

Ukraine: Vladimir Putin lines up his nuclear options

Larisa Brown George Grylls

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Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#) is set to demonstrate his willingness to use [weapons of mass destruction](#) with a nuclear test on Ukraine's borders, Nato is believed to have warned its members.

The Kremlin has been signalling its readiness for a significant escalation as [Russia loses ground on the battlefield](#).

Fears over Putin's earlier hints that he might resort to such tactics heightened on Monday with claims that a train operated by the secretive nuclear division was destined for Ukraine.

Konrad Muzyka, a Poland-based defence analyst, said the train, spotted in central Russia, was linked to the 12th main directorate of the [Russian ministry of defence](#) and that it was "responsible for nuclear munitions, their storage, maintenance, transport, and issuance to units".

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AP

The Russian nuclear submarine Dmitry Donskoy moored near Kronstadt, a seaport town 30km west of St. Petersburg, Russia in 2017. (File photo)

A senior defence source, however, said that a more likely demonstration of Putin's readiness to use [nuclear weapons](#) could come in the Black Sea.

Although they believed such a show of force would be more likely, they said it was "not impossible" that Putin

could fire a tactical nuclear weapon in Ukraine. If he chose to do so, he faced a significant risk.

"They could misfire and accidentally hit a Russian city close to the Ukrainian border such as Belgorod," the source said.

Nato is said to have sent an intelligence report to its members and allies alerting them to Russia's plans to test its nuclear-capable torpedo drone, Poseidon, dubbed the "weapon of the apocalypse".

The submarine K-329 Belgorod, which is carrying Poseidon, is believed to be headed to the Arctic. According to La Repubblica newspaper, it is about to be tested in the area of the Kara Sea.

Russia acknowledged on Monday that Ukrainian forces had broken through its defences in the southern Kherson region. Igor Konashenkov, a defence ministry spokesman, told reporters that the Ukrainians had seized territory thanks to "superior tank units" and had "penetrated into the depths of our defence".



RUSSIAN DEFENSE MINISTRY PRESS SERVICE/VIA AP

Russian nuclear submarines Prince Vladimir and Yekaterinburg are harboured at a Russian naval base in Gazhiyevo, Kola Peninsula, Russia, in 2021. (File photo)

The Moscow-based news outlet RBC reported that the commander of Russia's western military district, Colonel-General Alexander Zhuravlyov, had been dismissed, and would be replaced by Lieutenant-General Roman Berdnikov.

Kherson is one of the four regions illegally annexed by Moscow last week after a hasty sham referendum orchestrated by the Kremlin. Putin's land grab has threatened to push the conflict to a dangerous new level, raising the prospect of a nuclear strike masquerading as a defence of Russian territory.

Ukraine has also pushed to regain territory in the Luhansk region and claimed full control of Russia's eastern logistics hub, Lyman, in Donetsk.

Professor Andrew Futter, a University of Leicester academic and nuclear weapons expert, said the nuclear submarine could perform various tactical functions and was far more than just a nuclear delivery platform. He suggested that, as in the case of the train, Russia was trying to send a warning to the West to stop meddling in the conflict.

James Rogers, director of research at the Council on Geostrategy, said he would not rule out a Russian nuclear strike on Ukraine's advancing forces, no matter how unlikely that seemed.

"Given the quality of the decision-making in the Kremlin at the moment, nothing should be discounted. The Russians are getting desperate, but it would be a dramatic escalation and one that countries such as India and even China would surely condemn," he said.

How the West would respond to a nuclear strike is unclear. Rogers said extensive cyberattacks could be a possibility, as would "economic strangulation, and further support for Ukraine's government and armed forces".

Futter said that Nato allies responding to a strike on Ukraine would "open up Pandora's box", adding: "If the West uses nuclear weapons in response you really don't know what comes next."

Speaking at the Conservative party conference in Birmingham, General Kenneth McKenzie Jr, the former commander of US Central Command, said: "The threat of nuclear escalation is very high. We do ourselves no good if we ignore that."

