

Scott Ritter

Nuclear Weapons, Democracy and the Deep State

This is the edited transcript of the presentation by Scott Ritter to Panel 1, “The Growing Danger of World War III Underlines the Necessity for a New Security Architecture,” of the Schiller Institute’s April 15-16 Conference, “Without the Development of All Nations, There Can Be No Lasting Peace for the Planet.” Mr. Ritter is a former UN weapons inspector in Iraq.

Subheads have been added.



Schiller Institute

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Hello. Thank you very much for inviting me. It might seem like an odd combination—“Nuclear Weapons, Democracy, and the Deep State.” I cut my teeth on arms control back in 1987-88 when Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty [INF], instituting the beginning of an arms control regime that not just limited the growth of nuclear weapons, but actually eliminated entire categories of nuclear weapons. At that time, arms control was a byproduct ostensibly of government.

Most Americans weren’t aware of the different institutions, the different agencies, the different departments and the personnel within, who all participated in this inter-agency effort to make this treaty a reality. But if that’s your notion—and it was my notion at the time and I was an active participant in it—you were wrong. Because one needs to reflect on what happened in June of 1982 in the lead-up to this successful implementation of arms control. In 1982, arms control negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union were in effect frozen. They just simply weren’t talking to one another. And the world was watching as both the United States and the Soviet Union began to deploy categories of nuclear weapons that threatened European peace and security, and by extension global peace and security.

But an amazing thing happened on June 22, 1982. A million Americans rallied in New York City’s Central Park, and sent a clear signal to the U.S. government that we, the people of the United States of America,

were not happy with this current state of affairs; that we were demanding nuclear disarmament; we were demanding arms control. And a president who was as conservative as Ronald Reagan, who was vehemently anti-Soviet, who repeatedly referred to the Soviet Union as “the Evil Empire,”—this President was liberated politically to give consideration to the necessity of arms control. This led to a resumption of discussions, a resumption of dialogue, and as I indicated, the signing and

implementation of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty, and later the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty [START].

Now, we’re in a situation today where arms control is all but dead. Like 1982, we have a situation where the United States and Russia simply aren’t talking to one another; there are no negotiations. And the last remaining vestiges of arms control, the new START treaty, is set to expire in February 2026. If a new arms control treaty isn’t implemented to replace this, this means that both the United States and Russia will be engaged in a very dangerous nuclear arms race without any mechanism of control. How are we going to get out of this? Most Americans believe that we have to wait for the U.S. government to come to its senses; for the U.S. government to do the right thing. But the U.S. government isn’t the same government that existed back in the 1980s.

Back in the 1980s, we had something that was called the “inter-agency process”—that is, a process where the different departments and agencies of the U.S. government would coordinate with one another about policy issues related to national security. But they did so under the direction of the President of the United States through his National Security Advisor and the National Security Council. That’s how the American people were able to impact this process, by sending a signal to the President that we need a change; we demand a change. The President heard, and the President ordered the inter-agency process to begin creating the

conditions in which successful arms control could take place.

The Preemptive Nuclear Strike Doctrine

Today, we have a President—Joe Biden—who ran on a campaign platform promoting the concept of sole purpose doctrine—that is, that America’s nuclear arsenal, the sole purpose of this would be to deter other nations who possess nuclear weapons from ever attacking the United States. And if this deterrence failed, then to be able to deliver an extraordinarily punishing blow. The very awesome, horrible nature of this punishing blow was hopefully such that nobody would seek to attack the United States with nuclear weapons. We used to have this—it was called Mutually Assured Destruction.

But we don’t have this anymore. The United States now has a policy promulgated on the notion that the United States can conduct preemptive nuclear strikes made [on the basis of] non-nuclear causation. That is, in short, anytime the United States feels the need to use nuclear weapons, we can use nuclear weapons from a doctrinal standpoint. This is an extraordinarily dangerous situation. And Joe Biden rightfully recognized it as such. To be honest, so had Barack Obama before him, who inherited this preemptive nuclear posture from George W. Bush. But Barack Obama for eight years was unable to get the nuclear establishment—the inter-agency process—to come up with an adequate way of shifting from preemption to sole purpose. Joe Biden said he, as the Commander-in-Chief, would do this.

Last December, I participated in a reunion of sorts of negotiators and implementers and weapons inspectors associated with the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty experience. We had a guest at this reunion, a senior member of the Biden administration responsible for arms control. And the question was asked of this person, “How can the Commander-in-Chief, the most powerful executive, the man responsible for this, how could he not implement this policy? He said he wanted to do it. Why hasn’t this been done?”

We were told that the inter-agency wasn’t ready. That’s an amazing statement, because it wasn’t the inter-agency process, meaning a process where departments coordinate with one another. He spoke of the inter-agency as an entity, as a being. Who among us as American citizens have voted for this inter-agency?

