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Nuclear rhetoric and escalation management in Russia's war against Ukraine: A chronology

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Introduction

During the night of February 23, 2022, Russian forces crossed into Ukraine, seeking to capture Kyiv within days. A few hours later, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the beginning of a “special military operation.” In his speech, the Kremlin leader warned those who tried to stand in Russia’s way that they would face “never seen” consequences – a statement many interpreted as a thinly veiled threat to employ nuclear weapons. Nuclear allusions piled up in the subsequent weeks and months. Moscow’s nuclear insinuations were accompanied by Western comments, condemnations, and a few counter-threats. Most importantly, the Russian allusions triggered a public debate in several Western countries about how such narratives should be interpreted and what responses they required. This working paper attempts to collect Russia’s nuclear narratives and the reactions of the West.

As a starting point, we decided to go back to autumn 2021 to offer readers a before-after comparison. Nonetheless, given available resources, with regard to the time period until February 2022, this chronology only includes (a) *ex post* revelations of Washington’s assessments of Moscow’s intentions; (b) Russia’s public statements on a potential conflict with NATO; and (c) the Kremlin’s nuclear-related statements. We purposefully exclude numerous other contentious issues, like for instance Russia’s demands that NATO rule out Ukraine’s membership;¹ insistence upon Western restrictions on weapons deployments;² threats to deploy intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe in response to a similar NATO decision;³ or refusal to rule out a military deployment to Cuba or Venezuela.⁴

From February 24, 2022 onwards, we mainly focus on tracing nuclear signaling between Russia and the West, but we also include the two sides’ attempts at managing and controlling escalation dynamics; at exercising deterrence, dissuasion, and compellence; and at dealing with the domestic and international political implications of these nuclear-related processes. Within the West, we focus primarily on statements by officials from nuclear-weapon states or from NATO: We suspected that the statements of these individuals were more likely to lead to potential nuclear escalation.

Therefore, we identified, evaluated, and coded more than 200 statements and actions with a nuclear dimension, but also included hundreds of other potentially relevant exchanges. Below, we start by listing the most important developments. Subsequently, we present them graphically. The bulk of this paper, however, contains our summaries of all statements and actions we deemed relevant. We sought to provide enough context to enable the reader to trace back the unfolding discussions, and (where reasonably easy to access) include references to primary sources. Nonetheless, this chronology does not claim to be exhaustive.

¹ Andrea Shalal, Steve Holland and Andrew Osborn, “Biden warns Putin of sanctions, aid for Ukraine military if Russia invades,” *Reuters*, December 8, 2021 [<https://www.reuters.com/markets/currencies/biden-putin-set-crucial-call-over-ukraine-2021-12-07/>], and Vladimir Soldatkin and Dmitry Antonov, “Kremlin says presidents agree to further US-Russian talks on Ukraine,” *Reuters*, December 8, 2021 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-demands-security-guarantees-biden-curb-nato-expansion-2021-12-07/>].

² “Foreign Ministry statement on dialogue with the United States and other Western countries regarding security guarantees,” *Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, December 10, 2021 [https://archive.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4991520].

³ Alexander Marrow and Mark Trevelyan, “Russia says it may be forced to deploy mid-range nuclear missiles in Europe,” *Reuters*, December 13, 2021 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-says-lack-nato-security-guarantees-would-lead-confrontation-ria-2021-12-13/>].

⁴ Vladimir Isachenkov and Matthew Lee, “Russia’s talk of troops in Latin America called ‘bluster’,” *AP News*, January 14, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/europe-russia-ukraine-vladimir-putin-moscow-473d4b2eebff4dc59d8e7dff9e8653ba>].

This is the fourth and last update of this chronology. The first version of this working paper [appeared](#) in German in May 2022. The second iteration went [online](#) in September 2022. The third version was [published](#) in February 2023.

This fourth update contains two innovations.

Firstly, as journalists have managed to gain and publish new insights into events from 2021 onwards, we have tried to include this newly available information. To make it easier for readers to follow these updates, we have highlighted these changes in blue. This approach allowed us to include two additional nuclear signals, #111 and #150 below.

Secondly, we have colour-coded the various nuclear signals of escalation, warning and de-escalation throughout the document for an easier identification.

Escalatory

Warning

De-escalatory

Our analytical bottom line is that, compared to 2022, Russia's nuclear rhetoric has toned down. In this fourth issue of the chronology we analysed all statements of the past five months, from February 2023 until June 2023. Both escalatory statements we identified in this time period concerned the Russian stationing of nuclear weapons in Belarus. Otherwise, the tensions remained at the level of warnings, spotted with a few de-escalatory statements. Overall, with only two escalatory statements from Moscow, Russia's nuclear rhetoric was less threatening compared to the five months prior which saw eight Russian and one Western escalatory statements.

Taken together, three peaks of escalatory nuclear rhetoric can be identified between February 2022 and June 2023.

- **24-28 February 2022** saw Russian escalatory threats at the beginning of the war. Putin claimed that Western actions were a "very real threat" to "the very existence" of the Russian state and to its "sovereignty." Whoever tried to hinder Russia in Ukraine would face consequences "never seen," he argued. He also put Russia's "deterrence forces" on "high combat alert" (see below, statements no. 5 and 11). Western reactions comprised escalatory statements by British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss, voicing that Russia must be stopped in Ukraine, and the US warning Russia against using tactical nuclear weapons (no. 10 and 15).
- **25-29 April 2022** was marked by two Western escalatory statements, as US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin declared the United States now wanted "to see Russia weakened to the degree that it can't do the kinds of things it has done in invading Ukraine," a statement Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby confirmed (no. 49, 52). In response, Putin warned that Russia's response to strategic threats would be "swift, lightning fast," and that Russia had "all the tools for this" and would "use them if needed" (no. 53).
- **20-30 September 2022** was a period of numerous Russian nuclear threats. Prior to Putin announcing the annexation of four Ukrainian provinces on September 30, Dmitry Medvedev, the Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council and a former president and prime minister, noted that Russia could defend itself with "all the forces of self-defense" in case of an encroachment of its territory (no. 96). Putin also vowed to "make use of all weapon systems available" in case of "a threat

to the territorial integrity” of Russia (no. 97). Medvedev reiterated that “any Russian weapons, including strategic weapons” could be used to protect “all the territories that have joined [Russia]” (no. 101). Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov then underlined that all doctrines would apply to the entire Russian territory, including the nuclear security doctrine (no. 103); and Medvedev highlighted that Russia had “the right to use nuclear weapons if necessary” (no. 106). Washington reacted with National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan stressing that “the possible use of nuclear weapons for the first time since the Second World War” was “a matter that we have to take deadly seriously” and which would trigger “catastrophic consequences” (no. 104).

Notably, these peaks of escalatory rhetoric did not only provoke (limited) counter-threats, but were especially countered by a similar amount of de-escalatory statements. Accordingly, the two Russian escalatory threats during 24-28 February were met with two Western counter-threats and a series of four Western de-escalatory statements. Likewise, the three escalatory threats of 25-29 April (two Western, one Russian) seem to also have been balanced out by a Western and a Russian de-escalatory statement. The same can be said about 20-30 September, when six Russian escalatory statements were met with one Western counter-threat and four Western de-escalatory statements.

The bulk of statements, however, fell in the category of warnings and counter-warnings. In total, we counted 66 Russian and 50 Western warnings; compared to 29 Russian vs. 38 Western de-escalatory statements and 15 Russian and 6 Western escalatory threats. Numerically, the Western attempts at de-escalation have thus been higher.

Overall, compiling this chronology has been a time-consuming endeavor, but it has allowed us to place certain Russian statements and actions in a broader context, to offer empirically based policy analysis and advice, and to publish a number of products.

For example, in March 2022, Liviu Horovitz, Claudia Major, and Lydia Wachs [advised](#) the West to carefully assess these nuclear developments, but to avoid Putin’s escalation game. As early as April 2022, Liviu Horovitz and Lydia Wachs published an [initial analysis](#) of Russia’s nuclear threats. They argued that Moscow’s threats had to be taken seriously, but that there was no reason to panic – an analysis that seems prescient in retrospect. The SWP [podcast](#) has made their assessments available to a wider audience.

Based on this chronology, team members were able to provide well-informed analysis to various media outlets. An examples of Liviu Horovitz's work can be found [here](#). A few of the many contributions of Lydia Wachs can be accessed [here](#), [here](#), or [here](#).

In September 2022, Liviu Horovitz and Anna Clara Arndt published a [second analysis](#) of Russia’s rhetoric. They argued that, below the threshold of direct intervention, Western governments had more leeway to aid Ukraine’s war effort than many pundits and policymakers presumed.

This chronology also allowed team members to author [controversial opinion pieces](#). For instance, in November 2022, Liviu Horovitz, Anna Clara Arndt, and Lydia Wachs wrote that the constraints imposed by nuclear weapons would likely force both belligerents and their supporters into a protracted conflict.

Last but not least, Liviu Horovitz and Anna Clara Arndt published a [third analysis](#) of Russia’s nuclear signalling. They concluded that, faced with concerted opposition, Russia had abandoned its nuclear coercion attempts and its nuclear rhetoric had since largely subsided.

Key statements & developments

Below we include a selection of the most important nuclear interactions in this conflict. We coded the Russian steps and Western reactions. For the sake of simplicity, we distinguished between two actors only: Russia (RU) and the West (W). We classified the most important statements or actions as escalatory, warning or de-escalatory. “Escalatory” is anything that can be considered at least an implicit threat of nuclear use. “Warning” is anything that can at least be interpreted as an allusion to nuclear capabilities or a possible conventional escalation, but without the threat of nuclear use being directly derived from it. “De-escalatory” is everything that questions or even retracts previous statements or actions that were somehow linked to possible nuclear use, or includes steps through which actors (probably intentionally) forego an escalatory action.

1.	27 January 2022: RU [warning]: Medvedev: Russia has “the right” to use nuclear weapons in response to an existential threat, a right that makes it “possible to achieve various goals.”
2.	7 February 2022: RU [escalatory]: Putin: If Ukraine attempts to take back Crimea, European countries will be in conflict with Russia, which is a “leading” nuclear power superior to “many” NATO countries in terms of “nuclear force.”
3.	19 February 2022: RU [warning]: Yearly nuclear exercise, normally held in autumn.
4.	21-22 February 2022: RU [warning]: Putin: Ukraine is seeking to acquire tactical nuclear weapons, which would pose a “strategic threat” to Russia.
5.	24 February 2022: RU [escalatory]: Putin: Whoever tries to hinder Russia will face consequences “never seen” in history.
6.	24 February 2022: RU [warning]: Putin: Russia is “one of the most powerful nuclear states” and “there should be no doubt for anyone” that a direct attack on Russia would lead to defeat.
7.	24 February 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Biden: No US troops involved in the conflict, only to defend NATO.
8.	24 February 2022: W [warning]: Le Drian: NATO also has nuclear weapons.
9.	26 February 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Western states decide to only impose economic sanctions upon Russia and deliver military support for Ukraine.
10.	27 February 2022: W [escalatory]: Truss: Russia must be stopped in Ukraine.
11.	27 February 2022: RU [escalatory]: Putin: Russian deterrence forces will be placed on “high combat alert.”
12.	27 February 2022: W [warning]: Borrell: Financial aid to Ukraine, but also military jets (MiGs).
13.	28 February 2022: RU [warning]: Shoigu: High combat alert = more personnel.
14.	28 February 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Psaki: Announces additional support for Ukraine, but the United States can defend itself.
15.	28 February 2022: W [escalatory]: US warning Russia against using tactical nuclear weapons.
16.	28 February 2022: RU [warning]: Zakharova: United States dreams of deploying nuclear weapons to Ukraine.
17.	1 March 2022: RU [warning]: Russian military exercises with nuclear submarines in the Barents Sea and with mobile ICBMs in Siberia.
18.	28 February & 1 March 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Biden: US citizens have no reason to be afraid of nuclear war. US forces will not fight in Ukraine, only defend NATO.
19.	2 March 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Poland, Slovakia, Bulgaria, NATO will not send MiGs to Ukraine.
20.	2 March 2022: W [de-escalatory]: United States reschedules Minuteman III test.
21.	2 & 3 March 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: Lavrov: Thought of nuclear war is on Western, not Russian minds. Zakharova: Russia will not use nuclear weapons first.

22.	4 March 2022: W [de-escalatory]: NATO foreign ministers reject the no fly zone requested by Ukraine.
23.	5 March 2022: RU [warning]: Putin: A no fly zone would have “disastrous consequences.” And: The decision to put Russia’s deterrence forces on high alert had been necessary because UK Foreign Minister Truss had announced a NATO intervention in Ukraine.
24.	8 March 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Haines: No changes of the Russian nuclear posture, Putin wants to deter Western support for Ukraine.
25.	9 March 2022: RU [warning]: Peskov: MiGs that take off from “any other airfields” on NATO territory would be “an extremely undesirable and potentially dangerous scenario.”
26.	10 March 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Wolters: MiGs could be “mistaken as escalatory and could result in Russian escalation with NATO.”
27.	11 March 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Biden: NATO will be defended, but a direct confrontation with Russia – a third world war – has to be avoided.
28.	15 March 2022: W [warning]: Poland demands a NATO peacekeeping mission for Ukraine.
29.	16 March 2022: W [de-escalatory]: NATO decides not to send peacekeeping troops to Ukraine but to expand economic and military assistance.
30.	16 March 2022: RU [warning]: Putin: The West wants to “finish off” Russia, but it will fail.
31.	18-20 March 2022: RU [warning]: Use of a conventional Kinzhal missile in Ukraine.
32.	20 March 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Austin: Putin trying to “reestablish some momentum” and the United States can defend itself.
33.	22 March 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: Peskov: Nuclear weapons would only be used in “existential threat.” Ryabkov: Russia would “never escalate anything.”
34.	23 March 2022: RU [warning]: Peskov: A NATO mission in Ukraine would be “very reckless and extremely dangerous” and could have “consequences that would be hard to repair.” Lavrov: Everyone should try to avoid a “direct clash between the Russian and NATO armed forces.” Medvedev: Russia’s destruction could lead to nuclear war. Rogozin: Russia could destroy “any aggressor.”
35.	23 March 2022: W [escalatory]: Anonymous Biden administration official: Use of a tactical nuclear weapon in Ukraine would mean “all bets are off” regarding direct US intervention in the war. But nuclear use remains unlikely. Sullivan: There have been no Russian preparations.
36.	23 March 2022: W [warning]: France conducts test of nuclear-armed missile and deploys three of its four nuclear submarines.
37.	23 March 2022: W [warning]: Stoltenberg: „Any use of nuclear weapons will fundamentally change the nature of the conflict.”
38.	26 March 2022: RU [warning]: Medvedev: Russia could use nuclear weapons if its existence is threatened, even by conventional weapons.
39.	28 March 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: Peskov: Any outcome of the operation in Ukraine is “of course” not a reason to use nuclear weapons, only an existential threat would be. But: Everyone understands what Putin meant with his warning “not to interfere.” And: He does “not think” Putin would use nuclear weapons if a third country intervened in Ukraine. But: Russia has “all the possibilities” to punish such states. But: “No one is thinking about using, even about the idea of using a nuclear weapon.”
40.	31 March 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Senior Pentagon official: “No indication” Russia is preparing to use tactical nuclear weapons.
41.	1 April 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Pentagon cancels Minuteman III test.
42.	7 April 2022: W [warning]: G7 and Borrell: Any threat or use of nuclear weapons would be “unacceptable and result in severe consequences.”
43.	14 April 2022: RU [warning]: Medvedev: If Sweden and Finland join NATO, “no non-nuclear status of the Baltics will be possible.”
44.	14 April 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Burns: Putin’s threats must be taken seriously, but so far there are no alarming indications.
45.	19 April 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Kirby: Washington is monitoring Russian rhetoric, but confident its strategic deterrent posture remains sufficient.

46.	19 April 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: Lavrov: Russia initiated Putin-Biden and P5 statements that nuclear war cannot be won and must not be fought.
47.	20 April 2022: RU [warning]: Russia tests nuclear-capable Sarmat intercontinental missile. Putin: Sarmat will “safeguard Russia’s security from external threats.”
48.	20 April 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Kirby: Sarmat test was “routine” and Russia “properly notified” the United States.
49.	25 April 2022: W [escalatory]: Austin: United States wants “to see Russia weakened to the degree that it can’t do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine.”
50.	25 April 2022: RU [warning]: Lavrov: The risks of nuclear war are “very significant,” “serious” and “real.” But: He does not want to “artificially inflate these risks.” And: It is Russia’s “principled position” that nuclear war is inadmissible. Western arms deliveries to Ukraine are “pouring oil on the fire.”
51.	26 April 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Johnson: No risk of Moscow using nuclear weapons.
52.	27 April 2022: W [escalatory]: Kirby: United States do not want “to see Russia in a position to be able to do this again” and Russia should not be “in a position going forward, where they haven’t suffered consequences for this unprovoked invasion.”
53.	27 April 2022: RU [escalatory]: Putin: “If someone intends to intervene on what is happening from the outside and creates unacceptable strategic threats for us, then they should know that our response to oncoming strikes will be swift, lightning fast.” And: “We have all the tools for this, ones that no one can brag about.”
54.	28 April 2022: W [warning]: Sullivan: “We won’t succumb to nuclear blackmail,” nor “tolerate nuclear saber rattling and nuclear brinksmanship.”
55.	28 April 2022: W [warning]: Biden: United States is prepared for “whatever” Russia might do, but would send only military assistance, not troops, to Ukraine.
56.	29 April 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: Lavrov: Russian policymakers are “champions of making pledges by all nuclear countries never to start a nuclear war.”
57.	4 May 2022: RU [warning]: Russia simulates electronic launches of nuclear-capable missiles in Kaliningrad – unclear whether training routine or political signaling.
58.	5 May 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: Antonov: Russia would only use nuclear weapons defensively, in response to WMD use or when state existence is endangered.
59.	6 May 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: Zaitsev: Nuclear contingencies spelled out in Russia’s nuclear doctrine do not apply to the conflict in Ukraine.
60.	6 May 2022: W [warning]: Tomero: Nuclear use would have “devastating consequences” for Russia.
61.	7 May 2022: W [warning]: Macron inauguration ceremony with a nuclear component.
62.	7 May 2022: W [warning]: Burns: No evidence that Russia is planning for nuclear use, but its saber-rattling cannot be taken “lightly.”
63.	9 May 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: The nuclear-capable component of the Victory Day parade is cancelled and Putin makes no nuclear references.
64.	10 May 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: Grushko: Official nuclear doctrine drives policy.
65.	10 May 2022: W [warning]: Haines: Russia is using nuclear threats to deter Western supply of military aid – Putin would only use nuclear weapons in case of an existential threat. But: losing the war and/or a NATO intervention could qualify as such.
66.	12 May 2022: RU [warning]: Medvedev: NATO aid to Ukraine could lead to an open conflict with Russia, which would risk “full-fledged nuclear war.”
67.	28 May 2022: RU [warning]: Russia tests a hypersonic Zircon cruise missile.
68.	29 May 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: Kelin: Russia will use nuclear weapons when state existence is threatened. This has “nothing to do” with a “limited conventional operation.”
69.	31 May 2022: W [warning]: Biden: “Any” nuclear use “in this conflict” would be “completely unacceptable” and “entail severe consequences.”
70.	2 June 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Biden: Signals US readiness to engage Russia on strategic stability to reduce risks of arms race or nuclear escalation.
71.	3 June 2022: RU [warning]: Medvedev: Foreign-supplied weapons use against Russia could lead to strike on suppliers, which could lead to nuclear apocalypse.

72.	15 June 2022: RU [warning]: Ryabkov: US planners have an “ideology” of “limited nuclear war,” and a US nuclear use would be an “irreversible event.”
73.	17 June 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: Putin: “We are not threatening anyone” but would use “resources” to “defend our sovereignty.”
74.	17 June 2022: W [warning]: US tests Trident II missile.
75.	25 June 2022: RU [escalatory]: Putin: Announces the transfer of nuclear-capable missiles to Belarus and the re-equipment of its bombers to carry nuclear weapons.
76.	27 June 2022: W [warning]: G7 agrees that “any” nuclear use would be “unacceptable and met with severe consequences” – concern after Belarus announcement.
77.	28 June 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: Peskov: Russia is not planning to deploy nuclear weapons to Belarus, just nuclear-capable delivery vehicles.
78.	28 June 2022: W [warning]: US military unsuccessfully tests a hypersonic missile.
79.	6 July 2022: RU [warning]: Medvedev: Trying to punish a country with a large nuclear arsenal is “absurd,” could pose a “threat to the existence of humanity.”
80.	7 July 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: Matvienko: Russia sees nuclear weapons only as a deterrent, “exceptional cases” are “clearly and strictly prescribed.”
81.	12 July 2022: RU [warning]: Zakharova: Washington is “dangerously teetering on the brink of an open military confrontation” with Moscow – such “direct armed conflict between nuclear powers” would be “fraught with nuclear escalation.”
82.	12 July 2022: RU [warning]: Rogozin: Russia is preparing tests of Sarmat missiles.
83.	12 July 2022: W [warning]: United States conducts two successful hypersonic missile tests.
84.	20 July 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Brown: If Putin uses nuclear weapons in Ukraine, US policy is “all about deterrence” and avoiding a “slippery slope that we can’t recover from.”
85.	2 August 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: Restatement of official nuclear doctrine and claim that none of its contingencies is “relevant to the situation in Ukraine.”
86.	5 August 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: Russia’s nuclear policy is “aimed exclusively at protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country.”
87.	5 August 2022: W [warning]: Kahl: It is “not the time” for a sole purpose declaratory policy, in light of, for instance, Russia’s nuclear rhetoric.
88.	16 August 2022: W [warning]: US test launch of the Minuteman III ICBM.
89.	16 August 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: Shoigu: “From a military point of view, there is no need to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine.”
90.	22 August 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: Ryabkov: Clash between nuclear powers must be prevented. As per Russian doctrine, nuclear use only in case of aggression and threat to existence of the state.
91.	1 September 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Macron: France’s role is to avoid nuclear escalation and “everything” has to be done for “countries not to get engaged in the conflict carelessly.”
92.	7 September 2022: W [warning]: US conducts an announced Minuteman III test.
93.	14 September 2022: RU [warning]: Zakharova: Sending long-range weapons to Ukraine would make the United States “a direct party to the conflict.”
94.	16 September 2022: RU [warning]: Putin: Russia could intensify attack on Ukrainian infrastructure. And: Russia’s military conducts nuclear drills in the Arctic to test its ability to “defend the Russian arctic by military means.”
95.	16 September 2022: W [warning]: Biden: Russian nuclear use would “change the face of war unlike anything since World War II” and a US response would be “consequential.”
96.	20 September 2022: RU [escalatory]: Medvedev: Russia could defend the four Ukrainian provinces it was annexing with “all the forces of self-defense.”
97.	21 September 2022: RU [escalatory]: Putin: Russia will “make use of all weapon systems available to us” in case of “a threat to the territorial integrity” of Russia. “This is not a bluff.”
98.	21 September 2022: W [warning]: Stoltenberg: Allies will not engage in similarly “reckless and dangerous nuclear rhetoric,” but “will make sure that there is no misunderstanding in Moscow about the seriousness of using nuclear weapons,” which would cause “unprecedented consequences.”

99.	21 September 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Biden: Condemns Russia for “making irresponsible nuclear threats,” but does not issue any own warnings.
100.	22 September 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Blinken: Urges the UN Security Council to “send a clear message that these reckless nuclear threats must stop immediately,” but refrains from issuing any own warnings.
101.	22 September 2022: RU [escalatory]: Medvedev: Any weapons, “including strategic nuclear weapons and weapons based on new principles, could be used” to protect “all the territories that have joined [Russia].”
102.	23 September 2022: W [de-escalatory]: US officials: Express concern Putin could use tactical nuclear weapons, but stress that there is “no evidence” Russia was preparing such a strike.
103.	24 September 2022: RU [escalatory]: Lavrov: Russia’s “entire territory” is “under the state’s full protection” and all Russian “doctrines” apply to Russia’s “entire territory.”
104.	25 September 2022: W [escalatory]: Sullivan: “Any use of nuclear weapons will be met with catastrophic consequences for Russia.” Washington has been “clear and specific” towards the Kremlin regarding the US response.
105.	26 September 2022: RU [warning]: Ryabkov: Accuses Washington of an “irresponsible, extremely aggressive, extremely pushy course,” which is “bringing everyone closer to a dangerous line.”
106.	27 September 2022: RU [escalatory]: Medvedev: If the “threat” to Russia from “Nazi Ukraine” exceeds “the established danger limit,” the Kremlin “will have to respond,” including with “the most formidable weapon,” while the West will still “not directly intervene in the conflict even in this situation.”
107.	27 September 2022: W [de-escalatory]: US Strategic Command: “We have not seen any reason to adjust our own nuclear posture at this time.”
108.	28 September 2022: RU [warning]: Zakharova: The West talks “with ease” about nuclear weapons and is “engaged in total destruction” against Russia, whereas Moscow has pursued “many attempts to dialogue.”
109.	28 September 2022: W [warning]: US government: “There would be catastrophic, severe, strong, profound implications for Russia” if it used nuclear weapons.
110.	30 September 2022: RU [escalatory]: Putin: Washington “created a precedent” by using nuclear weapons during World War II.
111.	October 2022: W [warning]: US, UK, and France warned Russia that they would retaliate with conventional weapons if Moscow decided to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine.
112.	4 October 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: Peskov: Dismisses allegations that Russia would use nuclear weapons, blaming the West for engaging in “exercises in nuclear rhetoric.”
113.	6 October 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: Antonov: NATO has an “ill sense of fear in the context of [Russia’s] possession of nuclear weapons.” Zakharova: A nuclear war “should never be unleashed” and Russian statements are “turned inside out” by Western “hints” from politicians and spies.
114.	6 October 2022: W [warning]: Biden: Putin is “not joking” and Washington faces the “prospect of Armageddon,” hence needing to find an “off ramp.”
115.	7 October 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Various US institutions underline that there are no signs of an imminent nuclear threat – it is “not probable” that Russia would use nuclear weapons.
116.	11 October 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Biden: Does not think that Putin would use nuclear weapons, but it is “irresponsible for [Russia’s leader] to talk about it.”
117.	11 October 2022: W [warning]: G7: “Any use of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons by Russia would be met with severe consequences.”
118.	11 October 2022: W [warning]: Stoltenberg: The Steadfast Noon exercise will go ahead as NATO’s military strength “is the best way to prevent escalation.”
119.	12 October 2022: RU [warning]: Peskov: Criticizes Biden for his Armageddon comment – engaging in “nuclear rhetoric” is a “harmful and provocative practice.”
120.	12 October 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Austin: US does not see any indicators that Russia is changing its nuclear posture towards moving ahead with a nuclear strike.

121.	12 October 2022: W [warning]: A NATO official: A Russian nuclear strike would change the course of the conflict and “almost certainly be drawing a physical response from many allies, and potentially from NATO itself.”
122.	13 October 2022: W [warning]: Stoltenberg: “Any use of a smaller nuclear weapon will be a very serious thing, fundamentally changing the nature of the war in Ukraine, and of course that would have consequences.”
123.	13 October 2022: W [warning]: Borell: “Any nuclear attack against Ukraine will create an answer, not a nuclear answer but such a powerful answer from the military side that the Russian army will be annihilated.”
124.	14 October 2022: RU [warning]: Medvedev: Neither Americans nor Europeans want to die for Ukraine in “a nuclear apocalypse;” they would respond to a Russian nuclear use in a “careful and balanced” manner.
125.	14 October 2022: RU [warning]: Venediktov: Ukraine joining NATO “would mean a guaranteed escalation to World War Three,” which would be “suicidal” for existing NATO members.
126.	14 October 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Macron: France would “evidently” not use nuclear weapons in response to a Russian nuclear attack on Ukraine.
127.	16 October 2022: W [warning]: Sullivan: The seriousness of nuclear weapons use does not depend on the size of the weapon, meaning that tactical weapons use in Ukraine would be a serious matter.
128.	17 October 2022: W [warning]: NATO commences its Steadfast Noon nuclear exercise as planned.
129.	18 October 2022: RU [warning]: Peskov: The four annexed provinces “are inalienable parts of the Russian Federation and they are all protected. Their security is provided for at the same level as [it is for] the rest of Russia’s territory.”
130.	18 October 2022: W [warning]: Stoltenberg: Medvedev “is not right” to claim that there would be no serious NATO response to nuclear weapons use. “We have stated clearly that there will be severe consequences.”
131.	20 October 2022: W [warning]: Blinken: Washington has been “very clear” with Putin “directly and privately” about the “severe consequences” that would follow any nuclear use.
132.	23 October 2022: RU [escalatory]: Shoigu: Claims that Ukraine could escalate the conflict with a dirty bomb and calls his US, British, and French counterparts to repeat this message.
133.	23-24 October 2022: W [warning]: Austin and Wallace: Warn Shoigu not to use such allegations as a pretext for further Russian escalation. And: US, UK, and French foreign ministers issue a statement, “rejecting Russia’s transparently false allegations.”
134.	24 October 2022: RU [escalatory]: Russia places forces on alert to respond to a WMD attack. Kirillov: Claims Kyiv is planning a false-flag dirty bomb operation. Moscow sends a letter to the UNSC containing allegations against Ukraine.
135.	24 October 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: Naryshkin: It is “absolutely not” possible that Russia would use nuclear weapons in Ukraine.
136.	24 October 2022: W [warning]: Price: Expresses concern over “mirror imaging,” and underlines that the Administration has been “very clear” about the “severe consequences” of nuclear use.
137.	24 October 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Various US officials: There are no indications Russia is preparing to use WMD.
138.	25 October 2022: W [warning]: Biden: “Russia would be making an incredibly serious mistake for it to use a tactical nuclear weapon.” Austin rejects “pretexts” for Russian escalation.
139.	26 October 2022: RU [warning]: Russia conducts a planned nuclear exercise. Putin: “We know about the plans to use the so-called dirty bomb for provocations.”
140.	26 October 2022: W [warning]: Blinken: Washington has “communicated directly and very clearly” the “consequences” of using nuclear weapons.
141.	27 October 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: Putin: Ukraine is preparing a false flag attack with a radioactive bomb, but “there is no sense in [using nuclear weapons] for us, neither political, nor military.” Moscow has “never said anything proactively about Russia potentially using nuclear weapons.”

