

# Scott Ritter: What Will Your Candidate Do To Stop Nuclear War?

Sept. 21—*The following is an edited transcript of the Sept. 20, 2024, presentation by Scott Ritter to the 68th meeting of the International Peace Coalition. Ritter is a former Marine intelligence officer; UN weapons inspector, author and a tenacious fighter for the prevention of nuclear war between the United States and Russia, through dialogue and diplomacy. Subheads have been added. The video is available [here](#).*

Thank you for inviting me, and thank you Dennis Small for your outstanding presentation. In fact, I should probably just yield the floor back to you, because you were hitting everything perfectly.

I've been accused a lot lately of being an alarmist. Some people say, "You're irresponsibly engendering fear." But I will say right now that if you are not scared to death, then *you're* the problem; I'm not the problem. If nuclear war and the prospects of nuclear war don't scare you, I don't know why you're here in this forum, and I don't know what you're trying to accomplish. There literally is no other issue today—no other issue today; I'm just going to emphasize that again because I know people out there feel strongly about very many other issues. There is no other issue today that is more important than preventing a nuclear war—and we almost had one last week.

I don't know if people don't understand that [British Prime Minister] Keir Starmer brought with him the documents, the target lists. If [U.S. President] Joe Biden had signed off on those documents—the target lists—part of that target list would have been executed that night. British technicians are already in Ukraine, loading target data onto the Storm Shadow missiles. These missiles right now are being used against targets in Novorossiya, in the former Ukrainian provinces of Lugansk, Kherson, Donetsk, and Zaporozhye. Why? Because Ukraine—and again, it is its right to say it—says it is our territory. OK. Crimea; they say it's our territory. OK. That's why Russia is not responding by threatening nuclear war when Storm Shadow missiles are used against those targets. This is a debatable point.

Russian territory, however, outside of those five named areas, is Russian territory. It's sovereign territory, unquestionably sovereign territory. Any effort to use NATO-provided weapons—and it's not just NATO-provided weapons; it's NATO-targeted weapons. As Dennis said, this isn't about saying "OK, we'll fire a Storm Shadow off"; what's the difference between that and any other weapons system Ukraine has? Ukraine has had very good success using long-range drone systems and striking targets deep inside Russia. What's the difference between a Ukrainian drone system and a British- or American-provided missile? The Ukrainian drone system is a Ukrainian weapons system directed by the Ukrainian government; and Russia will hold the Ukrainian government to account, using whatever means it chooses to do so. This is the nature of conflict between two nations. Russia and Ukraine are in a state of advanced conflict. Ukraine thinks of it as a war; Russia calls it a special military operation. That's a matter of semantics; they are in conflict with one another.

## **NATO Is a Party to the Conflict**

NATO claims not to be a party to this conflict. And yet, when NATO provides weapons systems that can only strike targets when the targets have been processed by NATO-only entities—that's what people need to understand here. It's not just a matter of programming a Storm Shadow missile. There is an element in Europe, part of NATO, that absorbs American intelligence information; overlays it with American mapping information; and turns it into the data necessary to strike a target. That data is loaded into the Storm Shadow. Because the Storm Shadow communicates with GPS; it doesn't do it on a commercial GPS signal. That's just a single channel; it can be jammed. It does it using the military channels; that's two channels, and they're encrypted. They're encrypted by the United States using American encryption technology that has to be loaded into the systems by Americans, not by Ukrainians. Ukrainians are not cleared to operate this level of cryptographic-key material. So, when a

Storm Shadow is fired against a target inside Russia, it is literally being targeted by NATO. NATO is approving the target, and facilitating the use of this weapons system against the target. That means NATO is a literal party to the conflict.

And yet, Keir Starmer wanted Joe Biden to sign off on this; to say, allow us to use this American intelligence so that we can strike targets inside Russia using the Storm Shadow missile. This is an act of war. And it's something that, had Joe Biden signed off on, would have been implemented that night. It's not something that's going to happen down the road. It would have happened that night, Friday the 13th. And on Saturday the 14th, we would all have been dead.

