

## THE INTERVIEW WITH PETER KUZNICK, THE PROFESSOR OF HISTORY AT AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

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We continue the project of our journal «Russian Political Science — space for dialogue». Peter Kuznick, professor of history and Director of the Nuclear Studies Institute of the American University, agreed to answer our questions.



***Russian Political Science: You and Director Oliver Stone made a film and published a book called «The Untold History of the United States». Why did you decide to write the book and make the film?***

**Peter Kuznick:** Oliver Stone and I have been friends for more than twenty years. In 2007, he came to Washington to scout locations for his movie «Pinkville», about the My Lai massacre in Vietnam. He was just there for one day, so he asked me to join him for dinner. We were talking about politics and history with producer John Killik and cinematographer Bill Richardson and Oliver suddenly said:

«Peter, let's do it! Let's make a documentary!». And I answered: «Sure, that'll be great».

I was on sabbatical, so I wasn't teaching that year. I thought we'll do a one-hour documentary and I could get it done during my sabbatical leave. But when I went to see him in New York two weeks later, he had an idea for a 10-hour, 10-part documentary series. We started working on it in early 2008 and it took us five years to complete what turned out to be twelve episodes. In the middle of that, we decided to add a book because we could not convey enough information in the 58 minutes and 30 seconds we had for each documentary episode.

So, we ended up doing a film version and a book version. Initially, it was going to be a small book, but it ended up being more than 750 pages. Then, in addition

to the documentaries and the book, we did another book — *The Concise Untold History of the United States* — based on the documentary scripts. Then, we did the young readers' book, two volumes so far. There will be four altogether: for middle school and high school students. We are also doing a graphic novel. We just put out a new edition of the *Untold History* book, in which we added a 160-page chapter on 2012-early2019. So now it's more than 900 pages in English. It will be more than a thousand in Russian.

I don't know if you've read the Russian edition, but it's very heavy. When Oliver did his interviews with Vladimir Putin, Putin had a copy on his desk, and he said he'd liked it very much. Our project has been very well received in Russia. Oliver and his films are quite well known in Russia and we both have a sizeable following here, which we use to try to build friendlier relations between our two countries.

Our objective was to educate American people on the part of history that they don't usually learn about. That's why we call it "Untold History". And it's not so much that it's untold; the problem is more that it's unlearned. Academic historians in the United States largely agree with our perspective. They tend to be on the left politically and most are very critical of the traditional narrative about American exceptionalism. But the public doesn't know this history. The public in the United States doesn't know much history of any sort. In fact, in the 2007 National Report Card, the

area in which Americans did most poorly was not Math or Science, it was US History. Only 12% of American high school seniors were found to be “proficient” in US History. And that’s not excellent; that’s just proficient. Americans know very little history. Oliver and I decided we were going to rectify that and began this project in an attempt to do so.

**PRS: You and Oliver Stone have completed a new edition of your book, *The Untold History of the United States*, with a 160-page chapter devoted to the period of 2012-2018. How has the world changed in the last 7 years?**

**Peter Kuznick:** That’s what Oliver and I have been writing about lately — how much the world has changed. We released the original *Untold History* in late 2012.

From then to now, to when our new book came out, the world has gotten so much more dangerous. In 2012, *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* placed the hands of the Doomsday Clock at 8 minutes before midnight, which is too close for comfort. But that was not on the verge of nuclear catastrophe. Now the Doomsday Clock in January of 2018 was moved to 2 minutes before midnight. That change reflects the danger of war between the US and Russia primarily but other crises too.

Look at what’s happening around the world. The situation in Syria is still dangerous but has more or less stabilized. The Russians helped Assad defeat the opposition there. Hillary Clinton said she wanted a no-fly zone in Syria. The chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Joseph Dunford, said that if established a no-fly zone, there was going to be a war between the US and Russia. Yet, Hillary Clinton pushed for just such a no-fly zone. When we look at the situation in Eastern Europe and in the Baltics, we’ve got more and more deployment of NATO troops — another four battalions and 5,000 NATO troops standing up against the Russian troops on the other side. The Russians put nuclear-capable Iskander missiles in Kalin-

ingrad. That situation remains dangerous and volatile. The situation in Ukraine and Crimea is also still very dangerous. And the U.S. and Russia have both recently conducted the biggest military exercises since the end of the Cold War.