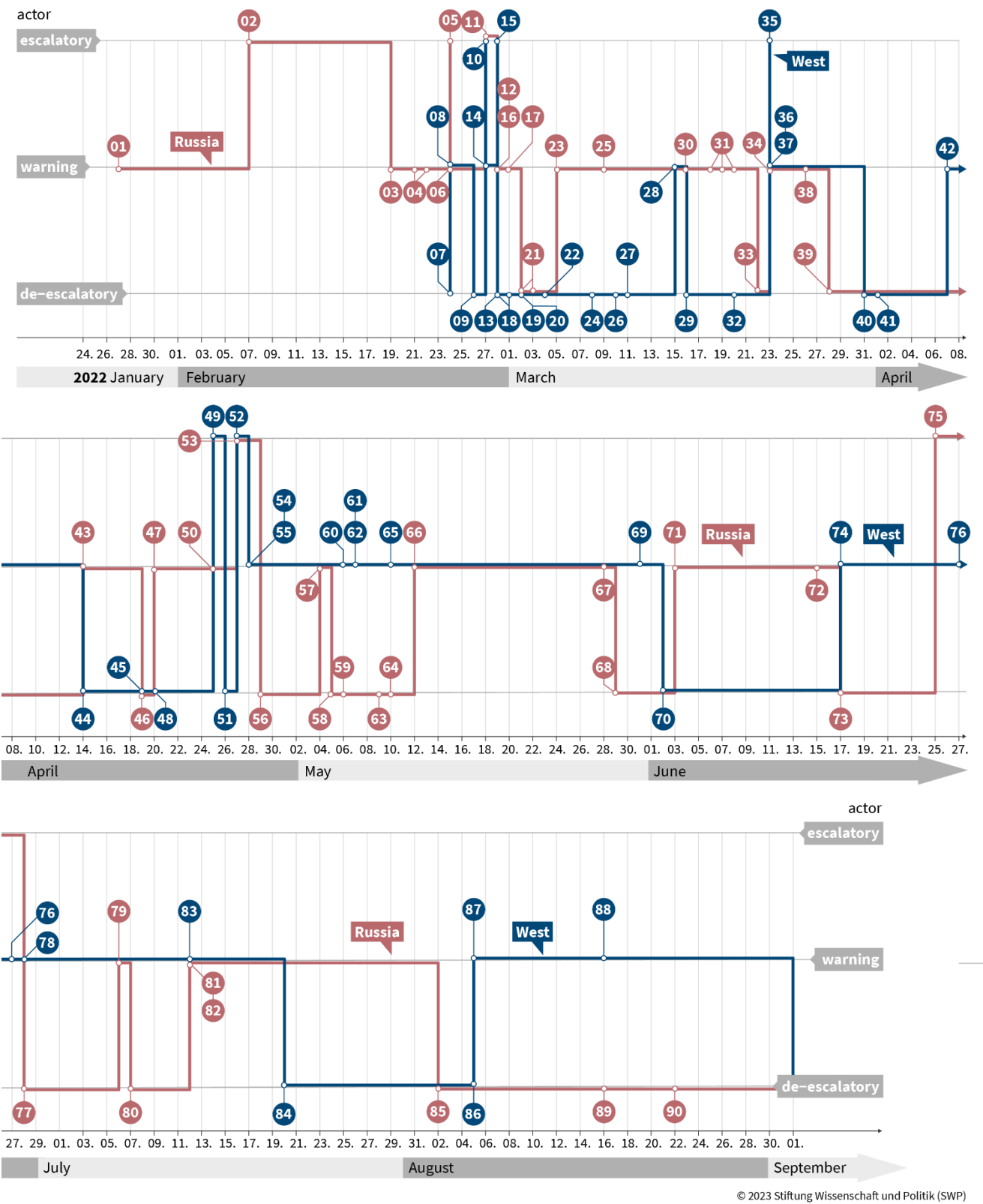
142.	27 October 2022: W [warning]: Biden: If Putin has “no intention” to use nuclear weapons, “why does he keep talking” about “the ability to use a tactical nuclear weapon.” Putin has “been very dangerous in how he’s approached” the nuclear question.
143.	30 October 2022: RU [warning]: Lavrov: The current situation bears similarity with the Cuban missile crisis. “This situation is very disturbing.” Russia does not see readiness from Western leaders to “show responsibility.”
144.	31 October 2022: W [warning]: Cleverly: Nuclear use would “change the nature of the conflict” and imply “severe consequences for Russia.” The dirty bomb claims are “absurd.”
145.	2 November 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Kirby: Administration has “grown increasingly concerned about the potential” that Putin might use a nuclear weapons, but there are still no concrete indications.
146.	2 November 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: Russian Foreign Ministry: Russia’s doctrine mandates only “defensive goals” and does not permit an “expansive interpretation.”
147.	3 November 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: Kelin: Russia will not use nuclear weapons in Ukraine, they are designed for other purposes. Peskov: Moscow would abide by its doctrine.
148.	4 November 2022: W [warning]: G7: “Any use of chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons by Russia would be met with severe consequences.”
149.	4 November 2022: RU [warning]: Medvedev: Russia’s has to stop the devil and is fighting “Nazis,” but it has various weapons and could “send all enemies” to hell, though this is “not” its task.
150.	14 November 2022: W [warning]: Bruns warned Naryshkin that there would be “serious consequences” if Russia “ever” chose to use nuclear weapons of “any kind.”
151.	17 November 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: Peskov: “No one” in Russia “has ever speculated on the issue” of using nuclear weapons, as “such matters” were “unacceptable per se.”
152.	30 November 2022: RU [warning]: Shoigu: Russia will invest in nuclear infrastructure. Lavrov: Even conventional clash between nuclear powers has to be avoided, as “escalation may become uncontrollable.”
153.	1 December 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Blinken: Administration still fears nuclear use, especially in an emergency for Russia, and does not want to expand the conflict, does not want a “war with Russia” or a “third world war.”
154.	3 December 2022: W [warning]: Nuland: “When we explained what the price would be for Russia, Putin decided to do something different,” namely to attack Ukraine’s energy infrastructure.
155.	3 December 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: Zakharova: “Nuclear Armageddon” has not happened not because of US “tough warnings,” but because “no one on this side of the border was planning it.”
156.	7 December 2022: RU [warning]: Putin: Warns of the “growing” threat of nuclear war, but emphasizes that he has “not gone crazy” and would not “brandish these weapons like a razor, running around the world.”
157.	7 December 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Price: “Any loose talk of nuclear weapons is absolutely irresponsible.”
158.	7 December 2022: W [warning]: Stoltenberg: Moscow’s nuclear rhetoric during the autumn “increased concerns” among NATO allies, but “Russia must know that any use of nuclear weapons would totally change the character, the nature, of the conflict.”
159.	8 December 2022: RU [de-escalatory]: Antonov: “Russia takes seriously its special responsibility as a leading nuclear power,” and its statements are merely “classic deterrence in extreme geopolitical circumstances.”
160.	9 December 2022: RU [warning]: Putin: It is worth thinking about developing nuclear disarming first-strike options, as the United States is already doing.
161.	9 December 2022: W [de-escalatory]: Austin: Repeats that Putin’s rhetoric is irresponsible, but does not engage in own warnings.
162.	10 December 2022: RU [warning]: Gavrillov: Washington green lighting Ukrainian strikes against Russian territory is “playing with fire, risking a full-scale war which could easily go nuclear.”
163.	13 December 2022: W [warning]: Smith: The Administration will “continue to signal to Russia” that any nuclear use in Ukraine would produce “unprecedented consequences.”

164.	18 December 2022: W [warning]: Burns: The Administration has “made very clear [...] what the serious risks of [nuclear use against Ukraine] would be.”
165.	19 December 2022: RU [warning]: Putin: The Belarusian air-force will receive training to use nuclear-capable airplanes, a change in Russia’s approach to military cooperation.
166.	25 December 2022: RU [warning]: Medvedev: “The only thing” that stopped the West from directly engaging in the war against Russia was nuclear deterrence.
167.	27 December 2022: RU [de-escalating]: Lavrov: “We have repeated again and again that there can be no winners in a nuclear war, and it should never be unleashed.”
168.	19 January 2023: RU [warning]: Medvedev: Russia’s defeat could “trigger a nuclear war.”
169.	2 February 2023: RU [warning]: Putin: Russia has “the means” to respond to Western tanks deliveries, and its response will not end with the use of armor, all have to understand.
170.	4 February 2023: RU [warning]: Medvedev: Strikes on Crimea could be responded with “anything” and “all types of weapons” – no “restrictions” in Russia’s nuclear doctrine.
171.	21 February 2023: RU [warning]: Putin: If US transforms the local conflict into a global confrontation, Russia would “react accordingly” to defend its “existence.”
172.	22 February 2023: RU [warning]: Medvedev: If US wants to defeat Russia, it should expect retaliation with “any weapon, including nuclear weapons.”
173.	28 February 2023: W [warning]: Kahl: Any use in Ukraine, on “any scale” would be considered a world changing event, bringing about “severe consequences far in excess of anything the Russians have experienced to date.”
174.	2 March 2023: RU [warning]: Ryabkov: US and NATO are “fueling the conflict” and “increasing involvement” could lead to “clash of nuclear powers” with “catastrophic consequences.”
175.	21 March 2023: RU [de-escalatory]: Russia and China reaffirm that “a nuclear war cannot be won and should not be fought.”
176.	21 March 2023: RU [warning]: Shoigu: There are “fewer and fewer steps” before “nuclear collision;” Putin: Russia would “respond accordingly” as the West was “already” using “weapons with a nuclear component.”
177.	22 March 2023: RU [warning]: Ryabkov: Nuclear conflict risk is “higher than anything we have had for the past few decades” as Moscow in a “de-facto” open conflict with Washington.
178.	23 March 2023: RU [escalatory]: Medvedev: “Every day when they provide Ukraine with foreign weapons brings the nuclear apocalypse closer;” if Putin were arrested in Germany, nuclear weapons will “fly to hit the Bundestag, the chancellor’s office and so on.”
179.	24 March 2023: RU [warning]: Medvedev: If Ukraine attempts to retake Crimea, Moscow is ready to use “absolutely any weapons,” including those mentioned in its nuclear doctrine.
180.	26 March 2023: RU [warning]: Putin: Russia would deploy delivery vehicles, finish constructing storage sites, and potentially station nuclear weapons in Belarus by summer 2023.
181.	28 March 2023: RU [warning]: Patrushev: US believed it could launch a first strike, but this was “very dangerous” and a “short-sighted stupidity,” as Russia had “unique modern weapons capable of destroying any adversary.”
182.	29 March 2023: RU [warning]: Ryabkov: The West ignored Russia’s “serious signals,” forcing Moscow into “an entire range of measures” – ignored these additional signals was an “irresponsible attitude.”
183.	31 March 2023: RU [warning]: Lukashenko: “Putin and I will decide and introduce here, if necessary, strategic weapons, and they must understand this, the scoundrels abroad, who today are trying to blow us up from inside and outside.”
184.	17 April 2023: W [de-escalatory]: Kahl: US would do “anything” it could to support Ukraine, but had no interest in “directly entering the conflict” and seeing it escalate to WWII.
185.	18 April 2023: W [warning]: G7: Irresponsible rhetoric and threat to deploy NW to Belarus were “unacceptable,” and any WMD use “would be met with severe consequences.”
186.	24 April 2023: RU [warning]: Lavrov: To the UN Security Council: The world may have reached a more dangerous situation than ever during the Cold War.
187.	25 April 2023: RU [warning]: Medvedev: World was “sick and quite probably on the verge of a new world war” – not inevitable, but growing risks of a nuclear confrontation.

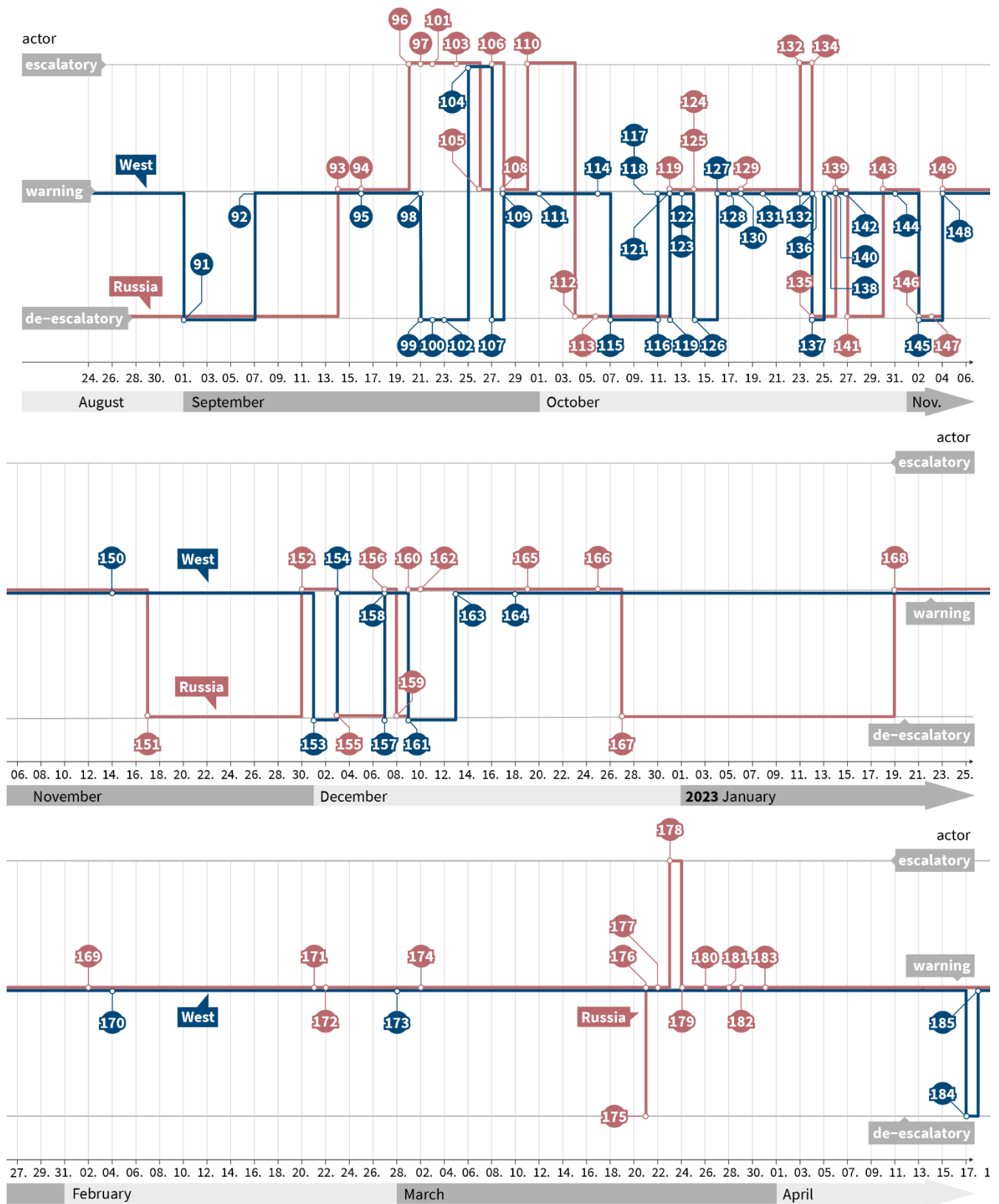
188.	25 April 2023: RU [warning]: Yermakov: Most pressing nuclear threat was not first-strike incentive, curbed by New START, but nuclear escalation as a result of direct military confrontation between nuclear powers – a risk that was growing because of US hostile course.
189.	27 April 2023: RU [de-escalatory]: Zakharova: Russia would “do everything” to prevent a “worst scenario,” but not at the cost of “infringing” on its “vital interests.”
190.	19 May 2023: W [warning]: G7: Russian threat to use nuclear weapon, “let alone any use of nuclear weapons” in the context of its aggression against Ukraine were “inadmissible.”
191.	22 May 2023: RU [warning]: Antonov: West should be aware of Russian response if it “blessed” Ukrainian attacks against Crimea – strikes would be seen as attacks on Russia.
192.	24 May 2023: RU [warning]: Peskov: Western “direct and indirect” involvement in Ukraine was “no secret” and “growing” – Russia was “drawing the appropriate conclusions.”
193.	25 May 2023: RU [escalatory]: Shoigu and Lukashenko signed an agreement to store Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus; Lukashenko: the relocation of nuclear weapons had begun.
194.	25 May 2023: W [warning]: Miller: The use of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons in the conflict would be met with “severe consequences.”
195.	26 May 2023: RU [warning]: Medvedev: Russia would launch a pre-emptive strike if Ukraine got nuclear weapons - West was seriously underestimating the risk of nuclear war.
196.	27 May 2023: RU [warning]: Kelin: Russia warned that Western supplies to Ukraine risked escalating the war to a new dimension “which we do not need and we do not want.”
197.	6 June 2023: RU [warning]: Lavrov: Western F-16s can “accommodate” nuclear weapons and supplying Ukraine with such fighter aircraft would escalate the conflict further.
198.	6 June 2023: W [de-escalatory]: Kirby: Biden had been consistent that he did not want to see the war escalate, certainly not into the nuclear realm.
199.	9 June 2023: R [warning]: Putin: Russia would start to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus after the facilities were ready on 7-8 July; with everything “going according to plan.”
200.	13 June 2023: RU [warning]: Lukashenko: the nuclear warheads Belarus received were 3 times more powerful than those dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and there would be “no hesitation” to use them “in the event of an aggression against us.”
201.	16 June 2023: RU [warning]: Putin: use of nuclear weapons was possible if Russia's territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty was threatened; Russia had more nw than NATO
202.	20 June 2023: RU [warning]: Shoigu: an attack on Russian territory, incl. Crimea, with missiles would mean the full involvement of the US and UK in the conflict; Russia would respond with immediate strikes on decision-making centers in Ukraine.
203.	20 June 2023: RU [de-escalatory]: Lavrov: said Biden’s statement that the threat of Russia using tactical nuclear weapons was “real” were “verbal escapades” that had “no foundation”.
204.	25 June 2023: W [de-escalatory]: US officials: the US was not involved in the Wagner mutiny, Moscow should abstain from nuclear escalation; Blinken: Russian instability was of concern, but US saw “no change” in Russia’s nuclear posture.

Graphic representation

Nuclear escalation dynamics between Russia and the West

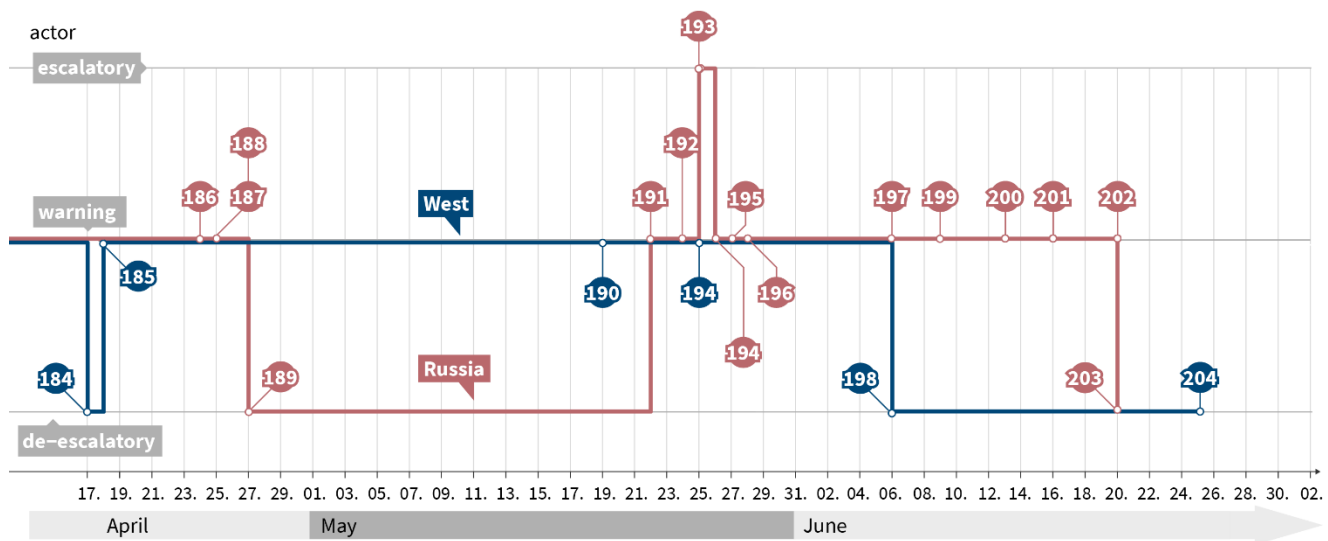


Nuclear escalation dynamics between Russia and the West



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Autumn & Winter 2021 – 2022: First nuclear signals

By **October 2021**, the US government had concluded that Moscow was planning a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and Washington was assessing how to help Kyiv organize its defense while also reducing the dangers of nuclear escalation. In an October meeting at the White House, **Mark A. Milley**, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, presented intelligence revealing that Russia's government envisioned a takeover of most of Ukraine. US officials thought the plan to be of "staggering audacity," and that it could pose a direct threat to NATO's eastern flank, or even destroy the post-World War II security architecture of Europe. Thus, US President **Joe Biden** determined that Putin had to be either deterred or confronted, anonymous sources told journalists in August 2022.

American policymakers saw Ukraine as a "troubled former Soviet republic with a history of corruption," and assessed how to best organize its resistance. Washington would need to deliver "significant new weaponry" to enable the Ukrainians to defend themselves, US policymakers concluded. "Too little could guarantee a Russian victory. But too much might provoke a direct NATO conflict with nuclear-armed Russia," reporters summarized the Administration's quagmire. Revealingly, the article mentions no discussion of a possible direct intervention. Rather, US officials saw even "significant" military deliveries as prone to lead to nuclear escalation. Milley's notes for the October meeting at the White House encapsulated the US goals and dilemmas: How to "underwrite and enforce the rules-based international order" against a nuclear-armed state "without going to World War III?" To achieve this end, Washington would have to avoid a "kinetic conflict between the US military and NATO with Russia." Also, it would have to "contain war inside the geographical boundaries of Ukraine." And finally, the United States and its allies would have to "empower Ukraine" and give it the "means to fight."

Throughout the winter, the US government deployed additional forces to Europe and sent arms to Ukraine. And yet, the "overriding White House concern about provocation influenced each decision about how much assistance and what kind of weapons to give the Ukrainians to defend themselves," *Washington Post* journalists were later told. "I make no apologies for the fact that one of our objectives here is to avoid direct conflict with Russia," **Jake Sullivan**, the US National Security Advisor, said of the prewar period. However, determining what Russia would interpret as provocative had been "more art than science," a US official later explained to journalists. "There has always been a balance between what is required to effectively defend, and what is going to be seen by Russia as the United States essentially underwriting the killing of huge numbers of Russians."⁵

By **mid-October 2021**, the preponderance of intelligence persuaded most within the US government that Russia was going to invade Ukraine. American military analysts had acquired sufficient intelligence to show that Russia's actions were incompatible with any other course of action – a conclusion that emerged clearly from the many interviews published on February 24, 2023 with respect to US intelligence assessments prior to Russia's invasion.⁶

It later emerged that **Burns** was sent to Moscow in **early November 2021** to "lay out in an unusual amount of detail exactly why we were concerned that Putin was preparing for a major new invasion, and then to be very clear about what the consequences would be should Putin choose to execute that plan," the CIA director told reporters for a February 24, 2023 article. Burns noticed Putin's "cockiness about

⁵ Shane Harris et al., "Road to war: As Putin prepared his invasion, the U.S. struggled to convince allies — and Zelensky — of the danger," *The Washington Post*, August 16, 2022 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/interactive/2022/ukraine-road-to-war/>].

⁶ Erin Banco et al., "Something Was Badly Wrong': When Washington Realized Russia Was Actually Invading Ukraine," *Politico*, February 24, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2023/02/24/russia-ukraine-war-oral-history-00083757>].

Russia's ability to enforce its will on Ukraine," but "at least one or two of them were a little bit surprised with what I laid out to them because the circle of advisers had gotten so small." Also, Burns returned to Washington "with a very strong impression that Putin had just about made up his mind to go to war." The CIA director believed that the decision was based on Putin's "own fixation on controlling Ukraine," as he "was convincing himself that strategically the window was closing on his opportunity to control Ukraine." Burns: "His conviction was that without controlling Ukraine and its choices, it's not possible for Russia to be a great power and have this sphere of influence that he believes is essential. And it's not possible for him to be a great Russian leader without accomplishing that." Putin let Burns know that "tactically" he saw the '21-'22 winter as a "favorable landscape," with the Europeans "distracted" and "quite skeptical" of the US reaction. Back in Washington, the Administration debated "how much support was required," as it did not want to "inadvertently speed up the Russian clock, incentivize Putin, or give him a pretext to make a decision he had not made." The US government "leaning too far forward could create dynamics either within the alliance or as we were trying to build world opinion against the Russians that made us look like we were the provocateurs," **Colin Kahl**, the Under-Secretary of Defense for Policy, later told journalists.⁷

More than a year later, US officials outlined their thinking with respect to sanctions in the **months preceding Russia's invasion**. For a February 24, 2023 article, Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo told reporters that Biden had made clear that the Administration was going to use sanctions to both "hold Russia accountable" and deter by making clear what Washington would do. US officials believed that Russia thought all the West could marshal was an "off-the-shelf" package. The US government had a five-pronged strategy: (1) sanction Russia's banking system; (2) limit its access to cutting-edge technology; (3) diminish its energy exports while also keeping steady global supplies of oil; (4) seize the physical assets of the kleptocracy to demonstrate to the Russian people that they were duped; and (5) "methodically eject Russia from the international economic order," explained **Daleep Singh**, deputy NSA for international economics.⁸

In turn, the Russian leadership sought to leverage uncertainty in its reactions to deter further Western involvement. Speaking to an online investment forum, **Vladimir Putin**, Russia's President, warned NATO on **November 30, 2021** against deploying troops and weapons to Ukraine, saying this would represent a "red line" for Moscow and would trigger a strong response. The Alliance's eastward expansion had already threatened Russia's core security interests, Putin said, and NATO could use Ukraine's territory to deploy missiles capable of reaching Moscow within five minutes. Russia had therefore been forced to counter these growing threats by developing new hypersonic weapons, arms that would soon enter service.⁹

Also, Russian officials started to suggest that a direct confrontation between Russia and NATO could become a reality. On **December 2**, Foreign Minister **Sergey Lavrov** told the OSCE that the strategic stability architecture was "rapidly being destroyed" and NATO was refusing to "constructively examine" Russia's proposals to "deescalate tensions and avoid dangerous incidents." The Alliance's "military

⁷ Erin Banco et al, "'Something Was Badly Wrong': When Washington Realized Russia Was Actually Invading Ukraine," *Politico*, February 24, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2023/02/24/russia-ukraine-war-oral-history-00083757>].

⁸ Erin Banco et al, "'Something Was Badly Wrong': When Washington Realized Russia Was Actually Invading Ukraine," *Politico*, February 24, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2023/02/24/russia-ukraine-war-oral-history-00083757>].

⁹ Vladimir Isachenkov, "Putin warns West: Moscow has 'red line' about Ukraine, NATO," *AP News*, November 30, 2021 [<https://ap-news.com/article/europe-russia-ukraine-vladimir-putin-moscow-cd558699728e9ae935e935eadf940efeb18>], and "Russia Calling! Investment Forum," *Website of the President of Russia*, November 30, 2021 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/67241>].

infrastructure” was drawing closer to Russia’s borders and the “nightmare scenario of military confrontation” was returning.¹⁰ No one should doubt Russia would defend its security interests, Russia’s ambassador to the United States, **Anatoly Antonov** wrote in a US outlet on **December 30**. If NATO kept “constructing military-strategic realities imperiling the existence of our country,” Russia would be forced to “create similar vulnerabilities for them.” The “military exploration” of Ukraine by NATO was “an existential threat” for Russia, and “urgent action” was needed, Antonov noted ominously.¹¹

In February 2023, US officials revealed some of the diplomatic steps they had taken in **January 2022**. For a February 24, 2023 article, **Michael Carpenter**, the US ambassador to the OSCE in Vienna, told journalists that, together with the Polish OSCE chairperson, they had sought to engage Russia on its grievances at the beginning of January 2022 within a renewed European Security Dialogue. “Russia basically refused to engage, and that’s when it became increasingly clear the Kremlin really had no interest in diplomacy all along. It was bent on war,” Carpenter said.¹²

As war became more probable, the US government issued a series of public and private warnings. For instance, in a news conference on **January 19**, **Biden** said that Russia had in fact already decided to invade Ukraine. The US President also offered a forceful warning. Such an attack would be “a disaster for Russia” as US allies and partners were “ready to impose severe costs and significant harm on Russia and the Russian economy.” Russia would be “held accountable” if it invaded. Yet the US President also suggested that a “minor incursion” might not prompt a severe response, signaling that there were disagreements within NATO on what to do with respect to various levels of Russian aggression.¹³ The next day, **January 20**, the White House sought to walk back the President’s caveat. He had been “absolutely clear” with Putin. “Any assembled Russian units move across the Ukrainian border, that is an invasion” for which Russia would pay a “heavy price.”¹⁴

In February 2023, US officials outlined some of the diplomatic efforts made just before Russia’s invasion. For a February 24, 2023 article, **Mark Milley** told journalists that there had been “a lot of effort” by Austin, Blinken, Sullivan, Biden, and himself to “try to dissuade Russia from doing this and to warn them if they did it these will be likely consequences.” US ambassador to the UN **Linda Thomas-Greenfield** concluded that Russia’s envoy to New York, Vasily Nebenzya, was simply unaware of what was actually happening. **Burns** said that the Administration’s consensus has been that “the basic decision to invade and a lot of the planning was in a circle of probably no more than three or four people around Putin.” Sullivan noted that the Administration was baffled by Russian behavior – all evidence was pointing towards war, but the IC was “overwhelmingly” in agreement that this was “a crazy thing to do.” Hence, there was an

¹⁰ “Russia to unveil security pact proposals in bid to restrain NATO,” *Reuters*, December 2, 2021 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-unveil-proposals-new-european-security-pact-soon-lavrov-2021-12-02/>].

¹¹ Anatoly Antonov, “An Existential Threat to Europe’s Security Architecture?,” *Foreign Policy*, December 30, 2021 [<https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/12/30/russia-ukraine-nato-threat-security/>].

¹² Erin Banco et al, “‘Something Was Badly Wrong’: When Washington Realized Russia Was Actually Invading Ukraine,” *Politico*, February 24, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2023/02/24/russia-ukraine-war-oral-history-00083757>].

¹³ “Remarks by President Biden in Press Conference,” *Website of the White House*, January 19, 2021 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/01/19/remarks-by-president-biden-in-press-conference-6/>].

¹⁴ Molly Nagle, “Biden clarifies comments on Ukraine, says any Russian move across border would be an ‘invasion,’” *ABC News*, January 20, 2022 [<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/biden-clarifies-comments-ukraine-russian-move-border-invasion/story?id=82376647>].

element of “what the hell are you guys doing.” **Derek Chollet**, the State Department counselor, noted that Washington could not “control others if they choose to do incredibly stupid things.”¹⁵

On **January 21**, US Secretary of State **Anthony Blinken** met **Lavrov** in Geneva, and again cautioned against invasion. Reportedly, the US official told his Russian counterpart that, in response to an invasion, Western sanctions would be fast and merciless, isolating Russia and crippling its economy. Also, Blinken reportedly said that NATO would provide Ukraine with massive military assistance. “If one Russian soldier or missile touched one inch of NATO territory, the United States would defend its allies,” the Washington Post later reported on the meeting. Blinken found Lavrov’s response “strident and unyielding.”¹⁶ During the subsequent press conference, Blinken said that a Russian invasion would be met with “swift, severe, and a united response” from the United States and its “partners and allies.”¹⁷

1.	Warning
A month before the invasion, the Russian leadership started to bring its nuclear arsenal into the political narrative, already suggesting an expansive interpretation of the official doctrine. Dmitry Medvedev , the Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council and a former president and prime minister, stated in an interview on January 27 , that there was no need to review Russia’s nuclear doctrine. Moscow had “the right” to use strategic nuclear forces “in response to an attack involving weapons of mass destruction against us or our allies and in response to any other threat to our country’s existence, in other words, to a danger that threatens the very existence of our state.” This was “a comprehensive formula” that made it “possible to achieve various goals,” Medvedev said. ¹⁸	

On the same **January 27**, Chinese Foreign Minister **Wang Yi** told Blinken that “regional security should not be guaranteed by strengthening or even expanding military blocs.” Actors should create a “balanced, effective and sustainable European security mechanism through negotiations, with Russia’s legitimate security concerns being taken seriously and addressed.”¹⁹

At the **end of January 2022**, **Putin’s top economic advisors** warned against the consequences of Western sanctions if war broke out. At the President’s residence outside Moscow, **Herman Gref**, the CEO of Sberbank and one of the most liberal members of Putin’s extended circle, gave a presentation that had been worked by those present, including by **Elvira Nabiullina**, the central bank governor. Harsh sanctions would set Russia’s economy back decades. GDP could fall by a third within two years. Real incomes could be cut by a fifth. Russians’ quality of life would lag behind even developing countries as restrictions on imports would make Russia struggle not only to find advanced technologies, but essentials such as medicines and food, the economic advisors noted. However, Putin cut Gref off and asked him what Russia should do to avoid the worst of the sanctions.²⁰

¹⁵ Erin Banco et al, “‘Something Was Badly Wrong’: When Washington Realized Russia Was Actually Invading Ukraine,” *Politico*, February 24, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2023/02/24/russia-ukraine-war-oral-history-00083757>].

¹⁶ Shane Harris et al, “Road to war: As Putin prepared his invasion, the U.S. struggled to convince allies — and Zelensky — of the danger,” *The Washington Post*, August 16, 2022 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/interactive/2022/ukraine-road-to-war/>].

¹⁷ Jeremy Herb, Veronica Stracqualursi and Vasco Cotovio, “Blinken warns any Russian ‘invasion’ of Ukraine would be met with a ‘severe and a united response’ following Lavrov meeting,” *CNN*, January 21, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/01/21/politics/blinken-lavrov-geneva-meeting-ukraine/index.html>].

¹⁸ “Medvedev sees no need to review Russia’s nuclear doctrine,” *TASS*, January 27, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1393713>].

¹⁹ “Wang Yi Speaks with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on the Phone at Request,” *Website of the Chinese MFA*, January 27, 2022 [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/kjgzbdffyq/202201/t20220127_10635268.html].

²⁰ Max Seddon and Polina Ivanova, “How Putin’s technocrats saved the economy to fight a war they opposed,” *Financial Times*, December 16, 2022 [<https://www.ft.com/content/fe5fe0ed-e5d4-474e-bb5a-10c9657285d2>].

