long as they're fighting a war in Ukraine, they're not going to have moral authority, and nobody's going to listen to them. So they need to end that war. We need to end all of these wars and get back on a path of peace and development. As Kennedy said, you know, none of these problems are beyond us. We created all of these problems, so we can solve all of these problems. These are within our capabilities, and we would know how to begin the process. Unfortunately, people who've got the power are not thinking along the lines that any of us are thinking about.

## **#Hughes**

Pascal, can I just add a little, just go back to the issue of nuclear weapons, just to add one more layer to our discussion about, you know, could a nuclear weapon be used really in any of these, both in Ukraine and in the Middle East countries? In the Middle East, we've recently, obviously, had the conversation about Donald Trump and him making a deliberate decision to use a nuclear weapon.

Another possibility is that there have been calls in Israeli society for the use of a nuclear weapon in Iran to save lives—save lives in quotes—using really the false narrative of what happened in Japan in 1945, the false narrative that the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki saved lives.

And Peter and I wrote an article about this also for Al Jazeera in Arabic, showing why this is a false narrative, why it is not true that these atomic bombings saved lives in 1945. And therefore, I mean, they wouldn't today either. Obviously, not to mention that the weapons are so much more powerful and would lead to far, far more casualties than even what Hiroshima and Nagasaki experienced. But it's not just deliberate use. When you have conflicts like this, history shows us that you could have an accident. You could have a miscalculation. You mentioned the Able Archer.

There are dozens of incidents where we now know during the Cold War we could have had nuclear weapon use. There were false alarms. There were submarines crashing into one another. And there was, of course, the Cuban Missile Crisis, which wasn't just about a deliberate use to start war on one side or the other. It was also about some quite kind of accidental, you know, situations and incidents taking place over those 12 days. If we extend these wars over months or even years, like it has been happening in Ukraine, the probability that something this dramatic, this, you know, tragic, this catastrophic happens really goes way up.

And I think that, you know, that in conjunction with leaders like Trump—like if Trump somehow thinks that he's being attacked—you don't think that he's going to send out, you know, thousands of warheads? If there's a cyberattack that makes it seem like one of these countries is being attacked, it could lead to a decision to launch on warning, and that launch would be, in fact, the first strike to begin with. So just the number of possibilities, especially when it comes to how dangerous and devastating these conflicts are, and really the thousands and even millions—you know, in the Ukraine conflict, millions of people who've been, millions of casualties—the nuclear weapon dimension brings it to a whole different level, where we're really talking about, as Peter puts it, planetary consequences.

## **#Pascal**

Yeah, but this is also well understood. And we are reaching the one-hour mark, so I'll just ask each of you for a final statement. But maybe, you know, there are rays of hope. I mean, one of them to me is, of course, the success of another very important treaty, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which was run through the United Nations against the will of all the nuclear weapon states. And it still managed to get over 50, not only signatures but ratifications. And it is now part of the UN—United Nations—law, basically. It is part of international law. Yes, it doesn't prevent the nuclear weapon states from continuing what they're doing, but it is... it is a global outcry, actually, on the diplomatic level of other states saying, like, guys, we are not okay with this. That, to me, is a ray of hope. Of course, again, what the real impact is is another question, but maybe first Peter and then Ivana, maybe one more thought each.

## #Kuznick

You know, what the people around the planet understand—and they understood it better, I think, during the Cold War. I see in the United States, I see with my students, that with the end of the Cold War, some people, many people, thought that the nuclear threat had abated. They thought that we were now safe, that the nuclear threat no longer existed. It was never true. In fact, from the beginning, we see with the NATO expansion starting in 1990, despite promises to the contrary, that we see the position—and we look at the situation in Ukraine. I talk about the lies involved. The first lie is that Russia was not provoked. They keep talking in the U.S. about an unprovoked attack. Russia was highly provoked, and in fact, all U.S. statesmen, or many of them at least, said at the time in 1990 that expanding NATO into Ukraine, after we promised Russia we wouldn't once they allowed Germany to reunite, would provoke Russia into war.

So the first thing is that this was unprovoked. This is the first lie. The second lie is that it's a full-scale invasion. We see what Israel did in Gaza. Russia is not doing that to Ukraine. It's not turning the country into rubble. It's not going after civilians. Sometimes they have, but for the most part, not. It's not a full-scale invasion. The third lie is that if we pour enough money into Ukraine, somehow, with money and arms, they'll be able to drive the Russians out of Ukraine. That's the third lie. And the fourth lie is that Russia is going to go after one piece of Europe after another if they win there. So we're facing problems. And we see this sharp swing to the right globally.