It’s not just the relationship between the US and Russia that is deeply troubling. The US is also forcing a confrontation with China. Not only are the two economic powerhouses involved in an ominous trade war, but the Chinese have built up their military capabilities, especially their Navy. They are taking their own inflexible stance in the South China Sea and the East China Sea. The US is running what it calls “freedom of navigation” operations, sending US warships into the South China Sea to challenge the Chinese navy. US and Chinese warships came within 45 yards of each other recently. There was almost a collision. That could have been disastrous. So, there’s also the danger of fighting in the South China Sea.

In addition to that, we have the always precarious standoff between India and Pakistan, which almost went to war recently following the latest attack on Indian troops in Kashmir. Many were killed there recently, and there’ve been other terrorist incidents before that. Then the Indians retaliated. Hindu nationalists had been out on the streets demanding that Modi strike Pakistan. Fortunately, the one bombing attack India launched in Pakistan hit an empty field. The Indians claim that they had killed a lot of troops, but that wasn’t true. Then the Pakistanis retaliated, but they also didn’t do any real damage. So, we were lucky because around 2000, after India and Pakistan tested their bombs in 1998, there was a serious confrontation that almost led to war. We all fear that scenario because India’s army is twice the size of Pakistan’s army. If fighting breaks out, the Indian Army will overwhelm the Pakistani army. Pakistan has plans to retaliate with nuclear weapons. India would like respond with its nuclear weapons. The latest scientific estimate is that even a limited nuclear war between

India and Pakistan in which 100 Hiroshima-sized nuclear weapons were used would send five million tons of soot and smoke and dust into the atmosphere and cause a partial nuclear winter in which up to two billion deaths could occur around the world. The debris in the stratosphere would block the sun's rays, Temperatures on the Earth's surface would plummet below freezing, destroying much of the agriculture and cause mass starvation and disease. The reality is that there are not 100 nuclear weapons, there are more than 14,000, and they're between 7 and 80 times the size of the Hiroshima bomb. Even if a small number of those were used, it could lead to nuclear winter and the deaths of most life on the planet. This is the danger that we face now. So, the world has gotten much more dangerous, and that's even aside from climate change and global warming.

We look at how things have changed since 2012: China's military is much more capable; Russia's military is much more capable. When Russia got involved in Georgia in 2008, the military did not do well. Ukraine, more recently, was a very different story. Russia's military capabilities have been vastly improved.

On March 1st, 2018 Vladimir Putin gave his State of the Nation Address. He said that Russia has now developed five new nuclear weapons, all of which can circumvent US missile defense. The US missile defense was all designed for ballistic missiles but the Russians have now different kinds of missiles, including hypersonic glide weapons. They've got nuclear torpedoes that can blow up coastal cities and make them uninhabitable for decades.

The US is also developing new nuclear weapons. Obama won the Nobel Peace Prize for his speech in Prague in 2009 where he calls for nuclear abolition. However, the reality is that the United States under Obama embarked on a 30-year 1.7 trillion-dollar nuclear modernization program whose goal is make every part of America's nuclear arsenal more efficient,

more useable, and more lethal. Sadly, that's Obama's real legacy, not nuclear abolition.

So, the United States is perfecting its nuclear weapons; the Russians are perfecting theirs; the Chinese — all nine nuclear powers are modernizing right now. India to; Pakistan is expanding its arsenal even more quickly; Israel — they all are. That's the danger. Now the United States pulled out of the JCPOA — the nuclear deal with Iran. The United States just put new sanctions on Iran this week. The Iranians have said that they're going to start relaunching parts of their nuclear program. They're not going to work on a weapon, but they're going to increase their centrifuges, produce more nuclear material — this is very dangerous too.

Trump asked Shinzo Abe to nominate him for the Nobel Peace Prize because he decided to fall in love with Kim Jong-un rather than to obliterate him. But Trump is a faithless lover. The hawks in the Trump administration wanted to get Korea out of the way because their real obsession is Iran. These people hate Iran and some of them are trying to provoke a war with Iran. Bolton, one of the neocon masterminds of the invasion of Iraq, had been wanting to invade Iran during George W. Bush's administration. Now he's back in charge again and looking for an excuse to go to war with Iran. Some of the same fools who predicted that the invasion of Iraq would be a cakewalk are now saying the same thing about Iran, but they don't know what they're talking about. War with Iran would be a disaster for all involved. Colonel Larry Wilkerson, who was Colin Powell's Chief of Staff, said that he's watching a replay of the invasion of Iraq. They're following the same script. Wilkerson says that if the Americans think that Iran is going to be easy, they're crazy. The Iranian people are going to mobilize to defend the regime. Even the ones who are critical are going to defend it against a US invasion. Wilkerson warned that war with Iran would be 10 to 15 times as costly for the US in