February 2022: The high-time of nuclear threat-making

2.	Escalatory
Ten days later, Putin continued developing the nuclear narrative. On February 7 , the Russian President implied at a joint press conference with French President Emanuel Macron during the latter's visit to Moscow that Ukraine could drag NATO into a nuclear war. If Ukraine joined NATO and decided to take back Crimea through military means, European countries would be automatically drawn into a military conflict with Russia, Putin said. The Kremlin understood that "NATO's united potential" was incomparably larger than that of Russia, but Russia was "one of the world's leading nuclear powers" and was "superior" to "many" NATO countries "in terms of the number of modern nuclear force components." Putin claimed that neither he nor Macron wanted to see developments "unfold" that way. ²¹	
3.	Warning
On February 19 , sitting alongside Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko, Putin oversaw an annual "strategic nuclear exercise," usually held in fall. Russian forces tested nuclear-capable air-, sea-, and land-based ballistic and cruise missiles. ²²	
4.	Warning
In a televised address on February 21 , Putin accused Ukraine of seeking to acquire nuclear weapons and stated that the possibility of "foreign technological support" could not be ruled out. ²³ On February 22 , he sought to clarify his earlier statement, stating that tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine would be a "strategic threat" to Russia. ²⁴	

In parallel, also on **February 21**, Moscow recognized the Ukrainian separatist regions of Donetsk and Luhansk as independent states. The European Union as well as the United States and several other countries responded by announcing a first wave of economic sanctions against Russia.²⁵ Against this background, German Chancellor **Olaf Scholz** suspended the certification process for the controversial Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline.²⁶ On **February 23**, US Defense Secretary **Lloyd Austin**, after a meeting with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, stressed that Washington would continue to deliver weapons to Ukraine even if Russia expanded its invasion, and would continue to support Kyiv with US Javelin anti-tank systems as well as other measures. The State Department's **Ned Price** had earlier stated that aid to Ukraine "would be accelerated in the event of additional Russian aggression." Since 2014, the

²¹ "News conference following Russian-French talks," *Website of the President of Russia*, February 8, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67735>].

²² "Учение сил стратегического сдерживания (Strategic deterrence exercise)," *Website of the President of Russia*, February 19, 2022 [<http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67814>], and Tom Balmforth and Maria Kiselyova, "Putin leads sweeping nuclear exercises as tensions soar," *Reuters*, February 19, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-starts-russias-strategic-nuclear-exercises-tensions-soar-2022-02-19/>].

²³ "Address by the President of the Russian Federation," *Website of the President of Russia*, February 21, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>].

²⁴ "Vladimir Putin answered media questions," *Website of the President of Russia*, February 22, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67838>].

²⁵ A great resource for all information related to Western sanctions on Russia during its war of aggression against Ukraine is: Chad P. Brown, "Russia's war on Ukraine: A sanctions timeline," *PIIE* [<https://www.piie.com/blogs/realtime-economic-issues-watch/russias-war-ukraine-sanctions-timeline>].

²⁶ Melissa Eddy, "Germany puts a stop to Nord Stream 2, a key Russian natural gas pipeline," *The New York Times*, February 22, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/22/business/nord-stream-pipeline-germany-russia.html>].

United States had committed more than 2.7 billion US dollars in security assistance to build the capacity of Ukraine's forces, including more than 650 million US dollars in 2021.²⁷

In February 2023, reporters unearthed some of the dynamics taking place in Russia just before the invasion. In 2014, **Russian officials** had urged Putin not to send troops into Crimea. He had made the choice alone. When the West, fearful of escalation and of endangering European economic ties to Russia, had responded with mild sanctions, Putin had become convinced that he had made the right decision, according to his officials. During the subsequent pandemic, Putin had become more and more isolated, with few links to more liberal advisers and increasingly fixated on Russia's greatness. "He really believes all the stuff he says about sacrality and Peter the Great. He thinks he will be remembered like Peter," a former senior official said. Also, Putin let himself be convinced by pro-Russian politicians in Ukraine around **Viktor Medvedchuk** that a majority of the population would welcome an annexation campaign. Due to prevalent corruption, the FSB confirmed Medvedchuk's assessment. At a **February 21** meeting of the Russian Security Council, even **Nikolai Patrushev** had suggested giving diplomacy another chance as military means were not as promising as they seemed. Putin was "overconfident" and overruled Patrushev. Putin had assumed a rapid and massive incursion would tumble the regime in Kyiv. Hence, Putin had informed Lavrov of his decision merely hours before the invasion. "It's all gone horribly wrong," a former senior Russian official confided to reporters. Immediately after the invasion, several dozen oligarchs gathered at the Kremlin for a rushed meeting. They were aware that the invasion would trigger western sanctions that could destroy their fortunes. "Everyone was completely losing it," a person who attended the meeting told the journalists.²⁸

Some details emerged on February 24, 2023 about US preparations before Russia's invasion. **Blinken** told an interviewer that Washington had been working with Kyiv to "help them see what was coming" and "make the necessary preparations," but Zelensky had been concerned about making these preparations public as this would "risk taking down his economy and foreign investment." Blinken had shared information with Zelensky already in October 2021 that Russia would likely invade and Washington had subsequently worked with Kyiv to aid preparations – thus, US officials had been much less surprised by Ukrainian resilience than the public. The Administration could rely on intelligence providing "very explicit information about what the Russians were actually thinking and what they were planning and what they were plotting to do with those forces." With respect to Russian intentions, **Blinken** said the invasion had not been about "NATO enlargement" or "some threat to Russia's security," but "all about Putin's vision that Ukraine should not be an independent country and should be absorbed back into Russia."²⁹

During the night of **February 23-24**, as Russian troops were already moving into the neighboring country, **Putin** announced a "special military operation" in Ukraine. "Irresponsible Western politicians" had created "fundamental threats" by expanding NATO eastwards and, thus, moving military infrastructure closer to Russia's border. Any further NATO expansion or the "ongoing efforts to gain a military foothold" in Ukraine were "unacceptable." NATO was just a "tool of US foreign policy." In "territories adjacent to Russia," which were "our historical land" to Putin, a hostile "anti-Russia" was taking shape. It was

²⁷ Joe Gould, Sebastian Sprenger and Rachel S. Cohen, "Pentagon studying fallback supply lines to Ukraine ahead of expanded Russian invasion," *Defense News*, February 23, 2022 [<https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2022/02/23/pentagon-studying-fallback-supply-lines-to-ukraine-in-case-of-expanded-russian-invasion/>].

²⁸ Max Seddon et al, "How Putin blundered into Ukraine — then doubled down," *Financial Times*, February 23, 2023 [<https://www.ft.com/content/80002564-33e8-48fb-b734-44810afb7a49>].

²⁹ Jeffrey Goldberg and Morgan Ome, "Blinken: I Understand Why Zelensky Is Demanding That the U.S. 'Do Even More and Do It Even Faster'," *Atlantic*, February 26, 2023 [<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/02/antony-blinken-ukraine-jeffrey-goldberg-zelensky/673188/>].

“fully controlled from the outside” and “doing everything to attract NATO armed forces and obtain cutting-edge weapons.” The West had now crossed the “red line” that Russia had repeatedly mentioned. To achieve its goals, NATO was “supporting the far-right nationalists and neo-Nazis in Ukraine, those who will never forgive the people of Crimea and Sevastopol for freely making a choice to reunite with Russia.” Moscow had to take “bold and immediate action” to “defend” its people, and Putin had decided to “carry out a special military operation.” It sought to “demilitarize and denazify Ukraine, as well as bring to trial those who perpetrated numerous bloody crimes against civilians, including against citizens of the Russian Federation.”³⁰

5.	Escalatory
Washington was pursuing a “policy of containing Russia, with obvious geopolitical dividends,” Putin added. However, NATO’s policy was for Russia “a matter of life and death.” The Western actions were “not only a very real threat” to Russia’s interests but to “the very existence” of the state and to its “sovereignty,” Putin said. Hence, he addressed “those who may be tempted to interfere in these developments from the outside,” saying that “no matter” who tried to stand in Russia’s way or “create threats for our country and our people,” had to know that “Russia will respond immediately, and the consequences will be such as you have never seen in your entire history” – what many interpreted as a veiled threat to employ nuclear weapons against those who interfered in Russia’s attempt to eliminate an existential threat. ³¹	

6.	Warning
Later in the same speech, Putin also emphasized that Russia was “one of the most powerful nuclear states” and had a “certain advantage in several cutting-edge weapons.” Within this clearly nuclear context, however, the Russian President defined the preconditions for a possible nuclear strike much more narrowly: “There should be no doubt for anyone that any potential aggressor will face defeat and ominous consequences should it directly attack our country.” ³² That a direct attack on Russia could be answered with nuclear weapons was consistent with both Russia’s nuclear doctrine, adopted in 2020, and the declaratory policies of other nuclear powers. ³³	

³⁰ “Address by the President of the Russian Federation,” *Website of the President of Russia*, February 24, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>], and “Full text: Putin’s declaration of war on Ukraine,” *The Spectator*, February 24, 2022 [<https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/full-text-putin-s-declaration-of-war-on-ukraine>], and Vladimir Isachenkov et al., “Russia attacks Ukraine as defiant Putin warns US, NATO,” *AP News*, February 24, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-europe-russia-moscow-kyiv-626a8c5ec22217bacb24ece60fac4fe1>].

³¹ “Address by the President of the Russian Federation,” *Website of the President of Russia*, February 24, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>], and “Full text: Putin’s declaration of war on Ukraine,” *The Spectator*, February 24, 2022 [<https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/full-text-putin-s-declaration-of-war-on-ukraine>], and Vladimir Isachenkov et al., “Russia attacks Ukraine as defiant Putin warns US, NATO,” *AP News*, February 24, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-europe-russia-moscow-kyiv-626a8c5ec22217bacb24ece60fac4fe1>].

³² “Full text: Putin’s declaration of war on Ukraine,” *The Spectator*, February 24, 2022 [<https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/full-text-putin-s-declaration-of-war-on-ukraine>].

³³ On Russia’s doctrine, see: “Foundations of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Area of Nuclear Deterrence,” *CNA*, June 4, 2020 [https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/foundations%20of%20state%20policy%20of%20the%20russian%20federation%20in%20the%20area%20of%20nuclear%20deterrence.pdf], on US doctrine, see “Fact Sheet: 2022 Nuclear Posture Review and Missile Defense Review,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, March 28, 2022 [<https://media.defense.gov/2022/Mar/29/2002965339/-1/-1/1/FACT-SHEET-2022-NUCLEAR-POSTURE-REVIEW-AND-MISSILE-DEFENSE-REVIEW.PDF>], on French doctrine, see: “Speech of the President of the Republic on the Defense and Deterrence Strategy,” *Website of the Élysée*, February 7, 2020 [<https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2020/02/07/speech-of-the-president-of-the-republic-on-the-defense-and-deterrence-strategy>], on UK doctrine, see: “Global Britain in a competitive age,” *Website of the UK Government*, March 16, 2021 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/975077/Global_Britain_in_a_Competitive_Age-_the_Integrated_Review_of_Security_Defence_Development_and_Foreign_Policy.pdf], and on China’s doctrine, see: Gerald C. Brown, “Understanding the Risks and Realities of China’s Nuclear Forces,” *Arms Control Today*, June, 2021 [<https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2021-06/features/understanding-risks-realities-chinas-nuclear-forces#endnote3>].

7.	De-escalatory
<p>Representatives of NATO countries strongly condemned the Russian invasion. On February 24, US President Biden condemned the “brutal assault [by the Russian military] on the people of Ukraine without provocation, without justification, without necessity.” He noted that NATO would convene to “map out the next steps” to “further strengthen all aspects” of the Alliance.”³⁴</p> <p>Biden added: “Our forces are not and will not be engaged in the conflict with Russia in Ukraine. Our forces are not going to Europe to fight in Ukraine but to defend our NATO Allies and reassure those Allies in the east.” However, the United States would “defend every inch of NATO territory with the full force of American power” and the Alliance was “more united and more determined than ever.”³⁵</p>	
8.	Warning
<p>Other NATO Allies expressed similar outrage. French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian called Putin a “cynic” and a “dictator” on February 24 and issued a first nuclear counter-threat, saying that the Russian President had to understand that the transatlantic Alliance was also a nuclear alliance.”³⁶</p>	

On **February 25**, Russia vetoed a United Nations Security Council draft resolution submitted by Albania and the United States that would have condemned Russia’s “aggression against Ukraine in violation of Article 2, paragraph 4 of the United Nations Charter.”³⁷

Blinken later outlined the rationale that had driven the Administration to respond so forcefully to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. For a February 24, 2023 article, the US Secretary of State noted that Biden had understood that Russia’s attack went to “the very principles that are at the heart of trying to keep peace and security around the world.” If Washington allowed “one big country” to “erase another off the map,” this would “open a Pandora’s Box to would-be aggressors around the world.” These concerns were particularly stark as the US intelligence community’s analysis was that “Russia would achieve substantial gains on the ground very rapidly” and “Kyiv could easily fall fast,” **Sullivan** said. “It wasn’t just the pressure of a war starting. It was the pressure of Russia, brutally, ruthlessly succeeding.” **Victoria Nuland**, the US Under-Secretary of State for political affairs, remembered that the US government was “preparing for many scenarios in which the Ukrainians essentially had to get Kyiv back, get their country back — potentially a government-in-exile. We didn’t know which scenario we were going to be looking at.”³⁸

In February 2023, US officials talked about their uncertainty with respect to Ukraine’s will to resist immediately after the invasion. Representative **Adam Schiff** noted that “after seeing how the Afghan military melted away in the face of the Taliban, we had a lot of skepticism about how well we could identify

³⁴ “Remarks by President Biden on Russia’s Unprovoked and Unjustified Attack on Ukraine,” *Website of the White House*, February 24, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/02/24/remarks-by-president-biden-on-russias-unprovoked-and-unjustified-attack-on-ukraine/>].

³⁵ “Remarks by President Biden on Russia’s Unprovoked and Unjustified Attack on Ukraine,” *Website of the White House*, February 24, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/02/24/remarks-by-president-biden-on-russias-unprovoked-and-unjustified-attack-on-ukraine/>].

³⁶ “‘Poutine doit comprendre’ que l’OTAN ‘est une alliance nucléaire’, lance Le Drian [‘Putin must understand’ that NATO ‘is a nuclear alliance,’ says Le Drian],” *Le Figaro*, February 24, 2022 [<https://video.lefigaro.fr/figaro/video/poutine-doit-comprendre-que-lotan-est-une-alliance-nucleaire-lance-le-drian/>].

³⁷ “Security Council Fails to Adopt Draft Resolution on Ending Ukraine Crisis, as Russian Federation Wields Veto,” *Website of the United Nations*, February 25, 2022 [<https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc14808.doc.htm>], and “S/2022/155,” *United Nations Security Council*, February 25, 2022 [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2022_155.pdf].

³⁸ Erin Banco et al, “‘Something Was Badly Wrong’: When Washington Realized Russia Was Actually Invading Ukraine,” *Politico*, February 24, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2023/02/24/russia-ukraine-war-oral-history-00083757>].

the will to fight.” **Nuland** told a reporter that “none of us expected the Ukrainians to be able to withstand as strongly as they did in those first four or five days.” **Scott Berrier** said that given Russian capabilities and the capacity of the Ukrainian army, the latter did “pretty well.” Burns commented that the CIA had not been surprised by Ukrainian resilience, but rather that it “did not understand clearly enough how ineffective the Russian military was going to be.” **Celeste Wallander**, the US assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs: “They were much less capable, the plan was much less coherent, there was much more dysfunction in the Russian military than was apparent in their exercises. The Russians were overconfident based on how easy it had been for them to intervene in Syria, and in fact that was not a good test of their capabilities.” **Milley** concluded that “the Russians thought that they had an effective competent army to execute combined arms maneuver,” but, “as it turned out, they couldn’t do it.”³⁹

9.	De-escalatory
Western statements, in turn, were accompanied by actions, which however remained limited to economic sanctions and military aid. Thus, in the days following the invasion, the United States, the European Union, many other European states, but also Canada, Japan, and Australia, adopted an unprecedented sanctions package against Russia; ⁴⁰ and on February 26 , Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby announced “an additional \$350 million in military assistance” for Ukraine, “including anti-armor, small arms and various munitions, body armor, and related equipment in support of Ukraine’s front-line defenders facing down Russia’s unprovoked attack.” ⁴¹	

10.	Escalatory
Nonetheless, certain Western statements could have been interpreted by Russian policymakers as laying the ground for a direct intervention. British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said on February 27 that the immense costs of the war could well be the beginning of the end for Putin. She feared, however, that Putin was determined to use the most unsightly means. Thus, she urged Russia, not to escalate the conflict, but noted that the West had to be prepared for Russia trying to use even the worst weapons.	
The “long-running conflict” in Ukraine was “about freedom and democracy in Europe,” Truss noted. “If we don’t stop Putin in Ukraine, we are going to see others under threat: the Baltics, Poland, Moldova, and it could end up in a conflict with NATO. We do not want to go there,” she warned, suggesting (intentionally or not) that the Western stakes warranted a direct intervention. ⁴²	

Russia was seemingly unimpressed by the overall Western reaction, but highly sensitive to the British statement. On **February 27**, Belarus held a referendum to amend its constitution, allowing the previously unconstitutional deployment of nuclear weapons on Belarusian territory.⁴³ The draft of the new

³⁹ Erin Banco et al, “‘Something Was Badly Wrong’: When Washington Realized Russia Was Actually Invading Ukraine,” *Politico*, February 24, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2023/02/24/russia-ukraine-war-oral-history-00083757>].

⁴⁰ Chad P. Bown, “Russia’s war on Ukraine: A sanctions timeline,” *PIIE*, August 15, 2022 [<https://www.piie.com/blogs/realtime-economic-issues-watch/russias-war-ukraine-sanctions-timeline>].

⁴¹ “Department of Defense Statement on Additional Military Assistance for Ukraine,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, February 26, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2947554/departement-of-defense-statement-on-additional-military-assistance-for-ukraine/>].

⁴² “In Full: Trevor Phillips On Sunday,” *Sky news*, February 27, 2022 [<https://news.sky.com/video/in-full-trevor-phillips-on-sunday-12553126>].

⁴³ “Belarus referendum approves proposal to renounce non-nuclear status – agencies,” *Reuters*, February 28, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/launchpad-russias-assault-ukraine-belarus-holds-referendum-renounce-non-nuclear->

Constitution had already been presented on **December 27, 2021**.⁴⁴ At the end of November 2021, **Lukashenko** had said that his country would be ready to host Russian nuclear weapons if NATO moved US atomic bombs from Germany to Eastern Europe. "I would offer Putin to return nuclear weapons to Belarus," he had told an interviewer. Back then, Lukashenko was apparently responding to NATO Secretary General **Jens Stoltenberg**, who had earlier in November said that the Western military Alliance would need to consider redeploying nuclear weapons east, if the new German government changed the country's policy on nuclear sharing.⁴⁵

11.	Escalatory
Even more disconcerting than the decision in Minsk, on February 27, Putin ordered Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu and Armed Forces Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov to put Russia's "deterrence forces," which include nuclear weapons, on a "high combat alert." Putin cited "unfriendly economic actions" taken against Russia by Western countries, namely the "illegitimate sanctions," and "aggressive statements" directed at Russia as reasons for the decision. ⁴⁶ It was not initially clear what specific steps would accompany this decision. ⁴⁷	

12.	Warning
Then, on February 28, Shoigu declared that he had implemented Putin's order by adding additional personnel at various locations – "shifts on duty" at "command posts" had been "put on enhanced combat duty." ⁴⁸ Experts consequently classified the decision as largely symbolic. ⁴⁹	

The West's reaction was immediate. On the same day, US Ambassador to the United Nations **Linda Thomas-Greenfield** condemned Putin's move "in the strongest possible way." Moscow's escalation of the war was "unacceptable" and the Russian leader had "tried every means possible to actually put fear in the world," the ambassador said. The US government had to "ramp up" its efforts at the United Nations and elsewhere to "hold him accountable."⁵⁰

2022-02-27/].

⁴⁴ "Amended Belarusian Constitution would drop country's goal to be nuclear-free, neutral," *TASS*, December 27, 2021 [<https://tass.com/world/1381539>].

⁴⁵ Vladimir Isachenkov, "Belarus president offers to host Russian nuclear weapons," *AP News*, November 30, 2021 [<https://ap-news.com/article/russia-ukraine-germany-migration-europe-ab1efae5e65bf01af3be2f6139ef6f4b>].

⁴⁶ "Meeting with Sergei Shoigu and Valery Gerasimov," *Website of the President of Russia*, February 27, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/67876>].

⁴⁷ "'Abschreckungskräfte' in Alarmbereitschaft ('Deterrence forces' on alert)," *Tagesschau*, February 27, 2022 [<https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/europa/putin-atomstreitkraefte-101.html>].

⁴⁸ "Strategic Missile Forces, Northern, Pacific fleets, long-range aviation put on high alert - Russian Defense Ministry," *Interfax*, February 28, 2022 [<https://interfax.com/newsroom/top-stories/74752/>].

⁴⁹ See for example: Heather Williams, "Putin is a Nuclear Bully," *RUSI*, March 1, 2022 [<https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/putin-nuclear-bully>], and "Stufe zwei von vier: Russland versetzt Abschreckungswaffen in besondere Alarmbereitschaft – was bedeutet das? (Level two of four: Russia puts deterrence weapons on special alert - what does that mean?)," *RND*, February 28, 2022 [<https://www.rnd.de/politik/stufe-zwei-von-vier-russland-versetzt-abschreckungswaffen-in-besondere-alarmbereitschaft-was-XJN5DK2IBJAMJLB5ZUVKWQ5HLL.html>], and Fred Kaplan, "Here Are the Scenarios Where Putin Might Actually Use a Nuke," *Slate*, March 1, 2022 [<https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2022/03/here-are-the-scenarios-where-putin-might-actually-use-a-uke.html>], and Olga Oliker, "Putin's Nuclear Bluff," *Foreign Affairs*, March 11, 2022 [<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-03-11/putins-nuclear-bluff>].

⁵⁰ "Transcript: U.N. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield on 'Face the Nation,' February 27, 2022," *CBS News*, February 27, 2022 [<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/transcript-linda-thomas-greenfield-un-ambassador-face-the-nation-02-27-2022/>], and Doina Chiacu and James Oliphant, "U.S. blasts Putin nuclear order as 'unacceptable,' considers further sanctions," *Reuters*, February 28, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/us-nato-condemn-putin-nuclear-alert-order-2022-02-27/>].

13.	De-escalatory
White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki saw the Russian decision as part of a typical pattern of the Kremlin, artificially fabricating threats to justify further aggressive actions. Russia had not been threatened by NATO or Ukraine at any time, she said. The United States had the ability to defend itself, but it also had to speak out against what Putin was doing, Psaki continued, noting that Washington was “open” to providing additional assistance to Ukraine. ⁵¹	

Stoltenberg expressed similar sentiments. Putin’s nuclear statements were congruent with Russia’s “very aggressive rhetoric,” with which it was trying to threaten Ukraine, but also NATO Allies, and to force the Alliance to withdraw all its forces from Eastern Europe. Russia’s stance only underscored the importance of Allies standing together, Stoltenberg said. This was why the West was supporting Ukraine, but NATO had in recent months and weeks also significantly increased its presence in the Eastern parts of the Alliance, Stoltenberg said.⁵²

In turn, Ukrainian Foreign Minister **Dmytro Kuleba** noted that the Russian “alert” decision had followed the announcement of a planned meeting between a Ukrainian and a Russian delegation for talks in Belarus. Accordingly, he interpreted Putin’s move as an attempt to raise the stakes and put additional pressure on the Ukrainian delegation. However, he said, Ukraine would not give in to such pressure. If the Russian announcement was a direct threat to employ nuclear weapons against Ukraine, such an attack would be a disaster for the world, but it would not break the Ukrainian government’s will, Kuleba said.⁵³

14.	Warning
Also on February 27 , as a result of a foreign ministers’ meeting, the European Union announced the delivery of weapons and lethal support to Ukraine worth 450 million euros. In a press conference, Josep Borrell , the European Union’s top diplomat, stated that this would include the delivery of fighter jets, which Ukraine had asked for: “We are going to supply arms and even fighter jets. We are not talking just about ammunition; we are providing the most important arms to go to war,” Borell said. “We know what kind of planes [the Ukrainian army can operate] and some Member States have these kinds of planes.” ⁵⁴ Borell was referring to fighter jets of the Soviet MiG or Sukhoi type, which for example Bulgaria, Croatia, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia reportedly owned. ⁵⁵ Media later suggested that several Western governments had hoped a potential delivery of fighter jets would not be made	

⁵¹ “‘This Week’ Transcript 2-27-22: White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki, Sen. Tom Cotton & Amb. Oksana Markarova,” *ABC News*, February 27, 2022 [<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/week-transcript-27-22-white-house-press-secretary/story?id=83130361>].

⁵² “NATO chief condemns ‘dangerous’ Putin rhetoric, vows support for Ukraine,” *CNN*, February 27, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/videos/politics/2022/02/27/stoltenberg-full.cnn>].

⁵³ “Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Dmytro Kuleba briefs international press on the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine,” *Facebook account of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine*, February 27, 2022 [<https://www.facebook.com/UkraineMFA/videos/minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-ukraine-dmytro-kuleba-briefs-international-press-/1331306997386999/>] (from 25:50)], and Max Seddon et al., “Putin puts Russian nuclear forces on high alert as west steps up sanctions,” *Financial Times*, February 27, 2022 [<https://www.ft.com/content/4bf149f7-6f70-4d8b-bc69-13a6c1f56e33>].

⁵⁴ “Informal videoconference of Foreign Affairs Ministers: Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell at the press conference,” *Website of the European External Action Service*, February 27, 2022 [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/111758/informal-videoconference-foreign-affairs-ministers-remarks-high-representativevice-president_en].

⁵⁵ Claire Mills and John Curtis, “Military assistance to Ukraine since the Russian invasion,” *House of Commons Library*, August 15, 2022 [<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9477/CBP-9477.pdf>].

public.⁵⁶ In addition, Borrell said Poland had agreed to act as a “logistical hub” for the delivery of such “material assistance.”⁵⁷

15.	Escalatory
Much more significant than these public statements, however, was the fact that Washington probably warned Moscow on February 28 or March 1 through government channels against using tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine. US media reported this in mid-March, citing statements by US officials from the National Security Council. ⁵⁸	

16.	Warning
Russia’s rhetoric, meanwhile, remained unchanged. On February 28 , a Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova , stated in an interview that it would be a “golden dream” for the United States to deploy nuclear weapons in Ukraine. ⁵⁹	

Also on **February 28**, Moscow reacted to the February 27 statements of British Foreign Secretary Truss. Kremlin spokesman **Dmitry Peskov** noted that the Russian government believed “statements” on “possible altercations or even collisions and clashes between NATO and Russia” were “absolutely unacceptable.”⁶⁰

March 2022: Drawing red lines

17.	Warning
On March 1 , Russia held another military exercise involving nuclear submarines in the Barents Sea and the deployment of mobile intercontinental ballistic missile systems in Siberia. ⁶¹	

In the face of Moscow’s threatening gestures, Western officials sought to simultaneously condemn Russia’s behavior and avoid further escalation.

⁵⁶ Paul McLeary, Alexander Ward and Betsy Woodruff Swan, “Shot down: How Biden scuttled the deal to get MiGs to Ukraine,” *Politico*, March 10, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/03/10/poland-fighter-jet-deal-ukraine-russia-00016038>].

⁵⁷ “Informal videoconference of Foreign Affairs Ministers: Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell at the press conference,” *Website of the European External Action Service*, February 27, 2022 [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/111758/informal-videoconference-foreign-affairs-ministers-remarks-high-representativevice-president_en].

⁵⁸ David E. Sanger, “U.S. warns Moscow against using chemical or biological weapons,” *The New York Times*, March 16, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/16/world/ukraine-russia-war/jake-sullivan-moscow-chemical-weapons?smid=url-share>].

⁵⁹ “It would be US ‘golden dream’ to have nuclear weapons in Ukraine — diplomat,” *TASS*, February 28, 2022 [<https://tass.com/world/1412847>].

⁶⁰ Mary O’Connor and Doug Faulkner, “Ukraine conflict: Russia blames Liz Truss and others for nuclear alert,” *BBC News*, February 28, 2022 [<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-60558048>].

⁶¹ Vladimir Isachenkov, “Russia holds drills with nuclear subs, land-based missiles,” *AP News*, March 1, 2022 [<https://ap-news.com/article/russia-ukraine-vladimir-putin-business-europe-moscow-563573526a93ea73a95698d8ddb61b9c>].

18.	De-escalatory
In a press conference on February 28 , US President Joe Biden denied the question of whether Americans should be afraid of nuclear war. ⁶² In his State of the Union address on March 1 , he further reiterated that US forces “are not engaged and will not engage in conflict with Russian forces in Ukraine.” Hence: “Our forces are not going to Europe to fight in Ukraine, but to defend our NATO Allies – in the event that Putin decides to keep moving west,” the US President said. He had made “crystal clear the United States and [its] Allies will defend every inch of territory of NATO countries with the full force of our collective power.” ⁶³	

The West also refrained from taking reciprocal steps in response to Russia’s nuclear alert. On **March 1**, **Stoltenberg** condemned Moscow’s “irresponsible” actions, but stressed that NATO would not alter its nuclear alert level. Russia itself had agreed in several statements that a nuclear war could not be won and therefore should never be fought, the NATO Secretary General said. Therefore, the Alliance would not do anything that could escalate the situation further.⁶⁴ The Commander of the United States Strategic Command, **Charles A. Richard**, expressed similar views. He was satisfied with the current deployment of the US forces and had made no recommendations to make changes, he explained.⁶⁵

Also, Western governments seemed bent to keep arms deliveries to Ukraine out of the public focus – presumably to avoid further escalation with Russia. For instance, at a **March 1** meeting of the US House of Representatives Armed Services Committee, two members of the Biden Administration, **Jessica Lewis** and **Mara Karlin**, confirmed that the United States had provided lethal support, including Stinger missiles, to Ukraine. There had been no prior statements on this from the White House, Pentagon, or State Department.⁶⁶

Russian officials meanwhile kept up their narrative. In a **March 1** speech to the Conference on Disarmament, **Lavrov** said that Ukraine had been seeking to acquire nuclear weapons, a threat that warranted a Russian response. Ukraine still had “Soviet nuclear technologies and the means of delivery of such weapons” and Russia could not “fail to respond to this real danger.”⁶⁷

⁶² “Remarks by President Biden at a Celebration to Mark Black History Month,” *Website of the White House*, February 28, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/02/28/remarks-by-president-biden-at-a-celebration-to-mark-black-history-month/>].

⁶³ “Remarks of President Joe Biden – State of the Union Address As Prepared for Delivery,” *Website of the White House*, March 1, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/03/01/remarks-of-president-joe-biden-state-of-the-union-address-as-delivered/>].

⁶⁴ “NATO Hasn’t Changed Nuclear Alert Level, Stoltenberg Says,” *Bloomberg*, March 1, 2022 [<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/videos/2022-03-01/nato-hasn-t-changed-nuclear-alert-level-stoltenberg-video>].

⁶⁵ “Subcommittee on Strategic Forces Hearing: ‘Fiscal Year 2023 Strategic Forces Posture Hearing,’” *Website of the US House Armed Services Committee*, March 1, 2022 [<https://armedservices.house.gov/hearings?ID=3AD9C1D7-8592-4E4B-97D0-318CE7CEC569> (from 28:20)].

⁶⁶ “20220301 Full Hearing: ‘Engagement with Allies and Partners,’” *YouTube account of the US House Armed Services Committee*, March 1, 2022 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HokOZU5FS_w], and Alexander Ward and Quint Forgy, “The U.S. won’t repeat it’s sending Stingers to Ukraine,” *Politico*, March 4, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/03/04/the-u-s-wont-repeat-its-sending-stingers-to-ukraine-00014317>].

⁶⁷ Emma Farge, “Russia says ‘real danger’ of Ukraine acquiring nuclear weapons required response,” *Reuters*, March 1, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/russias-lavrov-says-there-is-danger-ukraine-acquiring-nuclear-weapons-2022-03-01/>].

On **March 2**, the United Nation General Assembly passed a resolution “condemning the decision of the Russian Federation to increase the readiness of its nuclear forces” and demanding that Russia “immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.”⁶⁸

19.	De-escalatory
Just one week after it had been announced, the delivery of fighter jets by EU states was put on hold – apparently also mainly due to efforts to avoid escalation with Russia. For example, at a joint press conference with Stoltenberg on March 2 , Polish President Andrzej Duda declared his country was not sending “any jets to Ukraine because that would open a military interference in the Ukrainian conflict.” Poland was “not joining that conflict,” and NATO was “not a party to that conflict.” Warsaw was “supporting Ukrainians with humanity aid” but was not “going to send any jets to the Ukrainian airspace.” Stoltenberg made similar comments, noting that the Alliance had provided “different types of military support: material, anti-tank weapons, air defense systems and other types of military equipment” as well as financial support, but that NATO was “not to be part of the conflict” and was not “going to send the troops into Ukraine or move planes into Ukrainian airspace.” ⁶⁹ According to media reports, Slovakia and Bulgaria also rejected the delivery of MiG fighter jets to Ukraine. ⁷⁰	

20.	De-escalatory
Last but not least, US Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III on March 2 postponed a planned test launch of the US Minuteman III missile. “Now, in this time of heightened tensions, the United States and other members of the international community rightly saw [Putin’s actions] as dangerous and irresponsible and ... an unnecessary step,” Pentagon Press Secretary John F. Kirby said. “To demonstrate that we have no intention of engaging in any actions that can be misunderstood or misconstrued, the secretary of defense has directed that our Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile test launch scheduled for this week to be postponed,” he further commented on Austin’s decision. “We did not take this decision lightly, but instead to demonstrate that we are a responsible nuclear power.” ⁷¹	

Russian policymakers in the meantime sought to dial back earlier narratives and blame the West for the heightened danger of nuclear escalation.

