

Give Peace a Chance. Scott Ritter Goes to Washington

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A week ago this Sunday thousands of people gathered together at the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to collectively "rage against the war machine." History will judge if this event measured up to what its organizers had envisioned, and if the words spoken there will continue to resonate going forward.

From my own personal perspective, it doesn't matter if the rally is seen as a success, or the speeches delivered there deemed memorable. And while I applaud the organizers (yes, even the Libertarian Party) for making this event possible, as far as I am concerned their role is done. They got us to the starting line and helped fire the starter pistol.

But now it is up to those running the race to finish the race. And, based upon conversations I had with many of the participants afterwards, there is collective agreement that not only is this a race that *should* be run, but more importantly, *must* be won.

The interesting thing about the "Rage Against the War Machine" rally isn't so much that the organizers managed to bring together such a politically diverse group of speakers, but rather that the speakers spoke a common language that cut across political lines. For those who participated, this process was cathartic. For those who opted out, you are weaker for it.



Jimmy Dore addressing the crowd at the “Rage Against the War Machine” rally, February 19, 2023
(Courtesy Kim Iversen)

A race, like a journey, is run one step at a time. The “Rage Against the War Machine” rally was the first step of this race. To some, this start may have appeared like a stumble. To others, a tentative stride forward. But for most, the race represented the reality that the participants weren’t running a sprint, but rather a marathon, and the important thing wasn’t how that first step was characterized, but the fact that it took place at all.

Now that the race has started, however, we must decide who and what it is we are racing against. The “war machine” is a massive, nebulous entity that can be defined in many ways by many people, and I for one support all definitions so long as, in the end, they lead to a fair, just and equitable world where the interests of humanity trump the greed of the warmongers.

I have opted to define my race in stark terms—literally, a race against time. In February 2026, the last remaining arms control treaty limiting the strategic nuclear forces of both the United States and Russia, the New START treaty, expires. And on February 21 of this year, Russian President Vladimir Putin suspended Russia’s participation in the New START treaty. The reasons for this suspension are not important at this juncture—Russia has its position, the US has theirs. What is important is that arms control is no longer an active part of the diplomatic dialogue, or what passes as such today, between the US and Russia. And, unless a way is found to resuscitate arms control as a major policy objective, the risk of an unconstrained nuclear arms race post-February 2026 becomes real, and the potential—even probable—outcome manifests as a nightmare for all humanity.

The race to get arms control back on the US policy objective has a finish line—the November 2024 elections. If Americans can elect enough like-minded people—representatives, senators, and the president—to office who share this same vision, and agree on its absolute priority, then there remains hope that a new arms control treaty can be negotiated and ratified to forestall a potentially humanity-ending nuclear apocalypse.

But my race is more than just a 21-month marathon. It is an obstacle course, with numerous challenges that must be overcome in addition to the daunting task of staying the course.

One of the greatest challenges I will face on this race is that of Russophobia. In what I've termed "[the best speech I never gave](#)" (my abortive presentation penned for the occasion of the "Rage Against the War Machine" rally), I spoke of the "disease of Russophobia," warned about the "hate-filled rhetoric of Russophobia," and cautioned against "systemic Russophobia" as the greatest impediment to our collective ability to "open our minds and our hearts to accept the Russian people as fellow human beings deserving of the same compassion and consideration as our fellow Americans — as all humankind...allow the love we have for ourselves to manifest itself into love and respect for our fellow man...work with our fellow human beings in Russia to create communities of compassion that, when united, make a world filled with nuclear weapons undesirable, and policies built on the principles of mutually beneficial arms control second nature."

Scott Ritter will discuss this article and answer audience questions on Episode 49 of [Ask the Inspector](#).

While these goals and objectives may appear to reflect common sense, the fact is, not a single possible course of action is possible today because of Russophobia. It is, indeed, a disease, and fighting the infection is very much an uphill battle.

The key to solving the many problems facing the United States and Russia in the field of arms control is old fashioned diplomacy, where American representatives sit down with their Russian counterparts and engage in constructive—difficult, yes, but always constructive—dialogue that helps find points of commonality, identify points of disagreement, and helps chart a path that leads to mutually beneficial compromise.