dollars and casualties as was war in Iraq. Yet Bolton, Pompeo, Netanyahu, Mohammed bin Salman, Mohammed bin Zayed, and other madmen are cheering this on. Bolton has requested military options. The US has sent the Abraham Lincoln Carrier strike group to the Persian Gulf as well as fighter planes and anti-missile batteries and is talking about deploying 120,000 troops. And to what end? The JCPOA was working. But Trump is intent on creating chaos and bloodshed where there was actually progress and stability.

**RPS:** *As a scientist, you try to understand your country and ask questions that are asked not only in the US, but also in other countries. Here are a few questions you're trying to answer in your book and movie: why does the US place its military bases all over the world, the total number of which, according to some estimates, has exceeded one thousand? Why does the US spend more money on its armament than all the other countries taken together? Why does the US keep to hold a huge arsenal of nuclear weapons, most of which are in constant operational readiness? Of course, to get answers to all these questions one needs to watch your film or to read the book, but could you please briefly answer why the United States since the end of the Cold War has been continuing its ultra-militaristic policy?*

**Peter Kuznick:** You could argue that in some sense the Cold War never ended for the United States. Gorbachev said something very interesting. He said: We will do the worst thing to you we can possibly do. We will leave you without an enemy. He was right. The United States needed an enemy to justify its bloated military budget. The United States, at that time, was spending more on the military than the rest of the world combined. Recently, Russia and China have caught up a bit, but the United States still spends obscene amounts on its military and far more than

any of its rivals. In order to justify that, the US needs enemies.

Russia was no longer our enemy after the Cold War. When the Cold War ended, George H. W. Bush praised Gorbachev for his restraint in not using force to put down the rebellions in Eastern Europe. But almost immediately the United States invaded Panama. Then it got involved in the first Gulf War in Kuwait and in Iraq. So, the United States never stopped its military interventions. The much anticipated "peace dividend" never materialized. Then the United States got militarily involved in former Yugoslavia. When George W. Bush was elected, or should we say appointed by the Supreme Court in what amounted to a political coup, his supporters were members of a group called The Project for a New American Century (PNAC). They had a vision of US domination of the world. They traced back to the 1993 Defense Planning Guidance drafted by Wolfowitz, Libby, Hadley, and the other early neocons. They said in their reports that it would take a while for the United States to build up its military as much as it needs to unless there was "a new Pearl Harbor". Those are their words. The attack on 9/11 gave the United States its new Pearl Harbor. They immediately rushed in with the Patriotic Act and began looking for places to invade. The timing was so perfect that many people around the world think this was an inside job. I don't believe that. The Bush-Cheney crew was so incompetent that if they attempted to pull something like that off, it would have failed. Nor would they have been able to keep it secret for so long. But there are still odd occurrences like the collapse of building number seven, that help keep these rumors alive. From the first day Bush, Rumsfeld, Cheney, and others said we have to look into Iraq's involvement in 9/11. Iraq had no involvement in 9/11, and the American experts told them so. Richard Clarke was the Counterintelligence Chief for Bush, and he said: This is Osama bin Laden, it's al Qaeda, it has nothing to

do with Iraq. But he knew right from the beginning that the neocons wanted to pin this on Saddam Hussein and use that as an excuse to invade Iraq. The PNAC had been calling for the overthrow of Saddam's regime since its inception. Rumsfeld said: There are no good targets to bomb in Afghanistan; let's find the targets in Iraq. So, they had to deal with Afghanistan first, but that's because they wanted to get it out of the way. What they were really concerned about always was the invasion of Iraq.

