

basis for today's prosperous Austrian democracy. It set a precedent on which a neutral, independent, and democratic Ukraine could yet be built. Such a Ukraine would be both a buffer and a bridge between Russia and the rest of Europe. The EU accession process could cure many of Ukraine's current ills—among them, its notorious corruption. Of note, Russia has never objected to the idea of Ukraine joining the European Union.

The Partnership for Peace, which Russia joined in June 1994, has the potential to become a cooperative security system for Europe backed by NATO. European history prior to the Cold War demonstrates that, without Russian participation in the management of peace and security, Europe cannot be stable.

Given Kyiv's repudiation of the Minsk accords and the blood Russia has spilt to protect Russian speakers in the oblasts it has officially annexed, Moscow expects to keep them. There is little doubt that this accords with

the will of their inhabitants. But Russia needs to allay concerns in the West about its strategic intentions. This is a prerequisite for the achievement of a stable peace in Europe. Reluctant as it may be, Russia should consider permitting internationally supervised referenda in the parts of Ukraine it has occupied.

In Ukraine, as in the Korean conflict, an end to the fighting will likely follow rather than precede negotiations. A Korean-style armistice would perpetuate tensions and animosity rather than creating a Ukrainian peace on which a broader European peace can be built. Ukrainians and Russians must fix borders that enable them to coexist peacefully in future.

As was the case in the Peace of Westphalia, negotiations will be complex, take time, and involve talks in diverse forums with varying participants. But difficult as they may prove, negotiated solutions for both Ukraine and a new European security system are both overdue and desperately needed.

Scott Ritter

A U.S.-Russia Nuclear Conflict Is Not Just a Possibility, but Increasingly Becoming a Probability

Dec. 7—*The following is an edited transcript of a speech from a Dec. 7, 2024 webcast presentation by Scott Ritter (U.S.), former U.S. Marine Corps (ret.), former UN weapons inspector in Iraq, from Panel 1 of the Dec.7-8 Schiller Institute conference, "In the Spirit of Schiller and Beethoven: All Men, Become Brethren!" The panel was titled, "The Strategic Crisis: New and Final World War, or a New Paradigm of the One Humanity." The video of his presentation is available [here](#). Subheads have been added.*



Schiller Institute

Scott Ritter

I've been asked by Helga Zepp-LaRouche to prepare a video statement, given my inability to participate directly in this very important conference on international security.

Today, I'll be addressing the issue of the potential of a nuclear conflict between Russia and the United States. I have for some time now been stating that I believe this is not just a possibility, but increasingly becoming a probability, given the trajectory of relations; the deterioration of relations between the United States and Russia, especially as they center on the issue of Ukraine. I also believe that the situation warrants being described as an existential threat to the survival of not just the United States and Russia, but the entire world. That, contrary to some public speculation or articulation by American officials—in particular, Rear Admiral Thomas Buchanan, Director, Plans and Policy, for Strategic Command, which is the American combatant command responsible for America's strategic nuclear

arsenals and preparing to use those in time of war—that there could be a limited nuclear war, or somehow that the impacts, geopolitical and destructive and other impacts, of nuclear war could be limited.

I believe that a nuclear war would result in the termination of humanity as we know it today, and make the existence of modern nation-states like the United States and Russia impossible, given the outcome. Therefore, it is responsible to say that the situation we face today is perhaps the most dangerous situation the world has ever faced in the nuclear era.

Worse than the Cuban Missile Crisis

Now, there may be some people who say, “Wait a minute! We’re not the Cuban Missile Crisis.” I’d like to point out a couple of things. One, the Cuban Missile Crisis was a very dangerous situation, and history is right to judge it as such. But, the size of the respective nuclear arsenals of the United States and the then-Soviet Union, when compared and contrasted with the arsenals of the United States and Russia today, pales in comparison. The destructive power today is far greater; the ability to deliver this destructive power to targets around the world with great precision is unmatched.

Moreover, at that time, there was direct communication between the United States and the Soviet Union. President John F. Kennedy was able to communicate directly and indirectly with Nikita Khrushchev, the First General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Moreover, ambassadors of the Soviet Union met with American leadership; ambassadors of the United States met with Soviet leadership. There was a viable, meaningful back-channel that played an important role in facilitating communications. And, it was through this communication that a compromise solution was able to be reached that brought an end to the threat of a nuclear war.

Today there is no communication; no meaningful communication between the Biden administration and the government of President Vladimir Putin in Russia. Not because Russia doesn’t want the communication; the United States State Department, Secretary of State Antony Blinken has ordered the State Department not to have any communications with their Russian counterparts. And the Department of Defense has likewise given similar instructions regarding their Defense Attaches and military professionals. There are a handful of exceptions; deconfliction channels regarding the situation in Syria, and the occasional direct conversation

between senior military officials in the United States and their Russian counterparts.

But this does not constitute anything that remotely resembles the level of coordination that took place during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Void of any such connectivity, any communications, the possibility of a compromise solution, the probability of misunderstandings, mistakes, misjudgments; one is diminished—that is, a solution; and the other one is increased exponentially—that of a mistake, misjudgment, or otherwise just getting it wrong. When you get it wrong when you’re talking about nuclear war, you’re talking about the end of the world.