Dmitry Peskov, the Kremlin's spokesman, sought to downplay a call from Ramzan Kadyrov, the Chechen strongman, to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine. Kadyrov claimed he was sending three of his sons to join the fight after urging Moscow to take "more drastic measures ... and use low-yield nuclear weapons".

Peskov said: "The heads of regions have the right to express their point of view. Even at difficult moments, emotions should still be excluded from any assessments."

THE TIMES, LONDON

WORLD

Rare video shows Russia moving equipment belonging to a nuclear weapons unit

BY HALEY OTT
OCTOBER 4, 2022 / 10:19 AM / CBS NEWS

A video shared online of a train in Russia carrying equipment belonging to a Russian military unit that handles nuclear weapons should be taken as a message to the West, a military analyst says. The video, which a U.S. official told CBS News could not be independently confirmed, shows an armored personnel carrier with a cannon attached, as well as another vehicle belonging to the unit, being transported on the train, the analyst said.

"Such videos are never released by chance. I'm 100% sure that there was a purpose behind posting or releasing such a video," Konrad Muzyka, an aerospace and defense consultant focused on Russia and Belarus, told CBS News.

Muzyka said that it was highly unusual to see a video of that particular Russian unit, the 12th main directorate of the Russian Ministry of Defense, on the internet.

"This video of a train is a very good example of Russian strategy of trying to increase the pressure on the West and signal its — maybe not necessarily readiness — but willingness to escalate the situation," Muzyka said.

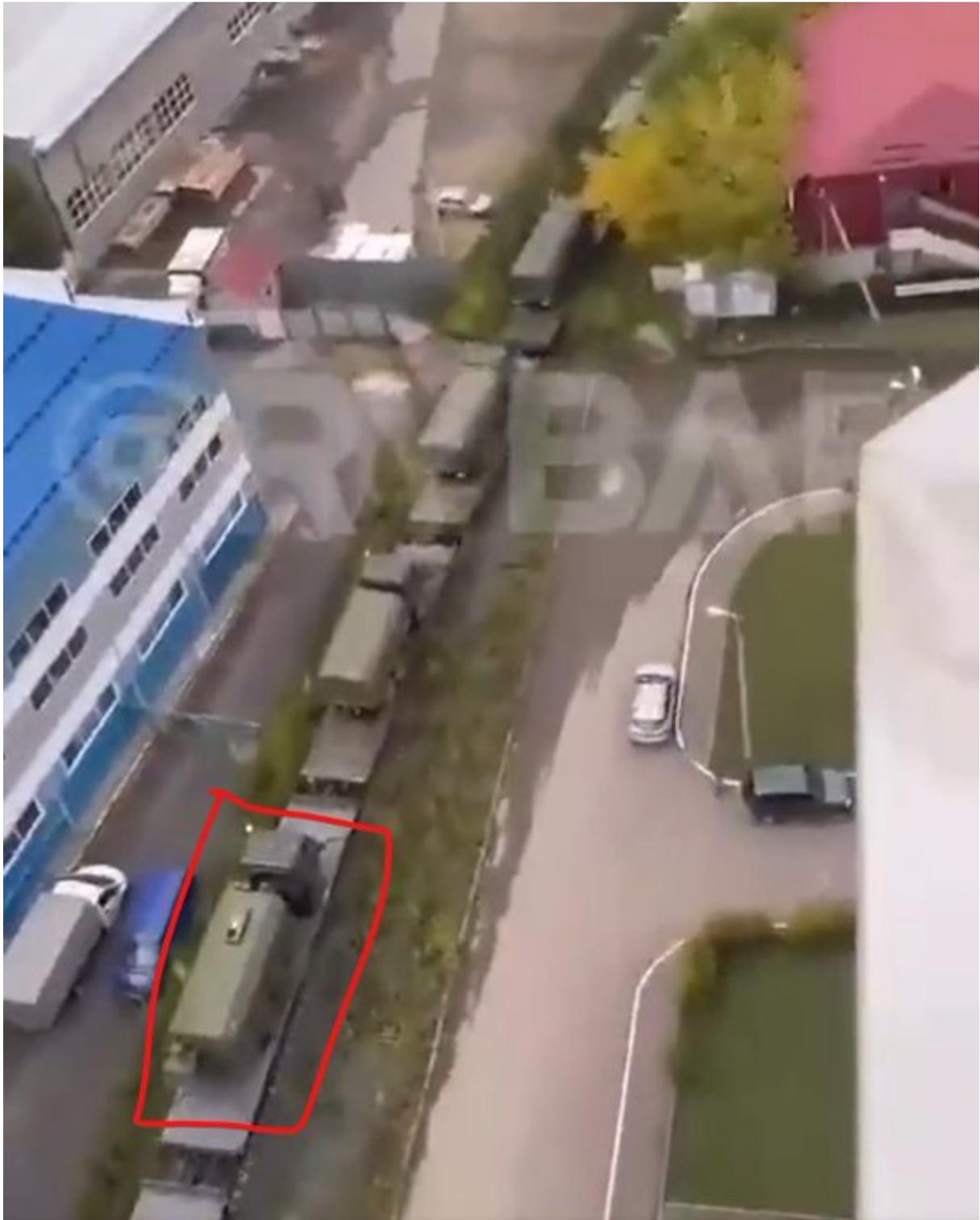
The video surfaced amid reports, which CBS News has been unable to independently verify, that the U.S.-led NATO military alliance had warned its member nations that Russia could be preparing to test its nuclear-capable Poseidon torpedo. The weapon was reportedly on a Russian military submarine headed toward the Arctic. There were also reports in the British press, which Muzyka said were incorrect, that the train featured in the online video was heading toward Russia's border with Ukraine.