I gave a talk today before the film festival at the Great Patriotic War Museum. They asked me to say something to introduce the film. So, I talked about 9/11. On 9/11, approximately three thousand Americans died. The United States has been invading countries since then. It is presently bombing nine different countries. I said that understanding World War II is crucial to understanding the last 74 years of world history. In the United States, most people believe it was the Americans who won World War II in Europe, that it was the US who defeated the Nazis. But Oliver Stone and I had made it clear both in both our documentary film series and in our books that the Soviets defeated the Nazis, not the United States. Most of the war, the Americans and the British were facing ten German divisions between us while the Soviets were facing two hundred German divisions. Germany lost one million on the western front and six million on the eastern front. That's why Churchill said that the Red Army "tore the guts" out of the German war machine. During the war, Americans knew how heroic the Soviet resistance was, but then it was expunged from historical memory. Now Americans know very little of this. I did an anonymous study with college students, and I asked them how many Americans died in WWII. The median answer was 90,000, which means they were only off by 300,000. I asked how many Soviets died in World War II and the median answer I got was 100,000. They were only

off by 27 million. They know almost no history and much of what they do "know" is wrong—dangerously so. The current American president is the ignoramus in chief when it comes to understanding history. The American story about World War II is just that simple: the war begins on December the 7th of 1941 when the US gets bombed at Pearl Harbor. Then the US gets involved in northern Africa and Italy. But the real war starts June 6, 1944 when the US invades Normandy on D-Day. From there the U.S. marches straight to Berlin and vanquishes the Nazis and the Allies win the war.

Obviously, that's got little to do with how the war was really fought. So, when we tell Americans that the war began June 22, 1941, or that we can trace it back to 1931 and the Japanese involvement in Manchuria or Munich or the fascist victory in the Spanish Civil War, they have no idea what we're talking about. The real war was what had been fought and won in the Soviet Union beginning with pushing back the Germans at Moscow. The turning point in the war was the Battle of Stalingrad, after which Hitler said: "The gods of war have gone over to the other side". Then the Germans started retreating. There was the big tank battle at Kursk and, after that, the Soviets troops pursued the Germans through Eastern Europe and Central Europe and made their way to Berlin. But the Americans' view of the war is totally different than the Soviets' or the Russians' today. In one survey I saw, only 11 percent of Americans credit the Soviets with playing the leading role in defeating fascism in Europe.

One of Oliver Stone and my goals was to help the Americans understand how the world looked through the eyes of America's adversaries during World War II. Roosevelt and Vice President Henry Wallace, a true American visionary during the 1930s and 1940s, understood the world through the Soviet eyes. That's why they strove for peaceful and friendly relations during and after the war. Now the Ameri-

cans have become so insular and myopic that they're incapable of understanding how the world looks to others. That's what we've been trying to do — show what the expansion of NATO means to Russia, show what the American invasion of country after country means to Russia, show what the chaos the U.S. has sown in the Middle East means to Russia.

**RPS:** *You are a very famous Professor of history, but you are also the Director of the Nuclear Studies Institute of the American University. Therefore, you have a very good apprehension of the possible consequences of the application of nuclear weapons — the full destruction of all the mankind. What do you think can explain the stagnation of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty Initiative? The Treaty was signed by 183 and ratified by 164 countries, but has not entered into force. The ratification of 44 countries possessing nuclear weapons or the potential for their creation (the list of countries is based on IAEA data) is required, 36 countries, including Russia (30 June 2000), Britain and France, possessing nuclear weapons, have ratified the document. Three of the remaining eight countries have not signed the Treaty: India, North Korea and Pakistan; five have signed but not ratified — the US, China, Egypt, Israel and Iran.*

**Peter Kuznick:** The United States Senate refuses to ratify the CTBT. The attitude that we see now in the Trump administration about treaties — Pompeo, Bolton, Trump, Morrison — is that they don't trust them. They don't want to see any constraints upon the freedom of action of the United States. They want to do away with all treaties. They say that the United States should not be limited by international treaties; the United States should have free rein to dominate the rest of the world and the world will be better off that way. This has been the American mantra certainly since the George W. Bush

administration, although we can trace the roots of "American exceptionalism" back several centuries before that. In 1993, the leading American neoconservative theorists laid this out clearly in their aforementioned Defense Planning Guidance. They clearly stated that that the United States should not allow any rival to develop anywhere in the world that can threaten US regional interests.