21.	De-escalatory
On March 2 , Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova expressed skepticism with regard to a possible Russian nuclear escalation. “We assume that this apocalyptic scenario [of Russia using nuclear weapons first] cannot be realized under any pretext and under any conditions,” she said. “When it comes to the use of nuclear weapons, we have already stated our position several	

⁶⁸ “General Assembly resolution demands end to Russian offensive in Ukraine,” *Website of the United Nations*, March 2, 2022 [<https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1113152>], and “A/ES-11/L.1,” *United Nations General Assembly*, March 1, 2022 [<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/LTD/N22/272/27/PDF/N2227227.pdf?OpenElement>]

⁶⁹ “Press conference with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the President of Poland, Andrzej Duda at Łask Military Airbase in Poland,” *Website of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, March 1, 2022 [https://www.nato.int/cps/fr/natohq/opinions_192582.htm].

⁷⁰ Paul McLeary, Alexander Ward and Betsy Woodruff Swan, “Shot down: How Biden scuttled the deal to get MiGs to Ukraine,” *Politico*, March 10, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/03/10/poland-fighter-jet-deal-ukraine-russia-00016038>].

⁷¹ “Austin Postpones Test of Minuteman III Missile,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, March 2, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2952925/>].

times. Perhaps you are confusing us with the United States, but the Russian Federation has never spoken about this.”⁷²

In a **March 3** interview, Foreign Minister **Lavrov** stated that the goal of Russia’s “military operation” in Ukraine was to prevent Kyiv from acquiring nuclear weapons. In addition, he made somewhat cryptic comments about a possible war with the West, yet arguing that Moscow’s nuclear rhetoric was merely a reaction to Western threats. Thus, Lavrov noted that the French Foreign Minister le Drian had reminded the Russian leadership that France also had nuclear weapons (see February 24). The Russian official also commented that British Foreign Secretary Truss had said “she was prepared for conflict between NATO and Russia” (see February 27). Also, he added that US President Biden had said that the alternative to sanctioning Russia was World War III. “I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the thought of nuclear war is constantly running through the minds of Western politicians but not the minds of Russians,” Lavrov concluded. “I assure you that we will not let any provocations cause us to lose our balance. But if a real war is unleashed against us, this must be a concern for those who are hatching such plans. And I believe these plans are being hatched.”⁷³

Meanwhile, fighting near Ukraine’s Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant during the night of **March 4** highlighted nuclear risks of a different kind as a building next to the power plant caught fire. Against this background, Ukrainian President **Volodymyr Zelenskyy** urged NATO countries to establish a no-fly zone (NFZ) in Ukraine. This was the only way to guarantee that Russia would not be able to attack any other nuclear facilities, he explained.⁷⁴

22.	De-escalatory
Zelenskyy’s NFZ request was however denied at an extraordinary NATO foreign ministers’ meeting to address the situation in Ukraine on March 4 – with reference to the associated risk of escalation. ⁷⁵ In the press conference that followed the summit, Stoltenberg condemned Russia’s “irresponsible” actions near the Zaporizhzhia nuclear facility. However, he stressed that NATO was “not part of this conflict” and was not seeking war with Russia. The Alliance had a responsibility to ensure that the conflict did not escalate and spread, he said. That scenario would be even more destructive and dangerous. Stoltenberg also said that NATO continued to believe in arms control, but that such negotiations would require a Russian regime that takes political processes seriously. According to Stoltenberg, the Allies had rejected the establishment of a no-fly zone because such a direct engagement of NATO states could lead to a larger war in Europe. ⁷⁶	

⁷² “Россия не хочет воплощения сценария нажатия ядерной кнопки, заявили в МИД (Russia does not want to implement the scenario of pressing the nuclear button, said the Foreign Ministry),” *RIA Novosti*, March 2, 2022 [https://ria.ru/20220302/mid-1776097080.html?utm_source=yxnews&utm_medium=desktop], and “Las unidades nacionalistas de Ucrania destruyeron a la población de Donetsk y Lugansk’: portavoz del Ministerio de Exteriores de Rusia (‘Ukrainian nationalist units ravaged the population of Donetsk and Luhansk’: Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson),” *La W Radio*, March 2, 2022 [<https://www.wradio.com.co/2022/03/02/las-unidades-nacionalistas-de-ucrania-destruyeron-donetsk-y-lugansk-portavoz-del-ministerio-de-exteriores-de-rusia/>].

⁷³ “Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s interview with TV channels RT, NBC News, ABC News, ITN, France 24 and the PRC Media Corporation, Moscow, March 3, 2022,” *Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, March 3, 2022 [https://www.mid.ru/en/press_service/minister_speeches/1802677/].

⁷⁴ “We have survived the night that could have stopped the history of Ukraine and Europe - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy,” *Website of the President of Ukraine*, March 4, 2022 [<https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/mi-perezhili-nich-yakamogla-zupiniti-istoriyu-ukrayini-ta-y-73337>].

⁷⁵ “NATO Foreign Ministers meet amidst escalating Russian aggression in Ukraine,” *Website of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, March 4, 2022 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_192795.htm].

⁷⁶ “Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the Extraordinary meeting of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs,” *Website of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, March 4, 2022 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_192739.htm].

Zelenskyy subsequently called the NATO decision and the foreign ministers' meeting "weak" and "confused."⁷⁷ German Foreign Minister **Annalena Baerbock**, by contrast, defended the decision. NATO was not able to intervene in the war. Nobody wanted the resulting danger of boundless escalation throughout Europe. Despite the "heartbreaking" situation, it was important to keep a "cool head."⁷⁸

Moscow's reaction, in turn, was anything but conciliatory, with the Russian President insisting that Russia's nuclear steps were a reaction to Western actions.

23.	Warning
<p>Putin warned on March 5 against the establishment of a no-fly zone. This would have "tremendous and disastrous consequences" – "not only for Europe but also globally." Russia would consider the states seeking to impose a NFZ as parties to the conflict. Similar to Lavrov, Putin also claimed that Ukraine was trying to obtain nuclear weapons and still had relevant capabilities from Soviet times. He described the Western sanctions against Russia as tantamount to "war," even though "thankfully" the conflict had "not got" to a hot war "yet." Putin explained that Russia's "so-called partners" understood what a NFZ "could lead to" and how much was at stake, "despite their reckless statements, for example, like the statement made by the UK Foreign Secretary, when she blurted out that NATO could get involved in the conflict. And we immediately had to take a decision to put our deterrence forces on high alert" (see Truss on February 27 and Lavrov's statement on March 3).⁷⁹</p>	

Meanwhile, views on a no-fly zone remained unchanged in both Ukraine and within NATO. **Zelenskyy** repeated his demand on **March 5** and **6**.⁸⁰ On **March 6**, **Baerbock** again explained her reasons for rejecting a NFZ. In the current situation, one was forced to choose "between plague and cholera," the foreign minister said. The situation in Ukraine was heartbreaking, and yet one could not justify a "spillover of this war to Poland, to the Baltic states." She repeated that it was necessary to "keep a cool head." A no-fly zone would mean that "NATO planes would shoot down Russian planes." One would then be "directly involved in this war," Baerbock said. The European governments also had a responsibility for Europeans and for ensuring that the war did not turn into a third world war, the minister stressed.⁸¹

However, Ukrainian demands for fighter jets resurfaced in Western debates. On **March 6**, US Secretary of State **Blinken** stated that the United States was in "very active discussions" with Poland on the extent to which Washington could supply US fighter jets to Warsaw to fill the resulting gap if Poland chose "to

⁷⁷ "We continue to fight, we will protect our state and liberate our land thanks to our heroes - address by the President of Ukraine," *Website of the President of Ukraine*, March 4, 2022 [<https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/mi-prodovzhuyemo-borotysya-mi-zahistimo-nashu-derzhavu-i-zvi-73357>].

⁷⁸ Tweet by @ABaerbock, *Twitter*, March 4, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/ABaerbock/status/1499818157053255684>].

⁷⁹ "Meeting with female aircrew members of Russian airlines," *Website of the President of Russia*, March 5, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67913>], and "Putin likens sanctions to an 'act of war' and warns Ukraine might lose statehood," *The New York Times*, March 5, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/05/world/russia-ukraine/putin-ukraine-statehood?smid=url-share>].

⁸⁰ "I am sure that soon we will be able to tell our people: come back, because there is no more threat - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy," *Website of the President of Ukraine*, March 5, 2022 [<https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/upevnenij-sho-vzhe-skoro-mi-zmozhemo-skazati-nashim-lyudyam-73365>], and "Ukraine receives support from partners backed by concrete steps - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy," *Website of the President of Ukraine*, March 6, 2022 [<https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/ukrayina-otrimuye-vid-partneriv-pidtrimku-pidkriplenu-konkre-73377>].

⁸¹ "Krieg gegen die Ukraine – wie weit wird Putin gehen? (War against Ukraine – how far will Putin go?)," *Das Erste*, March 6, 2022 [<https://daserste.ndr.de/annewill/videos/Krieg-gegen-die-Ukraine-wie-weit-wird-Putin-gehen,annewill7418.html>] (from 2:30)].

provide [MiG] fighter jets to the Ukrainians.”⁸² For the US government, a deal in which the United States would compensate Poland for supplying MiGs to Ukraine represented an acceptable alternative to direct US deliveries to Kyiv. The latter could be seen by Russia as an escalation, US media reported, citing statements by three anonymous officials within the Biden Administration. A Polish decision to deliver MiGs, on the other hand, would be Poland’s sovereign right and thus not a direct US delivery.⁸³

Two days later, however, this deal seemed to be off the table again. On **March 8**, Polish Foreign Minister **Zbigniew Rau** announced that Poland was ready “immediately and free of charge” to transfer all its MiG-29 jets to Ramstein Air Base and “place them at the disposal of the Government of the United States of America.” In exchange, Warsaw was requesting Washington to provide “used aircraft with corresponding operational capabilities.”⁸⁴ However, the Polish initiative had not been coordinated with the US government, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs **Victoria Nuland** said the same day.⁸⁵ Hours later, Pentagon spokesman **Kirby** rejected the proposal as not “tenable.” The “prospect” of fighter jets “at the disposal of the Government of the United States of America” departing from “a US/NATO base in Germany to fly into airspace that is contested with Russia over Ukraine raises serious concerns for the entire NATO alliance,” Kirby said. The decision about “whether to transfer Polish-owned planes to Ukraine” was “ultimately one for the Polish government.”⁸⁶

24.	De-escalatory
<p>Also on March 8, the US House of Representatives Select Intelligence Committee held a hearing to assess Russia’s nuclear threats. At that hearing, Avril Haines, the Director of National Intelligence, stated that Russia had probably underestimated the international response to the invasion of Ukraine. Still, Putin was unlikely to be deterred by such blowback. Instead, he might escalate further to force a disarmament of Ukraine and its neutrality, and to prevent Kyiv from moving any closer to the United States or to NATO. The US intelligence community assessed that Putin perceived the West as not respecting him enough. The Russian president probably thought he could not afford to lose this war, Haines said. What kind of victory he was willing to accept might change over time, due to the war’s significant costs, she noted.</p> <p>Putin’s nuclear saber rattling fit this assessment very well, Haines added. Nonetheless, the public announcement of a heightened alert of Russian deterrent forces was highly unusual. The United States had not seen such public pronouncements since the 1960s, Haines pointed out. But the US intelligence community had not observed any specific adjustments in Russia’s nuclear forces, going beyond what had occurred in previous moments of heightened tensions in recent decades. Putin’s nuclear threatening gestures were likely intended to discourage the West from providing additional support to Ukraine, Haines said. Putin was probably still confident that Russia could defeat Ukraine and</p>	

⁸² “Secretary Blinken With Margaret Brennan of CBS News,” *Website of the US Department of State*, March 6, 2022 [<https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-on-cbs-face-the-nation-with-margaret-brennan/>].

⁸³ Paul McLeary, Alexander Ward and Betsy Woodruff Swan, “Shot down: How Biden scuttled the deal to get MiGs to Ukraine,” *Politico*, March 10, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/03/10/poland-fighter-jet-deal-ukraine-russia-00016038>].

⁸⁴ “Statement of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland in connection with the statement by the US Secretary of State on providing airplanes to Ukraine,” *Website of the Republic of Poland*, March 8, 2022 [<https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/statement-of-the-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-poland-in-connection-with-the-statement-by-the-us-secretary-of-state-on-providing-airplanes-to-ukraine>].

⁸⁵ “Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Testifies on Ukraine,” *C-SPAN*, March 8, 2022 [<https://www.c-span.org/video/?518355-1/undersecretary-nuland-russian-forces-seeking-control-chemical-weapons>] (from 22:10)].

⁸⁶ “Statement by Pentagon Press Secretary John F. Kirby on Security Assistance to Ukraine,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, March 8, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2960180/statement-by-pentagon-press-secretary-john-f-kirby-on-security-assistance-to-uk/>].

wanted to prevent Western support that could tip the balance and force a conflict with NATO, she concluded.⁸⁷

Meanwhile, the failed MiG deal was again the subject of a **March 9** telephone conversation between **Austin** and Polish Defense Minister **Mariusz Błaszczak**. In the subsequent press conference, spokesman **Kirby** reiterated the US government's opposition to the Polish proposal. He said that the US did not currently support the transfer of more fighter aircraft to the Ukrainian Air Force and therefore had no desire to have Polish jets placed under US custody. Kirby cited three reasons for this: "First, we believe the best way to support Ukrainian defense is by providing them the weapons and the systems that they need most to defeat Russian aggression. In particular, anti-armor, and air defense. [...] Secondly, Ukrainian Air Force currently has several squadrons of fully mission capable aircraft. We assess that adding aircraft to the Ukrainian inventory is not likely to significantly change the effectiveness of the Ukrainian Air Force relative to Russian capabilities." Finally, "the intelligence community has assessed the transfer of MIG-29s to Ukraine may be mistaken as escalatory. And could result in significant Russian reaction that might increase the prospects of a military escalation with NATO" Kirby added. Thus, providing additional combat aircraft offered "little increased capabilities at high risk."⁸⁸

On **March 9**, German Chancellor **Scholz** also rejected the delivery of fighter jets to Ukraine from the Ramstein Air Base in Germany. He said it was necessary to consider very carefully what could be done concretely to support Ukraine – "and that certainly does not include fighter jets," the chancellor said in a joint press conference with Canadian President **Justin Trudeau**, who agreed: All actors had to be very careful in order to avoid contributing to escalation and to an expansion of the conflict.⁸⁹

Meanwhile, **Zelenskyy** thanked Poland for the proposed alternative solution in a **March 9** address and called on the countries involved to resolve the purely "technical issue" of the delivery procedure "immediately." Human lives were at stake, he said.⁹⁰ In an interview, the Ukrainian president added that he thought Russia's nuclear threats were a "bluff." It was one thing to be a "murderer." It was another thing to be suicidal. Any use of nuclear weapons spelled the end for everyone involved – not just the actor using them first. Putin's threat displayed weakness. "One threatens to use nuclear weapons only when all else fails," Zelenskyy said. "I am sure that Russia is aware of the disastrous consequences of attempting to use nuclear weapons."⁹¹

⁸⁷ "Intelligence Directors Testify on National Security Threats," *C-SPAN*, March 8, 2022 [<https://www.c-span.org/video/?518352-1/house-intel-panel-told-putin-endgame-ukraine>] (from 17:00)].

⁸⁸ "Pentagon Press Secretary John F. Kirby Holds a Press Briefing, March 9, 2022," *Website of the US Department of Defense*, March 9, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/2961792/pentagon-press-secretary-john-f-kirby-holds-a-press-briefing-march-9-2022/>].

⁸⁹ "Pressekonferenz von Bundeskanzler Olaf Scholz mit dem Premierminister von Kanada, Justin Trudeau (Press conference by Chancellor Olaf Scholz with Prime Minister of Canada Justin Trudeau)," *Website of the German Federal Government*, March 9, 2022 [<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/mediathek/livestream/pressekonferenz-von-bundeskanzler-olaf-scholz-mit-dem-premierminister-von-kanada-justin-trudeau-2011814>] (from 14:10)].

⁹⁰ "Ukrainians withstood and inspired the whole world with their determination - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy," *Website of the President of Ukraine*, March 9, 2022 [<https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/ukrayinci-vistoyali-j-nadihnuli-ves-svit-svoyeyu-rishuchisty-73457>].

⁹¹ "Wenn die Ukraine bei dir ist, fühlst du dich sicher (When Ukraine is with you, you feel safe)," *Die Zeit*, March 9, 2022 [<https://www.zeit.de/2022/11/wolodymyr-selenskyj-ukraine-russland-krieg-interview/seite-2>].

25.	Warning
In turn, Kremlin spokesperson Peskov warned at a March 9 press conference against the use of “any other airfields” for military aircraft takeoffs. This was “an extremely undesirable and potentially dangerous scenario.” ⁹²	

On **March 10**, anonymous sources leaked to the media that the government in Warsaw had proposed to deliver MiGs via Ramstein out of fear of possible Russian military strikes – potentially nuclear – on Polish military bases. However, with the US equally unwilling to take on additional escalation risks, the West instead decided to supply air defense systems to Ukraine.⁹³

26.	De-escalatory
The Commander of the United States European Command Tod Wolters indeed expressed such escalation concerns on March 10 . MiGs would “not appreciably increase the effectiveness of the Ukrainian Air Force” as it already owned “numerous mission capable aircraft” that were “flying daily.” And: The US intelligence community assessed that the transfer could be “mistaken as escalatory and could result in Russian escalation with NATO,” which would produce “a high risk scenario.” ⁹⁴	

The US government had a “tight rope to walk – support Ukraine, keep the coalition (NATO/EU) together, and not provoke a mercurial Putin,” former US Director of National Intelligence **James Clapper** explained in an interview. After all, the “Russian threshold for using nuclear weapons [was] lower.” However, Clapper expressed incomprehension at the strict rejection of MiG deliveries. After all, he said, Washington was already supplying thousands of Stinger and Javelin missiles to Ukraine, “which are responsible for the deaths of thousands of Russian soldiers – which would seem to violate Putin’s ‘red line’ already.”⁹⁵

Statements by Western leaders shed additional light on NATO’s dilemma. In an interview on **March 11**, British Prime Minister **Boris Johnson** noted that any head of state in Zelenskyy’s position would call for a no-fly zone; and yet, the United Kingdom could not agree to such a demand. There was “a line” beyond which the United Kingdom and NATO would be deemed to be in direct conflict with Russia. To implement a no-fly zone, UK pilots would have to shoot down Russian warplanes, Johnson said. It was “agonizing,” but “everything” had to be done to avert such a scenario, as it would involve “two P5 nuclear powers.”⁹⁶

27.	De-escalatory
On the same March 11 , Biden also stressed that while the United States would “defend every inch of NATO territory with the full might of a united and galvanized NATO,” Washington would “not fight a	

⁹² “Peskov calls possibility of other countries using their airfields to support Ukraine a potentially dangerous scenario,” *Interfax*, March 9, 2022 [<https://interfax.com/newsroom/top-stories/76036/>].

⁹³ Courtney McBride, William Mauldin and Michael R. Gordon, “U.S., Allies Look at Sending Soviet-Designed Air-Defense Systems to Ukraine,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 10, 2022 [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-allies-look-at-sending-soviet-era-air-defense-systems-to-ukraine-11646933998>], and Alexander Ward and Joseph Gedeon, “The U.S. can’t stop Poland from giving Ukraine its MiGs,” *Politico*, March 11, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/03/11/the-u-s-cant-stop-poland-from-giving-ukraine-its-migs-00016664>].

⁹⁴ “Statement by Gen. Tod D. Wolters, Commander, U.S. European Command,” *Website of US European Command*, March 10, 2022 [<https://www.eucom.mil/pressrelease/41972/statement-by-gen-tod-d-wolters-commander-us-european-command>].

⁹⁵ Alexander Ward and Joseph Gedeon, “Biden The Cautious, Pt.1,” *Politico*, March 15, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/03/15/biden-the-cautious-pt-1-00017461>].

⁹⁶ Alix Culbertson, “Ukraine war: Boris Johnson tells Sky News it is ‘deeply upsetting’ to refuse Volodymyr Zelenskyy a no-fly zone,” *SKY News*, March 11, 2022 [<https://news.sky.com/story/ukraine-war-boris-johnson-tells-sky-news-it-is-deeply-upsetting-to-refuse-volodymyr-zelenskyy-12562635>].

war against Russia in Ukraine.” The reason: “A direct confrontation between NATO and Russia is World War III. And something we must strive to prevent.”⁹⁷ The United States had a “sacred obligation on NATO territory — a sacred obligation — Article 5,” but Washington would “not fight the third World War in Ukraine,” Biden added at a political event.⁹⁸

These caveats notwithstanding, the West agreed on further military assistance to Ukraine. On **March 11**, **Josep Borrell** said that the European Union would provide another 500 million euros worth of military assistance to Kyiv.⁹⁹ The following day, **Blinken** also announced further US support of up to 200 million US dollars.¹⁰⁰

As Russia’s threats appeared to succeed in deterring the delivery of fighter jets to Ukraine, however, officials in Moscow began to link other arms deliveries to potential escalation. For instance, on **March 12**, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister **Sergey Ryabkov** told an interviewer that Moscow had warned the United States that orchestrating the delivery of weapons from a number of countries to Ukraine was not only a “dangerous move,” but it would render the “convoys” “legitimate targets.”¹⁰¹

Around the world, many worried about the crisis’ dangers. UN Secretary General **Antonio Guterres** on **March 14** noted the potential for escalation in the current situation. Thus, he warned that a nuclear conflict was again “within the realm of possibility” and that raising the alert of Russian nuclear forces had been a “bone-chilling development.”¹⁰²

Regardless, on **March 15**, in an unprecedented show of solidarity, the prime ministers of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovenia, as well as Polish Deputy Prime Minister **Jarosław Kaczyński**, traveled to Kyiv, where they met with **Zelenskyy** and Ukrainian Prime Minister **Denys Shmyhal**.

28.	Warning
In this context, Kaczyński made a renewed push for direct Western support for Ukraine, calling for “a peacekeeping mission from NATO, or even possibly from a larger international structure, but a mission that will be able to defend itself and that will operate on Ukrainian territory.” ¹⁰³	

This proposal was met by a mixed response. Ahead of an extraordinary NATO defense ministers’ meeting on **March 16**, Danish Defense Minister **Morten Bødskov** said the Danish government was “ready to

⁹⁷ Tweet by @POTUS, Twitter, March 11, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/potus/status/1502353759455821833>].

⁹⁸ “Remarks by President Biden at the House Democratic Caucus Issues Conference,” *Website of the White House*, March 11, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/03/11/remarks-by-president-biden-at-the-house-democratic-caucus-issues-conference/>].

⁹⁹ “Informal EU Leaders’ meeting in Versailles: Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell upon arrival,” *Website of the European External Action Service*, March 11, 2022 [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/informal-eu-leaders%E2%80%99-meeting-versailles-remarks-high-representativevice-president-josep_en].

¹⁰⁰ “\$200 Million in New Security Assistance for Ukraine,” *Website of the US Department of State*, March 12, 2022 [<https://www.state.gov/200-million-in-new-security-assistance-for-ukraine/>].

¹⁰¹ “Russia warns U.S. over arms shipments to Ukraine,” *Politico*, March 12, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/03/12/russia-warns-u-s-over-arms-shipments-to-ukraine-00016820>], and “МИД: конвои с иностранным оружием на Украине станут целями для ВС России (Foreign Ministry: convoys with foreign weapons in Ukraine will become targets for the Russian Armed Forces),” *RIA Novosti*, March 12, 2022 [<https://ria.ru/20220312/oruzhie-1777818523.html>].

¹⁰² “Secretary-General’s remarks to the Press on the war in Ukraine [as delivered],” *Website of the United Nations*, March 14, 2022 [<https://www.un.org/sg/en/node/262376>].

¹⁰³ “Poland Seeks NATO Force In Ukraine On ‘Peacekeeping Mission’,” *NDTV*, March 16, 2022 [<https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/poland-seeks-nato-force-in-ukraine-on-peacekeeping-mission-2825363/amp/1>].

contribute soldiers” to such a peacekeeping mission “if it can help put an end to this bloody war.”¹⁰⁴ German Defense Minister **Christine Lambrecht**, however, expressed caution. “This is not a war in which NATO is involved,” she said. It was necessary to “prevent a conflagration” and to “keep a cool head to ensure that this war does not become a NATO war.”¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, she said, a very intensive discussion was needed about what constitutes “credible deterrence” and what would be “required” to achieve it. “Even if there is no evidence so far that the alliance territory is under attack, we cannot rule it out,” the minister stressed.¹⁰⁶

29.	De-escalatory
<p>In the press conference following the NATO defense ministers’ meeting on March 16, however, there was no mention of the Polish proposal for a peacekeeping mission. Stoltenberg said Allies were united in their support for Ukraine, but they were equally united in saying that “NATO should not deploy forces on the ground or in the airspace of Ukraine.” This is because they “have a responsibility to ensure that this conflict, this war, doesn’t escalate beyond Ukraine.” NATO would “not tolerate any attack on Allied sovereignty or territorial integrity,” he stressed. In this context, Stoltenberg announced a “reset” of the Alliance’s “collective defense and deterrence for the longer term.” Above all, NATO’s eastern flank should be strengthened. Referring to the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act, which had ruled out the permanent stationing of NATO troops on the territory of the former Warsaw Pact states, he stressed that today we were in a “totally different security environment.” The Alliance would not let this document “create problems or hindrance for NATO to make the necessary decisions.” In light of Putin’s nuclear threats, Stoltenberg warned, one should “not underestimate the dangers related to the military capabilities of Russia, including the will to actually use force and impulse devastation and destruction on others.” NATO would do everything necessary “to make sure that there is no room for misunderstanding in Moscow, for miscalculation in Moscow about our commitment, readiness to protect and defend all allies and every inch of NATO territory.” In addition, he explained, ministers had decided to provide significant support to Ukraine.¹⁰⁷</p>	

Also on **March 16**, in an emotional speech to the US Congress, **Zelenskyy** campaigned for the establishment of a no-fly zone or, alternatively, the delivery of S-300 air defense systems to Ukraine.¹⁰⁸ And indeed on the same day, **Biden** announced an additional military support package for Kyiv, including “800 anti-aircraft systems to make sure the Ukrainian military can continue to ... stop the planes and helicopters that have been attacking their people and to defend their Ukrainian airspace.”¹⁰⁹ According to the

¹⁰⁴ Charles Szumski, “Denmark to join possible peacekeeping mission in Ukraine,” *Euractiv*, March 17, 2022 [https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/denmark-to-join-possible-peacekeeping-mission-in-ukraine/].

¹⁰⁵ “Scholz gegen Nato-Mission in Ukraine (Scholz against NATO mission in Ukraine),” *t-online*, March 16, 2022 [https://www.t-online.de/nachrichten/ausland/id_91840204/vorschlag-aus-polen-bundeskanzler-scholz-gegen-nato-mission-in-ukraine-.html].

¹⁰⁶ “Lambrecht: Angriff auf Nato-Gebiet nicht ganz auszuschließen (Lambrecht: An attack on NATO territory cannot be completely ruled out),” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 16, 2022 [<https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/konflikte-lambrecht-angriff-auf-nato-gebiet-nicht-ganz-auszuschliessen-dpa.urn-newsml-dpa-com-20090101-220316-99-545830>].

¹⁰⁷ “Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the Extraordinary meeting of NATO Ministers of Defence,” *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, March 16, 2022 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_193194.htm].

¹⁰⁸ Zachary B. Wolf, Curt Merrill and Ji Min Lee, “Zelensky’s address to Congress, annotated,” *CNN politics*, March 16, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2022/03/politics/ukraine-zelensky-congress-speech-annotated/>].

¹⁰⁹ “Remarks by President Biden on the Assistance the United States is Providing to Ukraine,” *Website of the White House*, March 16, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/03/16/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-assistance-the-united-states-is-providing-to-ukraine/>].

White House, the 800 million US dollars package included additional 800 Stinger and 2,000 Javelin air defense systems and 100 advanced guided missiles.¹¹⁰

30.	Warning
Russian rhetoric, meanwhile, remained aggressive. In a videoconference with representatives of Russian regional governments on March 16 , Putin leveled serious accusations against Western states. The West, he said, wanted to “cancel” Russia, “to finish [it] off, to reduce [it] to nothing by turning [it] into a weak and dependent country, destroying [its] territorial integrity and dismembering Russia.” But this would not work, the West would “fail,” Putin stressed. He also again described Western sanctions as having “all the attributes of an aggression, a war.” ¹¹¹ This comparison could be interpreted as a potential legitimization for further Russian aggression, or even for threats involving nuclear weapons.	

Against the backdrop of continued Russian rhetoric, US National Security Advisor **Jake Sullivan** spoke with his Russian counterpart, **Nikolai Patrushev**, Secretary of the Russian Federation Security Council on **March 16**. In this context, Sullivan warned Moscow “about consequences and implications of any possible Russian decision to use chemical or biological weapons in Ukraine.”¹¹²

On **March 17**, **Zelenskyy** continued his political campaign for additional support for Ukraine. In a speech to the German Bundestag, he urged the German government to take “the leadership role that Germany deserves” and called on members of the Bundestag to provide more aid to Kyiv. In particular, he said, Germany should trade less with Russia and support Ukraine’s EU accession plans. He also indirectly asked for a no-fly zone.¹¹³

The response remained muted. In a joint press conference with NATO Secretary General **Stoltenberg**, **Scholz** promised Germany would “continue to stand by the brave Ukrainians in defending their country and resisting Russian aggression – with financial means, with humanitarian aid, but also by supplying military equipment.” However, he stressed, “it should also be clearly stated: NATO will not intervene militarily in this war.”¹¹⁴ **Stoltenberg** expressed a similar view. NATO had “a responsibility to prevent this conflict from escalating further. That would be even more dangerous. And would cause more suffering, death and destruction.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ “Fact Sheet on U.S. Security Assistance for Ukraine,” *Website of the White House*, March 16, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/03/16/fact-sheet-on-u-s-security-assistance-for-ukraine/>], and Ken Dilanian, Dan De Luce and Courtney Kube, “Biden admin will provide Ukraine with killer drones called Switchblades,” *NBC News*, March 16, 2022 [<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/ukraine-asks-biden-admin-armed-drones-jamming-gear-surface-air-missile-rcna20197>].

¹¹¹ “Meeting on socioeconomic support for regions,” *Website of the President of Russia*, March 16, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67996>].

¹¹² “Statement by NSC Spokesperson Emily Horne on National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan’s Call with Nikolay Patrushev, Secretary of the Russian Security Council,” *Website of the White House*, March 16, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/03/16/statement-by-nsc-spokesperson-emily-horne-on-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan-call-with-nikolay-patrushev-secretary-of-the-russian-security-council-3/>].

¹¹³ Volodymyr Zelenskyy, “Selenskyjs Rede vor dem Bundestag im Wortlaut (Zelenskyy’s speech to the Bundestag verbatim),” *Zeit Online*, March 17, 2022 [<https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2022-03/wolodymyr-selenskyj-rede-bundestag-ukraine>].

¹¹⁴ “Pressestatements von Bundeskanzler Scholz und Generalsekretär Stoltenberg zu seinem Besuch am 17. März 2022 (Press statements by Chancellor Scholz and Secretary General Stoltenberg on his visit on March 17, 2022),” *Website of the German Federal Government*, March 17, 2022 [<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/pressestatements-von-bundeskanzler-scholz-und-generalsekretaer-stoltenberg-zu-seinem-besuch-am-17-maerz-2022-2017208>].

¹¹⁵ “Press point by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg with the Chancellor of Germany, Olaf Scholz,” *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, March 17, 2022 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_193192.htm?selectedLocale=en].