"Going forward, we are going to see more reports about Russian activities that relate to nuclear weapons, that relate to drills of units which can potentially be carrying nuclear warheads," Muzyka said. "Russia will try to increase the pressure on the

West, and it will try to indicate to the world that, from its point of view, the nuclear option is being considered. But, you know, I still think that, to a large extent, it is a bluff."

Myzyka said that by declaring recently that all options are on the table, the Russian leader has put himself in a position where he "cannot really back down right now. And they will try to test Western resolve, and they will try to influence Western and Ukrainian decision making."

Fears that Russia could launch a tactical, or small-scale nuclear strike have mounted since Putin issued his warning last week that he would defend Russian territory — including parts of Ukraine he unilaterally declared dominion over this week — by "all the means at our disposal."



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy appeared to take the threat seriously, telling CBS' "Face the

Nation" on Sunday: "Maybe yesterday it was a bluff. Now, it could be a reality."

"He wants to scare the whole world. These are the first steps of his nuclear blackmail," Zelenskyy said. "I don't think he's bluffing. I think the world is deterring it and containing this threat. We need to keep putting pressure on him and not allow him to continue."

CBS News senior foreign correspondent Charlie D'Agata asked the exiled mayor of Melitopol, a Ukrainian city currently occupied by Russian forces, whether he believed the Russian leader would resort to nuclear weapons as he lashes out in anger over battlefield losses.

"I expect it," Mayor Ivan Federov told CBS News.



Justin Crump, a veteran of the British army and the CEO of the intelligence consulting firm Sibylline, told BBC News earlier Tuesday, however, that Russia was likely stoking concern over a possible nuclear attack primarily to influence Western decision making.

"I think it's pretty clear that Russian intent is to keep us nervous, to try across a whole spectrum of activities to dislocate Western support for Ukraine," Crump said. "I suspect that there's quite a high likelihood of some kind of nuclear test in the Arctic, probably showcasing their new technology. That could well happen at this time of year anyway. But of course, anything like that now will be jumped on as proof that Russia is increasing the tension, increasing the ante, is getting ready to use weapons... These are not things to indicate something is imminent, but they're being jumped on and extrapolated in this climate of fear. So that's something we do have to be quite aware of."

