

RUSSIA-UKRAINE INVASION

NUCLEAR SABER RATTLING

A TIMELINE OF THE VARIOUS THREATS MADE BY RUSSIAN LEADERS AND OFFICIALS REGARDING THE USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN THE CONFLICT

FEBRUARY 27, 2022

Putin ordered Russian nuclear forces to operate on a heightened state of alert in response to “aggressive statements” from the West in response to the invasion of Ukraine.

APRIL 24, 2022

In what seemed to be a response to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s Meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov warned that further support for Ukraine could cause an increase in tensions, stating that, given current tensions, the danger of a World War III was “real”.

MAY 12, 2022

Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev warns that NATO military aid to Ukraine could lead to a Russia-NATO nuclear war.

SEPTEMBER 21, 2022

During a speech ordering the “partial mobilization” of Russian troops, Putin warned that Russia “will use all the means at our disposal” to defend its territory, a statement widely interpreted to mean the use of nuclear weapons. This statement was echoed a few days later in an address to the UN General Assembly by Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, just a day after territories in Ukraine under Russian occupation held “referendums”, where he stated that, Russian territory, including territory “further enshrined” in Russia’s constitution in the future, “is under the full protection of the state.”

SEPTEMBER 30, 2022

During an address at the signing of the treaties on accession of Donetsk, Lugansk, Zaporozhye, and Kherson regions to Russia, Putin made direct references to the bombing of German cities during World War II and the precedent created by the US and the use of nuclear weapons.

OCTOBER 24, 2022

Russian officials, including Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, are accusing Ukraine of preparing to use a radioactive dirty bomb on Ukrainian territory, sparking concerns that Russia may be planning to use a dirty bomb and blame it on Ukraine. These claims have been rejected by the US, UK, and France, and IAEA inspectors have failed to find evidence of the construction or preparation of a dirty bomb.

FEBRUARY 24, 2022

During his address to the Russian people announcing the invasion of Ukraine, Putin warned that any outside interference in Ukraine would or of a direct attack on Russia would be met with an immediate response and the consequences would be “such as you have never seen in your entire history.”

APRIL 20, 2022

Russia carried out the first test launch of its new nuclear capable RS-28 Sarmat long-range ICBM. Putin stated that the missile could defeat any missile defense and that it should cause countries threatening Russia to “think twice”. Despite concerns created by this statement and weapons test, the US Department of Defense confirmed that Russia had properly notified the US prior to the launch as required by the New START treaty and that it was not a threat.

APRIL 27, 2022

Seemingly in response to increasing Western support and supplying weapons to Ukraine, Putin announced in Russia’s main legislative assembly that Russia would respond to any combative military provocation from outside Ukraine. Putin said, “We have all the tools for this, that no one else can boast of having. We won’t boast about it. We’ll use them, if needed, and I want everyone to know that”, heavily hinting at the use of nuclear weapons.

MAY 29, 2022

Russian ambassador to Britain told BBC that he does not believe that his country would use tactical nuclear weapons in the war against Ukraine until Russian territorial security is threatened. This came after denying the allegations of war crimes in the town of Bucha.

SEPTEMBER 27, 2022

Former Russian President Medvedev released a statement on Telegram about the potential use of nuclear weapons against Ukraine that used exact terminology stipulating one of the conditions of Russia’s nuclear strike doctrine. Additionally, Medvedev stated that Russia has the right to defend itself with nuclear weapons if pushed beyond its limits and that the US-led NATO alliance would be too scared of a “nuclear apocalypse” to directly enter the conflict in response.

OCTOBER 1, 2022

The head of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, called for the use of low-yield nuclear weapons in Ukraine after the loss of the strategically important town of Lyman, becoming the first prominent Russian official to directly call for the use of nuclear weapons.