On **March 17**, the issue of MiG deliveries came up again. At a press briefing with US Defense Secretary **Austin**, Slovak Defense Minister **Jaroslav Nad'** said the jets and their possible replacement with newer US aircraft had been part of the conversation with Austin.¹¹⁶

US intelligence agencies, meanwhile, expected Russian reliance upon nuclear deterrence to increase. On **March 17**, US Defense Intelligence Agency Director Lt. Gen. **Scott Berrier** submitted a written statement noting that “this war and its consequences slowly weaken Russian conventional strength.” As a result, “Russia likely will increasingly rely on its nuclear deterrent to signal the West and project strength to its internal and external audiences.”¹¹⁷

Some details emerged on February 24, 2023 about US interactions with China in **spring 2022**. **Blinken** told an interviewer that Washington had been concerned by the “no limits” phrase at the Xi-Putin summit meeting. In a videoconference on **March 18**, **Biden** told Xi that “any Chinese military support for Russia in this conflict” or a “systematic evasion of sanctions” would be a “serious problem” for the bilateral relationship. The official readout had merely stated that Biden “described the implications and consequences if China provides material support to Russia as it conducts brutal attacks against Ukrainian cities and civilians.” Subsequently, China abstained, Blinken assessed one year later. There had been “no lethal military support” or systematic evasion of sanctions.¹¹⁸

Possibly also against the background of this assessment and referring to the Polish proposal of a NATO peacekeeping mission, US Ambassador **Thomas-Greenfield** stressed again on **March 20** that there would be no American ground troops in Ukraine. “We don’t want to escalate this into a war with the United States, but we will support our NATO allies,” Thomas-Greenfield explained, reiterating a repeatedly stated US position. Nevertheless, “other NATO countries may decide that they want to put troops inside of Ukraine,” she further explained. And: “If there is an attack on any of our NATO countries under Article 5, ... we will support those countries and defend those countries,” she affirmed, noting that the United States had troops in NATO countries.¹¹⁹

Stoltenberg gave a similarly cautious reply on **March 20**, when asked whether a potential Russian use of chemical weapons would change NATO’s position on a no-fly zone. “Allies support Ukraine, but at the same time it is extremely important that we prevent this conflict from becoming a full-fledged war between NATO and Russia, because that will cause much more damage,” he explained. “Russia is a nuclear power,” Stoltenberg stressed. Putin was spreading “dangerous nuclear rhetoric” and the Alliance’s main

¹¹⁶ “Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III and Slovakia Minister of Defense Jaroslav Nad’ Hold A Press Conference, Bratislava, Slovakia, March 17, 2022,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, March 17, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/2970344/secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-and-slovakia-minister-of-defense-jarosl/>].

¹¹⁷ Scott Berrier, “Statement for the Record, Worldwide Threat Assessment, Armed Services Committee, Intelligence And Special Operations Subcommittee, United States House Of Representatives,” *Defense Intelligence Agency*, March 17, 2022, p.22 [https://armedservices.house.gov/_cache/files/5/f/5fa65e01-08c0-4b83-9713-7516a0bc4d62/481DE0F0E64E412E4B1EA9EC9984A1B8.20220317-iso-witnessstatement-berrier.pdf].

¹¹⁸ Jeffrey Goldberg and Morgan Ome, “Blinken: I Understand Why Zelensky Is Demanding That the U.S. ‘Do Even More and Do It Even Faster’,” *Atlantic*, February 26, 2023 [<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/02/antony-blinken-ukraine-jeffrey-goldberg-zelensky/673188/>]. “Readout of President Joseph R. Biden Jr. Call with President Xi Jinping of the People’s Republic of China,” *White House Website*, March 18, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/03/18/readout-of-president-joseph-r-biden-jr-call-with-president-xi-jinping-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-2/>].

¹¹⁹ “UN ambassador: Russia-Ukraine talks ‘seem to be one-sided,’” *CNN politics*, March 20, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/vid-eos/politics/2022/03/20/sotu-linda-thomas-greenfield-full.cnn>].

responsibility was to protect one billion people living in NATO countries, he said. However, the use of chemical weapons would be “a blatant and brutal violation of international law.”¹²⁰

31.	Warning
Against this background, Russia seemed bent to signal resolve by choosing to employ new types of nuclear-capable weapons. According to Russian media, Moscow employed a new Kinzhal hypersonic missile for the first time in Ukraine on March 18-20 – a nuclear-capable missile, but carrying a conventional warhead. ¹²¹	
32.	De-escalatory
The US government appeared unimpressed. On March 20 , US Defense Secretary Austin explained that Putin was using these weapons because he was trying to “reestablish some momentum.” As for Moscow’s nuclear threats, Austin stressed, “any threat of the use of a nuclear weapon ... is very dangerous.” However, he remained “confident” that the United States could defend itself as well as its allies and partners. Russia’s nuclear rhetoric was “not helpful,” but he was taking it seriously. A potential use of chemical weapons by Russia, Austin said, would draw a “significant reaction from not only the United States, but also the global community.” However, he would “not speculate about what exactly would change [the US calculus].” ¹²²	
33.	De-escalatory
Once again, some Russian officials started to walk back their government’s nuclear narratives. For instance, in a March 22 interview, Kremlin spokesman Peskov again claimed that Ukraine had sought to develop nuclear weapons. However, when asked whether Putin would use nuclear weapons, he merely referred to Russia’s official doctrine, according to which nuclear weapons could be used only in the event of an “existential threat” to Russia. There was no other reasons than the ones mentioned in the doctrine, he stressed. Nonetheless, he avoided a definitive answer on whether Russia was considering using nuclear weapons in the current situation. ¹²³ On the same day, Sergey Ryabkov toed this line. “The question of potential use of [Russia’s] military nuclear potential [was] completely tied to the corresponding clauses of the Russian military doctrine and corresponding points of the basics of state policy on nuclear deterrence.” Russia had “an extremely responsible approach to this matter” and would “never escalate anything.” ¹²⁴	
34.	Warning
The very next day, however, Russian officials again warned of a possible NATO-Russia confrontation should there be a NATO peacekeeping mission in Ukraine. This “would be a very reckless and extremely dangerous decision,” Peskov explained. Any possible contact between Russian and NATO	

¹²⁰ “Full NATO Sec. General: ‘Our core responsibility is to protect 1 billion people living in ... NATO countries,’” *NBC News*, March 20, 2022 [<https://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/video/full-nato-sec-general-our-core-responsibility-is-to-protect-1-billion-people-living-in-nato-countries-135795269832>].

¹²¹ Jon Henley, “What are hypersonic missiles and why is Russia using them?,” *The Guardian*, March 20, 2022 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/20/what-are-hypersonic-missiles-and-why-is-russia-using-them-kinzhal-ukraine>].

¹²² “Austin vows ‘significant reaction’ if Russia uses chemical or biological in Ukraine,” *CBS News*, March 20, 2022 [<https://www.cbsnews.com/video/austin-vows-significant-reaction-if-russia-uses-chemical-or-biological-in-ukraine/#x>].

¹²³ “Russia’s Peskov refuses to rule out using nuclear weapons,” *CNN*, March 22, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/audio/podcasts/amanpour/episodes/71d4cfbb-450d-44f8-8f98-ae600150d048>].

¹²⁴ “Russia adheres to responsible approach to matter of use of nuclear weapons — diplomat,” *TASS*, March 22, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1425609>].

forces “could have clear consequences that would be hard to repair,” he continued.¹²⁵ **Lavrov** expressed similar sentiments: “This would be the direct clash between the Russian and NATO armed forces that everyone has not only tried to avoid but said should not take place in principle,” the Russian minister concluded.¹²⁶ Later, on **March 23**, Medvedev said the United States had conspired to destroy Russia as part of a “primitive game” since the 1991 fall of the Soviet Union. The Kremlin would never allow the destruction of Russia, he added, but warned Washington that if it did achieve what he characterized as its destructive aims, then the world could face a dystopian crisis that would end in a “big nuclear explosion.” Russia’s destruction could lead to an unstable leadership in Moscow “with a maximum number of nuclear weapons aimed at targets in the United States and Europe.”¹²⁷ **Dmitry Rogozin**, the head of the state aerospace corporation, Roscosmos, said that Russia’s nuclear arsenal would help deter the West from intervening in Ukraine. Russia was “capable of physically destroying any aggressor or any aggressor group within minutes at any distance.”¹²⁸

35.	Escalatory
<p>On the same day, on March 23, US media reports suggested a marked hardening in US rhetoric regarding a potential Russian nuclear use. According to a Biden administration official, the US president “remained adamant about keeping American forces out of Ukraine.” Yet “it would be misguided not to closely examine the thresholds, if any, under which the president would reverse himself.” Even the use of sub-strategic nuclear weapons inside Ukraine “would mean that ‘all bets are off’ on the United States and NATO staying out of the war,” a senior official reportedly said. Similarly, Democratic Senator and Armed Services Committee Chairman Jack Reed also suggested that a Russian attack with chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons of mass destruction in Ukraine would have “consequences.” A nuclear attack inside Ukraine could even “be considered an attack on a NATO member,” if nuclear radiation were to be blown into a NATO state, he reportedly added. However, according to US officials, the Biden administration so far considered the likelihood of a nuclear attack to be low. Neither the US nor NATO had observed any military actions indicating Russia was preparing a nuclear strike, said a senior official. “We haven’t seen anything that’s made us adjust our posture, our nuclear posture,” National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan also confirmed.¹²⁹</p>	

36.	Warning
<p>France appeared similarly undaunted by Russia’s threats. Notwithstanding the level of tensions, the French Defense Ministry announced on March 23 that it had conducted a test of a nuclear-armed</p>	

¹²⁵ “Russia says sending international peacekeepers to Ukraine would be ‘very reckless,’” *Reuters*, March 23, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/moscow-says-sending-peacekeeping-troops-ukraine-may-lead-nato-russia-2022-03-23/>].

¹²⁶ “Lavrov: Sending peacekeepers could lead to clash,” *Yahoo news*, March 23, 2022 [<https://sg.news.yahoo.com/lavrov-sending-peacekeepers-could-lead-141252453.html>].

¹²⁷ Guy Faulconbridge, “Putin ally warns of nuclear dystopia due to United States,” *Reuters*, March 23, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/putin-ally-says-united-states-is-trying-destroy-russia-2022-03-23/>].

¹²⁸ Nebi Qena and Cara Anna, “NATO: 7,000 to 15,000 Russian troops dead in Ukraine,” *AP News*, March 24, 2022 [<https://ap-news.com/article/russia-ukraine-zelenskyy-kyiv-europe-nato-e35e54b40359e52f3ffd4911577b669a>].

¹²⁹ David E. Sanger et al., “U.S. Makes Contingency Plans in Case Russia Uses Its Most Powerful Weapons,” *The New York Times*, March 23, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/23/us/politics/biden-russia-nuclear-weapons.html>].

air-launched missile as planned.¹³⁰ According to later media reports, the French armed forces also deployed three of their four nuclear submarines around the same time. French experts suggested this was done to protect the submarines from a potential Russian nuclear strike on French naval bases.¹³¹

Ahead of an extraordinary NATO summit on **March 24**, NATO Secretary General **Stoltenberg** appeared much more determined than before as well. In a press conference on **March 23**, he stressed the Alliance was not only “ready ... to protect and defend Allies” but also “ready to respond massively to any potential threat or attack against any NATO Allied country.” NATO has “deployed a substantial number of combat-ready troops to the eastern part of the Alliance” and “on top of that, increased the presence by the United States and others within the bilateral arrangements.” At the extraordinary summit, Stoltenberg declared, Allies would further agree to deploy “four more battlegroups to Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania” and to substantially increase their long-term presence as part of the previously announced deterrence and defense “reset” of the Alliance. Russia had to stop its “dangerous” and “irresponsible” nuclear saber rattling, Stoltenberg continued. NATO was sending Russia a “very clear message ... that a nuclear war cannot be won and should never be fought,” he said. The war in Ukraine had to end, “because we need to do everything we can to prevent the war from escalating beyond Ukraine and becoming even more deadly and even more dangerous,” he stressed.

37.	Warning
Echoing earlier statements from US officials, Stoltenberg also declared that “any use of nuclear weapons” would “fundamentally change the nature of the conflict.” Similarly, any chemical weapons use would be “absolutely unacceptable,” “a blatant violation of international law” with “severe consequences,” and would “fundamentally change the nature of the conflict.” Any use of chemical weapons would be “absolutely unacceptable.” ¹³² On the following day, Biden echoed this sentiment, stating that a Russian use of chemical weapons “would trigger a response in kind.” ¹³³	

A growing rhetorical confrontation ensued. In an apparent parallel to Russia’s nuclear doctrine, according to which nuclear weapons could be used in case of an existential threat, **Vladimir Medinsky**, a member of Russia’s presidential administration declared on **March 24** that the West was “pushing Russia towards destruction.” “The very existence of Russia as a Russian civilization is at stake today,” he declared.¹³⁴ On **March 25**, **Lavrov** commented on Western sanctions against Russia, claiming that “a genuine hybrid war, a ‘total war’” had been declared against Russia. “This term ... is now pronounced by many European politicians when talking about what they want to do with Russia,” he said and added, “the goals are not concealed, they are publicly announced, that is to destroy, devastate, ruin, and suffocate the Russian economy and Russia as a whole.”¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Tweet by @Armees_Gouv, *Twitter*, March 23, 2022 [https://twitter.com/Armees_Gouv/status/1506706444917383176].

¹³¹ Michaela Wiegel, “Frankreich schickt drei Atom-U-Boote zu Manövern (France sends three nuclear submarines on maneuvers),” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 24, 2022 [<https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/erhoehte-alarmbereitschaft-frankreich-schickt-drei-atom-u-boote-in-manoever-17906079.html>].

¹³² “Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg previewing the extraordinary Summit of NATO Heads of State and Government,” *Website of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, March 23, 2022, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_193610.htm].

¹³³ “Remarks by President Biden in Press Conference,” *Website of the White House*, March 24, 2022, [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/03/24/remarks-by-president-biden-in-press-conference-7/>].

¹³⁴ “Мединский: Запад подталкивает Россию к разрушению политической системы и всей страны (Medinsky: The West is pushing Russia to destroy the political system and the entire country),” *TASS*, March 24, 2022 [<https://tass.ru/politika/14167939>].

¹³⁵ “Lavrov slams all-out sanctions spree, says West’s values ‘aren’t worth a red cent’,” *TASS*, March 25, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1427557>].

38.	Warning
<p>On March 26, Medvedev once again emphasized the expansive nature of Russia's nuclear doctrine. According to its own "special document on nuclear deterrence," Moscow was "entitled" to use nuclear weapons in four instances. The fourth case was when "an act of aggression" was "committed against Russia and its allies, which jeopardized the existence of the country itself, even without the use of nuclear weapons, that is, with the use of conventional weapons." The Russian government possessed a "determination to defend the independence, sovereignty of our country, not to give anyone a reason to doubt even the slightest that we are ready to give a worthy response to any infringement on our country, on its independence."¹³⁶</p>	

The verbal escalation continued. Also on **March 26**, at a meeting with Ukrainian refugees in Poland, **Biden** called Putin a "butcher."¹³⁷ In a subsequent speech at Warsaw's Royal Palace, he went further declaring, "for God's sake, this man [Putin] cannot remain in power" and describing NATO's mutual assistance clause, Article 5, a "sacred obligation."¹³⁸ This statement, which seemed to indicate a shift in US goals towards a policy of regime change vis-à-vis Moscow, caused a stir among observers and was promptly walked back by the Biden administration. "He was not discussing Putin's power in Russia, or regime change," explained a White House official.¹³⁹ US Secretary of State **Blinken** made similar comments on the same day. "I think the President, the White House made the point last night that, quite simply, President Putin cannot be empowered to wage war or engage in aggression against Ukraine or anyone else," declared Blinken. "We do not have a strategy of regime change in Russia or anywhere else ... It's up to the Russian people." However, the United States have "a strategy to strongly support Ukraine ... to put unprecedented pressure on Russia ... to make sure that we're providing all of the humanitarian support that we can, and ... to reinforce NATO."¹⁴⁰ This position was reiterated by US Permanent Representative to NATO **Julianne Smith** on **March 27**. "Let me be clear ... the US does not have a policy of regime change towards Russia, but ... Putin cannot be empowered to wage war," she emphasized.¹⁴¹

Also on **March 27, Russia** carried out a missile attack near the Polish NATO border – an area where Western weapons were reportedly being brought into Ukraine.¹⁴²

On the same day, **March 27**, in a detailed interview, **Zelenskyy** laid out Ukraine's position regarding potential negotiations with Russia. Kyiv, he said, was ready to talk about security guarantees and neutrality. However, such guarantees could not "become just another paper like the Budapest Memorandum," he stressed. The document "should be signed by all of the security guarantors" and "ratified by the parliaments of the guarantor countries." In addition, it was "imperative that there be a referendum in Ukraine," since such a change in status would require a constitutional amendment, which could only be

¹³⁶ Daniel Boffey, "Russia reasserts right to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine," *The Guardian*, March 26, 2022 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/26/russia-reasserts-right-to-use-nuclear-weapons-in-ukraine-putin>].

¹³⁷ Christopher Cadelago and Craig Howie, "Biden, off the cuff, says Putin 'cannot remain in power'," *Politico*, March 26, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/03/26/biden-putin-poland-speech-00020671>].

¹³⁸ "Remarks by President Biden on the United Efforts of the Free World to Support the People of Ukraine," *Website of the White House*, March 26, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/03/26/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-united-efforts-of-the-free-world-to-support-the-people-of-ukraine/>].

¹³⁹ Christopher Cadelago and Craig Howie, "Biden, off the cuff, says Putin 'cannot remain in power'," *Politico*, March 26, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/03/26/biden-putin-poland-speech-00020671>].

¹⁴⁰ Humeysra Pamuk, "U.S. has no strategy of regime change in Russia, Blinken says," *Reuters*, March 27, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/us-has-no-strategy-regime-change-russia-blinken-says-2022-03-27/>].

¹⁴¹ "US sanctions are impacting Russian economy: US ambassador to NATO," *Fox News*, March 27, 2022 [<https://video.foxnews.com/v/6302023283001#sp=show-clips>].

¹⁴² Michael Crowley, "Would Putin Strike NATO Supply Lines to Ukraine? History Suggests No," *The New York Times*, March 28, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/28/us/politics/russia-ukraine-nato-weapons.html>].

implemented relatively quickly, that is within a few months, by means of a referendum, explained Zelenskyy. Yet, as long as Russian troops were in Ukraine, no security guarantor would sign such a document, nor would a potential Ukrainian referendum be legitimate. Zelenskyy also expressed skepticism regarding the Polish push for a peacekeeping mission in Ukraine. This had been “entirely Poland’s idea” and he did not “completely understand the proposal at the moment.” Ukraine did not need “a stagnant conflict on [its] territory,” he explained. Further, the Ukrainian President rejected Russian claims that Kyiv possessed biological or chemical weapons. “We’d love to, but there’s nothing here,” he stated. If he had been in power when Ukraine “signed away all its interests,” he “would not have given up everything.” Asked about the Ukrainian war aims, Zelenskyy explained that Kyiv wanted to “minimize the number of deaths and reduce the duration of this war” as well as bring about a withdrawal of the Russian troops to the “compromise territories,” that is to where they were before the February 24 attack. “I understand that forcing Russia to completely let the territory go is impossible, it would lead to World War III,” he declared.¹⁴³

On **March 28, Biden** qualified his controversial remarks in Poland that Putin could not remain in power. He had merely expressed his “moral outrage” and “personal feelings” about Putin’s “actions” and his “brutality.” He “wasn’t ... articulating a policy change.” Putin “shouldn’t remain in power. Just like ... bad people shouldn’t continue to do bad things. But it doesn’t mean [that Washington has] a fundamental policy to do anything to take Putin down in any way,” Biden emphasized. Putin’s behavior was “totally unacceptable,” he said. But the way to deal with this was to “keep NATO completely united and to help Ukraine where we can.” After repeated inquiries about a possible US regime change policy, Biden pointed to the escalation risks of such a strategy: “The last thing I want to do is engage in a land war or a nuclear war with Russia,” the US president stressed. People like Putin should not “be ruling countries, but they do” and he had merely expressed his indignation about this. Asked to clarify his statement that a Russian use of chemical weapons would “trigger a response in kind,” Biden said that such an act would “trigger a significant response.” He refused to say what exactly that meant, however, because “then Russia knows the response.”¹⁴⁴

39.	De-escalatory
<p>Biden’s controversial remarks did not result in an escalation of Russian nuclear rhetoric. On March 28, Kremlin spokesperson Peskov did emphasize that Biden’s statements about Putin were “alarming,” a “personal insult” and “unacceptable.” “It’s not for the United States’ president to decide who is going to be and who is the president of Russia, it is the people of Russia who decide it during elections,” he explained. However, in the same interview Peskov also clarified and revised previous nuclear threats, citing Russian doctrine. “Any outcome” of Russia’s operation in Ukraine “of course, is not a reason for usage of a nuclear weapon,” he said. Russia, he said, had a security concept that “very clearly states that only when there is a threat for the existence of the state in our country, we can use and we will actually use nuclear weapons to eliminate the threat for the existence of our country.” “Let’s keep these two things separate ... the existence of the state and the special military operation in Ukraine,” Peskov said. “They have nothing to do with each other.”</p> <p>Nevertheless, the Kremlin spokesman also recalled “the initial statement of [Putin] ... when he ordered the operation on the 24th February,” in which he warned various states “not to interfere in affairs between Ukraine and Russia during this operation.” “Everyone understands what he meant [by</p>	

¹⁴³ “‘It’s not just a war. It’s much worse.’ Volodymyr Zelensky’s first interview with Russian journalists since the war began,” *Meduza*, March 28, 2022 [<https://meduza.io/en/feature/2022/03/28/it-s-not-just-a-war-it-s-much-worse>].

¹⁴⁴ “Remarks by President Biden Announcing the Fiscal Year 2023 Budget,” *Website of the White House*, March 28, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/03/28/remarks-by-president-biden-announcing-the-fiscal-year-2023-budget/>].

that],” Peskov declared. When asked if that meant Putin would use nuclear weapons if a third country intervened in Ukraine, he said, “I don’t think so,” although Putin had made it clear that no one should interfere. If anyone did, Peskov explained, Russia had “all the possibilities to prevent that and punish all those who are going to interfere.” However, “no one is thinking about using, not even about the idea of using a nuclear weapon.”

Asked about a scenario in which Russia might send troops to or bomb a NATO country, Peskov remained cautious: “If it’s not a reciprocal act, so if they don’t make us do that, we cannot think about that and we do not want to think about that.”¹⁴⁵

At negotiations in Istanbul on **March 29**, Ukrainian representatives submitted a proposal on what Ukrainian neutrality, one of Moscow’s key demands, might look like. Accordingly, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Turkey, Germany, Canada, Poland, and Israel would have to offer a pledge mirroring NATO’s Article 5 to respond to any attack on Ukraine’s sovereignty. Ukrainian negotiator **David Arakhamia** called this a “Ukrainian NATO” that would ensure a “fortified neutrality status.”¹⁴⁶

At first sight, the Russian side appeared to react favorably to the Ukrainian proposal, with Russian Deputy Defense Minister **Alexander Fomin** presenting the Istanbul negotiations as a reason to “radically ... reduce military activity in the Kiev and Chernigov direction.” This measure was meant to “increase mutual trust and create the necessary conditions for further negotiations,” he explained.¹⁴⁷ This was “not a ceasefire,” however, stressed Presidential Administration member **Medinsky**.¹⁴⁸

On the same day, Pentagon spokesman **Kirby** confirmed that some Russian troops were indeed withdrawing from the Ukrainian capital. However, Kirby did not interpret this as a full-fledged withdrawal, but rather as a redeployment in preparation for the next offensive. “We believe that this is a repositioning, not a real withdrawal, and that we all should be prepared to watch for a major offensive against other areas of Ukraine,” he explained. The threat to Kyiv was not over, he added.¹⁴⁹

The reaction of the states expected to underpin Ukraine’s neutrality, however, remained cautious. According to media reports, France seemed open to some kind of guaranteed neutrality status, but not to a mutual assistance clause along the lines of NATO’s Article 5.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, British Justice Minister **Dominic Raab** stated in a **March 30** interview that the United Kingdom would “not ... replicate unilaterally

¹⁴⁵ “Putin’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Ukraine and the West: ‘Don’t push us into the corner,’” *YouTube account of PBS News-Hour*, March 29, 2022 [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xHmgTRkn6M>], and “No one in Russia is thinking about using nuclear weapons, Kremlin spokesman says,” *TASS*, March 29, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1428619>].

¹⁴⁶ Jared Malsin, Lindsay Wise and Bojan Pancevski, “Ukraine Proposal for NATO-Style Security Guarantee Greeted With Skepticism,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 30, 2022 [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-proposal-for-nato-style-security-guarantee-greeted-with-skepticism-11648683375>].

¹⁴⁷ Daria Markina, “Russia says it will ‘drastically reduce’ military assault on Kyiv and Chernihiv,” *CNN*, March 29, 2022 [https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-03-29-22/h_05b5d57fd38ef2bd90c0be7fb3481f4a].

¹⁴⁸ “It’s now 10 p.m. in Kyiv. Here are the latest developments in the war in Ukraine,” *CNN*, March 29, 2022 [https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-03-29-22/h_7b383b799488768802afd9e84dbd50ea].

¹⁴⁹ Michael Conte and Ellie Kaufman, “Pentagon: Russian troop movement near Kyiv area likely ‘a repositioning, not a real withdrawal,’” *CNN*, March 29, 2022 [https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-03-29-22/h_1095de53c2282c9172d1c6f032672db7].

¹⁵⁰ Jared Malsin, Lindsay Wise and Bojan Pancevski, “Ukraine Proposal for NATO-Style Security Guarantee Greeted With Skepticism,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 30, 2022 [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-proposal-for-nato-style-security-guarantee-greeted-with-skepticism-11648683375>].

the NATO commitments that apply to NATO members.” The bottom line: “Ukraine is not a NATO member” and London would not risk a direct military confrontation with Russia, he explained. The British government had provided a lot of military support, including training for Ukrainian troops as well as anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles, and it would always consider “other ... forms of support,” stressed Raab.¹⁵¹

In turn, Berlin appeared cautiously supportive of the Ukrainian proposal. Chancellor Scholz had “signaled a general readiness [to provide security guarantees],” said German government spokesperson **Steffen Hebestreit** on **March 30**. Nevertheless, it would be necessary to consider carefully how such security guarantees would be formulated. He did not want to speculate about a possible “military component,” Hebestreit explained. In line with Raab, he also emphasized that Berlin did “not want to become a military actor in this war.”¹⁵² **Baerbock** expressed similar caution. It was important to understand, what a direct confrontation with Russia would mean, she stressed. This would be “a third world war, ... a direct military confrontation between Russia and the NATO alliance area, and we are experiencing right now that [Putin] ... has stopped at virtually nothing,” she continued. Therefore, everything possible needed to be done to prevent further escalation. However, she said, there would be a response to any use of chemical weapons, though she would not speculate about that, but rather do “everything to ensure that it does not come to that.” Germany would provide full support “in all the areas in which we can support without running the risk that this war spills over to other European countries,” added Baerbock. Thus, “if guarantees are needed, Germany will be there and provide guarantees.”¹⁵³

Meanwhile, further efforts were made to deliver Soviet weapons to Ukraine from European countries’ stockpiles. On **March 30**, US Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security **Celeste Wallander** explained that the United States had “focused on getting countries that hold Soviet legacy systems, including S-300 systems — that have spare parts, missiles, different parts of that S-300 — who are willing to send that to Ukraine.”¹⁵⁴

On the same day, **March 30**, a spokesman for the Russian Defense Ministry, **Igor Konashenkov**, confirmed recent Russian troop movements were indeed part of a planned redeployment in preparation for a new phase in the conflict focused on the Donbass region.

*At the first stage of the special military operation ..., it was planned to force the enemy to concentrate his forces, means, resources and military equipment to hold large settlements in these areas, including Kyiv, to tie them up on the battlefield and without storming these cities, ... inflict such a defeat on the armed formations of the Kyiv regime that would not allow it to use these forces in the main direction of operations of our armed forces – in the Donbas. All of these goals have been met.*¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Tweet by @BBCr4today, *Twitter*, March 30, 2022 [https://twitter.com/BBCr4today/status/1509094159570898945?s=20&t=a_UaAO5UwgPvjQohNg-i_g].

¹⁵² “30. März 2022 – Regierungspressekonferenz (March 30, 2022 – Government press conference),” *YouTube account of Jung & Naiv*, March 30, 2022 [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLGkpu7kAFk> (from 24:00)].

¹⁵³ “Maischberger vom 30. März 2022 (Maischberger on March 30, 2022),” *Das Erste*, March 30, 2022 [<https://www.daserste.de/information/talk/maischberger/videos/maischberger-die-woche-video-1010.html>].

¹⁵⁴ Joe Gould, “Will Slovakia send Ukraine S-300 air defenses? The Pentagon is working on it,” *Defense News*, March 30, 2022 [<https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2022/03/30/will-slovakia-send-ukraine-s-300-air-defenses-the-pentagon-is-working-on-it/>].

¹⁵⁵ Nathan Hodge, “Russian military spokesperson says “planned regrouping” around Kyiv and Chernihiv underway,” *CNN*, March 30, 2022 [https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-03-30-22/h_9138a7911da731de3daf074036751043].

Russia's military reorientation was accompanied by more moderate rhetoric. In a speech to representatives of the Russian business community on **March 31**, **Putin** called the Western sanctions an "economic war." Their goal, he claimed, was to "reduce Russia's development" and to curb the country's rights to be free and independent – a formulation that could be classified as more moderate than previous statements. Unlike previous declarations, in which Russian representatives had accused the West of attacking Russia's existence, this time Putin simply said that Russia did not want to "dance to a foreign tune, ... give away [its] national rights, [its] traditional values."¹⁵⁶

Meanwhile, the West focused on expanding assistance to Ukraine. On **March 31**, following a videoconference bringing together states supporting Kyiv, British Defense Secretary **Ben Wallace** noted that 35 countries now wanted to support Kyiv. "There will be more lethal aid going into Ukraine," Wallace said, but some states, led by the United States, had also promised more financial support. In light of the Russian bombing of Ukrainian cities, Kyiv now needed longer-range artillery, Wallace explained. In addition, Ukraine was looking for equipment to defend its coast and "armored vehicles of some types, not necessarily tanks, but certainly protective vehicles ... and more anti-air [systems]."¹⁵⁷

40.	De-escalatory
Against this background, US intelligence officials concluded Russia was not doing anything to prepare for using nuclear weapons. There had not been "any activity by the Russians that would change [the US] assessment or ... strategic deterrence posture," a senior US Pentagon official stated in a March 31 briefing. There was "no indication at this time that [Russia is] preparing to use those kinds of weapons." ¹⁵⁸	

April 2022: Fading momentum

41.	De-escalatory
Nevertheless, the US military took no chances and on April 1 canceled the initially postponed test of a Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile. According to US Air Force spokeswoman Ann Stefanek , this decision "was due to the same reasons as when it had been first delayed." The Air Force was "confident in the readiness of the strategic forces of the United States," Stefanek stressed. ¹⁵⁹ On the same day, a US defense official acknowledged that Washington had also kept a successful hypersonic missile test from mid-March under wraps to prevent further escalation with Russia. ¹⁶⁰	

¹⁵⁶ "Rede von Wladimir Putin vor Vertreten der russischen Wirtschaft am 31.03.22 (Speech by Vladimir Putin to representatives of the Russian economy on March 31, 2022)," *YouTube account of Phoenix*, March 31, 2022 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SwRzRxyz_2I].

¹⁵⁷ "UK to send more lethal aid to Kyiv," *Sky News*, March 31, 2022 [<https://news.sky.com/video/uk-to-send-more-lethal-aid-to-kyiv-12579025>].

¹⁵⁸ "Senior Defense Official Holds a Background Briefing," *Website of the US Department of Defense*, March 31, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/2985309/senior-defense-official-holds-a-background-briefing/>].

¹⁵⁹ Phil Stewart and Idrees Ali, "Exclusive: U.S. cancels ICBM test due to Russia nuclear tensions," *Reuters*, April 2, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/exclusive-us-cancels-icbm-test-due-russia-nuclear-tensions-2022-04-01/>].

¹⁶⁰ Oren Lieberman, "US tested hypersonic missile in mid-March but kept it quiet to avoid escalating tensions with Russia," *CNN*, April 5, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/04/04/politics/us-hypersonic-missile-test/index.html>].

Arms deliveries, however, remained unaffected by these apparent de-escalation efforts. On **April 1**, a US official announced that the US government would soon begin working with allies to facilitate the delivery of Soviet tanks to Kyiv.¹⁶¹ It was in this context that Germany agreed to a transfer of 56 BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicles from stockpiles of the Eastern German National People's Army now in possession of the Czech Republic.¹⁶²

On **April 2**, Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister **Hanna Malyar** declared that the entire Kyiv region had now been "liberated."¹⁶³ In the days following the Russian withdrawal, an increasing number of reports of killings and other atrocities committed by Russian troops in the temporarily occupied areas surfaced.¹⁶⁴ As early as **April 3**, **Human Rights Watch** said it had documented "laws-of-war violations against civilians in ... the Chernihiv, Kharkiv, and Kyiv regions."¹⁶⁵ **Zelenskyy** went further, accusing Russia of "genocide."¹⁶⁶

Gruesome images from the Kyiv suburb of Bucha in particular also triggered an international outcry.¹⁶⁷ In Germany, reports about alleged war crimes sparked a debate about a potential embargo on Russian gas and seemed to facilitate the provision of military support for Ukraine. "There must be a reaction," declared Defense Minister **Lambrecht** on **April 3**. "Such crimes cannot remain unanswered," she added, promising to examine what needed to be done to provide additional military assistance to Ukraine and calling for a discussion among EU member states on a potential freeze of gas imports from Russia.¹⁶⁸

Similarly, **Baerbock** promised at a conference meant to organize support for Moldova on **April 4** that Germany would once again "step up support for the defense of Ukraine" because "Bucha and Mariupol show that this is a matter of life and death for millions of people in Ukraine." Therefore, she noted, Germany was "now also looking at systems that [it had] not delivered so far and [was] discussing whether technical problems that [occurred] during delivery and use cannot be solved after all." Apart from that, the European Union would once again "significantly tighten" sanctions, the foreign minister concluded.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, on the same day the **Council of the European Union** condemned "in the strongest

¹⁶¹ Helene Cooper, "U.S. Will Help Transfer Soviet-Made Tanks to Ukraine," *The New York Times*, April 1, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/01/us/politics/us-tanks-ukraine.html>].