Yes, Putin might use nuclear weapons.
We need to plan for scenarios where he
does

Christopher S Chivvis

Putin's saber-rattling doesn't necessarily mean he'll deploy nukes.
But he certainly could



Putin threatened to use nuclear weapons to 'protect Russia' – implying he may use them to defend the regions he is annexing. Photograph: AP

Fri 23 Sep 2022 17.30 BST

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ews of the Ukrainian army's **recent advances** swept across western capitals like fresh air. A war that was for months mired in crushing artillery fire had suddenly opened up. Russian forces, **outmaneuvered** by the Ukrainian army, fled, again proving weaker than anyone expected. **Hopes lifted** that Ukraine could win the war and force their tormentor back to the prewar battlelines – and perhaps further.

Russia shared the same assessment. Vladimir Putin knows his military is **badly damaged** and getting weaker. The Russian president responded with military mobilization and preparations to annex the Ukrainian regions Russia now controls, just as he did in Crimea in 2014. He also **threatened** to use nuclear weapons to “protect Russia” – implying he may use them to defend the regions he is annexing.

Meanwhile, Ukraine, emboldened by the success of its Kharkiv operation, **wants advanced tanks** and other new weapons systems from the west. In the face of Putin's wanton disregard for human life and reckless nuclear threats, they may well get them.

No one should conclude that Putin would use a nuclear weapon just because he threatened to do so – the credibility of his words alone is nil. His nuclear saber-rattling is condemnable, and Joe Biden rightly attacked it on **Sunday** and again **at the United Nations** on Wednesday. The president is also right to maintain ambiguity about how the United States might respond if Russia detonated a nuclear weapon.

But just because Putin has threatened nuclear attack doesn't mean it won't happen. Sadly, it isn't that hard to see a path to nuclear use from here. There are many variants, but the basic story goes something like this:

Western support to **Ukraine** increases this autumn, with new weapons systems and larger quantities of the weapons already deployed. Western intelligence gives the Ukrainians an even sharper edge against a Russian force that is large but poorly trained, under-equipped and demoralized. The Russian military takes heavy losses. It's routed from one of the Ukrainian regions it has annexed.

In this scenario, Putin's grand project is now collapsing once and for all. Protests in **Russia** intensify. He fears losing his grip on power and being dragged, Gaddafi-like, through the streets. So he strikes Ukrainian forces with a tactical nuclear weapon in a gamble to underscore the risks, stop the war, and avert disaster for himself. His aim is not to gain a military advantage, but to raise the stakes so high that western capitals are forced to rethink their strategy.

After that, de-escalation would be hard. The United States and Nato nuclear powers would come under pressure for a nuclear strike of their own – probably on Russia itself, due to a lack of other options. With its conventional forces in disarray, Russia's likely response to this strike would be to broaden the nuclear conflict to Nato.

The US might try to avoid such an escalating nuclear scenario by **deploying a large conventional US force** to Ukraine, but this would be almost as escalatory from Russia's perspective as a Nato nuclear attack. Even if such a strategy did work to de-escalate, the nuclear taboo is broken, and with it, the possibility that other despots use nuclear weapons in the future is much higher.

The whole world should want to avert this scenario. The United States and its allies need to deploy all the leverage they can – carrots as well as sticks – to get China, India, and other G20 countries to condemn Russia's nuclear threat. The tepid reception Putin got from India and China earlier this week seems like a sign these rising powers understand the stakes for their own futures. China is conflicted about Ukraine because it views Russia's operation there through the lens of its own aims for Taiwan. But Beijing should still appreciate the disastrous consequences a nuclear conflict – even if contained to Europe – would have for its economic future.

Peer pressure alone, however, is not likely to be enough. Biden should also find a way to reinforce that the US is not aiming to oust Putin – although it may be difficult to make this case convincing given the extensive sanctions regime,

Biden's own statements about Putin, and the past US record of overthrowing despots.

