
III. Review

BOOK REVIEW

‘If a Solution Could Be Found at the Nuclear Abyss ...’

by Paul Gallagher

Disarmament in the Time of Perestroika: Arms Control and the End of the Soviet Union—A Personal Journal

by Scott Ritter

Atlanta: Clarity Press, 2022

Paperback, 356 pp. with notes, \$29.95

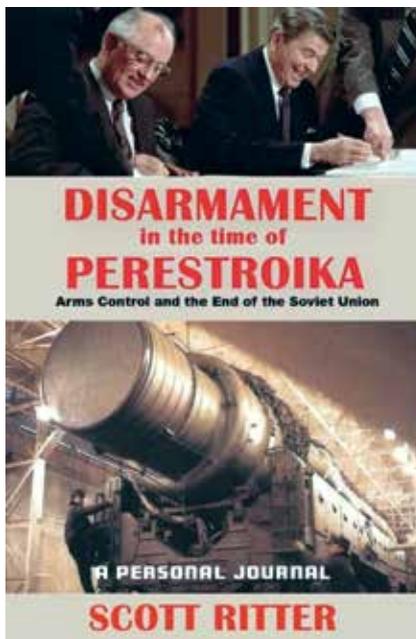
May 28—Scott Ritter was once the UN arms inspector who stood up and told the Congress and the world, that there were *no* weapons of mass destruction in Saddam Hussein’s Iraq before the U.S. invasion of 2003. His new (September 2022) book is based on one of his earlier deployments, as a United States arms inspector in 1988-91, monitoring the Soviet Union’s destruction of its SS-20 missiles under the crucial Reagan-Gorbachev Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty of 1987.

As befits Ritter’s *current* importance as an opponent of the NATO war with Russia in Ukraine, his ongoing book tour saw controversial and well-attended events in the United States this Winter, and has been extended through many appearances in Russia during the spring. But the NATO-Russia “Ukraine crisis” which was manifest by the fall of 2021 is neither discussed nor referred to in this book: Ritter thus respects the evolution of his own views of

the world in his many intervening experiences of the past 35 years.

The book is a fascinating interworking of four stories, each in great detail, from what must be Ritter’s well-organized files, research, and memory. First, how the INF Treaty was arrived at and ratified. Second, how the restricted, off-limits Soviet city of Votkinsk (earlier the Russian hometown of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky) was invested, inspected and also befriended over several years by American armed forces inspectors and civilian experts who verified the destruction of the SS-20 missiles and that none were being secretly produced. Third, how a citizen in national service, given a crucial mission for which he or she clearly lacks the starting qualifications, can seize the mission with energy and determination and help to shape and occasionally lead it—this was Ritter’s own “personal journal” of the book title.

And finally, how American inspectors interacted and cooperated with Russian citizens—including missile factory officials and workers—who were then undergoing the dramatic, unnerving economic and political change of Mikhail Gorbachev’s unsuccessful *perestroika* policy. Even as their living standards were clearly threatened, Ritter shows, Russian citizens and even Votkinsk missile factory workers



supported the INF Treaty as an achievement of the two countries' leaders for peace, and supported the treaty inspections.

This fourth "story" provides the beating heart of the otherwise exhaustive technical and physical descriptions Ritter provides of how the INF missile inspections were actually done at first, and how they evolved into a thorough and reliable monitoring of Soviet missile production.

Witness to Unfolding Tragedy

Intermediate Nuclear Force weapons are ground-based ballistic or cruise missiles with ranges of 1,000 to 5,500 km (620 to 3,400 miles) and shorter-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) with ranges from 500 to 1,000 km. Because of their flight times of just minutes to destroy their targets, they have been the weapons to drive the threat and worldwide fear of superpower nuclear war when that threat has been most intense, from the Cuban Missiles Crisis of 1962, to the Euromissiles Crisis of 1982-83, to today.

INF missiles were finally prohibited under the 1987 INF Treaty, gained by the strategic policy change of the 1980s by President Reagan and the attempted general policy change of Secretary Gorbachev. These missiles, most importantly the Soviet SS-20s and U.S. Pershings, were all destroyed during the "trust, but verify" intrusive inspections of 1988-1991 in which Marine Lieutenant Scott Ritter was an energetic and creative participant.

But in 2018 the United States withdrew from the Treaty, and in February 2023 Russia "suspended its participation." Thus the INF Treaty is a leading character—a murdered character—in the still-unfolding 60-year tragedy prefiguring, today, a NATO-Russia nuclear world war.