Who selected this inter-agency? How did this inter-agency come into being, and why is this inter-agency allowed to block the direction ordered by a person who was elected by the American people?

The Danger Is the Deep State

This is the danger; this is the Deep State. The inter-agency as it currently exists is the living manifestation of what people call the Deep State. An unelected body of bureaucrats and experts and technocrats who exist for the sole purpose of creating a mechanism linked to national security designed to sustain political power. And they are more powerful than the President of the United States.

So, now we have to return to the issue of democracy. How do we, the people, come out of this? Because if we simply sit back and wait for the government to do the right thing, we have seen that a President that is elected through the processes of democracy, who campaigned saying he wanted to go to sole purpose, away from preemption, was unable to do so—blocked by this unelected blob called the “inter-agency.” Since we don’t vote for the inter-agency, how can we change the inter-agency?

The answer is that we have to make it clear that we will not accept the inter-agency. Now how do we do this? I just remind people to go back in time and reflect on what happened in June of 1982 when a million Americans took to the street and made it clear that they would not tolerate anything less than a concerted effort to move towards nuclear disarmament and arms control. We’re going to need to do it again, and the 2024 election is, I believe, going to go down in history as one of the most critical elections not only in American history, but world history. Because should we fail to put a leader in place who not only believes in arms control, but is willing to obviate the control mechanisms of the Deep State, then I’m afraid that in five years we may not be able to have this kind of dialogue—this kind of seminar. Why? Because most of us won’t be here. Why? Because there will be a nuclear conflict.

‘On the Edge of a Nuclear Abyss’

We are on the edge of a nuclear abyss of our own making. Nuclear weapons are deployed. They are backed by doctrines that speak of nuclear preemption. The Russians are so frustrated and worried about the American policy that there is talk within the Russian establishment of modifying their own doctrine to in-

corporate preemption. We see it in the North Koreans speaking of a preemptive nuclear strike. Why? Everybody is concerned about the United States of America. Everybody is concerned about the American nuclear enterprise and the irresponsible actions and words of the American political leaders and the unelected Deep State. And if we sit back and do nothing, then we are headed down a path of disaster.

You know, the American group of nuclear scientists—the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists—they do something called the nuclear clock. And they recently set the clock to 90 seconds. I think that’s just misleading. That implies that we have time. We don’t have any time. The real state of the nuclear clock is a half-second from midnight; less than that. All it takes is one click and it’s all over. And we are positioned to have that click at any moment. One mistake, one miscalculation, one error of judgment and nuclear weapons will

be launched. Once they’re launched, there is no such thing as a limited nuclear strike. It will be total nuclear conflict, and we will all die. That’s the reality of the situation we, the American people, and everybody in the world faces today.

So, in short, if you don’t make nuclear disarmament and arms control your number one policy, you’re wrong. Everything else is important, I’m not denying that. But nothing else matters if the world doesn’t exist. And the only thing out there right now capable of destroying the world tomorrow is nuclear weapons in the hands of the United States. So, we should all be pushing for the empowering of the American people so that we can once again give voice to this concept of democracy and bring our elected officials to heel, and in doing so bring an end to this unelected Deep State known as the inter-agency. Thank you very much.

Adolfo Pérez Esquivel

We, the Peoples of the World, Want Peace!

The following is a statement by Adolfo Pérez Esquivel which was read as part of the proceedings for the Schiller Institute’s April 15-16 Conference, “Without the Development of All Nations, There Can Be No Lasting Peace for the Planet” during Panel 1, “The Growing Danger of World War III Underlines the Necessity for a New Security Architecture.” Mr. Esquivel is a civil rights activist and a Nobel Peace Prize winner (1980) from Argentina. The statement was read by Juan Carrero of Spain. Watch the entire conference [here](#).

Subheads have been added.

Good afternoon. My name is Juan Carrero, President of the small S’Olivar Foundation, based in Mallorca, Spain.

Today I have been granted a double honor.

The first is that of communicating a message from Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, our dear companion and teacher for half a century now, in the nonviolence movement, who also, as international president of SERPAJ,



Asemblea Nacional/Romina Icaza
Adolfo Pérez Esquivel

the Peace and Justice Service, has accompanied the peoples on the paths of justice and peace.

The value of his efforts in Latin America was justly recognized in 1980 with the Nobel Peace Prize. Those were different times in the Nobel Institute and the Norwegian parliament. Since then, his generosity has only grown. There is no global cause towards which he has been indifferent. Among many other international commitments, he has always energetically supported us in our efforts for peace, justice, truth and reconciliation in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, the scene of the greatest massacres since World War II.

To support our efforts, for several years he even proposed me for a Nobel Peace Prize, thus becoming, with his support, the Spanish candidate with the most support ever: from the unanimous support of Spain’s parliament to the support of thousands of institutions, personalities and organizations.

Together with Lanza del Vasto, the European direct disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, Adolfo has been for my