A ceasefire would help to calm the situation and avoid further escalation, but convincing the Ukrainians to accept one is going to be extremely hard now that they have the momentum on the battlefield. Russia's disastrous plan to annex the regions makes negotiations all the less appealing because it effectively takes these regions off the table.

Western capitals should at least point out to Ukrainian leaders that their prospects of retaking all their territory may not be as bright as they hope. There is a very long way to go – their operation in Kharkiv was dramatic, but only bought them back a fraction of their territory. Whether it can be replicated for the remainder is uncertain. At a minimum, now is not the time to offer the Ukrainians advanced new weapons systems.

Putin has presented the world with impossible choices. Russia must emerge from this crisis chastened for its recklessness. But in the next few weeks, leaders need to find offramps to prevent the worst. This will take maximum flexibility and creativity from all sides.

- Christopher S Chivvis is a senior fellow and director of the Carnegie Endowment's American statecraft program

Opinion: The most likely nuclear scenario

From CNN Opinion

Published 3:55 AM EDT, Wed September 28, 2022

CNN –

With his forces retreating in Ukraine, international allies expressing concern and citizens at home fleeing partial mobilization, Russian President Vladimir Putin has reached for the threat of nuclear weapons – and revived Western fears of atomic apocalypse.

“The territorial integrity of our homeland, our independence and freedom will be ensured, I will emphasize this again, with all the means at our disposal,” Putin said in a speech last week. He added that “those who try to blackmail us with nuclear weapons should know that the prevailing winds can turn in their direction.”

So, how worried should we be? Here, former British army officer and former commander of the UK & NATO Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Forces, Hamish de Bretton-Gordon, explains the crucial differences between “tactical” and “strategic” weapons and why all-out nuclear war probably isn’t on the cards anytime soon.

The views expressed in this commentary are his own.

CNN: What’s the difference between a ‘strategic’ and ‘tactical’ nuclear weapon?

De Bretton-Gordon: It is all about scale – strategic nuclear weapons are basically Armageddon. Russia and the West (including the United States, Britain and France) both have almost 6,000 warheads each, according to the Federation of Nuclear Scientists, which is pretty much enough to change the planet as we know it. This is called Mutually Assured Destruction, with the rather ironic acronym MAD.



Hamish de Bretton-Gordon

These warheads are fitted to Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) which can travel thousands of miles and are aimed at key sites and cities in the US, UK, France and Russia.

Tactical nuclear weapons meanwhile are much smaller warheads with a yield, or explosive power, of up to 100 kilotons of dynamite – rather than roughly 1,000 kilotons for strategic warheads.

That said, tactical nuclear weapons could still create huge amounts of damage, and if fired at a nuclear power station – for example Zaporizhzhia in southern Ukraine – could create a chain reaction and contamination on a scale with a nuclear strike.

CNN: What shape are Russia's nuclear weapons in?

De Bretton-Gordon: This is difficult to tell for certain, but my assumption is that Russia's strategic weapons and ICBMs are probably in good condition and always ready. It is only Russia's strategic nuclear weapons which now give it parity with the US and NATO militarily, so I expect them to be well looked after.

But this is likely not the case for the tactical weapons. The warheads and missiles are probably in reasonable condition but the vehicles they are mounted on are, I believe and have on good authority, in poor condition. Judging by the state of the rest of the Russian Army equipment on show in Ukraine, this is a fair assumption.

It is likely that these launchers would need to travel hundreds of miles to get into a position where they could attack Ukraine, as they only have a range of up to 500 kilometers (310 miles). But from a mechanical perspective it's unlikely, in my opinion, that they would get that far.

Also, it is likely these weapons rely on microprocessors and other high-tech components which are in very short supply in Russia – given international sanctions and the heavy use of precision guide missiles by Russia, which also use these parts.

CNN: What about strikes on nuclear stations?