That's the point I'm trying to make here, people. It's not a joke; it's not a game. The Russians are not bluffing. [Russian President] Vladimir Putin made this clear on Thursday when it became evident that the United States was having this meeting with Starmer in the White House. He basically said that if you do this, you will be a party to the conflict, and Russia will have to act accordingly. Dmitri Peskov, Putin's spokesperson, reiterated this point, and said the President has made this quite clear.

### **'Don't Let Your Fingers Get Burned'**

But not clear enough, because they still had the meeting. On Friday, the Russian Ambassador to the United Nations [Vassily Nebenzia], in front of the Security Council in session, reiterated this point: That it will be a declaration of war if the United States and Great Britain enable Ukraine to use NATO-provided weapons to strike Russia. The Russian Ambassador to the United States took it a step further. Anatoly Antonov said, if you think that a nuclear conflict will be limited to Europe—basically acknowledging that if this happens, Russia will use nuclear weapons against Europe—if you're an American and you think it will be limited to Europe, think again. We will strike you; you're playing with fire—don't let your fingers get burned.

When he said this, it sent shockwaves through the American community. Former government officials—and if you know anything about how the Establishment works, we have a whole host of former government officials who advise; who have connectivity with the current administration. They called Anatoly Antonov—and you have to ask yourself, why didn't the govern-

ment call? Because we don't have connectivity with the Russians anymore.

I was at the Russian Embassy on Friday night. I was there at the invitation of Anatoly Antonov. I was there to attend a piano concert performance of Rimsky-Korsakov and other Russian composers as part of Anatoly Antonov's effort to demonstrate to the American people the culture of Russia; to help disentangle the Russophobia that has spun its web around the Americans. I've never seen the ambassador so distracted and so concerned. This was his big moment; he has been working for months to bring this concert in to make this demonstration. And yet, at this moment, his mind was elsewhere.

Now, I know where his mind was. He was uncertain whether or not he would live the day. He was uncertain what the United States would do. He had done his duty in articulating this though to the various former government administration officials who called the Biden administration and said, "He's not bluffing. This is as real as it gets. If you sign this document, we will be at war with Russia, and the war will be a nuclear war."

### **Seventy-Two Minutes for the World To End**

I don't know if you guys are hearing what I'm saying. We all almost died on Saturday. If you read Annie Jacobsen's wonderful book, *Nuclear War: A Scenario*, it's a work of fiction. But it was written after consulting former nuclear war planners; people who were in the system, who understood how nuclear war is fought. They understand how things go. Do you know how long it takes for the world to end in a nuclear conflict? From start to finish; from the beginning of the initiation of events that lead to the first launch of a nuclear weapon until all life on Earth is forever destroyed, either instantly or things have been set in motion for the long, lingering death—seventy-two minutes. That's all it takes, ladies and gentlemen: 72 minutes.

What are we going to do about this? This is the existential question of our time. What are we going to do about this? I think that most people who are in attendance here share my fear, my concerns about the danger of nuclear war. But Joe Biden is not done. As Dennis Small said, he is going to meet with [Ukrainian President Volodymyr] Zelensky at the United Nations General Assembly debate, where they're going to talk

about how to make this happen; what is needed to make this happen. The European Parliament, as Dennis said, said we want this to happen. Why? Because Europe believes that Russia is bluffing. Europe believes that Putin is bluffing. Europe doesn't believe that Russia would pull the trigger.

I've been studying Russia my entire life. First as the Soviet Union, later in the decade of the 1990s, and I've been watching Vladimir Putin very closely for 25 years. I've had the privilege of visiting Russia twice in the last year. I would have gone a third time, but the U.S. government stopped me. One of the reasons they stopped me is because of the insights that I have gained by visiting Russia and speaking with Russian officials, Russian military authors, etc. I will say this: Russia doesn't bluff. Russia understands what war is more than anybody in the West does. Russia understands the sacrifices necessary to sustain a nation in times of existential crisis. And the Russians are not willing to allow NATO, the United States, or any of its proxies, to put the Russian state at risk; to put the Russian nation at risk. And allowing Ukraine to use long-range NATO-provided systems targeted by NATO, isn't just an extension of the Ukrainian war-fighting capability. It gives NATO a preemptive strike capability. This is what people don't understand.