¹⁶² Robin Alexander and Klaus Geiger, "Ukraine bittet Scholz direkt um Panzer, doch dieser zögert (Ukraine asks Scholz directly for tanks, but Scholz hesitates)," *Welt*, April 6, 2022 [<https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article238015209/Ukraine-Krieg-Ukraine-bittet-Scholz-direkt-um-Panzer-doch-dieser-zoegert.html>].

¹⁶³ "Ukraine says its troops regain full control of Kyiv region — as it happened," *DW*, April 2, 2022 [<https://www.dw.com/en/ukraine-says-its-troops-regain-full-control-of-kyiv-region-as-it-happened/a-61337996>].

¹⁶⁴ Daniel Boffey and Martin Farrer, "'They were all shot': Russia accused of war crimes as Bucha reveals horror of invasion," *The Guardian*, April 3, 2022 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/03/they-were-all-shot-russia-accused-of-war-crimes-as-bucha-reveals-horror-of-invasion>].

¹⁶⁵ "Ukraine: Apparent War Crimes in Russia-Controlled Areas," *Human Rights Watch*, April 3, 2022 [<https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/04/03/ukraine-apparent-war-crimes-russia-controlled-areas>].

¹⁶⁶ Nelson Oliveira, "Zelenskyy accuses Russia of genocide for alleged atrocities in Ukraine," *CBS News*, April 3, 2022 [<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/genocide-russia-ukraine-war-zelenskyy-face-the-nation/>].

¹⁶⁷ Daniel Boffey and Martin Farrer, "'They were all shot': Russia accused of war crimes as Bucha reveals horror of invasion," *The Guardian*, April 3, 2022 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/03/they-were-all-shot-russia-accused-of-war-crimes-as-bucha-reveals-horror-of-invasion>].

¹⁶⁸ "Es muss eine Reaktion geben (There has to be a reaction)," *Tagesschau*, April 3, 2022 [<https://www.tagesschau.de/multimedia/sendung/bab/bab-lambrecht-zu-butscha-101.html>].

¹⁶⁹ "Baerbock: 'Kriegsverbrechen dürfen nicht ungesühnt bleiben' (Baerbock: 'War crimes must not go unpunished')," *YouTube account of AFP Deutschland*, April 4, 2022 [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbIMi0R-OEY>].

possible terms the reported atrocities committed by the Russian armed forces,” and added that the European Union stood “in full solidarity with Ukraine” and would “continue to firmly support Ukraine and ... advance, as a matter of urgency, work on further sanctions against Russia.”¹⁷⁰

Biden spoke with similar outrage as his European partners, calling Putin “brutal” and a “war criminal” on **April 4**. On the US side, however, this signified no notable change in rhetoric from previous statements of the US President. Biden also stressed the need to “gather all the detail” to bring those responsible to justice at a war crimes trial;¹⁷¹ and promised to consider additional sanctions.¹⁷²

On the following day, **April 5**, UN Secretary General **Guterres** also declared that he would “never forget the horrifying images of civilians killed in Bucha” and called for “an independent investigation to guarantee effective accountability.” “The war in Ukraine must stop,” he added and directly called out Russia: “We are dealing with the full-fledged invasion, on several fronts, of one Member State of the United Nations, Ukraine, by another, the Russian Federation – a Permanent Member of the Security Council – in violation of the United Nations Charter, and with several aims, including redrawing the internationally-recognized borders between the two countries.”¹⁷³

At NATO, too, Allies focused on mobilizing additional support for Ukraine. On the eve of a two-day meeting of NATO foreign ministers on **April 5**, **Stoltenberg** stressed that Moscow was not giving up its ambitions in Ukraine despite the partial withdrawal of Russian troops near Kyiv. NATO foreign ministers would now discuss what more they could do to help Ukraine prepare for the next Russian offensive.

*In the coming weeks, we expect a further Russian push in eastern and southern Ukraine. To try to take the entire Donbas and to create a land-bridge to occupied Crimea. ... Allies are determined to provide further support to Ukraine. Including anti-tank weapons, air-defense systems and other equipment. ... The repositioning of the Russian troops will take some time, some weeks, but after that, we are afraid that we can see a big Russian offensive in Donbas with the aim to take Donbas. In that window, it is extremely important that NATO Allies provide support.*¹⁷⁴

Stoltenberg, however, remained vague about specific systems that the Alliance might deliver. For “operational reasons,” he said, it would be better to “actually provide support” than to “announce every specific weapon system.”¹⁷⁵ In a press briefing on the same day, US Ambassador to NATO **Smith** provided

¹⁷⁰ “Ukraine: Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on Russian atrocities committed in Bucha and other Ukrainian towns,” *Website of the Council of the European Union*, April 4, 2022 [<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/04/04/ukraine-declaration-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-eu-on-russian-atrocities-committed-in-bucha-and-other-ukrainian-towns/>].

¹⁷¹ Aamer Madhani, Zeke Miller and Chris Megerian, “Biden: Putin should face war crimes trial for Bucha killings,” *AP News*, April 5, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-crimes-biden-putin-84767d1c3c35a7a36f2f70ceacc3fa0>].

¹⁷² Aamer Madhani, Zeke Miller and Chris Megerian, “Biden: Putin should face war crimes trial for Bucha killings,” *AP News*, April 5, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-crimes-biden-putin-84767d1c3c35a7a36f2f70ceacc3fa0>], and “‘Russia Must Answer To The World’: Global Condemnation Of Ukraine Killings Mounts,” *RFE/RL*, April 4, 2022 [<https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-russia-bucha-killings-atrocities-condemnation/31784634.html>].

¹⁷³ “Secretary-General’s remarks at the UN Security Council Meeting on Ukraine [as delivered],” *Website of the United Nations*, April 5, 2022 [<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2022-04-05/secretary-generals-remarks-the-un-security-council-meeting-ukraine-delivered>].

¹⁷⁴ “Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg ahead of the meetings of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs on 6 and 7 April 2022,” *Website of the North Atlantic treaty Organization*, April 5, 2022 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_194325.htm].

¹⁷⁵ “Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg ahead of the meetings of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs on 6 and 7 April 2022,” *Website of the North Atlantic treaty Organization*, April 5, 2022 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_194325.htm].

some more detail, explaining that “two-thirds of the Allies” were offering lethal support and all Allies were supplying humanitarian and economic aid. Yet, these were “sovereign decisions ... not taken by NATO,” she stressed. There would be “no NATO pressure.”¹⁷⁶ Some specifics did trickle through however. Thus, media reported on **April 5** that the Czech Republic had provided Kyiv with T-72 tanks and BVP-1 infantry fighting vehicles. Nonetheless, both Czech Defense Minister **Jana Cernochova** and a Defense Ministry spokesperson refused to confirm or deny this transfer.¹⁷⁷

In comparison, Berlin remained relatively hesitant. German media reported on **April 6** that the Ukrainian government had directly asked the Chancellor’s Office for the delivery of 100 Marder infantry fighting vehicles at the end of March. However, the German government had then taken the position that such weapon types could only be delivered in lockstep with allies, and Washington had not yet supplied tanks.¹⁷⁸ On **April 5**, Ukrainian Ambassador **Andriy Melnyk** still requested Marder, Leopard and Gepard tanks from Germany.¹⁷⁹ **Scholz** however stuck to his position. Berlin would “put in place everything that is right and makes sense” to help “ensure that Russia does not win this war,” he told parliament the next day. Yet, this support was limited by what was “feasible in view of the decisions of our allies and ... the capabilities of the Bundeswehr.”¹⁸⁰

*We act on the question of what we export, ... what we finance, in coordination with our friends and allies within the EU and NATO ... We provide military support in the same way [as our friends and allies] and nobody jumps the gun. ... I believe that it would be a grave mistake, particularly on this issue, if Germany were to adopt a special role and a special path.*¹⁸¹

Overall, the West was nonetheless moving towards providing more extensive military support to Kyiv. At a NATO foreign ministers’ meeting in Brussels on **April 7**, Ukrainian Foreign Minister **Kuleba** once again requested heavy weapons.¹⁸² British Foreign Secretary **Truss** answered this call swiftly, announcing after the meeting that NATO member states had agreed to “supply new and heavier equipment.” She explained: “We agreed to help Ukrainian forces move from their Soviet-era equipment to NATO standard equipment, on a bilateral basis.” In the same vein, **Blinken** confirmed that the US government would examine what “new systems” could be supplied to Ukraine.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁶ “Online Press Briefing with Ambassador Julianne Smith, U.S. Permanent Representative to NATO,” *Website of the US Department of State*, April 5, 2022 [<https://www.state.gov/online-press-briefing-with-ambassador-julianne-smith-u-s-permanent-representative-to-nato/>].

¹⁷⁷ “Czech Republic sends tanks, infantry fighting vehicles to Ukraine,” *Reuters*, April 5, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/czech-republic-sends-tanks-ukraine-czech-tv-reports-2022-04-05/>].

¹⁷⁸ Robin Alexander and Klaus Geiger, “Ukraine bittet Scholz direkt um Panzer, doch dieser zögert (Ukraine asks Scholz directly for tanks, but Scholz hesitates),” *Welt*, April 6, 2022 [<https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article238015209/Ukraine-Krieg-Ukraine-bittet-Scholz-direkt-um-Panzer-doch-dieser-zoegert.html>].

¹⁷⁹ “Andrij Melnyk: ‘Was wir heute brauchen, sind schwere Waffen’ (Andriy Melnyk: ‘What we need today are heavy weapons’),” *Deutschlandfunk*, April 5, 2022 [<https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/andrij-melny-ukrainischer-botschafter-ukrainekrieg-sanktionen-waffen-100.html>].

¹⁸⁰ “Scholz: Kein Diktatfrieden für die Ukraine (Scholz: No dictated peace for Ukraine),” *T-online*, April 6, 2022 [https://www.t-online.de/nachrichten/deutschland/innenpolitik/id_91968394/scholz-kein-diktatfrieden-fuer-die-ukraine.html].

¹⁸¹ “Deutscher Bundestag, Stenografischer Bericht, 27. Sitzung, Berlin, Mittwoch, den 6. April 2022 (German Bundestag, Shorthand Report, 27th Session, Berlin, Wednesday, April 6, 2022),” *Website of the German Bundestag*, April 6, 2022 [<https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/20/20027.pdf>].

¹⁸² Jon Helney, “Ukraine tells Nato: Donbas battle will be like second world war,” *The Guardian*, April 7, 2022 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/07/ukraine-calls-for-weapons-weapons-weapons-from-western-allies>].

¹⁸³ Henry Foy, Max Seddon and Andres Schipani, “Nato states agree to supply heavy weapons to Ukraine,” *Financial Times*, April 8, 2022 [<https://www.ft.com/content/1c0e6e15-c8fe-4a84-99dc-12b6836bf0f4>].

At the same time, NATO leaders started prefacing upcoming posture changes. For instance, **Stoltenberg** emphasized the need to ensure that NATO could “protect and defend all NATO allies” even “in a more dangerous world.” The Alliance was “in the midst of a very fundamental transformation” as it had to “move from tripwire deterrence to something which is more about deterrence by *denial* or defense,” he added.¹⁸⁴

Meanwhile the German government appeared increasingly split. According to media reports from **April 7**, Chancellor **Scholz’s** office was continuing to delay a decision on tank deliveries, arguing that first an agreement had to be reached with allies. A German observer also pointed out rumors that concerns over a potential military escalation and hopes Germany might still be able to return to the *status quo ante* after the war were shaping discussions at the Chancellery.¹⁸⁵ By contrast, Economics Minister **Habeck**, Foreign Minister **Baerbock**, as well as politicians from the liberal FDP and the conservative opposition party CDU supported expanding military assistance.¹⁸⁶

42.	Warning
The German government was not alone to worry about a potential escalation. Indeed on April 7 , the foreign ministers of the G7 countries and EU Foreign Affairs Representative Borrell adopted a statement warning against “any threat or use of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons.” They reminded Russia of its “obligations under international treaties” and stressed that “any use by Russia of such a weapon would be unacceptable and result in severe consequences.” ¹⁸⁷	

European states nonetheless went ahead with heavy weapon deliveries. According to reports from **April 8**, the Czech Republic supplied additional heavy military equipment to Ukraine, including 10 tanks and other infantry fighting vehicles.¹⁸⁸ Kyiv had also obtained a S-300 air defense system from Slovakia, Prime Minister **Eduard Heger** confirmed, while emphasizing that this did “not mean that the Slovak Republic has become a part of the armed conflict in Ukraine.”¹⁸⁹ According to a statement by US President **Biden**, the United States would “reposition the Patriot missile system to Slovakia in return” in order “to enable this transfer and ensure the continued security of Slovakia.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁴ Edward Malnick, “Jens Stoltenberg: We need a beefed-up Nato to face down threats to European security,” *The Telegraph*, April 9, 2022 [<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2022/04/09/jens-stoltenberg-need-beefed-up-nato-face-threats-european-security/>].

¹⁸⁵ Ralf Fücks, “Putin muss diesen Krieg verlieren (Putin must lose this war),” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, April 4, 2022 [<https://zeitung.faz.net/faz/politik/2022-04-04/deutschland-muss-mehr-fuer-die-ukraine-tun/744179.html?GEPC=s5>].

¹⁸⁶ Hans von der Burchard, “Scholz holds up German tank deliveries to Ukraine,” *Politico*, April 7, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/scholz-holds-up-german-tank-delivery-to-ukraine/>].

¹⁸⁷ “G7 Foreign Ministers’ Statement on Russia’s War of Aggression Against Ukraine,” *Website of the US Embassy & Consulates in Italy*, April 7, 2022 [<https://it.usembassy.gov/g7-foreign-ministers-statement-on-russias-war-of-aggression-against-ukraine/>].

¹⁸⁸ Jan Lopatka, “Czechs ship tanks, rocket launchers, artillery to Ukraine,” *Reuters*, April 8, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/czechs-ship-tanks-rocket-launchers-artillery-ukraine-2022-04-08/>].

¹⁸⁹ “Slovakia says it has given S-300 air defence system to Ukraine,” *Al Jazeera*, April 8, 2022 [<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/8/slovakia-says-it-has-given-s-300-air-defence-system-to-ukraine>], and Tweet by @eduardheger, *Twitter*, April 8, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/eduardheger/status/1512386024399376389?s=20&t=Qg97ot-RaABYqjGuEvWE8Yw>].

¹⁹⁰ “Statement from the President on Delivery of Air Defense Systems to Ukraine,” *Website of the White House*, April 8, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/04/08/statement-from-the-president-on-delivery-of-air-defense-systems-to-ukraine/>].

Meanwhile, things still did not appear to be moving in Berlin. On **April 8**, Defense Ministry spokeswoman **Christina Routsis** explained that a previously considered delivery of 100 Marder tanks would not go ahead because this equipment was “simply indispensable” for the German armed forces to fulfil their constitutional defense tasks, as well as NATO obligations.¹⁹¹

Also on **April 8**, **Medvedev** once again engaged in threatening rhetoric, describing Western economic sanctions as an “act of aggression” against Russia on his Telegram channel.¹⁹²

This did not deter further Western arms deliveries. On **April 10**, Lithuanian defense chief **Valdemaras Rupšys** announced Lithuania would soon train Ukrainian troops on Lithuanian territory to enable them to use modern military equipment. “We are ready to train their instructors to prepare them to work with the equipment that we ourselves operate,” Rupšys said.¹⁹³ At an EU foreign ministers’ meeting on **April 11**, the **European Union** also increased its military assistance by an additional 500 million euros, bringing its total military support to Ukraine up to 1.5 billion euros.¹⁹⁴ Invoking the “terrible images” from Ukraine, **Baerbock** had declared ahead of the EU meeting that Ukraine needed “further military material, especially also heavy weapons.” There was no time for excuses, but for “creativity and pragmatism,” she had added.¹⁹⁵

Moscow appeared unimpressed. On **April 11**, Kremlin spokesperson **Peskov** warned against the increasingly probable accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO. “We have repeatedly said that the alliance remains a tool geared towards confrontation and its further expansion will not bring stability to the European continent,” Peskov stressed.¹⁹⁶ The following day, on the 61st anniversary of Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin’s flight to space, **Putin** once again referred to sanctions, stressing that it was impossible to isolate Russia. Despite “complete” isolation, the Soviet Union had become the first country to carry out a mission in space, he pointed out and added that it was “impossible to severely isolate anyone in the modern world – especially such a vast country as Russia.”¹⁹⁷

In a media interview on **April 13**, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister **Oleg Syromolotov** repeated claims by Moscow that Ukraine had been seeking to acquire nuclear weapons. Ukraine had the technical capability to accomplish this, he said. “A scenario in which nuclear material could be brought to Ukraine from third countries” could not be ruled out either, added Syromolotov. There was also “a very real threat of

¹⁹¹ “Regierungspressekonferenz vom 8. April 2022 (Government press conference on April 8, 2022),” *Website of the German Federal Government*, April 8, 2022 [<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/regierungspressekonferenz-vom-8-april-2022-2024686>].

¹⁹² Rebecca Ratcliffe, Dani Anguiano, Lauren Aratani, Léonie Chao-Fong, Martin Belam and Samantha Lock, “Czech Republic delivers armaments to Ukraine – as it happened,” *The Guardian*, April 9, 2022 [https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/apr/08/russia-ukraine-war-latest-news-zelenskiy-says-borodyanka-much-worse-than-bucha-johnson-to-meet-scholz-live?CMP=share_btn_tw&page=with%3Ablock-6250ffc38f081f653cd8c32c#block-6250ffc38f081f653cd8c32c], and Post on Telegram channel of Dmitry Medvedev, *Telegram*, April 8, 2022 [https://t.me/medvedev_telegram/40].

¹⁹³ “Chief of defense: training for Ukrainian troops to be organized in Lithuania,” *Delfi*, April 11, 2022 [<https://www.delfi.lt/en/politics/chief-of-defense-training-for-ukrainian-troops-to-be-organized-in-lithuania.d?id=89936431>].

¹⁹⁴ Matthias Kolb, “EU erhöht Waffenhilfe auf 1,5 Milliarden Euro (EU increases arms aid to 1.5 billion euros),” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, April 11, 2022 [<https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/waffen-ukraine-eu-aussenminister-1.5565119>].

¹⁹⁵ “Die Ukraine braucht schwere Waffen (Ukraine needs heavy weapons),” *Tagesschau*, April 11, 2022 [<https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/ukraine-waffen-baerbock-eu-aussenminister-101.html>].

¹⁹⁶ Isabel van Brugen, “Russia Warns Sweden, Finland Against Joining NATO,” *Newsweek*, April 11, 2022 [<https://www.newsweek.com/russia-peskov-warns-sweden-finland-joining-nato-1696947>].

¹⁹⁷ Guy Faulconbridge, “Putin says peace talks with Ukraine are at dead end, goads the West,” *Reuters*, April 12, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-flies-into-russian-far-east-ukraine-talks-with-belarusian-leader-2022-04-12/>].

chemical terrorism from the fascist nationalists operating under the auspices of the current Kiev regime and the units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine controlled by them.”¹⁹⁸ On the same day, US officials once again warned that any Russian use of chemical weapons in Ukraine would trigger a “proportional” response, though not a US military intervention in Ukraine.¹⁹⁹

Meanwhile, according to NATO and EU officials, there was a growing willingness among the member states of both institutions to supply more heavy weaponry to Ukraine.²⁰⁰ Indeed, following a phone call with Zelenskyy, **Biden** announced on **April 13** “an additional \$800 million in weapons, munitions, and other security assistance” for Ukraine. “This new package of assistance will contain many of the highly effective weapons systems we have already provided and new capabilities tailored to the wider assault we expect Russia to launch in eastern Ukraine,” the US president said. It included “artillery systems, artillery rounds, and armored personnel carriers.” In addition, Biden declared, he had “also approved the transfer of additional helicopters” and the US would continue “to facilitate the transfer of significant capabilities from our Allies and partners around the world.”²⁰¹ On the same day, US State Department spokesperson **Ned Price** contextualized continued US assistance to Ukraine, suggesting that “the nature of the conflict [was] changing” as Russia was refocusing on southern and eastern Ukraine after having lost the battle of Kyiv. Security assistance for Ukraine would need “to adapt to that changing reality to provide our Ukrainian partners with precisely what they need to fortify their positions in the east, in the south, to continue to beat back this Russian onslaught.”²⁰²

At the same time, news outlets reported that a new US intelligence guidance from the Administration would allow the US government to “significantly expand the intelligence it [was] providing to Ukraine’s forces” to assist them in a possible new Russian offensive in the East. However, no information would be provided “that would enable the Ukrainians to strike targets on Russian territory,” US officials stressed.²⁰³

Russia swiftly condemned this significant additional Western support for Ukraine. For example, **Ryabkov** warned on **April 13** that “attempts to slow down our special operation, inflict maximum damage on the Russian contingents and formations of the [Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics] will be severely suppressed.” The West should be warned “that US-NATO weapons transports *passing through Ukrainian territory* are considered by us as legitimate military targets,” he emphasized. He also repeated allegations that the United States had developed biological weapons in Ukraine and blamed Washington for the failure of bilateral negotiations on nuclear strategic stability.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁸ “Олег Сыромолотов: среди беженцев с Украины могут быть террористы (Oleg Syromolotov: there may be terrorists among refugees from Ukraine)”, RIA Novosti, April 13, 2022 [https://ria.ru/20220413/syromolotov-1783159363.html?_x_tr_sl=ru&_x_tr_tl=de&_x_tr_hl=de&_x_tr_pto=wapp].

¹⁹⁹ Alexander Ward and Jonathan Lemire, “Team Biden scrambles to respond to claims of Russia chemical weapon use,” *Politico*, April 12, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/04/12/biden-admin-russia-chemical-weapons-00024709>].

²⁰⁰ Felicia Schwartz, Henry Foy and John Reed, “US sends Ukraine more weapons and intelligence to repel Russian offensive,” *Financial Times*, April 14, 2022 [<https://www.ft.com/content/9f31d808-a209-46f1-a7d2-1bc443aa698d>].

²⁰¹ “Statement by President Joe Biden on Call with President Zelenskyy and Additional Security Assistance to Ukraine,” *Website of the White House*, April 13, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/04/13/statement-by-president-joe-biden-on-call-with-president-zelenskyy-and-additional-security-assistance-to-ukraine/>].

²⁰² “Department Press Briefing – April 13, 2022,” *Website of the US Department of State*, April 13, 2022 [<https://www.state.gov/briefings/department-press-briefing-april-13-2022/>].

²⁰³ Michael R. Gordon, Warren P. Strobel and Vivian Salama, “Biden Administration to Provide Ukraine With More Intelligence, Heavier Weapons to Fight Russia,” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 13, 2022 [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-expands-flow-of-intelligence-to-ukraine-as-white-house-sends-more-arms-11649868029>].

²⁰⁴ “Сергей Рябков: США пытаются спровоцировать в России дефолт (Sergei Ryabkov: US is trying to provoke a default in Russia)”, TASS, April 13, 2022 [<https://tass.ru/interviews/14365393>].

On **April 14**, the flagship of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, the Moskva, sank. Per Ukrainian sources, the ship was hit by Ukrainian Neptune missiles, a claim that Western intelligence sources tentatively supported. The Russian side, in turn, claimed that the ship was sunk by a fire and an explosion on board.²⁰⁵

On the same day, more became known about Russia's reaction to increased Western military support for Ukraine. Reports emerged that Russia had sent a two-page diplomatic protest note "On Russia's concerns in the context of massive supplies of weapons and military equipment to the Kiev regime" to the United States and other governments probably as early as **April 12**. In this demarche, Moscow reportedly warned against the supply of "most sensitive" weapons, notably multiple launch rocket systems. "We call on the United States and its allies to stop the irresponsible militarization of Ukraine, which implies unpredictable consequences for regional and international security," the document reportedly read, and accused the United States of "pressuring other countries to stop any military and technical cooperation with Russia, and those with Soviet-era weapons to transfer them to Ukraine."²⁰⁶

In the United States, in turn, the demarche was publicly presented as a sign that military support for Ukraine was working. Western weapons appeared to be "having an effect" in Ukraine, noted an anonymous US official. Indeed, **Andrey Kortunov**, an expert close to the Kremlin, confirmed that Moscow viewed Western arms deliveries with growing concern. "It seems the United States and the West in general are right now testing the limits of Russian tolerance when it comes to weapons deliveries," he suggested. "It's clear that these volumes are already so significant that they can affect the course of the hostilities, and this is raising concerns." Although Russia had thus far avoided attacking arms shipments outside Ukraine, there were "still fears regarding strikes that may hit the territory of NATO member countries," explained Kortunov. "One certainly does not want to create a pretext for some further escalation."²⁰⁷

Indeed, on **April 14**, **Kirby** acknowledged the risks of weapons deliveries to Ukraine. The United States did "[not] take any movement of weapons and systems going into Ukraine for granted." Therefore, Washington was "very careful about how much information [it] put out there" and sought "to modulate that activity on any given day." Also: "I think the less we say about that, the better," Kirby concluded.²⁰⁸ In a similar vein, German Vice Chancellor **Habeck** revealed concerns among some NATO states that

²⁰⁵ Brad Lendon, "Russian warship sinks in the Black Sea after Ukraine claims it was hit by a missile," *CNN*, April 14, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/04/14/europe/russia-navy-cruiser-moskva-fire-abandoned-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>], and Felicia Schwartz, Henry Foy and John Reed, "US sends Ukraine more weapons and intelligence to repel Russian offensive," *Financial Times*, April 14, 2022 [<https://www.ft.com/content/9f31d808-a209-46f1-a7d2-1bc443aa698d?shareType=nongift>].

²⁰⁶ Karen DeYoung, "Russia warns U.S. to stop arming Ukraine," *The Washington Post*, April 15, 2022 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/04/14/russia-warns-us-stop-arming-ukraine/>].

²⁰⁷ David E. Sanger, Helene Cooper and Anton Troianovski, "Girding for New Battle, Russia Warns U.S. on Advanced Weapons for Ukraine," *The New York Times*, April 15, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/15/world/europe/ukraine-russia-us-weapons-warning.html?referringSource=articleShare>].

²⁰⁸ "Pentagon Press Secretary John F. Kirby Holds a Press Briefing," *Website of the US Department of Defense*, April 14, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3000814/pentagon-press-secretary-john-f-kirby-holds-a-press-briefing/>].

arms deliveries could expand the war. “Heavy weapons are synonymous with tanks, and all NATO countries have so far ruled this out to not become targets themselves,” he explained.²⁰⁹ British media suspected a link between the Russian protest note and the backpedaling from Habeck, who had previously supported increased military assistance.²¹⁰

43.	Warning
More Russian warnings occurred on April 14 , as Medvedev once again pointed out the risks of Sweden and Finland joining NATO, which would “more than double” “the length of the alliance’s land borders with Russia.” Consequently, these borders would “have to be strengthened” and “no non-nuclear status of the Baltics [would] be possible.” Hence: “The balance must be restored,” stressed Medvedev. Specifically, this would mean “considerable” naval, ground and air defense forces, “increased tensions along the borders, Iskanders, hypersonic weapons, and nuclear-armed ships ... at arm’s length” from Sweden and Finland, he elaborated. “No sane person” could want this. ²¹¹	

44.	De-escalatory
Meanwhile on the same day, April 14 , Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director William Burns put into perspective nuclear escalation concerns. Asked about his agency’s risk assessment of a possible use of tactical nuclear weapons, he explained that though the situation had to be taken seriously, no “practical evidence” indicated Russian preparations for such a scenario.	
<p><i>President Biden is deeply concerned about avoiding a third world war, about avoiding a threshold in which ... nuclear conflict becomes possible. ... Russian military doctrine holds that you could escalate to de-escalate. ... Some Russian leaders have talked about a circumstance in which ... NATO would intervene militarily on the ground in Ukraine. ... That’s not something, as President Biden has made very clear, that’s in the cards, but ... given the potential desperation of President Putin and the Russian leadership, given the setbacks that they’ve faced so far militarily, none of us can take lightly the threat posed by a potential resort to tactical nuclear weapons or low-yield nuclear weapons. ... While we’ve seen some rhetorical posturing on the part of the Kremlin about moving to higher nuclear alert levels, so far we haven’t seen a lot of practical evidence of the kind of deployments or ... military dispositions that would ... reinforce that concern. But we watch for that very intently.</i>²¹²</p>	

Against this background, **Chris Coons**, a Democratic Senator close to Biden, caused confusion by calling for a discussion on the circumstances in which a direct US intervention in Ukraine might be possible.²¹³ “It is important that on a bipartisan and measured way we in Congress and the administration come to a common position about when we are willing to go the next step and to send not just arms but troops to

²⁰⁹ Hans von der Burchard, “Germany’s Habeck warns tank deliveries to Ukraine could turn West into Russian ‘target’,” *Politico*, April 15, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/berlin-bickers-over-tanks-for-ukraine-amid-warnings-that-west-could-become-target/>].

²¹⁰ Julian Borger, “Russia warns US of repercussions if it sends more arms to Ukraine – reports,” *The Guardian*, April 15, 2022 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/15/russia-warns-us-of-repercussions-if-it-sends-more-arms-to-ukraine-reports>].

²¹¹ Polina Ivanova and Henry Foy, “Russia warns of nuclear expansion in Baltics if Finland and Sweden join Nato,” *Financial Times*, April 14, 2022 [<https://www.ft.com/content/4e296c6d-a268-4dbc-8f80-093d2b5c6a08>].

²¹² “CIA Director William Burns Speaks at Georgia Tech,” *YouTube account of Georgia Tech*, April 14, 2022 [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yVWzer7TTP0> (from 55:42)], and David E. Sanger and Julian E. Barnes, “C.I.A. Director Airs Concern That Putin Might Turn to Nuclear Weapons,” *The New York Times*, April 14, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/14/us/politics/putin-nuclear-weapons.html>].

²¹³ Andrew Desiderio, “Biden’s closest Senate ally emerges as a shadow secretary of state,” *Politico*, March 24, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2021/03/24/chris-coons-biden-foreign-policy-477789>].

the aid in defense of Ukraine,” declared Coons. “If the answer is never then we are inviting another level of escalation in brutality by Putin.”²¹⁴ However, the statement was quickly walked back. Coons had merely tried to make clear that the West had to draw red lines regarding a potential use of chemical or nuclear weapons by Russia, said an associate of the Senator. Later Coons himself clarified that he was not calling for the deployment of US troops to Ukraine. According to Congress observer **Andrew Desiderio**, the Senator’s statements did “not [represent] any sort of shift on Capitol Hill” either.²¹⁵

Tapping into such concerns over a potential Russian chemical or nuclear weapons use, **Zelenskyy** warned on **April 15** that the whole world should be prepared for this scenario. It was unclear whether Russia’s threats were “real information, but it [could] be truth,” he said. Russia “could do it,” human lives meant nothing to Moscow.²¹⁶

Meanwhile, a US Defense Intelligence Agency official acknowledged Washington was concerned Moscow might escalate out of desperation, confronted with the West’s increasing military assistance and political unity, media reported on **April 18**. Russian Iskander missiles posed a particular concern, a US Air Force officer suggested, as they could be armed with nuclear warheads and had “performed surprisingly well” in the war.²¹⁷ Yet in media reports from **April 19**, other US officials appeared particularly keen to question any escalation concerns, qualifying CIA Director Burns’ already cautious statements from a few days before. Burns’ assessment had not been based “on any new intelligence or other evidence that Russia was preparing to use nuclear weapons, but rather on a prudent analysis of Russia’s situation” and nuclear doctrine, which set a “lower,” though “still pretty high,” threshold for the use of nuclear weapons. “Nothing we’ve seen suggests they’re on the precipice,” the anonymous officials reportedly emphasized. On the contrary, Russian officials had emphasized that there was currently no “existential” threat to Russia – the prerequisite for nuclear use in Russian doctrine. Moreover, any first nuclear strike by Moscow presumably would remain a limited “warning shot” to which NATO could respond in a variety of non-nuclear ways, US officials said. Given NATO’s conventional superiority vis-à-vis Russia, Putin was unlikely to risk further escalation, added one official.²¹⁸

45.	De-escalatory
On April 19 , Pentagon spokesperson Kirby further qualified escalation concerns. Aside from Putin’s initial nuclear threats, there had been little comparable rhetoric since. Consequently, he explained, Washington was “actively monitoring [this] every single day,” but remained “comfortable” that it had “an appropriate strategic deterrent posture in place and there [was] no need to make any changes to it.” ²¹⁹	

²¹⁴ Joe Irizarry, “Sen. Coons discusses U.S. response to Russia/Ukraine war, including possible troop deployment,” *Delaware Public Media*, April 14, 2022 [<https://www.delawarepublic.org/delaware-headlines/2022-04-14/sen-coons-discusses-u-s-response-to-russia-ukraine-war-including-possible-troop-deployment/>].