De Bretton-Gordon: As Putin's conventional warfare is struggling in Ukraine, I expect the Russians to increasingly turn to unconventional warfare.

At the heart of this move is attacking civilians rather than opposition forces. This manifests itself with attacks on hospitals, schools and 'hazardous' infrastructure, like chemical plants and nuclear power stations. If these are attacked, they can become improvised chemical or nuclear weapons.

The Russians hope that if the Ukrainian people give up, the military will quickly follow, which, in my opinion, is a highly flawed assumption – both are showing a lot more mettle than the Russians.

The Russians hope that if the Ukraine people give up the military will quickly follow, which in my opinion is a highly flawed assumption.

Hamish de Bretton-Gordon

We have seen several occasions in Ukraine where Russian forces appear to deliberately bomb chemical factories to cause toxic contamination.

Though blowing up these power stations would not create a nuclear explosion similar to a weapon detonation, it could spread radioactive debris and contaminate local water supplies.

Meteorological conditions at the moment indicate that all this contamination would also head west across Europe. This could be seen as an attack on NATO and trigger Article 5 – where an attack on one ally is considered an attack on all allies – which would allow NATO to strike directly back at Russia.

Hopefully, this possibility is something the Russian high command fully recognizes.

CNN: What's the likelihood of these nuclear scenarios?

De Bretton-Gordon: The use of strategic nuclear weapons is extremely unlikely in my opinion. This is a war nobody can win, and at the moment it does not seem likely that this regional conflict in Europe would lead to a global nuclear war which could destroy the planet for many generations.

I am sure the checks and balances are in place in the Kremlin, as they are at the White House and 10 Downing Street to make sure we are not plunged into global nuclear conflict on a whim.



Opinion: Desperate Putin will twist, not stick

I believe Putin's tactical nuclear weapons are unusable. Even if their vehicles do work, the minute they turn their engines on to move they will be picked up by US and NATO intelligence.

I hope the private discussions the Biden and Putin administrations have apparently been having are along the lines of, 'you move your tactical nukes and NATO will take them out with long range precision guided missiles'. It would appear this is the case from what Jake Sullivan, the US National Security Advisor to the White House, disclosed over the weekend.

The most likely nuclear scenario is, I believe, an attack by Russia on a nuclear power station in Ukraine. This could have a similar effect to a tactical nuclear explosion but would be easier to deny for the Russians, who accuse Ukraine of deliberately bombing their own power stations.

It is only Russia that has tactical nuclear weapons in this conflict, so it would be undeniable if they're used that Russia is responsible, and hence trigger NATO action. So degraded are Russian conventional forces, that they would likely be quickly overcome by NATO forces if it came to that, which even with Putin's other failings, presumably he realizes.

CNN: What can we learn from Russia's weapons playbook in Syria?

De Bretton-Gordon: I believe the Russians developed their unconventional warfare tactics in Syria. (Russian forces entered Syria's long civil war in 2015, bolstering ally President Bashar al-Assad's regime). I do not believe Assad would still be in power had he not used chemical weapons.

The massive nerve agent attack on August 21, 2013 on Ghouta stopped the rebels overrunning Damascus. The four-year conventional siege of Aleppo was ended by multiple chlorine attacks.

And it does not appear that Putin has any morals or scruples. Russia attacked hospitals and schools in Syria which it is repeating again in Ukraine. Unconventional warfare aims to break the will of civilians to resist, and Putin appears to be happy to use any means and weapons to achieve this.

CNN: How much does this come down to Putin's call?

De Bretton-Gordon: These weapons are doctrinally controlled at the highest levels and would require Putin to make the decision on a strategic strike.

However Soviet doctrine, which the Russians still seem to be following, allows local commanders to use tactical nuclear weapons to stave off defeat, or loss of Russian territory.

The attempted annexation of four districts through the current sham referendums makes the likelihood of tactical use very high, if these places are attacked. Though one still expects that local commanders would defer to Putin first before pressing their own equivalent of a red button.