We see the militarization. Pascal, you're in Japan. Look at what's happening in Japan, which we've hardly even gotten a chance to talk about. But Japan has doubled its military spending. Takeuchi's visit to the United States—the word that resonates with me is that it was cringeworthy—that she says to Donald Trump, "Oh, Donald, you're the only one who can bring peace to the world. Oh, Donald, you're so handsome. Look at Barron, how handsome he is. I know where he gets his good looks. Oh, Donald, you know, we're going to give you value with hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of investments." You know, this kind of flattery, while most of the world is seeing through this facade and seeing the U.S. as, you know, a fraud and not a leader, not a moral force. You see Japan doing the opposite.

And that to me is, you know, I took students on a study abroad class in Kyoto, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki every year, every August, from between 1995 and 2020, when we had to stop because of COVID. You know, and I understand that Kishida now is talking about getting rid of the three non-nuclear principles. There are people there talking about getting rid of Article 9, turning Japan into a normal country, which means a warmongering, militaristic country. That's going to be a war. That's going to see Japan lose its sons and daughters the way the United States and others have. I don't want to see that happen. So I just think that, you know, we talked about the TPNW, and we talk about the NPT, and we talk about rational diplomacy, but I don't see it happening at this point.

That's why the people of the planet have got to get together and say that we need regime change, and we need to get rid of every one of these leaders who is a warmonger and does not think along

the lines of peace and development. And it's going to happen in the U.S. I say Trump talks about regime change in Iran. The places where he's going to see regime change, where we need it, are Washington and Tel Aviv. And we're going to see in November regime change in the United States. I hope it's going to happen in Israel too. I don't see the signs of it quite there yet, but that's what the world needs now. We need a different kind of leadership and a much stronger democracy, and we need peaceful alternatives and to be thinking in different terms.

## **#Pascal**

Couldn't agree more. And the last word goes to you, Ivana.

## **#Hughes**

Yes. So let me just say a couple of words about the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which, thank you, Pascal, for mentioning. It truly is a bright light in a very dark world. Right now, the treaty has 75 states parties. That means all states that have ratified the treaty, and another 25 signatory states who are working. So we're at more than half of UN member states now a part or party to that treaty. And I do really think that this is an important accomplishment, not just symbolically, but also in terms of norm setting, and also in terms of really giving states that don't have nuclear weapons a kind of opportunity to voice their concerns, because clearly, you know, if we're describing planetary consequences to nuclear war, everybody has a stake in this.

The other thing that I see, thinking about the history of the nuclear age and thinking about the times when we actually did have some progress, which was in the 60s initially with the Partial Test Ban Treaty that ended nuclear testing in the atmosphere. That was a very important development in many ways — I would argue the most successful of all efforts in the nuclear age to halt the kind of testing that was going on at that time, that was sickening people locally but also spreading radioactive fallout globally. I think it was just an enormous accomplishment. And of course, in that same decade, we had the NPT. Has it lived up to all its promises? No. Does it still have potential? And is it, you know, you were referring earlier to it as this cornerstone of international security — one of the largest agreements — all of that stands.

And I think the potential is still there. We just have to see it through. But both in the 60s with these treaties and then in the 80s when we actually made progress with the end of the Cold War, we referred a little bit to Reagan and Gorbachev, them saying nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought again. All of that, all of these things occurred during times of real crisis, real problems. The Partial Test Ban Treaty was negotiated months after the Cuban Missile Crisis. You know, Gorbachev and Reagan came together on the heels of, you know, or just as we were at the highest number of nuclear warheads, on the heels of this Able Archer and a false alarm incident in '83 — like a lot of really bad things were happening. And so in some sense, I think my personal hope, and I know Peter shares this, is that this is a real wake-up moment for people.

As he said, most people almost were unaware that we even had nuclear weapons up until 2022, with obviously a new phase in the war between Russia and Ukraine, and people sort of were back to realizing, oh, we do still have a nuclear weapons problem. And now to see it be so blatantly, you know, kind of showcased by Donald Trump with these statements of, you know, ending civilizations, I'm really hoping that this is a big wake-up call for the people to really learn first and foremost what's at stake and decide that now is the time to do something about it. And then the bright light, the TPNW, gives us a framework for what we should be demanding of our governments to make people living in these nuclear-armed states safe and to make the rest of humanity safe as well.

## **#Pascal**

Yeah, it's either waking up now or for humanity to rest in peace forever, because we've built the capacities to blow ourselves into Armageddon. Unfortunately, there are people who want that, but there are also billions of people who don't. So, fingers crossed that we manage to get together. And I would like to thank both of you. For people who want to follow you, I will put links to your publications and where people can find you, also on social media, in the description box below. Ivana, Peter, thank you so much for your time today.

## **#Kuznick**

Thank you, Pascal.

## **#Hughes**

Thank you so much. Thanks for having us.