### **'The Line Has Been Drawn'**

Because if NATO can use Ukrainian weapons to take out strategic targets inside Russia, and then follow that up with a NATO strike—conventional in nature, designed to decapitate Russian leadership—and then follow that up with a wave of low-yield nuclear weapons which are now integrated into the American arsenal and are part of our nuclear employment plan—I don't know how many people understand that the former commander of the United States Strategic Command, in speaking to Congress, said: "I prefer a preemptive nuclear strike." Listen to what I'm saying: "I prefer preemptive nuclear strike." That's his preferred way of doing war: preemptive nuclear strike.

Now, you're a Russian listening to that, and you're watching NATO and the United States giving Ukraine the ability to launch the first wave of preemptive action under the guise that it's just Ukraine, paralyzing the Russians so that the second wave—a NATO wave—comes in, decapitates, followed by a preemptive nucle-

ar strike. And you're the Russians saying, "What do we do about this?" What they do is, they say, "We have to draw a line." And the line has been drawn. They are not bluffing. This is existential in nature.

We have a [presidential] election coming up in the United States. It's turning out to be one of the most important elections of our time—not because of abortion, not because of immigration, not because of the economy, not because of anything that everybody else has talked about, but because, if we make it to the election—because there's a good chance we won't; there's a good chance we won't make it to next week; there's a good chance we won't make it to tomorrow, depending on decisions that are being made. But if we make it to the election, the person we elect is going to be the person that is either going to take us into World War III, a general nuclear strike, or is going to resolve the issue.

Right now, there's only one candidate that's injecting the threat of nuclear war into the political debate, and that, of course, is Donald Trump. There's a lot of people out there that say they could never vote for Donald Trump. That's your prerogative. But if you don't want to vote for Donald Trump, at least exploit the fact that he's injected something into the political debate, and make your candidate of choice respond. We have to inject a discussion about the dangers of nuclear war into the American political debate, at this election. It must become the existential issue of this election: No other issue matters, because if there's a nuclear war and we're all dead, no other issue matters.

### **No Campaign Issue Matters if We're All Dead**

We can't solve the matters of abortion, immigration, the economy, and other things, if there's no country—if there's no world. We have to stop this nuclear war—we all almost died last week! And again, I just want to make that point: If it weren't for some brave statements made by Russian government officials, from the President, to the two ambassadors, Biden would have signed off on Keir Starmer's documents. Storm Shadow missiles would have been launched against targets inside Russia, and Russia would have responded, beginning the cycle of escalation that leads to a general nuclear conflict.

We need to inject sanity into the political discourse. We need to put pressure on Jill Stein, to respond to the op-ed that was [written by Robert F. Ken-](#)

[neddy, Jr. and Donald Trump, Jr.](#) published in *The Hill*, which put on the table, for the first time, from a campaign, the necessity of negotiating an end to the conflict in Ukraine, and linking the conflict in Ukraine to the danger of nuclear war, because they're linked! We need Jill Stein to commit. We need [Vice President] Kamala Harris to commit. We need this to become a political issue. And once it becomes a political issue, that puts pressure on the Biden administration not to engage in the precipitous activity that would generate a nuclear conflict.

### **Operation DAWN**

On 28 September we're having a rally in Kingston, New York. It's the beginning of what I call [Operation DAWN](#). Operation DAWN is the four simple questions I am asking the American people: What will you be

willing to do to save **Democracy**? To save **America**? To save the **World**? By making your vote count in November?

And what you need to do is just that: Make your vote count. Don't give your vote away. Make the candidate earn your vote, and the issue that you need to emphasize for them to earn [your vote] is: What is their strategy for preventing a nuclear war? What is their strategy for bringing about peace with Russia? What is their strategy for promulgating disarmament, reintroducing disarmament into the political dialogue between Russia and the United States? Right now, only one side has put something out there. We need all sides to do that. We need this to become a matter of national discussion, national debate. And then, and only then, might we dodge this bullet.

Thank you very much for letting me speak.