Words Have Meaning

We have a situation today where the behavior of the United States, when coupled with a stated strategic objective of achieving the strategic defeat of Russia—that remains the official policy objective of the United States vis à vis Russia, especially when it comes to Ukraine. “Strategic defeat”; words have meaning. This means the collapse of the Russian government; this means the collapse of the Russian economy; this means the collapse of Russian society; this means the dismemberment of Russia; this means that Russia no longer exists as a unified state that is currently manifested in the form of the Russian Federation.

If the Russians were to reverse the tables and say they were seeking the strategic defeat of the United States, and using the same sort of terms applied to the United States, not only would the American public and the American body politic voice opposition, but we would view this as an existential threat, and we would respond accordingly, and justifiably. Russia has likewise said that this is unacceptable. Then you marry this with a situation where the United States is engaged in direct combat operations against Russia. We do this indirectly, using a Ukrainian proxy, but the weapon, the ATACMS artillery rocket system, is a weapon that cannot be used by Ukraine without a) the permission of the United States, and b) extensive interaction between United States military professionals and the weapons system prior to its being used by Ukraine to fire against targets on Russian soil, particularly targets on Russian soil as defined by the pre-2014 borders of Russia and Ukraine.

Russia views this as a direct attack; as literally a declaration of war. Now, the Foreign Minister of Russia, Sergey Lavrov, has softened this rhetoric in a recent interview with Tucker Carlson. He has said that

the Russians don't view this as a direct war between Russia and the United States, but rather a proxy conflict. But prior to that, it had been spoken of by the Russian President and others as indicating that the United States had become a direct party to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. When you combine that fact with the policy of the strategic defeat of Russia and the statements by Rear Admiral Thomas Buchanan—the Director of Plans for Strategic Command—where he had, in a recent speech delivered before the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C., articulated the preparation of the Biden administration to engage in nuclear conflict with Russia, where the United States would prevail, meaning to win a war, one can understand that the Russians would have to respond in a manner which indicated that their strategic deterrent is now in play. That means that their nuclear weapons are now on the table.

A Lower Threshold for Nuclear War

Indeed, Russia recently altered its nuclear doctrine to lower the threshold for use of nuclear weapons. One of the conditions that would give a green light for the release of Russian nuclear weapons is a scenario where a nuclear power provides a non-nuclear power the ability to strike Russia conventionally in a way that threatened its existential survival. Many people believe that the current American policy of allowing Ukraine to use ATACMS missiles against Russia falls into this. Definitely the Kremlin does; Dmitri Peskov, the Kremlin spokesperson, has said words to that effect.

So, here we are in a very dangerous situation, where the behavior of the United States in Ukraine against Russia has raised the real possibility and the probability of a nuclear conflict. The good news is, we know what the problem is and how to solve this problem. The problem, of course, is the use of ATACMS missiles by Ukraine against Russia. If you remove that from the table, you have eliminated the escalatory aspects of American involvement in Ukraine that could draw in Russia's nuclear weapons. We would have de-escalated this conflict. Instead, by continuing to use ATACMS, we've created the conditions where there are escalatory factors in play. Russia, for instance, making a decision to use the Oreshnik intermediate-range missile in combat; the first time in the history of

the world that a weapons system of this character—a strategic weapons system—has been used in combat. Fortunately, it was a non-nuclear payload, but the bottom line is that we have crossed yet another threshold; one that Russia had indicated will be crossed again if they are called upon to respond to additional attacks by Ukraine using American-provided and American-facilitated ATACMS missiles.

Right now, as we speak, the United States Congress, the House of Representatives, have several initiatives underway to put pressure on the Biden administration to get a reversal of that decision. While I applaud this action, the reality is, given where we are in the calendar, well into December, with only two weeks left in the Congressional term, a new Congress coming in in early January, it's unlikely that anything other than raising awareness of the situation can be accomplished. But this, in and of itself, is very valuable. You see, it's not the Biden administration's reversal of the ATACMS decision that is going to salvage this situation. It's the actions of the incoming Trump administration.

And, by raising the profile of the danger of nuclear war and the existence of a realistic solution to this problem—again, the denial of permission to Ukraine to use American ATACMS missiles against Russian soil—one can hope that the Trump administration will make the appropriate statements to the effect that this policy will not be continued on during the Trump administration.

'Help Me Help You'

Then, we have a situation where we can hope that the officials in the Russian Federation are listening, and they can understand that what is being done is within the framework, or I should say the intent, equivalent to that famous scene in *Jerry Maguire* where Tom Cruise and Cuban Gooding, Jr. are talking about cooperation, and Tom Cruise says, "Help me help you." That's basically where we're at today. By promoting the necessity for a reversal of the decision about the use of ATACMS missiles, we're telling the Russians to help us help you by stepping away from the threshold of nuclear weapons; by giving peace a chance; by giving the incoming Trump administration an opportunity to act in a way that reverses this very dangerous policy by the Biden administration that green lights the use of ATACMS missiles against Russians.