The U.S. had to be able to fight multiple wars at the same time. Therefore it needed to substantially increase defense spending and upgrade its military capabilities. They had to walk back that report at the time because it provoked such a strong negative reaction when word of it leaked out. But that was the program for the Project for a New American Century. After the US invaded Afghanistan, the neocons were proudly proclaiming that the U.S. had become the most powerful country in history. On January 5, 2003 the New York Times headlined its Sunday magazine section "American Empire: Get Used To It". Suddenly the neoconservatives were crawling out of the woodwork and proudly proclaiming that the US was indeed the world's greatest empire, something that would have been anathema just a few years earlier. In 1990, neoconservative columnist Charles Krauthammer wrote that with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States had now become the world's sole superpower. He said that this was America's "unipolar moment", and it might last 30 to 40 years. After the US invaded Afghanistan, he looked back and said that he had been mistaken in 1990. He had underestimated American strength. It was not the unipolar moment, it was the "unipolar era" and it might last indefinitely. But Afghanistan and Iraq turned out to be disasters. The head of the Arab League announced that "The gates of hell are open in Iraq". By 2006, even Krauthammer was forced to acknowledge that that the unipolar era was over and that the unipolar moment was rapidly coming to a close. No, today, the United

States is no longer the global hegemon, especially with the rise of China, India, and Russia. The difficult lesson is that the United States has to learn how to live in a multipolar world. The US refuses to learn that lesson and the world has become increasingly unstable and precarious, largely as a result.

**RPS: Any decisions in the sphere of international relations have consequences, especially when they concern very sensitive historical or religious issues. What consequences do you see in recognition of Israel's claims to the Golan Heights and the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel by the United States?**

**Peter Kuznick:** I see them both as being very dangerous. US policy toward that region has been very misguided for a long time. It is largely motivated by oil. Every time the US looks at the Middle East, it sees oil, as it does now with Venezuela. Roosevelt made a deal with the Saudis and the British during World War Two. So the US defends the Saudi regime in exchange for Saudi oil. Roosevelt's idea was that the US would have Saudi oil; the British would have Iranian oil, and we would share Iraqi and Kuwaiti oil. In 1953, the US, led by Kermit Roosevelt's team at the CIA, overthrew the very popular Mossadegh government in Iran. The US ambassador had written back to Washington saying that between 95 and 98 percent for all Iranians supported Mossadegh. But Mossadegh had made the mistake of nationalizing British oil interests. When Eisenhower and Dulles got into office, the United States wouldn't tolerate that. They overthrew Mossadegh and replaced him with the Shah, who was very repressive and ruled until 1979, another 26 years.

US policy has been pro-Saudi, pro-Israeli. Israel moved gradually to the right, and more sharply in recent years under Netanyahu. I object to Israeli policy not because Israel is a Jewish state or because some say it doesn't have a right to exist. I object to Israel's right-wing policies and

its treatment of the Palestinians. The occupation is illegal and needs to be ended. Israel has also become more oppressive internally; there are parts of Israel where women get assaulted for walking on the sidewalk. There's a lot of religious intolerance. Many of those who've made Israel so conservative are the Russian Jews who have gone there. They are among the most conservative ones in Israeli society. Although it's somewhat democratic, even democracy in Israel is being threatened by its policy toward the Arab citizens in Israel. Israel was once an internally progressive country with a strong socialist influence. That is sadly long gone.

Now about the Golan Heights and Jerusalem. Firstly, trying to absorb the Golan Heights goes against international law that the land seized in 1967 should go back to its original owners. Secondly, we know what a two-state solution would look like. We've come very close in the past, but the US has always been on the side of Israel. It's another dangerous situation that could erupt into war at any time.

**RPS: Yes. Today there are many crises and conflicts in the world: Ukraine, Syria, Venezuela, etc. In many ways, these crises arise because the US authorities are trying to remove the leader of a country that constructively cooperates with Russia. This trend is also evident in Iraq and Libya. NATO enlargement, the so-called sanctions — is an attempt to do everything to make cooperation with Russia more difficult. What for? Preparing for World War III? The destruction of all life on earth? Don't you think that since the end of the Cold War, Russia has changed dramatically, but the United States continue to fight? And why do not the official circles of the United States understand that cooperation with Russia is more profitable both economically and politically for the United States and for all the mankind?**