²¹⁵ Alexander Ward and Quint Forgey, “Putin will only stop when we stop him,” *Politico*, April 18, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/04/18/putin-will-only-stop-when-we-stop-him-00025901>].

²¹⁶ Jeremy Herb, “Exclusive: Zelensky says world should be prepared for possibility Putin could use nuclear weapons,” *CNN*, April 16, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/04/15/politics/tapper-zelensky-interview-cnntv/index.html>].

²¹⁷ William A. Arkin, “Putin’s Iskander Missiles Are Battle-Tested—and Can Carry Nuclear Warheads,” *Newsweek*, April 18, 2022 [<https://www.newsweek.com/putins-iskander-missiles-are-battle-tested-can-carry-nuclear-warheads-1698559>].

²¹⁸ David Rothkopf, “Even if Russia Uses a Nuke, We Probably Won’t—but Putin Would Still Pay Dearly,” *The Daily Beast*, April 19, 2022 [<https://www.thedailybeast.com/even-if-russia-uses-a-nuke-we-probably-wontbut-putin-would-still-pay-dearly>].

²¹⁹ “Pentagon Press Secretary John F. Kirby Holds a Press Briefing,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, April 19, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Trans/Tran/Article/3004347/pentagon-press-secretary-john-f-kirby-holds-a-press-briefing/>].

Possibly in light of this assessment, Western arms deliveries continued. Per media reports, Western governments were now “focused on sending longer-range weapons like howitzers, antiaircraft systems, anti-ship missiles, armed drones, armored trucks, personnel carriers and even tanks.”²²⁰ Around **April 18** and **19**, the United States ignored Russian warnings and conducted four transport flights with military assistance for Kyiv.²²¹ The United Kingdom also announced that it had provided additional military support, including “anti-tank and anti-ship missiles and long-range artillery” worth 588 million US dollars. And contrary to earlier concerns, Russia refrained from attacking supply lines outside of Ukraine, US media reported.²²²

Nonetheless, Western governments attempted to limit escalation risks. US officials reportedly remained reluctant to provide intelligence and weapons, such as “rocket artillery, ground attack aircraft, and medium range drones,” that could enable Ukraine to expand the war onto Russian territory. Western governments also apparently sought to keep certain arms deliveries under wraps. **France**, for example, merely stated that it had provided military support amounting to 100 million euros without providing further detail.²²³ Some observers also suggested **Poland** had decided against providing MiG jets to Ukraine to avoid provoking Russia, though a senior US official stressed the United States had “never opposed European nations sending MiGs to Ukraine.”²²⁴

46.	De-escalatory
Continued Western military assistance to Ukraine did not have a direct impact on Russian rhetoric. On April 19 , Lavrov merely repeated previously voiced complaints about the West and Ukraine. Asked whether Russia was considering to use tactical nuclear weapons, he pointed out that Moscow had initiated both the June 2021 Putin-Biden statement and the January 2022 P5 declaration that a nuclear war could not be won and must never be fought. However, he refused to comment on Zelenskyy’s warning about a potential Russian use of nuclear weapons. ²²⁵	

On **April 19**, the Ukrainian General Staff announced the beginning of a Russian offensive in eastern Ukraine. Russian representatives confirmed this. **Lavrov** spoke of “an important moment in this entire special operation” with the aim to achieve the “complete liberation of the Donetsk and Luhansk republics.” **Shoigu** declared that Russia was “gradually” implementing its plan to “liberate the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics.”²²⁶

²²⁰ Steven Erlanger, Eric Schmitt and Julian E. Barnes, “The U.S. Races to Arm Ukraine With Heavier, More Advanced Weaponry,” *The New York Times*, April 19, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/19/world/europe/us-ukraine-weaponry.html>].

²²¹ “World Bank slashes global growth forecast; Ukraine says Russia’s major offensive in the Donbas has started,” *CNBC*, April 19, 2022 [<https://www.cnb.com/2022/04/18/russia-ukraine-live-updates.html>].

²²² Steven Erlanger, Eric Schmitt and Julian E. Barnes, “The U.S. Races to Arm Ukraine With Heavier, More Advanced Weaponry,” *The New York Times*, April 19, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/19/world/europe/us-ukraine-weaponry.html>].

²²³ Steven Erlanger, Eric Schmitt and Julian E. Barnes, “The U.S. Races to Arm Ukraine With Heavier, More Advanced Weaponry,” *The New York Times*, April 19, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/19/world/europe/us-ukraine-weaponry.html>].

²²⁴ Alexander Ward and Quint Forgy, “Ukraine is still waiting on new warplanes,” *Politico*, April 20, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/04/20/ukraine-is-still-waiting-on-new-warplanes-00026606>].

²²⁵ “Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov denies war crimes in Ukraine, says Russia not targeting civilians,” *India Today*, April 19, 2022 [<https://www.indiatoday.in/world/russia-ukraine-war/video/russian-foreign-minister-sergey-lavrov-denies-war-crimes-in-ukraine-says-russia-not-targeting-civilians-1939323-2022-04-19>].

²²⁶ “Lawrow sieht neue Phase im Ukraine-Krieg (Lavrov sees new phase in Ukraine war),” *Tagesschau*, April 19, 2022 [<https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/europa/ukraine-kaempfe-luhansk-mariupol-109.html>].

Meanwhile, Germany remained cautious about escalation risks. After a video conference with the G7 countries as well as representatives from the EU, NATO, Poland and Romania on **April 19**, **Scholz** reiterated that there would be no direct NATO intervention in Ukraine, though he also promised further military and financial support for Ukraine.

[Germany and its allies] will continue to support Ukraine, financially and also militarily. ... At the same time, it is our duty to prevent the war from spreading to other countries. Therefore, NATO cannot and will not intervene directly in the war. ... Initially, we supplied Ukraine with weapons from our own stockpiles. ... [But] the possibilities we have [in this respect] are reaching their limits. That is why we are setting up a special fund so that our army will finally be well equipped. ... We will always maintain our ability to defend Germany and the territory of our NATO Allies against a Russian attack. ... That is why, in a second step, we have made it possible for Ukraine to buy military equipment from industrial production in our countries. ... Our common goal is to continue to strengthen the Ukrainian military so that it can continue to resist the attack. We have asked the German defense industry to tell us what material it can supply in the near future ... and we will provide [Ukraine] with the money needed to buy it. ... [This will include] anti-tank weapons and air defense equipment ... [and] also other things such as ammunition and what can be used in an artillery battle. In addition, we are ready to support our NATO partners who still have weapon systems that come from Russian production ... and can be used immediately [by Ukraine].²²⁷

The following day, the former leader of the German social democratic party (SPD) **Sigmar Gabriel** linked Scholz's hesitancy regarding heavy weapons for Kyiv to agreements with allies and escalation concerns. The German government, like other NATO Allies, including the United States and the United Kingdom, feared that "with the delivery of these weapons [notably tanks] they themselves will enter this war and will have to reckon with the other side, with Putin, trying to fend off such tanks by using tactical nuclear weapons." This is a risk NATO did not want to take, Gabriel declared.²²⁸

47.	Warning
On April 20 , Putin announced the successful test of a new nuclear-capable Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missile. This, he said, was "a great and landmark event in the development of advanced weapon systems in the Russian army." There was "no" comparable system "in the world" and there would not be any "for a long time to come," Putin claimed. "This truly unique weapon will bolster the combat capabilities of our Armed Forces, ... reliably safeguard Russia's security from external threats and ... make those who in the frenzy of rabid and aggressive rhetoric are trying to threaten our country think twice," he added. ²²⁹ Per the Russian Defense Ministry, however, the missile was still in a "testing program" and would only become part of the Russian armed forces' arsenal "after [its] completion." ²³⁰	

²²⁷ "Pressekonferenz von Bundeskanzler Scholz zur Telefonschaltkonferenz am 19. April 2022 (Press conference by Chancellor Scholz on the teleconference on April 19, 2022)," *Website of the German Federal Government*, April 19, 2022 [<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/pressekonferenz-von-bundeskanzler-scholz-zur-telefonschaltkonferenz-am-19-april-2022-2026400>].

²²⁸ Tobias Armbrüster, "Gabriel (SPD): Mehr Transparenz der NATO bei Waffenlieferungen (Gabriel (SPD): More transparency about NATO arms deliveries)," *Deutschlandfunk*, April 20, 2022 [<https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/interview-sigmar-gabriel-spd-zu-streit-mit-ukrainischem-botschafter-melnyk-dlf-8e7d0407-100.html>].

²²⁹ "Putin congratulates Armed Forces on successful launch of Sarmat ICBM," *TASS*, April 20, 2022 [<https://tass.com/defense/1440607>].

²³⁰ Anton Troianovski, "Russia says it has successfully tested a new intercontinental missile that can evade defenses," *The New York Times*, April 20, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/20/world/europe/russia-icbm-putin.html>].

48.	De-escalatory
In any case, the Pentagon appeared unimpressed by the test. ²³¹ Russia had “properly notified the United States under its New START treaty obligations that it planned to test this ICBM,” read a statement by Press Secretary Kirby . Such tests were “routine” and “not a surprise.” Consequently, Washington did “not deem the test to be a threat to the United States or its allies.” ²³²	

Media reports from the same day however suggested a higher level of US escalation concerns than Biden Administration officials tended to let on. According to Pentagon sources, Defense Secretary **Austin** received regular briefings from Head of US Strategic Command **Charles Richard** on the status of Russia’s nuclear arsenal. In this context, there were more concerns about a potential Russian nuclear use “than at any time since the end of the Cold War,” officials revealed, though any nuclear scenario remained extremely unlikely.²³³

Media reporting on the Russian leadership did not help to alleviate these concerns. In an **April 20** report, a US outlet cited ten anonymous “Kremlin insiders,” according to whom only a small part of the Russian elite viewed the invasion of Ukraine as a “catastrophic mistake.” Therefore, Putin’s position of power was secure, although the war was lasting longer than Russia’s foreign intelligence service, the FSB, had expected, these sources suggested. The Kremlin was now focused on achieving a limited victory in the east of Ukraine to avoid looking “hopelessly vulnerable and weak in the face of the threat seen from the US and its allies.” Some sources also believed “Putin could turn to a limited use of nuclear weapons if faced with failure in a campaign he views as his historic mission.”²³⁴

German Chancellor **Scholz** once again explained his hesitancy regarding the delivery of heavy weapons on **April 22**. In line with previous statements, he warned of the danger of being drawn into the war referring to nuclear escalation risks, although he refused to state that a delivery of German tanks would lead to nuclear war. Echoing concerns raised by US representatives, he also underscored the pressure the Russian regime was under in light of Western sanctions. Perhaps in view of this situation, Scholz explained that although he had warned Putin against using chemical or biological weapon, no one had “a plan to attack Russia militarily or to bring about a change of government from the outside.”

In this situation, we need a cool head and well-considered decisions, because our country bears responsibility for peace and security throughout Europe. I do not think it is justified for Germany and NATO to become parties to the war in Ukraine ... I said very early on that we must do everything to avoid a direct military confrontation between NATO and a highly armed superpower like Russia, a nuclear power. I am doing everything I can to prevent an escalation that would lead to a third world war. There must be no nuclear war. ... There is no textbook for this situation in which one could read about the point at which we are perceived as a party to this conflict. ... [Therefore,] it is all the more important that we carefully consider and closely coordinate every step we take. Russia is in dramatic trouble, the sanctions are causing enormous damage to Russia’s economy,

²³¹ “Pentagon says Russia notified U.S. ahead of ‘routine’ ICBM test-launch,” *Reuters*, April 20, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/pentagon-says-russia-notified-us-ahead-routine-icbm-test-launch-2022-04-20/>].

²³² “Pentagon Press Secretary John F. Kirby Statement Regarding Russian ICBM,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, April 20, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3005764/pentagon-press-secretary-john-f-kirby-statement-regarding-russian-icbm/>].

²³³ Barbara Starr and Zachary Cohen, “US defense secretary being regularly briefed on any potential Russian nuclear moves,” *CNN*, April 20, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/04/20/politics/austin-russia-nuclear-briefings/index.html>].

²³⁴ “Kremlin Insiders Alarmed Over Growing Toll of Putin’s War in Ukraine,” *Bloomberg News*, April 20, 2022 [<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-20/putin-s-war-in-ukraine-has-russian-elites-fearing-global-isolation>].

*the string of military defeats can no longer be glossed over by any government propaganda. ... Putin is under tremendous pressure.*²³⁵

Meanwhile, **government officials from the Baltic states and Ukraine** expressed little concern about a potential use of nuclear weapons by Moscow. According to media reports, Ukrainian officials thought Putin was “bluffing” in order to “distract from Russia’s military failures and give NATO nations an excuse to limit their support for Kyiv.” Baltic officials, in turn, pointed out that Russian nuclear weapons had always been there. There had been more concern “about the Chernobyl nuclear plant when the Russians occupied it,” than about the Kremlin’s threats.²³⁶

In a strong show of solidarity, US Defense Secretary **Austin** and Secretary of State **Blinken** visited Ukrainian President Zelenskyy and his foreign and defense ministers in Kyiv on **April 24** and pledged more than 322 million US dollars additional military aid.²³⁷ The following day, **Blinken** declared that “in terms of Russia’s war aims, Russia has already failed and Ukraine has already succeeded” because Moscow had failed to take Kyiv and to “take away [Ukraine’s] sovereignty and independence.”²³⁸

49.	Escalatory
Austin went further, declaring that the United States now wanted “to see Russia weakened to the degree that it can’t do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine,” a statement some observers interpreted as an expansion of NATO’s goals. ²³⁹	

By contrast, on the same day **Josep Borrell** dampened expectations regarding an EU import ban on Russian oil and gas. “At the moment, we in the EU do not have a unified position on this question,” he explained.²⁴⁰

50.	Warning
In a lengthy April 25 interview, Lavrov somewhat dialed back previous nuclear threats. Although there was a real danger of nuclear war, Russia continued to stand behind the principle of the January 2022 P5 statement that nuclear war was inadmissible, he explained.	
<i>All five [UN Security Council] leaders signed the declaration on the inadmissibility of nuclear war. This is our principled position. ... Now the risks are very significant. I don’t want to artificially inflate these risks. ... The danger is serious, real. It cannot be underestimated. During the</i>	

²³⁵ Melanie Amann and Martin Knobbe, “Es darf keinen Atomkrieg geben (There must be no nuclear war),” *Spiegel*, April 22, 2022 [<https://www.spiegel.de/politik/olaf-scholz-und-der-ukraine-krieg-interview-es-darf-keinen-atomkrieg-geben-a-ae2acbf-8125-4bf5-a273-fbcd0bd8791c>].

²³⁶ David Brennan, “Vladimir Putin’s Ukraine Nuclear Threats Create Dangerous Guessing Game,” *Newsweek*, April 22, 2022 [<https://www.newsweek.com/vladimir-putin-nuclear-weapon-threats-dangerous-guessing-game-ukraine-russia-1700067>].

²³⁷ Simon Lewis, “On Ukraine visit, Blinken, Austin pledge return of U.S. diplomats, more security aid,” *Reuters*, April 25, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/blinken-austin-pledge-return-us-diplomats-more-security-assistance-kyiv-visit-2022-04-25/>].

²³⁸ “Russia failing in its war aims, Antony Blinken says after Ukraine visit - BBC News,” *YouTube account of BBC News*, April 25, 2022 [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82NWq-wm42I>].

²³⁹ Kylie Atwood and Jennifer Hansler, “Austin says US wants to see Russia’s military capabilities weakened,” *CNN*, April 25, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/04/25/politics/blinken-austin-kyiv-ukraine-zelensky-meeting/index.html>], and Julian Borger, “Pentagon chief’s Russia remarks show shift in US’s declared aims in Ukraine,” *The Guardian*, April 25, 2022 [https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/25/russia-weakedend-lloyd-austin-ukraine?utm_term=Au-tofeed&CMP=twg_gu&utm_medium&utm_source=Twitter].

²⁴⁰ “Borrell says no EU agreement on Russian energy embargo,” *Reuters*, April 25, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/borrell-says-no-eu-agreement-russian-energy-embargo-2022-04-25/>].

*Cuban Missile Crisis, there were not many “written” rules. But the rules of conduct were clear enough. Moscow understood how Washington behaved. Washington understood how Moscow behaved. Now there are few rules. ... At the same time, the other instruments of arms control and non-proliferation have been practically destroyed. ... The United States rejected almost all contacts because we were forced to defend the Russians in Ukraine.*²⁴¹

Moreover, Lavrov complained that arms deliveries to Kyiv were “pouring oil on the fire.” The countries involved wanted to “force the Ukrainians to fight with Russia to the last soldier.” Like this, they hoped, this conflict would drag on “longer, so that Russia ... would suffer more and more,” Lavrov declared, emphasizing that these Western supplied weapons would “be a legitimate target for Russian forces.” “Warehouses, including in the west of Ukraine, have become such a target more than once,” he stressed. “How else? NATO is essentially going to war with Russia through a proxy and arming that proxy,” added Lavrov.²⁴²

Western countries appeared largely unimpressed by Lavrov’s remarks. “If Russia threatens the Third World War, then it is a clear sign that Ukraine is succeeding,” commented Latvian Foreign Minister **Edgars Rinkēvičs** on the same day. “We should not give in to Russian blackmail but double down our support to Ukraine and sanctions against Russia,” he added.²⁴³

51.	De-escalatory
<p>Boris Johnson made similar comments, explaining that he did not see a risk of Moscow using nuclear weapons, even if the Russian military experienced further defeats. “Given the massive Russian backing for what [Putin] is doing, given the apparent obliviousness of the Russian media about what is really happening in Ukraine, the paradox is that Putin has far more political space to back down, to withdraw,” explained Johnson.²⁴⁴ His Minister of the Armed Forces James Heappey added, Lavrov’s nuclear allusions were the “sort of bravado” that had been his “trademark over the course of 15 years or so.” There was no “imminent risk of escalation,” Heappey stressed. “What the West is doing to support its allies in Ukraine is very well calibrated,” though “it suits the Kremlin’s narrative to claim that they are somehow in a confrontation with NATO,” he added.²⁴⁵ The risk of nuclear war was “vanishingly small.”²⁴⁶ Nor did Heappey see any particular risk of escalation should British weapons be used against targets in Russia. “There are lots of countries around the world that operate kit that they have</p>	

²⁴¹ “Интервью Министра иностранных дел Российской Федерации С.В.Лаврова программе ‘Большая игра’ на ‘Первом канале’, Москва, 25 апреля 2022 года (Interview with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S.V. Lavrov in the Big Game program on Channel One, Moscow, April 25, 2022),” *Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, April 25, 2022 [https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1810694/].

²⁴² “Интервью Министра иностранных дел Российской Федерации С.В.Лаврова программе ‘Большая игра’ на ‘Первом канале’, Москва, 25 апреля 2022 года (Interview with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S.V. Lavrov in the Big Game program on Channel One, Moscow, April 25, 2022),” *Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, April 25, 2022 [https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1810694/].

²⁴³ Tweet by @edgarsrinkevics, *Twitter*, April 25, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/edgarsrinkevics/status/1518701970781097991?s=20&t=TXViigQY8kFSFWrEBwfXGA>].

²⁴⁴ Michael Howie, “Boris Johnson says he doesn’t expect Putin to resort to nuclear weapons if Russia suffers more Ukraine losses,” *Evening Standard*, April 26, 2022 [<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/boris-johnson-talktv-interview-vladimir-putin-nuclear-weapons-russia-ukraine-b996462.html>].

²⁴⁵ “Lawrow schließt Verhandlungslösung für Ukraine bei Waffenlieferungen aus (Lavrov rules out a negotiated solution for Ukraine on arms deliveries),” *Welt*, April 26, 2022 [<https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article238383059/Lawrow-Keine-Verhandlungslösung-fuer-Ukraine-bei-Waffenlieferungen.html>].

²⁴⁶ Michael Howie, “Boris Johnson says he doesn’t expect Putin to resort to nuclear weapons if Russia suffers more Ukraine losses,” *Evening Standard*, April 26, 2022 [<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/boris-johnson-talktv-interview-vladimir-putin-nuclear-weapons-russia-ukraine-b996462.html>].

imported from other countries; when those bits of kit are used we tend not to blame the country that manufactured it, you blame the country that fired it,” he explained.²⁴⁷

In comparison, the US reaction to Lavrov’s statements was somewhat more cautious. Thus, **Mark A. Milley**, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, condemned Russia’s nuclear saber rattling as “completely irresponsible,” adding that “any time a senior leader of a nation-state starts rattling a nuclear saber, then everyone takes it seriously.”²⁴⁸

Still, Western countries appeared increasingly determined to support Ukraine. On **April 26**, more than 40 countries gathered for defense talks at the US air base in Ramstein, Germany, to coordinate the delivery of military assistance to Ukraine. In this context, German Defense Minister **Lambrecht** promised Berlin would “facilitate the delivery of Gepard self-propelled anti-aircraft guns to Ukraine,” – a noticeable change in direction from Germany’s previous hesitancy regarding the delivery of heavy weapons.²⁴⁹ US Defense Secretary **Austin** even expressed optimism that Ukrainian could win the war if it had “the right equipment.”²⁵⁰ According to subsequent media reports, US officials including **Sullivan** and **Burns** however qualified Austin’s statements about a Ukrainian victory and the need to weaken Russia in behind the scenes discussions with allies. The White House merely wanted “to force Putin to understand that he could not win the war.”²⁵¹ Anonymous official sources also confirmed that **Biden** had asked Blinken and Austin to tone down their rhetoric, worrying they were setting “unrealistic expectations” talking “about winning in Ukraine.”²⁵²

52.	Escalatory
In an April 27 briefing, Pentagon spokesperson Kirby condemned Russian nuclear rhetoric, including Lavrov’s recent remarks, as “irresponsible,” but refused to speculate on a potential Russian nuclear use.	
<i>Raising the specter of nuclear confrontation is irresponsible. It's certainly not what you would expect from a modern nuclear power... Certainly, nobody wants to see, or nobody should want to see it escalate into the nuclear realm. And there's no reason that it should. Mr. Putin can do the right thing right now by ending the war, moving his forces out of Ukraine, sitting down in good faith with President Zelensky and coming up with a negotiated settlement.. ... I'm not going to again, speculate here about what Russia may or may not do with [tactical nuclear weapons] or any other system. ... we're monitoring [the nuclear threats] every single day as best, we can. And</i>	

²⁴⁷ Elly Blake, “Ukraine can hit Russia with weapons supplied by UK, says armed forces minister,” *Evening Standard*, April 26, 2022 [<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/ukraine-russia-invasion-weapons-supplied-uk-james-heapey-b996382.html>].

²⁴⁸ Zachary Cohen, Ellie Kaufman and Michael Conte, “Exclusive: Top US general tells CNN ‘global international security order’ is at stake following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine,” *CNN*, April 26, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/04/26/politics/mark-milley-interview-cnn/index.html>].

²⁴⁹ Phil Stewart, “At defence talks in Germany, U.S. says world galvanized against Russia’s invasion,” *Reuters*, April 26, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/us-hosts-ukraine-talks-germany-war-enters-critical-phase-2022-04-25/>].

²⁵⁰ Laura Wolf, Kerstin Rottmann and Frank Stocker, “Wir haben das Gefühl, dass es einen Moment der Gelegenheit gibt (We feel there is a moment of opportunity),” *Welt*, April 24, 2022 [<https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article238356525/Ukraine-News-Guterres-besucht-Moskau-Haben-das-Gefuehl-dass-es-einen-Moment-der-Gelegenheit-gibt.html>].

²⁵¹ Christian Esch et al., “Wer hat welchen Plan dafür, wie der Krieg enden soll? (Who has what plan for how the war should end?),” *Spiegel*, May 27, 2022 [<https://www.spiegel.de/ausland/ukraine-wie-endet-ein-krieg-der-von-einer-nuklearen-grossmacht-gestartet-wurde-a-9e9bdb9a-1e5b-4f4a-ae0e-ad9d73204409>].

²⁵² Carol E. Lee et al., “When the secretaries of Defense and State said publicly the U.S. wants Ukraine to win and weaken Russia, Biden said tone it down,” *NBC News*, June 16, 2022 [<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/secretaries-defense-state-said-publicly-us-wanted-ukraine-win-biden-sa-rcna33826>].

we continue to see nothing that gives us cause to change our strategic nuclear deterrent posture. And we're confident that in our ability to defend the homeland from that perspective, as well as our allies and partners.

In addition, Kirby confirmed Austin's earlier statement that Washington did "[not] want to see Russia in a position to be able to do [something like the invasion of Ukraine] again." Instead it wanted "to see Ukraine win" and "able to defend itself." Russia should not be allowed to remain "in a position going forward, where they haven't suffered consequences for this unprovoked invasion," Kirby stressed.²⁵³

53.	Escalatory
On the same day, Putin issued another veiled nuclear threat, warning third parties against interfering in the war in Ukraine. This would trigger an immediate reaction.	
<i>If someone intends to intervene on what is happening from the outside and creates unacceptable strategic threats for us, then they should know that our response to oncoming strikes will be swift, lightning fast. We have all the tools for this, ones that no one can brag about, and we won't brag—we will use them if needed—and I want everyone to know this. All the decisions have been made in this regard.</i> ²⁵⁴	

54.	Warning
The following day, on April 28 , US Ambassador to Russia John Sullivan showed himself and Washington undeterred by this renewed Russian threat making, instead confirming the new broader US goals in the war as laid out by previous US statements. Accordingly, Washington would "do all" it could to ensure that the Russian decision to invade was "a strategic defeat for [Putin] and his government, and not a victory for him in Ukraine." While Russia's nuclear rhetoric was not new, it had recently escalated in "a dramatically irresponsible way," noted Sullivan. Washington by contrast was not engaging in "irresponsible rhetoric with respect to nuclear weapons" and was "prepared to deter nuclear aggression against the United States." Hence: "We won't succumb to nuclear blackmail," nor "tolerate nuclear saber rattling and nuclear brinksmanship," Sullivan concluded. ²⁵⁵	

55.	Warning
In parallel, also on April 28 , Biden however appeared to implicitly acknowledge Russian concerns over external interference in Ukraine. Even before the war he had "made clear" that Washington would "[not] send US troops to fight Russian troops in Ukraine, but ... would provide robust military assistance" and "try to unify the Western world against Russia's aggression," he explained. "Despite the disturbing rhetoric coming out of the Kremlin, the facts are plain for everybody to see," Biden declared. "We're not attacking Russia; we're helping Ukraine defend itself against Russian aggression," including with significant intelligence and military assistance.	

²⁵³ "Pentagon Press Secretary John F. Kirby Holds a Press Briefing," *Website of the US Department of Defense*, April 27, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3012823/pentagon-press-secretary-john-f-kirby-holds-a-press-briefing/>].

²⁵⁴ Maureen Breslin "Putin warns of 'lightning fast' response if any nation intervenes in Ukraine war," *The Hill*, April 28, 2022 [<https://thehill.com/policy/international/russia/3469863-putin-warns-of-lightning-fast-response-if-any-nation-intervenes-in-ukraine-war/>], and "Putin issues new threat to countries intervening in Ukraine," *CNN*, April 27, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2022/04/27/putin-threat-ukraine-ip-vpx.cnn>].

²⁵⁵ Jennifer Hansler, "Putin's war on Ukraine has 'driven US-Russia relations into the depths,' US ambassador to Moscow says," *CNN*, April 28, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/04/28/politics/us-ambassador-russia-sullivan-cnn/index.html>].

Yet, Biden rejected Russian claims that the war in Ukraine was a “life-or-death struggle” and a Russia-NATO “proxy war.” These statements were concerning, explained Biden, because they showed “the desperation that Russia is feeling about their abject failure in being able to do what they set out to do in the first instance.”

Instead of saying that the ... Ukrainians, equipped with some capability to resist Russian forces, are ... [causing Moscow's military failures in Ukraine], they've got to ... tell their people the United States and all of NATO is engaged ... in taking out Russian troops and tanks. ... It's an excuse for their failure. But ...no one should be making idle comments about the use of nuclear weapons. ... It's irresponsible.

Asked whether he was concerned that Russia might start acting as if it was engaged in a proxy war with Washington, Biden said the United States was “prepared for whatever they do.” However, the United States would only send military assistance, not troops, to Ukraine.²⁵⁶

On **April 29**, a senior US defense official once again put in perspective escalation concerns, explaining that though Washington continued to “monitor Russia’s nuclear capabilities every day,” it did “not assess that there is a threat of the use of nuclear weapons ... [or] to NATO territory.”²⁵⁷

56.	De-escalatory
<p>The same day, April 29, Lavrov qualified his earlier statements about the risks of nuclear war. His words had been taken out of context. In fact, he had stressed that Russia had been “champions of making pledges by all nuclear countries never to start a nuclear war” and had repeatedly insisted on such a declaration with other nuclear powers. Lavrov meant the declarations by Russia and the United States, as well as by the P5 states, that a nuclear war could not be won, which he claimed had grown out of Moscow’s initiative. Referring to a statement by Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki that Warsaw would “welcome” a deployment of US nuclear weapons to Poland, Lavrov declared that it was Western states, like Poland and Ukraine, that were using dangerous nuclear rhetoric.</p> <p><i>We never were playing with such dangerous [nuclear rhetoric]. ... We should all insist on the statements made by the P5, never ever there could be a nuclear war. But to make sure that this is the case, the West must discipline speakers like our Ukrainian and Polish colleagues who see no danger in playing with such very, very risky words.</i></p> <p>In addition, Lavrov clarified that Russia did not see itself at war with NATO, but that Western arms deliveries were a legitimate military target for Russian forces once they reached Ukrainian territory.</p> <p><i>We do not see ourselves at war with NATO because this is exactly another step ... to increase the risks of what we just discussed. Unfortunately, NATO it seems considers itself to be at war with Russia. NATO and the European Union leaders ... they bluntly, publicly and persistently say Putin must fail, Russia must be defeated. ... As soon as these [Western] weapons are reaching Ukrainian territory, they are fair game for our special operation.</i>²⁵⁸</p>	

²⁵⁶ “Remarks by President Biden on the Request to Congress for Additional Funding to Support Ukraine,” *Website of the White House*, April 28, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/04/28/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-request-to-congress-for-additional-funding-to-support-ukraine/>].

²⁵⁷ “U.S. sees no threat of Russia using nuclear weapons despite rhetoric – official,” *Reuters*, April 29, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/us-sees-no-threat-russia-using-nuclear-weapons-despite-rhetoric-official-2022-04-29/>].

²⁵⁸ “Full interview with Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov,” *YouTube account of Al Arabiya English*, April 29, 2022 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_DwOZOajfY4 (from 19:13)].

Lavrov made similar remarks again on **May 1**, claiming that his nuclear statements had been misrepresented by Western media.

*The Western mass media and Western politicians misrepresent what Russian institutions say. When they talk about [nuclear] threats and ask me how real these threats are, I always answer like this: Russia has never stopped making agreements that will ensure that war will not emerge. We proposed to our American colleagues to repeat what Gorbachev and Reagan had said in 1987 and to accept a declaration confirming that a nuclear war would have no winners. We could not convince the Trump administration, but the Biden administration agreed. And in 2021 in Geneva, Putin and Biden accepted that declaration on our initiative. There was also a proposal by Putin to convene a summit of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, but the United States and Britain put the brakes on it.*²⁵⁹

May 2022: Backpedalling to the official doctrine

On **May 2**, a senior adviser to Zelenskyy, **Andriy Yermak**, stated that he personally did not believe Russia would use a nuclear weapon.

*The people who make these decisions want to live—and if they start to use nuclear weapons it will be the end, not just for some soldier ... It will be a new nuclear war and nobody knows who would be alive after this.*²⁶⁰

In the meantime, nuclear escalation remained a concern in Washington. On **May 3**, news outlets in the United States reported on an intelligence assessment for the White House on the risk of Russia using nuclear weapons. An anonymous intelligence official told journalists that while Putin's threats were becoming less credible through their constant repetition, escalation had become "a true danger" as Moscow was increasingly dissatisfied with its war effort and Western weapons deliveries were turning the tide of the war against Russia. Valery Gerasimov, Russia's military chief, had recently visited Ukraine, potentially with the purpose of informing the generals on the ground of future war plans, US officials speculated. "At this point, no one thinks that nuclear escalation will occur on the battlefield or originate in Ukraine," said one US policymaker. "But if nuclear escalation occurs, they [Russian generals in Ukraine] need to know what measures are expected from them during the shock period that the use of a WMD [weapon of mass destruction] would provoke. Do they attack? Do they hunker down and prepare for retaliation? Do they withdraw to Russia to defend the state?" According to media reports, US officials appeared particularly concerned about a nuclear demonstration strike. This is "definitely part of Russia's repertoire," explained a US Strategic Command official. As Putin would find himself in a situation where he was "back against the wall," with "no prospects of salvaging the war," and feeling "the bite of

²⁵⁹ "Lavrov in esclusiva su 'Zona Bianca': 'Russia non ha mai smesso dialogo per evitare Guerra Mondiale' | 'L'Italia in prima fila contro di noi, una sorpresa negativa' (Lavrov exclusively on 'White Zone': 'Russia has never stopped dialogue to avoid World War' | 'Italy in the front row against us, a negative surprise')," *Tgcom24*, May 1, 2022 [https://www.tgcom24.media-set.it/mondo/lavrov-in-esclusiva-su-zona-bianca-russia-non-ha-mai-smesso-dialogo-per-evitare-guerra-mondiale_49548127-202202k.shtml].