Ritter's *Disarmament in the Time of Perestroika* shares one of the characteristics of such a drama: There is not a sentence in the book which draws conclusions about the course of events in U.S.-Soviet history, or even about the particular history of this period; it is all presented as events and

individual actions.

Perhaps most important are the chapters on the "campaigns" and "battles" occurring over *perestroika* among Communist Party leaders and the Russian population. These were taking place on the national level even as Russians whom Ritter and other inspectors came to know in the area around Votkinsk city, where the missile production factory was the engine of the economy, were suffering the effects of the SS-20 production shutdown, and hoping that *perestroika* ("restructuring") reforms would somehow give them a recovery.

Ritter's historical research files on the struggles for and against Gorbachev's intended reforms must be quite rich. He has in detail the initially opposed, but eventually converging attacks on *perestroika* from the old Soviet Communist Party leaders on one hand, and the "democracy party" insurgents associated with Boris Yeltsin on the other—but also, the way that both were reflected in the growing unrest of the secluded citizens of Votkinsk and their very informative and insightful local newspaper, *Leninski Put'* ("Lenin's Path"). He describes how the Soviet military attempted to respond to President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative with, among other moves, the new mobile *Kourier* missile, produced under the noses of both the American inspectors and the Soviet leadership, which became an issue of the *perestroika* debates.

And he includes a little-known feature of embattled Gorbachev's April 5, 1988 speech to the Party Congress he had called, in which Ritter observes that the Russian leader seemed to echo—but to no avail—JFK's inaugural address:

Perestroika is not manna from the skies—in-
stead of waiting for it to be brought in from
somewhere, it has to be brought about by the
people themselves in their town or village, in
their work collective. What are needed today
more than ever are deeds, actions, not talk about
perestroika.... Therefore, we must put a blunt
question to people who persist in complaining



Scott Ritter

and pointing a finger at those in charge, at the “higher-ups”: What have you yourself done for *perestroika*?

To See Ourselves as Others See Us

Ritter and his fellow American inspectors not only read the *Leninski Put*, they also wrote to it and for it; and Ritter himself was once strongly criticized in it for remarks, coached by his superiors, which he had just made in an interview in *The Washington Times*, not realizing that *Leninski Put* would be on

being implemented under *perestroika*. Every day brought a struggle to survive, every tomorrow a journey into the unknown. Not for the Americans....

That is not the case today, despite the claims of NATO triumphalists. Scott Ritter has made regular reports from his numerous “book events” in cities across Russia, where he is recognized and reported on widely—likely also in the current newspaper of Votkinsk. From Irkutsk on May 9, he wrote that Russia’s forced economic

restructuring under NATO’s monster sanctions is succeeding where *perestroika* did not. Russians, he reported, have built industry incubators which, through R&D, are developing new concepts, new technologies. They are actively seeking foreign investment, and they are getting it. Ritter called what he had seen in Novosibirsk and Irkutsk, in the way of economy, “unimaginable” for a country at war and also under the most stringent sanctions ever imposed.

Regarding *Disarmament in the Time of Perestroika*, on May 15, *Tatar Inform* published a story reporting Ritter’s statement that he had written the book to remind that 35 years ago, even after decades of Cold

War conflict, nuclear war threats, and hate-and-fear propaganda by both sides, Americans and Russians could see their goals in common. He wrote the book because:

[I] wanted to convey to the people of the two countries [Russia and the United States] that we can work and coexist together without war and conflict. If a solution was found when the world was on the brink of nuclear abyss, nothing prevents it from being found now.... I think my book should be read by as many Russians and Americans as possible. Because people on both sides have forgotten how to find common ground and understand each other.



White House

Communist Party General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev and U.S. President Ronald Reagan sign the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, the first in which the U.S. and the Soviet Union agreed to eliminate a weapons class and reduce the number of weapons in their nuclear stockpiles. The White House, Dec. 8, 1987.

it immediately. Ritter admits his “American” foolishness:

For the first time since I began work in Votkinsk, I was compelled by conscience to examine the current state of relations from the Soviet point of view. What I saw was not pretty. The Americans, it seemed, were oblivious to the realities of Soviet existence....

For the Soviets in Votkinsk, the INF treaty implementation was, literally, an existential crisis. The economic, social, and political life blood of the Votkinsk community was under threat because of the disarmament activities