JANUARY 22, 2023

Vyacheslav Volodin, speaker of the Duma, warned that, “If Washington and NATO countries supply weapons that will be used to strike civilian cities and attempt to seize our territories, as they threaten, this will lead to retaliatory measures using more powerful weapons.” He also stated that “Arguments that nuclear powers have not previously used weapons of mass destruction in local conflicts is untenable.”

FEBRUARY 21, 2023

Putin announced that Russia would be suspending its participation in the New START arms control treaty. He announced that new strategic assets had been put on combat duty and threatened to resume nuclear tests.

MARCH 30, 2023

Nobel Peace Prize winning journalist Dimitry Muratov warns that Russian state propaganda is “preparing people to think that nuclear war isn’t a bad thing.” Further, state media talks of targeting Britain and France and that a prominent talk-show host recently suggested that Russia “should declare any military target on the territory of France, Poland, and the United Kingdom a legitimate target.

JUNE 21, 2023

Yuri Borisov, the head of Roscosmos, said that the RS-28 Sarmat ICBM, nicknamed the Satan 2, has assumed combat duty. Tested in early 2022, the Sarmat is an underground silo-based missile that Russian officials say can carry up to 15 nuclear warheads, though the US military estimates its capacity to be only 10 warheads.

JANUARY 7, 2024

Russia reportedly completed the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus following Belarus’ amendment which removed its commitment to remain free of nuclear weapons. Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko confirmed the nuclear transfers and the equipment of Belarusian aircraft for nuclear capabilities.

FEBRUARY 29, 2024

During his annual state of the nation address, Russian President Vladimir Putin threatened to use nuclear weapons if Western allies provided troops to aid Ukraine. Putin boasted of his country’s nuclear arsenal, including the deployment of new hypersonic missiles.

MARCH 14, 2024

Western officials reported that Russia has moved tactical nuclear weapons from its own borders into neighboring Belarus. The move is primarily aimed at ramping up pressure on NATO’s eastern flank.

JUNE 6, 2024

Russian President Vladimir Putin said he could deploy conventional missiles within striking distance of the United States and its European allies if they allowed Ukraine to strike deeper into Russia with long-range Western weapons. Putin added that the West was wrong to assume that Russian would never use nuclear weapons.

MARCH 25, 2023

Putin announced that Russia planned to station tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus. He stated that Russia had already transferred an Iskander short-range missile system, a device that can be fitted with nuclear or conventional warheads and planned to help Belarus convert 10 aircraft to make them capable of carrying tactical warheads and train Belarus’ pilots to fly the re-configured aircraft.

JUNE 13, 2023

Russian political scientist Sergey Karaganov called for the use of nuclear weapons against NATO member states in Europe, stating “We will have to hit a bunch of targets in a number of countries in order to bring those who have lost their mind to reason.”

OCTOBER 25, 2023

Russia’s Parliament passed a bill to withdraw from the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). The vote was passed unanimously with 154 votes to zero. Russia claims that they will not resume testing, but experts warn that a new test by either Russia or the US could spark a new arms race.

FEBRUARY 18, 2024

The Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of Russia, Dmitry Medvedev, claimed that Moscow would use nuclear weapons in the event that Ukraine and its allies managed to push Russia out of the currently occupied areas of Ukraine. Medvedev added that a Western victory and a return to the borders of 1991 would constitute a complete collapse of Russia.

MARCH 13, 2024

Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that Russia is ready to use nuclear weapons if its sovereignty or independence is threatened. Asked in an interview with Russian state media if he has ever considered using battlefield nuclear weapons in Ukraine, Putin responded that there has been no need for that.

MAY 7, 2024

Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered Russian forces to rehearse deploying tactical nuclear weapons, as part of military drills to respond to what he called “threats” by the West. Russia’s defense ministry said a set of measures will be carried out to practice the issues of preparation and use of non-strategic nuclear weapons.

JUNE 11, 2024

Russia and Belarus launched a second stage of drills intended to train their troops in tactical nuclear weapons. During the second stage of these drills, Russian and Belarusian troops underwent joint training in non-strategic nuclear weapons used in combat.