**Peter Kuznick:** The atmosphere in the United States, especially regarding

relations with Russia, is very disturbing. For the last few years, there's been an effort, heightened by Russia's intervention in Ukraine and reincorporation of Crimea, to demonize Russia. In the American media, everything one hears or reads about Russia is negative. The picture that Americans get is that Russia is intent upon recreating the old Soviet empire, that Russia unlawfully seized eastern Ukraine and Crimea and now poses a threat to Poland, Hungary, and Lithuania. Putin is portrayed as an evil person who wants to extend Russian influence. Putin is often quoted as saying that the great tragedy of the 20th century was the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Americans take that to mean that he's out to recreate the Soviet Union or create a new Russian Empire. Russian interference in the US election reinforced everything negative people thought about Russia. So there's a lot of fear in the United States about Russia's role in the world. Donald Trump made a halfhearted effort to ease those tensions. But Donald Trump is a terrible president and a terrible human being! During the campaign, when he was running for president, I visited Russia several times. I spoke at different conferences and pretty much all of my Russian colleagues were supporting Donald Trump. I asked Senator Alexey Pushkov why he and so many other Russians supported Donald Trump and he answered, "for one reason and one reason only—he said he wants to be friends with Russia". I agreed with Trump that the United States and Russia need to be friends. I disagreed with him about almost everything else. I knew that Trump might say the right thing about US-Russian relations, but once he got into office, he was not going to act on it that way we all wanted to see. I argued that Russia was better off with a reasonable and predictable warmonger like Hillary Clinton, of whom I was very critical, than a reckless, rash, impulsive, narcissistic bully like Donald Trump. We see now that Trump has been worse for Russia than

Obama was or than even Hillary Clinton would have been.

But there are not enough people in the US advocating friendly relations between our two countries. There are a few of us who are speaking out: Steve Cohen, Noam Chomsky, Dan Ellsberg, Oliver and I, and a few others. Just not a lot of people who espouse this view.

Sometimes, if you turn on American television, they might have four "experts" and each one of them is saying that the Russian involvement in the American election was an "act of war". To me, that's crazy because the United States has been getting involved in everybody's elections for 74 years. But no context is offered. No one mentions the US involvement in Russia's elections. The most egregious case was in 1996. Hollywood even made a film titled *Spinning Boris* about how the Americans stole the election for Yeltsin in 1996, who was polling 7 percent when the Americans got involved. And the Americans are still involved everywhere. Trump, Bolton, and Pompeo now want to overthrow the governments of Venezuela and Iran. The US has overthrown governments repeatedly since the 1950s. There is no end in sight.

I appear often on Russian television, including on all the major networks. In the United States, people with my views do not get invited on mainstream television and rarely get interviewed by the media. Overall, I do a couple hundred interviews a year around the world but don't often get asked to be on mainstream American media. The US has freedom of the press, but it's very narrow and if you think outside of the box or challenge the prevailing centrist consensus, you don't get a hearing in the United States. Part of the danger is that Americans don't hear alternative voices. The Democrats, who should be the friends of peace, have been attacking Russia mercilessly, especially because of Russia's 2016 election meddling. They make no effort to understand why the Russians might do the things they do. They have

no historical context to put this into and hence think it's gratuitous malevolence on Russia's part. That's dangerous. Americans don't have to approve of Russian actions, but they do need to understand them so we can begin to have serious discussions of matters like halting interference in each other's elections.

**RPS: Professor, you have studied in detail the policy of presidents and leaders of other countries in the XX — early XXI centuries. What leaders, politicians, political advisers, and intellectuals of this period could you distinguish which are in abundance today and which are lacking in the US and other countries of the world today?**

**Peter Kuznick:** I think, we've got several big priorities. **The first priority** for me is to drastically reduce nuclear weapons. The main threat in the short term to the continued existence of our species and other life on the planet is the danger of nuclear war. There still are more than 14,000 nuclear weapons. The US and Russia have nearly 93 percent of them. The United States recently announced that it was withdrawing from the INF treaty. That was a big mistake. Trump has also said that he doesn't want to renew the New START treaty when that expires in two years. Putin in his March 1, 2018 state of the nation address emphasized, how destructive it was when the US abrogated the ABM Treaty. So, we destroyed the ABM Treaty, we destroyed the nuclear deal with Iran. We are destroying the INF treaty, which had successfully eliminated an entire class of short- and medium-range missiles, and there's a real possibility that the US and Russian won't renew the New START treaty. To say that's very dangerous would be an understatement.

We are facing the prospect of nuclear anarchy and an arms race like the one we had in the 1980s when there were nearly 70,000 nuclear weapons.