Western military sources say that Putin is getting involved in the close battle and seems to be giving fairly low-level commanders their orders. This is extraordinary – it appears that only now Putin has lost faith in his generals after Ukraine recaptured large swathes of the north-east earlier this year – and suggests a broken command and control system, and a president who doesn't trust his generals.

(That said, while Russian military command on the ground appears to be failing, there is no suggestion Putin's control in the Kremlin is wavering).

Even in an attack on a power station one assumes Putin would be involved, as the West would likely construe it as an improvised nuclear weapon and act accordingly.

CNN: How should the West respond now – and in the event of a nuclear strike?

De Bretton-Gordon: The West must make it absolutely clear to Putin that any use of nuclear, or chemical or biological weapons is a real redline issue. That said, I don't think all-out nuclear war is at all likely.

NATO must direct that it will take out Russia's tactical nuclear weapons if they move out of their current locations to a position where they could threaten Ukraine, and must also make clear that any deliberate attacks on nuclear power stations will exact an equal and greater response from NATO.

This is the time to call Putin's bluff. He's hanging on by his fingertips, and we must give him no chances to regain his hold. Russia's forces are now so degraded that they are no match for NATO and we should now negotiate, with this in mind, from this position of strength.

Moscow unlikely to use nuclear weapons, say ex-Russian generals

Former Russian generals tell Al Jazeera that while the prospect of nuclear war remains slim, the situation could quickly escalate.

A Russian serviceman stands guard near the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant [File: Alexander Ermochenko/Reuters]

Published On 23 Sep 2022

23 Sep 2022

Russia is unlikely to use [nuclear weapons](#) in Ukraine unless NATO puts boots on the ground, two retired Russian generals have told Al Jazeera.

“If the collective West attacks Russia with its conventional armed forces, then Russia’s response could very well be nuclear since there is no comparison between the West’s conventional military potential and that of Russia,” said Evgeny Buzhinsky, a retired lieutenant general who served as the Russian military’s top arms control negotiator from 2001 to 2009.

What you need to know about the Russia-Ukraine war

list of 5 items

- list 1 of 5

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[Explainer: Will capping Russian oil prices actually work?](#)

end of list

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However, Buzhinsky stressed that Russia had little to gain from using nuclear weapons in Ukraine under the present circumstances.

He argued that the Russian military did not need nuclear weapons to achieve its strategic objectives, such as destroying transport infrastructure used to deliver Western arms shipments or damaging the country's electricity network.



The Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. [File: Alexander Ermochenko/Reuters]

Mutual destruction

At the same time, Buzhinsky warned that initiating a nuclear attack would almost certainly put Moscow and Washington on a dangerous escalating spiral.

“There can be no limited use of nuclear weapons – to think otherwise is an illusion,” he said.

“Any nuclear conflict between Russia and the United States will lead to complete mutual destruction.”

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A similar assessment was given by Leonid Reshetnikov, a retired lieutenant general who spent more than 40 years working in the Soviet and Russian foreign intelligence services.

Reshetnikov told Al Jazeera that the prospect of Russia using tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine was “impossible and would make little military sense” right now.

He argued that such a move would be a sharp deviation from the risk-averse strategy that Russia has pursued in Ukraine so far, noting that the Kremlin waited nearly seven months before declaring a [partial mobilisation](#).

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NATO troops becoming directly involved in the conflict could change Moscow’s calculus, however.

“The United States and practically all of Europe are already participating in this conflict by providing Ukraine with weapons, intelligence, instructors, and volunteers,” Reshetnikov said.

AD

“If this continues to further escalate, then that creates the risk of a global war in which nuclear weapons could be used.”

For some, the current showdown brings back memories of the Cold War, a time of incredibly high global tensions as the Soviet Union and Washington competed in an arms race for nuclear supremacy.

According to Reshetnikov, “the Cold War was nonsense compared with the situation today”.