Today, however, no such diplomacy is taking place. In the Russian Embassy to the United States sits two men who, under ideal circumstances, would take the lead in helping craft any future arms control agreement with the United States, Ambassador Anatoly Antonov and Major General Evgeny Bobkin. Ambassador Antonov was the chief Russian negotiator for the New START treaty, and is steeped in the very issues that would have to be addressed going forward. General Bobkin is an officer of the Strategic Rocket Forces, with experience in both silo-based and road mobile intercontinental ballistic missiles. His first-hand knowledge of Russian systems and nuclear posture would be invaluable in helping both the US and Russia define the parameters of any new treaty, especially one that sought to incorporate new Russian systems that have been deployed since New START entered force back in 2010.

On February 23, 2023, Russia celebrated Defender of the Fatherland Day, an annual celebration of the Russian armed forces. It is a big deal, and the Russian Embassy held a reception worthy of the occasion. I was fortunate enough to receive an invitation, and I jumped at the opportunity to attend.

I'm glad I did.

Earlier today, I tweeted out a short video clip of me toasting the occasion of Defender of the Fatherland Day with a pair of Russian colonels.

I couldn't think of a better way to spend February 23...the video speaks for itself. pic.twitter.com/6mpMOpN4bu

Most people commenting about the tweet liked it; some did not. Adrian Karatnycky, a Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council and co-Director of the “Ukrainian Jewish Encounter,” [responded](#), “Scott Ritter raises a toast to Russia’s war against Ukraine in the company of the Army that is perpetrating this genocide.”

“Where were you, Mr. Atlantic Council?” [I replied](#). “For someone whose ostensible raison d’être is the furtherance of fact-based analysis, one would think you’d be at the tip of the spear when it comes to garnering important insights into complex issues. And yet...absent, on all counts.”

And that, of course, is the whole point. Back when I served as an inspector with the On-Site Inspection Agency, implementing the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, there were numerous occasions where I would have the occasion to meet socially with Soviet diplomats and military personnel. On every occasion, these meetings would result in my writing up an account of the meeting, highlighting points I thought could be of interest from both a political and military standpoint. The Soviets I met would undoubtedly be doing the same. This was, and is, the “nuts and bolts” of the so-called “cocktail circuit,” a process of interaction designed to break down barriers and provide the respective parties the opportunity to get to know one another, and the nations they represented, a little bit better.

In short, Diplomacy 101.

There were no representatives of the United States in attendance that evening (I was there as a private citizen.) And as a result, they missed the opportunity to evaluate the tenor and tone of Ambassador Antonov’s address. Yes, one can read the words from the Russian Embassy press release the next day. But to hear the Ambassador in person changes everything.

“On April 25, 1945, there was a famous meeting of Soviet and American troops on the Elbe River,” Antonov said, solemnly. “We remember that time when our countries stood shoulder to shoulder to save humanity from Nazism. Russian and American veterans cherish the memory of their comradeship in arms. It is our hope that the spirit of the Elbe will not just remain a symbol in relations, but will actually help us improve the situation in the world.”

And unless you were there, you could not see how his words resonated on the faces and in the eyes of the Russian officers present, men who wished nothing more for there to be better relations with the United States, but who were resigned to accomplishing their mission if there were not.



The meeting of Soviet and American soldiers on the Elbe River, the World War Two Memorial, Washington, DC.

By absenting themselves from the event, American diplomats and military officers likewise missed out on the opportunity to discuss arms control with Major General Evgeny Bobkin, who in 1986 helped bring into service the SS-25 road mobile ICBM—the very missile I would, two years later, be inspecting as part of the INF treaty.

“The suspension of New START,” General Bobkin said, “is a pause. We can either return to implementation,” he noted, “or,” he added with a wave of his hand, “do away with it altogether. The choice is with the Americans.”

The finality of his words was bone-chilling.

The evening was full of such observable—and as such, learnable—moments, all missed because of elitist posturing which held that by isolating Russia, America and the collective west is weakening Russia.

Anyone in attendance at the Russian Embassy that night could tell you that while Russia was saddened by the snub, they were neither isolated nor weakened.

They were determined.

But the best part of the evening for me was the human-to-human contact, among people who treated me as a friend, a feeling I gladly reciprocated.

No propaganda.

No Russophobia.

Just people being people—humans being human.

And it gave an old Marine the chance to meet fellow professional soldiers in the best venue possible—a social gathering, where we could discuss issues calmly, without recrimination or rancor.

Because the alternative is to meet them on the field of battle.

Given that option, I’ll drink to peace anytime. And I’d be honored to do it in the company of

men and women like those whom I had the privilege of meeting that evening.

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