I take my students every year to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the Hiroshima

atomic bomb museum, there used to be a display that said that by 1985 the world had developed the equivalent of 1.47 million Hiroshima bombs. I would write that down every year. Our countries had gone crazy. What did we need 1,5 million Hiroshima bombs for? That was just insanity. That's where we're headed again if we allow all these arms deals to expire. We go back to a nuclear arms race as we had in the 1980s. Trump wants that. In fact, he said the United States can defeat everybody in an arms race. Well, the US might be able to, but I don't know what kind of sick, perverse victory that would be. You don't need 4,000 or 7,000 or 14,000 nuclear weapons to destroy another country. 100 nuclear weapons are enough to destroy another country. Russia could destroy the United States with 100 nuclear weapons just as the US could destroy Russia with 100 nuclear weapons. It might take a few more to destroy China but certainly not 7,000. So, the first thing we need to do is to really work together to get the number down below the threshold for nuclear winter. If we can't completely abolish nuclear weapons, we have to substantially reduce the size of the arsenals. That would be number one.

**Number two** would be climate change, global warming. We're running out of time. The United States is the biggest polluter; China and India are huge polluters. Every study by the scientists shows that the polar ice caps are melting, the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is rising, extreme weather episodes are becoming more frequent, and temperatures and sea levels are rising. Scientists predicted planetary disaster if temperatures rise above 2 degrees C. Now that looks almost inevitable. Many hope we can limit the rise to 3 degrees. Some fear 4 degrees. Certain countries are going to be under water before long. The cities on the coastlines around the world will have to be abandoned. Many southern regions, including large parts of India, will become uninhabitable. Our

species in the long term might not survive. The nuclear threat and the global crisis are the two major existential issues for me.

**The third** big issue is the gap between rich and poor. It's enormous and it's growing. You see it all over the world. We've got corruption: in Russia, in the United States, and elsewhere. It takes different forms in different countries. Americans talk about Russian oligarchs and how much control they have. That happens in the United States too, where the richest people have inordinate control over politics, over policy, over the economy, and over society. You have your oligarchs. We have our plutocrats. They both need to go. They are parasites, bloodsuckers. We need to deal with corruption around the world. We need to narrow the gap between rich and poor around the world. Right now, the richest 8 people in the world have more wealth than the poorest 3.7 billion, half of the world population. In the United States, the richest 3 people have more wealth than the bottom half of the population. It's a global phenomenon; it happens in Russia too. According to some estimates, China produces a new billionaire every week. We need to deal with this question about inequality and the fact that so many people around the world can barely survive while some greedy bastards suck it all up for themselves.

The United States and Russia can also do a lot of other helpful things together. We can combat terrorism together, find ways to educate backward regions of the planet, and help develop the underdeveloped countries. We can certainly ease the tensions that are creating conflict and the possibility of war around the planet. If the United States and Russia could cooperate as friends rather than confront each other as enemies, the whole world would benefit.

In 1942, Franklin Roosevelt said that after the war we would need four policemen in order to maintain peace and stability. He pointed to the US, the USSR,

China, and Britain. I don't think we need four policemen, but we do need leaders. Sadly, there is nobody on the world scene now who speaks for the planet. Trump wants to make America great again. Putin wants to make Russia great again. Xi wants to make China great again. Modi wants to make India great again. That strikes me as pathetic. Not one of them can rise to the challenge we face today. If we look at it from the standpoint of the entire planet, the things that unite us are much stronger than those that divide us. Of course, there are religious differences; there are ethnic differences, national differences, racial differences, linguistic differences, cultural differences, but our humanity is universal. Right now, our planet is fragile and imperiled. We need leaders who think in terms of the planet not their own narrow, parochial interests.

The first priorities, as I said, are ridding the planet of nuclear weapons and intervening dramatically to halt global warming, and then we need to develop parts of the world that aren't developed and redistribute wealth globally. Take a country like Afghanistan, for example. The corruption is out of control. The literacy and education levels are abysmally low. It's still very difficult for girls to get an education. Proper healthcare is almost nonexistent. Life expectancy lags far behind most of the world. And the US spends far more on the military than on long-term development. A few years ago, the US spent \$110 billion on the military and \$2 billion on sustainable development in Afghanistan. There are so many things that we need to be doing right now to uplift the parts of the world where people are suffering, starving, and dying. We need to spread the wealth in a very much more equitable fashion.

***RPS: The last question. We have a traditional question that we ask our guests. Is politics a science or an art?***

**Peter Kuznick:** If it's an art, we don't have enough artists. We need better

artists because the artwork that they're producing is terrible.