“What we are seeing now is both sides trying to exert pressure on each other, gradually inching towards the possibility of a direct confrontation. I don’t think we will see nuclear war today or tomorrow, but it’s difficult to say how the ongoing escalation will develop a year from now.”



Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov defended the war and accused Ukraine of committing atrocities at the UN. [Russian Foreign Ministry/Handout/Reuters]

Nuclear capabilities

Russia is believed to have the world's largest nuclear arsenal, with nearly 6,000 warheads, according to [estimates](#) from the Federation of American Scientists.

Along with China, Russia is also one of the leaders in developing hypersonic missiles, which are capable of travelling five times the speed of sound and changing trajectory mid-flight.

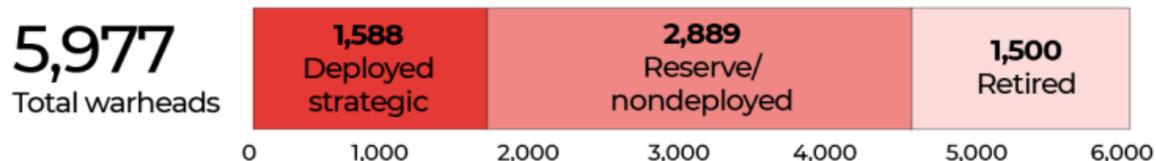
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Under the nuclear doctrine adopted in 2020, Russia stated that it was prepared to use nuclear weapons if it received information about an incoming ballistic missile hit, was subject to an attack involving nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction, had adversary damage critical infrastructure that controlled its nuclear arsenal, or if it was faced with a conventional military threat that put the “very existence of the [Russian] state itself” in jeopardy.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Russia's nuclear programme

Russia has an **estimated 5,977 nuclear warheads**. About 1,588 warheads are currently deployed which means they are on intercontinental missiles and at heavy bomber bases.



Between 1949 and 1990, the Soviet Union carried out a total of 715 nuclear tests.



In 1961, the Soviet Union conducted the world's largest nuclear explosion by detonating the Tsar Bomba over Novaya Zemlya, north of the Arctic Circle. [AFP PHOTO]



Source: Federation of American Scientists, Arms Control Association (ACA) | September 2022

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(Al Jazeera)

Concerns about the potential of nuclear escalation have risen since the start of the war in Ukraine.

Days after sending troops into his neighbouring country, Russian President Vladimir Putin [ordered](#) the military to put Russia's nuclear forces on high alert in response to what he called "aggressive statements" from NATO powers.

During a nationally televised address on Wednesday, Putin [accused](#) Western governments of “nuclear blackmail” and seeking to “weaken, divide, and destroy” Russia through their military support to Ukraine.

“If the territorial integrity of our country comes under threat, we will certainly make use of all the means at our disposal to protect Russia and its people,” he said, a comment widely interpreted as a thinly veiled nuclear threat.

“This is not a bluff,” Putin continued. “Those who are trying to blackmail us with nuclear weapons should know that the wind can also turn in their direction.”

Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev appeared to further up the ante on Thursday when he [declared](#) that the Kremlin could use nuclear weapons to defend territories that are incorporated into Russia from Ukraine.

The rhetoric from Moscow has sparked condemnation from the West.

US President Joe Biden [accused](#) Putin of making “overt nuclear threats” against Europe and showing a “reckless disregard for the responsibilities of the non-proliferation regime.”

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Biden has previously [threatened](#) Russia with a “consequential” response if Moscow were to use chemical or tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine.

Meanwhile, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told the Reuters news agency that the security bloc would “make sure that there is no misunderstanding in Moscow about the seriousness of using nuclear weapons,” while adding that it had not observed any changes in Russia’s nuclear posture.

In an interview with Britain’s Guardian newspaper, Mykhailo Podolyak, a senior aide to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, urged other nuclear powers to commit to “swift retaliatory nuclear strikes” against Russia if Moscow attempted to use its weapons in Ukraine.

SOURCE: AL JAZEERA