If it is science, then we need better scientists because the science they're producing stinks too. So, politics is both art and science really because what you have to be able to do is empathize, what you have to be able to do is see the world through the eyes of your adversaries. It's not something one learns and there have been very few prominent American politicians who have had that ability. The last one who really did was John Kennedy. The last year of Kennedy's life, following the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy and Khrushchev reached out to each other. That last year they were doing some tremendous things: they concluded the first nuclear arms control treaty. Kennedy wanted to pull the United States out of Vietnam. Kennedy gave his extraordinary and visionary commencement address at American University, where I teach. He called for an end to the Cold War and friendship between the Americans and the Soviets. He pointed out that what the Soviets suffered in World War II was the equivalent of the entire United States east of Chicago being destroyed. He also said that we have to be accepting of our differences. We might not agree on everything, but we have to make the world safe for diversity. The same message was given by Henry Wallace during and after World War II. Wallace said that we should have a friendly competition and we'll see which system better serves the needs of mankind. That would be fine even now.

When I look at what's happening in Russia, I find some of it very disturbing. Russia is much too conservative a country for my taste. Religion plays too big of a role. I go to conferences with historians and they're openly espousing Christianity and openly attacking homosexuals. I see some of that same thinking in more subtle form in the United States but almost never at meetings of historians and other scholars. We need much more dialogue between the American and Russian people. We need to

work together on new projects. Oliver and I have talked to Russian filmmakers about making movies together. Both our societies are desperately in need of reform. In both countries, the wealth is concentrated in too few hands. In the US, the richest 1 percent have more wealth than the bottom 90 percent. The average African American family has little more than 5 percent of the wealth of the average white family. If Vladimir Putin were a wise and confident leader, he would not stifle dissent. In fact, he wouldn't just tolerate it. He would actively encourage dissent, because there's not enough open debate in Russia or in the United States. The situation in China is even more frightening. I know from my Russian friends that many of them are afraid to speak out about what they don't like, what they disagree with. In a healthy society, people should be encouraged to criticize. One of the dangers is that insecure leaders equate dissent with disloyalty. We've seen how dangerous that is in country after country over the decades. The greatest patriots are the biggest critics — the people who love their country and want to see it be as good as it can be. Wherever we see things that are not good, we need to make them better. That's been more a part of America's political traditions than Russia's. But I think Russia needs to develop that. Russia must become more open at home and more of a force for peace around the world. Clearly, the United States has long ago stopped being a positive force on the world stage. And given China's political traditions, I fear for the potentially dystopian future when China rules the world. Perhaps India has some potential when it gets out from under Modi and the poisonous climate resulting from Hindu nationalism. India will soon be the world's largest country population wise. Its problems are vast, but so is its potential. I hope Congress and other progressive parties can make a quick comeback in India.

So, I think we need more grassroots challenge to existing elites all across the

globe. We need critical films and books. Right at the beginning of *Untold History*, Oliver Stone and I say that there are libraries full of books about what the United States has done well throughout its history. We don't need to reinforce that. Americans have an overly inflated sense of their country's contributions already. They get it in the schools; they get it in the books; they get it from their newspapers; they get it from television and movies. What Oliver and I do is hold up a mirror to the United States and show what the United States has done wrong. We show the United States' dark side, the unsavory aspects of American history. We want the United States to reach its potential and become a force for good in the world. Doing that is difficult but not impossible. Oliver and I challenge America's self love—its exceptionalism—the belief that the US is not just different than other countries; it is better than other countries. That it only wants to spread freedom and democracy around the world. That might be laughable to Russians, but they would be astonished to see how many Americans believe that. Our job is to undercut the mythology of American greatness. It's to present a more

honest history. Understanding history is so important. One's understanding of history determines, in large part, how one understands the present and what one can imagine for the future. Historical understanding limits one's sense of what's possible. If people think that what exists now is all that is possible, then one can't dream of a different future. And our species needs to start dreaming big again. In order to dream, people have to be able to think critically and express that criticism openly. That, to me, is the highest act of patriotism. Any fool can wave a flag and chant the name of his or her country and sing "God Bless America" or "God Bless Russia". Having the freedom to openly criticize our government and to challenge orthodox historical interpretations is the best thing about the United States. Oliver and I might not get invited very often on mainstream US media, but there are other ways to get our message across. Historians, scholars, truth-tellers, and journalists in other countries need to find their own way to speak truth to power. Given how precarious the world has become, we don't have the luxury of failure or of remaining silent.