²⁶⁰ Deborah Haynes, "Ukraine war: President Zelenskyy's top aide says he doesn't think Russia will launch nuclear strike," *Sky News*, May 2, 2022 [<https://news.sky.com/story/ukraine-war-president-zelenskyy-s-top-aide-says-he-doesnt-think-russia-will-launch-nuclear-strike-12604098>].

economic sanctions,” it would be “shock” that “might be what he needs to survive.” It was “counterintuitive, but he could get to the place where stopping the fighting is his priority, through any means necessary,” a US official concluded.²⁶¹

Events on the ground did little to dispel concerns in Washington. On **May 4**, Belarus launched “unannounced combat drills,” likely in response to US and NATO exercises planned in Europe over the course of the month of May. UK intelligence suggested the exercise aimed to “deter Ukrainian forces,” although it did not pose a concrete threat to Kyiv.²⁶²

57.	Warning
Also on May 4 , the Russian defense ministry announced it had simulated nuclear strikes in Kaliningrad. Around 100 Russian servicemen practiced “electronic launches” of nuclear-capable Iskander mobile ballistic missile systems, also carrying out a maneuver to change their position in order to avoid “a possible retaliatory strike,” the ministry added. ²⁶³ It remained unclear, whether this was just a routine exercise, or whether it involved any political signaling.	

Meanwhile, questions on the size and intent of US military aid to Ukraine resurfaced. A *New York Times* article claiming on **May 4** that “US intelligence” was “helping Ukraine kill Russian generals” caused a stir. The article cited anonymous US officials saying that US intelligence had enabled Ukraine to kill Russian generals.²⁶⁴ Biden officials immediately pushed back. On the same evening, National Security Council spokesperson **Adrienne Watson** called the story’s headline “misleading and the way it is framed ... irresponsible.” She explained: “The United States provides battlefield intelligence to help the Ukrainians defend their country. We do not provide intelligence with the intent to kill Russian generals.”²⁶⁵

These disclaimers notwithstanding, on **May 5**, anonymous US officials were quoted by *NBC News* saying that US intelligence had enabled Kyiv to sink Russia’s Moskva vessel by identifying the ship and its location prior to the Ukrainian attack. However, the officials stressed that the US government “did not know in advance that Ukraine was going to target the Moskva ... and was not involved in the decision to strike. Maritime intelligence is shared with Ukraine to help it defend against attack from Russian ships.”²⁶⁶ In a subsequent statement, Pentagon spokesperson **Kirby** stressed that the US government did “not provide intelligence on the location of senior military leaders on the battlefield or participate in the targeting decisions of the Ukrainian military.” Rather: “Ukraine combines information that we and other partners provide with the intelligence that they themselves are gathering on the battlefield, and

²⁶¹ William M. Arkin, “What Putin’s General Was Doing in Ukraine, According to Top Secret Report,” *Newsweek*, May 3, 2022 [<https://www.newsweek.com/what-putins-general-was-doing-ukraine-according-top-secret-report-1702801>].

²⁶² “Russian War Report: Belarus launches “combat preparedness test,” *Atlantic Council*, May 6, 2022 [<https://www.atlantic-council.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/russian-war-report-belarus-preparedness-test/#belarus>].

²⁶³ “Russia Simulates Nuclear Strikes Near EU,” *The Moscow Times*, May 11, 2022 [<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/05/05/russia-simulates-nuclear-capable-strikes-near-eu-a77586>].

²⁶⁴ Julian E. Barnes, Helene Cooper and Eric Schmitt, “U.S. Intelligence Is Helping Ukraine Kill Russian Generals, Officials Say,” *The New York Times*, May 4, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/04/us/politics/russia-generals-killed-ukraine.html>].

²⁶⁵ Alexander Ward and Quint Forgey, “Biden admin pushes back on NYT’s killer Ukraine story,” *Politico*, May 5, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/05/05/biden-admin-pushes-back-on-nyts-killer-ukraine-story-00030420>].

²⁶⁶ Ken Dilanian, Courtney Kube and Carol E. Lee, “U.S. intel helped Ukraine sink Russian flagship Moskva, officials say,” *NBC News*, May 5, 2022 [<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/us-intel-helped-ukraine-sink-russian-flagship-moskva-officials-say-rcna27559>].

then they make their own decisions and they take their own actions.”²⁶⁷ In response to the NBC story on the Moskva, Kirby also said that the US government was “not involved in the Ukrainians’ decision to strike the ship or in the operation they carried out.” Washington had had “no prior knowledge” of Ukraine’s intent to target the ship. “The Ukrainians have their own intelligence capabilities to track and target Russian naval vessels, as they did in this case,” Kirby concluded.²⁶⁸

According to an anonymous official, President **Biden** also became involved on **May 6**, when he called CIA Director Burns, Director of National Intelligence Haines, and Defense Secretary Austin to express his concerns over the leaks, which “undermined the US goal of helping Ukraine.”²⁶⁹

58.	De-escalatory
<p>Russian officials nonetheless continued to march back Putin’s nuclear narratives. On May 5, Russian Ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov explained that nuclear weapons could only “be used in response to the use of WMD against Russia and its allies, or in the event of aggression against our country, when the very existence of the state is jeopardized.” The decision to raise the alert level of Russia’s deterrent forces had been “misinterpreted” by the West. As had been explained by Shoigu, the alert had been “only about the work shifts of strategic forces commands which began to perform combat duties with reinforced personnel.” This meant that Russia had “increased its vigilance against the backdrop of extremely confrontational statements by Western countries, including NATO member states that possess nuclear weapons,” clarified Antonov. He concluded: Russia did not “threaten the United States and its European allies, but, on the contrary, is making every effort to prevent the escalation of the Ukrainian crisis. ... We are compelled to warn of the emerging risks associated with the intervention of NATO states into the Russian special military operation.”</p> <p>In contrast, the “current generation of NATO politicians clearly does not take the nuclear threat seriously,” Antonov complained, pointing at what he saw as “a flurry of blatant misrepresentation of Russian officials’ statements on our country’s nuclear policy.” Moreover, he reiterated claims that Ukraine had intended to obtain nuclear weapons and had a biological weapons program, while criticizing Poland’s openness to host US nuclear weapons.</p> <p>Nevertheless, Antonov also highlighted Russia’s interest in reaching “agreements that will guarantee that a catastrophic confrontation will not be unleashed,” pointing to Moscow’s efforts to restate that there could be no winners in a nuclear war with Biden and the other P5 states. Further, he stressed the importance of the New START agreement as a “universally recognized gold standard in the sphere of maintaining strategic stability and transparency between the major nuclear powers,” claiming that “Russia has repeatedly drawn the attention of the United States that it is important to continue the joint work on an agreement that could replace New START and accommodate new realities of international security and development of military technologies.”²⁷⁰</p>	

²⁶⁷ “Pentagon Press Secretary John F. Kirby Holds a Press Briefing,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, May 5, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3022007/pentagon-press-secretary-john-f-kirby-holds-a-press-briefing/>].

²⁶⁸ Ken Dilanian, Courtney Kube and Carol E. Lee, “U.S. intel helped Ukraine sink Russian flagship Moskva, officials say,” *NBC News*, May 5, 2022 [<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/us-intel-helped-ukraine-sink-russian-flagship-moskva-officials-say-rcna27559>].

²⁶⁹ Shane Harris and Dan Lamothe, “Intelligence-sharing with Ukraine designed to prevent wider war,” *The Washington Post*, May 11, 2022 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/05/11/ukraine-us-intelligence-sharing-war/>].

²⁷⁰ Tom O’Connor, “Russia Ambassador to U.S. Says NATO Not Taking Nuclear War Threat Seriously,” *Newsweek*, May 5, 2022 [<https://www.newsweek.com/russia-ambassador-us-says-nato-not-taking-nuclear-war-threat-seriously-1703968>].

59.	De-escalatory
The same narrative was peddled in Moscow. On May 6 , the Russian Foreign Ministry's Deputy Spokesman Alexey Zaitsev reaffirmed the fact that Russia would not use nuclear weapons in Ukraine, but would do so only in accordance with the scenarios set out in its nuclear doctrine. "Scenarios for Russia's possible use of nuclear weapons are clearly spelled out in Russian doctrine. They are not applicable to tasks set in the special military operation in Ukraine," emphasized Zaitsev. "Russia adheres to the principle that there can be no winners in a nuclear war and it must not be unleashed." ²⁷¹	
60.	Warning
In Washington, former officials emphasized the "game changing" nature of a Russian nuclear employment. On May 6 , former nuclear policy Pentagon official Leonor Tomero told US outlets that Russian nuclear use would "galvanize the whole world" against Moscow. "We should make clear that it would have devastating consequences," she stressed. Civilian victims in particular would create a "strong push" for a direct US intervention. ²⁷²	
61.	Warning
Against this background of nuclear signaling and counter-signaling, it was unclear whether France's actions were intentional or not. On May 7 , an inauguration ceremony took place for the recently re-elected French president Emmanuel Macron . The celebrations symbolically focused on deterrence with a troops review including forces linked to nuclear deterrence. ²⁷³	
62.	Warning
In Washington, the intelligence community remained cautious. On May 7 , CIA Director Burns warned that Putin was "in a frame of mind in which he doesn't believe he can afford to lose." The intelligence community saw no "practical evidence at this point of Russian planning, deployment or even potential use of tactical nuclear weapons." But: "Given the kind of sabre-rattling we've heard from the Russian leadership, we can't take lightly ... those possibilities." The current second phase of the war was "at least as risky a phase as that first phase we saw over the first seven or eight weeks of the conflict, and maybe even riskier in some ways too," he added. ²⁷⁴	

Other former officials also underlined the "dramatic nature" of a Russian nuclear use. On **May 9**, former US Secretary of State and National Security Advisor **Henry Kissinger** noted that a Russian nuclear use would be a game changer requiring a significant US response, and that the US government would better think now about what to do in such a scenario. Both sides had to "understand" the "inner red line" of the "opposite number." It was unclear for how long the conventional escalation could continue. At some point, one side would decide that additional conventional escalation would strain "society to a point that will limit its fitness to conduct international policy as a great power in the future." Kissinger did not know when that point would be reached, but subsequent escalation would involve "moving into a category of weapons that in 70 years of their existence have never been used." He concluded: "If that line is

²⁷¹ "Russia has no intention to employ nuclear weapons in Ukraine, says diplomat," *TASS*, May 6, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1447783>] and "Russia says it won't use nuclear weapons in Ukraine," *Reuters*, May 6, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/video/watch/idOV621306052022RP1>].

²⁷² Felicia Schwartz and Demetri Sevastopulo, "How the west became less anxious about Russia's nuclear threat," *Financial Times*, May 6, 2022 [<https://www.ft.com/content/41fc6e5d-6e39-440d-97f2-cf7c517fc99b>].

²⁷³ Clea Caulcutt, "Playbook Paris (Paris Playbook)," *Politico*, May 6, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/playbook-paris/rene-top-depart-grand-deballage-au-ps-macron-2-0/>].

²⁷⁴ William Burns, "Transcript: Vladimir Putin 'doesn't believe he can afford to lose' — William Burns, CIA director," *Financial Times*, May 7, 2022 [<https://www.ft.com/content/bd87fafd-1f9c-4dcd-af64-940cf9495ce5>].

crossed, that will be an extraordinarily significant event. Because we have not gone through globally what the next dividing lines would be. One thing we could not do in my opinion is just accept it.”²⁷⁵

63.	De-escalation
Some evidence suggests that Moscow also sought to signal restraint. On May 9 , Russia celebrated the 77 th anniversary of the end of World War II with a Victory Day Parade in Moscow. On May 7 , media had reported that the Russian Defense Ministry had announced a fly-past maneuver with a Il-80 nuclear-command airplane. ²⁷⁶ However, this component of the parade was cancelled “due to the weather,” according to Kremlin spokesperson Peskov – although the weather in Moscow was sunny and clear. ²⁷⁷ In in speech at the military parade, Putin drew parallels between World War II and Russia’s war in Ukraine, and again blamed the West, notably NATO, and the government in Kyiv for the situation. The Alliance’s expansion had “forced” Russia to launch “a pre-emptive strike at the aggression.” Russian soldiers in Ukraine were “defending today what [their] fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers fought for. The wellbeing and security of their Motherland was their top priority in life,” said Putin. ²⁷⁸ And yet, the Russian leader neither mentioned nuclear weapons nor announced a general mobilization, as some observers had expected him to do. ²⁷⁹	

64.	De-escalation
The same line was toed in Moscow. The next day, May 10 , officials again emphasized the official nuclear doctrine. Asked if Russia would rule out a pre-emptive tactical nuclear strike on Ukraine, Alexander Grushko , Russia’s Deputy Foreign Minister said that a decision on the possible use of nuclear weapons was clearly set out in Russia’s military doctrine. “We have a military doctrine – everything is written there,” Grushko was quoted as saying. ²⁸⁰	

65.	Warning
In Washington, US intelligence officials warned that the conflict would be prolonged and escalation remained possible. On May 10 , Director of National Intelligence Haines provided another intelligence assessment of the ongoing war in a Testimony on Global Threats and National Security for the Senate Armed Services Committee. Putin was “preparing for prolonged conflict” during which he still intended to “achieve goals beyond the Donbas” as he “most likely” also judged that had “a greater ability and willingness to endure challenges than his adversaries.” Putin was “probably counting on US and EU resolve to weaken,” Haines explained. In this context, she dampened hopes of a negotiated solution as long as both sides “believe they can continue to make progress militarily.” However, she warned, “Putin faces a mismatch between his ambitions and Russia’s current conventional military capabilities.” Therefore, “the next few months could see us moving along a more unpredictable and	

²⁷⁵ Henry Kissinger, “‘We are now living in a totally new era’ — Henry Kissinger,” *Financial Times*, May 9, 2022 [<https://www.ft.com/content/cd88912d-506a-41d4-b38f-0c37cb7f0e2f>].

²⁷⁶ “Putin to send nuclear ‘doomsday’ warning on 9 May,” *The Guardian*, May 6, 2022 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2022/may/06/russia-ukraine-war-rescue-operations-to-resume-in-mariupol-hellscape-un-says-amid-rumours-russia-wants-to-claim-city-for-victory-day-live?page=with:block-627534218f089d6a6e498bf8#block-627534218f089d6a6e>].

²⁷⁷ Isabel van Brugen, “Russia Cancels Military Flyovers on Victory Day Amid ‘Adverse Weather’,” *Newsweek*, May 9, 2022 [<https://www.newsweek.com/russia-cancels-military-flyovers-victory-day-may-9-adverse-weather-1704656>].

²⁷⁸ “Victory Parade on Red Square,” *Website of the President of Russia*, May 9, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/68366>].

²⁷⁹ Holly Ellyatt, “All-out war on Ukraine? Putin could be gearing up for something big this ‘Victory Day’,” *CNBC*, May 9, 2022 [<https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/06/putin-could-look-to-declare-victory-in-ukraine-by-may-9-victory-day.html>].

²⁸⁰ Guy Faulconbridge, “Possible nuclear strike Russia says it is all our military doctrine,” *Reuters*, May 10, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/possible-nuclear-strike-russia-says-its-all-our-military-doctrine-2022-05-10/>].

potentially escalatory trajectory. At the very least, ... the dichotomy will usher in a period of more ad hoc decision-making in Russia.” Current trends increase “the likelihood that President Putin will turn to more drastic means,” including “potentially escalatory military actions,” continued Haines.

However, **Haines** interpreted Russia’s nuclear rhetoric as an attempt “to deter the White House Press Secretary **Jen Psaki** saw the Russian decision as part of a typical pattern of the Kremlin, artificially fabricating threats to justify further aggressive actions. Russia had not been threatened by NATO or Ukraine at any time, she said. The United States had the ability to defend itself, but it also had to speak out against what Putin was doing, Psaki continued, noting that Washington was “open” to providing additional assistance to Ukraine.²⁸¹ and the West from increasing lethal aid to Ukraine and to respond to public comments of the US and NATO Allies that suggest expanded Western goals in the conflict. If Putin perceives the United States is ignoring his threats, he may try to signal to Washington the heightened danger of its support to Ukraine by authorizing another large nuclear exercise involving a major dispersal of mobile, intercontinental missiles, heavy bombers, strategic submarines,” she elaborated. But: Putin “would only authorize the use of nuclear weapons if he perceived an existential threat to the Russian state or regime,” she noted. “That could be the case in the event that he perceives that he is losing the war in Ukraine and that NATO, in effect, is either intervening or about to intervene., which would obviously contribute to a perception that he is about to lose the war in Ukraine,” explained Haines. She also emphasized that “with tensions this high there’s always an enhanced potential for miscalculation, unintended escalation, which we hope our intelligence can help to mitigate.”²⁸²

In line with this assessment, the White House appeared concerned about pushing Moscow into a corner. On **May 10**, **Biden** expressed the fear that Putin had miscalculated, expecting NATO to fall apart, and now remained without a “way out.” The Russian President was a “very, very, very calculating man.” He was now faced with European and transatlantic unity. “And the problem I worry about now is that he doesn’t have a way out right now, and I’m trying to figure out what we do about that,” Biden said.²⁸³

On the same day, however, **Macron** somewhat dampened this notion of European and transatlantic unity. There would be no quick path to EU membership for Ukraine, a process that would “take several years, and most likely several decades.” The Europeans were working to “preserve the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine so that peace returns to our continent.” It was “up to Ukraine alone to define the conditions for negotiations with Russia” and the Europeans’ “duty” was “to stand with Ukraine to achieve the ceasefire, then build peace.” “We will then be there to rebuild Ukraine as Europeans, always,” Macron stressed. Yet, he also added that Europe was “not at war with Russia” and warned of humiliating Putin “because in the end, when peace returns to European soil, we will need to build new security balances and we will need, together, to never give in to the temptation of humiliation, nor the spirit of revenge, because these have already in the past wreaked enough havoc on the roads to

²⁸¹ “‘This Week’ Transcript 2-27-22: White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki, Sen. Tom Cotton & Amb. Oksana Markarova,” *ABC News*, February 27, 2022 [<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/week-transcript-27-22-white-house-press-secretary/story?id=83130361>].

²⁸² “Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines Testimony on Global Threats and National Security,” *C-SPAN*, May 10, 2022 [<https://www.c-span.org/video/?519983-1/us-believes-russia-preparing-prolonged-conflict-ukraine> (from 12:00)].

²⁸³ “Remarks by President Biden at a Democratic National Committee Fundraiser,” *Website of the White House*, May 9, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/05/10/remarks-by-president-biden-at-a-democratic-national-committee-fundraiser-4/>].

peace.”²⁸⁴ Some observers interpreted this comment as a sign that France wanted to find a compromise solution by making concessions to Russia.²⁸⁵

Meanwhile, similar statements came from Italian Prime Minister **Mario Draghi** on **May 11**. “We must continue to support Ukraine and put pressure on Moscow, but also ... begin to ask ourselves how to build peace. The negotiation process is very difficult, but the first point is how to build this negotiation process,” explained Draghi. Yet, “this peace must be the peace that Ukraine wants, not a peace imposed by a certain type of ally or by others,” he emphasized.

Media reports from **May 11** provided some additional detail on earlier coverage of US intelligence sharing with Ukraine. US and Ukrainian officials had reportedly confirmed that Washington was providing “information about the location and movements of Russian forces ... in real-time, ... [including] satellite imagery and reporting gleaned from sensitive US sources.” As per its intelligence-sharing guidance, the US government however was not supplying intelligence that could be used to target “senior military officers or ministers” or “targets outside Ukraine’s borders.” Doing so, Washington sought to avoid becoming involved in attacks on Russia, which was also the reasoning behind rejecting the Polish proposal to supply Ukraine with MiGs. Moreover, officials stressed, the US did not tell Ukraine to attack particular Russian targets but “would share information about the location of, say, command and control facilities — places where Russian senior officers often tend to be found.” The final decision to strike a particular target lay with Ukraine. If by contrast Washington provided “targeting information to a foreign party ... [it would be] acting as a proxy” according to its own definition, explained former US official **Scott R. Anderson**.²⁸⁶

66.	Warning
From Moscow, Medvedev continued his “cautioning” stance on May 12 . “NATO countries pumping weapons into Ukraine, training troops to use Western equipment, sending in mercenaries and the exercises of Alliance countries near our borders increase the likelihood of a direct and open conflict between NATO and Russia,” he noted. “Such a conflict always has the risk of turning into a full-fledged nuclear war,” Medvedev said. “This will be a disastrous scenario for everyone.” ²⁸⁷	

The Ukrainian government nevertheless rejected the Franco-Italian narrative on a need to accommodate Russia. “We want the Russian army to leave our land — we aren’t on Russian soil,” **Zelenskyy**

²⁸⁴ “Speech by Emmanuel Macron at the closing ceremony of the Conference on the Future of Europe,” *Website of the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union*, May 10, 2022 [<https://presidence-francaise.consilium.europa.eu/en/news/speech-by-emmanuel-macron-at-the-closing-ceremony-of-the-conference-on-the-future-of-europe/>].

²⁸⁵ Zoya Sheftalovich, “Zelenskyy: Macron asked Ukraine to make concessions to help Putin save face,” *Politico*, May 13, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/zelenskyy-macron-asked-ukraine-concession-help-putin-save-face/>], and Matthew Karnitschnig, “Europe’s leaders fall out of key on Ukraine,” *Politico*, May 16, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/europes-leaders-fall-out-of-key-on-ukraine/>].

²⁸⁶ Shane Harris and Dan Lamothe, “Intelligence-sharing with Ukraine designed to prevent wider war,” *The Washington Post*, May 11, 2022 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/05/11/ukraine-us-intelligence-sharing-war/>].

²⁸⁷ Guy Faulconbridge, “Russia warns West over risk of conflict with NATO,” *Reuters*, May 12, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-warns-west-over-risk-conflict-with-nato-2022-05-12/>].

stressed on **May 12**. “We won’t help Putin save face by paying with our territory. That would be unjust.”²⁸⁸ France’s attempts to find a “way out for Russia” were “in vain,” he added.²⁸⁹ On the same day, Foreign Minister **Kuleba** similarly questioned hopes for negotiations to bear fruit quickly. The conditions for negotiations were determined on the battlefield and “now that we feel more confident in the fight, our position in the negotiations is also getting tougher,” he explained. “The real problem is that Russia does not show the desire to participate in real and substantive negotiations.” Kuleba also called for further weapons deliveries, notably rocket launcher systems and aircraft.²⁹⁰

The Russian government meanwhile continued to emphasize the need to avoid a direct clash with NATO. On **May 12**, Kremlin spokesperson **Peskov** noted that “all want to avoid” a direct Russia-NATO clash, Russian media reported. “Russia [wants to avoid it] and, statements to this effect have been repeatedly made by NATO and, most importantly, by Washington, including at the highest level: such statements have been made by President Biden,” he stated.²⁹¹

On **May 13**, **NATO** announced that “NATO Allies and partners were taking part in a series of long-planned military exercises stretching from the High North to the Balkans to enhance the readiness and interoperability of NATO forces.” NATO Spokesperson **Oana Lungescu** explained that “these are regular exercises, planned well before Russia’s brutal and unjustified invasion of Ukraine, but they help to remove any room for miscalculation or misunderstanding about our resolve to protect and defend every inch of Allied territory.”²⁹²

In parallel, officials on both sides of the Atlantic presented their views on the balance between conflict and negotiations. On **May 13**, US Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs **Karen Donfried** responded to Draghi’s call for negotiations, explaining that the US focus remained “on strengthening Ukraine’s hand as much as possible on the battlefield, so that when the time does come Ukraine has as much leverage as possible at the negotiating table.”²⁹³ According to later comments from an anonymous US official, the Administration was at that point not worried about statements urging negotiations over Ukraine by European leaders. Such debates “were not new” but “allies also understand what’s at stake here” and European unity remained at unprecedented levels, the official told journalists.²⁹⁴

²⁸⁸ Zoya Sheftalovich, “Zelenskyy: Macron asked Ukraine to make concessions to help Putin save face,” *Politico*, May 13, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/zelenskyy-macron-asked-ukraine-concession-help-putin-save-face/>], and “Інтерв’ю Президента для проекту Porta a Porta італійського телеканалу Rai 1 (Interview of the President for the Porta a Porta project of the Italian TV channel Rai 1),” *Facebook account of the Office of the President of Ukraine*, May 13, 2022 [<https://www.facebook.com/president.gov.ua/videos/677123696684383/>].

²⁸⁹ Matthew Karnitschnig, “Europe’s leaders fall out of key on Ukraine,” *Politico*, May 16, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/europes-leaders-fall-out-of-key-on-ukraine/>].

²⁹⁰ Clemens Wergin, “‘Wenn sie uns den Krieg aufdrängen, dann schlagen wir zurück’ (‘If they force war on us, we’ll fight back’),” *Welt*, May 12, 2022 [<https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/plus238707129/Ukraines-Aussenminister-Kuleba-Wenn-sie-uns-den-Krieg-aufdraengen-dann-schlagen-wir-zurueck.html>].

²⁹¹ “Kremlin warns against attempts to interfere in Russia’s special operation in Ukraine,” *TASS*, May 12, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1449925>].

²⁹² “Long-planned NATO exercises across Europe get underway,” *Website of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, May 13, 2022 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_195250.htm#:~:text=In%20Estonia%2C%2015%2C000%20troops%20from,Wasp%2Dclass%20landing%20ship%20Kearsarge.].

²⁹³ “Briefing with Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs Karen Donfried on the Secretary’s Upcoming Travel to Germany and France,” *Website of the US Department of State*, May 13, 2022 [<https://www.state.gov/assistant-secretary-for-european-and-eurasian-affairs-karen-donfried-on-the-secretarys-upcoming-travel-to-germany-and-france/>].

²⁹⁴ Matthew Karnitschnig, “Europe’s leaders fall out of key on Ukraine,” *Politico*, May 16, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/europes-leaders-fall-out-of-key-on-ukraine/>].

In fact on the same day, on **May 13**, a phone call took place between US Secretary of Defense **Austin** and Russian Defense Minister **Shoigu**. According to a Pentagon readout of the call, Austin “urged an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine and emphasized the importance of maintaining lines of communication.”²⁹⁵ The call was reportedly initiated by Austin and the first of its kind since the beginning of the war; previous attempts apparently had been declined by the Russian side.²⁹⁶ On the same day, another call took place between German Chancellor **Scholz** and **Putin**, reportedly initiated by the German side.²⁹⁷ “Of course sooner or later you have to come to the point where there have to be diplomatic initiatives again,” commented German government spokesperson **Hebestreit**.²⁹⁸

The German government’s position vis-à-vis Ukraine, however, remained somewhat unclear. In an extraordinary meeting of the German defense committee on **May 13**, **Scholz** reportedly explained that there was an agreement with the United Kingdom, France and the United States not to deliver Western-made tanks to Ukraine, which would include German Leopard tanks.²⁹⁹ According to statements by members of parliament who attended the meeting, which was closed to the public, weapons deliveries also would not go beyond the types of weapons that had already been announced. Further, Scholz announced the phone call with Putin, though not without emphasizing “that the goal [must be] reestablishing the territorial integrity of Ukraine.” FDP spokesperson for defense policy **Markus Faber** caused a stir, reportedly leaving the meeting early together with a number of members of parliament from his party to express his frustration with Chancellor Scholz’s vague answers during the session. In light of strong criticism for this step, which was seen as openly undermining Scholz, Faber later resigned from his position as defense policy spokesperson.³⁰⁰

Following his phone call with **Putin**, **Scholz** further declared on **May 13** that “there must be a ceasefire in Ukraine as quickly as possible.”³⁰¹ Yet, in a subsequent interview on **May 15**, he elaborated that Germany wanted to “help Ukraine defend itself.”³⁰² Berlin wanted to ensure together with its allies that “Russia lays down the weapons and withdraws its troop from Ukraine.” This was why Germany imposed wide-ranging sanctions, explained Scholz. The Russian invasion attempt “must fail,” stressed the Chancellor. Only Ukraine could negotiate for itself. Asked about the risk of nuclear use, Scholz explained that

²⁹⁵ “Readout of Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III’s Call With Russian Minister of Defense Sergey Shoigu,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, May 13, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3030753/readout-of-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iiis-call-with-russian-minister/>].

²⁹⁶ Idrees Ali, “In first since Ukraine invasion, Pentagon chief speaks with Russian counterpart,” *Reuters*, May 13, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/us-defense-chief-urged-immediate-ukraine-ceasefire-call-with-russian-counterpart-2022-05-13/>].

²⁹⁷ “Germany’s Scholz calls Putin for first time in weeks,” *DW*, May 13, 2022 [<https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-scholz-calls-putin-for-first-time-in-weeks/av-61793077>].

²⁹⁸ “Regierungspressekonferenz vom 13. Mai 2022 (Government press conference on May 13, 2022),” *Website of the German Federal Government*, May 13, 2022 [<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/suche/regierungspressekonferenz-vom-13-mai-2022-2039742>].

²⁹⁹ Georg Ismar, “Blockiert Scholz Panzer für die Ukraine?: Der Kanzler und die informelle Nato-Absprache (Is Scholz blocking tanks for Ukraine?: The Chancellor and the informal NATO agreement),” *Tagesspiegel*, May 27, 2022 [<https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/blockiert-scholz-panzer-fuer-die-ukraine-der-kanzler-und-die-informelle-nato-absprache/28377748.html>].

³⁰⁰ Mario Kubina, “Viele Worte, wenig Inhalt? (Many words, little content?),” *Tagesschau*, May 13, 2022 [<https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/scholz-verteidigungsausschuss-103.html>], and “‘Sehr konstruktives Gespräch’ - aber auch Kritik (‘Very constructive discussion’ - but also criticism),” *Tagesschau*, May 13, 2022 [<https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/scholz-verteidigungsausschuss-101.html>].

³⁰¹ Tweet by @Bundestkanzler, *Twitter*, May 13, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/Bundestkanzler/status/1525079306514440194>].

³⁰² Sven Böll, Florian Harms and Miriam Hollstein, “‘Russland hat keines seiner Kriegsziele erreicht’ (‘Russia has not achieved any of its war aims’),” *T-online*, May 15, 2022 [https://www.t-online.de/nachrichten/deutschland/id_92182048/-russland-hat-keines-seiner-kriegsziele-erreicht-olaf-scholz-nach-putin-telefonat.html].

it made “no sense to speculate about this.” However, he warned against ignoring citizens’ fears and stressed that Berlin would not take “any decisions that could lead to a direct confrontation between NATO and Russia.” Echoing Macron’s earlier statements, Scholz also dampened hopes of a quick path to EU membership for Ukraine – “there are clear criteria for joining the EU,” he said. A very different tone was struck by Estonian Prime Minister **Kallas**, however, who explained that “peace can’t be the ultimate goal,” and that “a peace that allows aggression to pay off” remained unacceptable.³⁰³

These national debates notwithstanding, on **May 14**, the **G7** foreign ministers issued a Statement on Russia’s war against Ukraine pledging to “uphold [their] engagement in the support of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, including Crimea, and all states.”³⁰⁴

Military developments also impacted the political environment. On **May 14**, Russia conducted drills with Su-27 fighter jets near Kaliningrad.³⁰⁵ Later on, on **May 16**, Ukrainian forces remaining in a besieged steel plant in Mariupol surrendered to Russian forces as part of a secretly negotiated deal between the belligerents. Wider peace talks were however stalling, despite Russian indications that Moscow might be willing to accept a neutral status for Ukraine following the “Austrian model” as a compromise, media reported.³⁰⁶ According to news reports, Kyiv was increasingly focusing on re-establishing control over Russian-held territories, including those seized in 2014. Against this backdrop, British officials reportedly warned that “any attempt to take back areas such as Crimea” would come with “a much greater threat of the use of chemical or nuclear weapons.” There also seemed to be concerns that Russia could incorporate captured territories into the Russian state through staged referenda and deem “any Ukrainian counterattack there ... an attack on Russia itself” justifying potential nuclear use. According to US and Ukrainian officials, a Ukrainian request for multiple-launch rocket systems (MLRS) had raised escalation concerns in this context.³⁰⁷

Meanwhile, Moscow adopted a moderate tone vis-à-vis Sweden and Finland’s accession to NATO. On **May 16**, **Putin** explained that although Russia had “no problems” with Sweden and Finland, the expansion of NATO military infrastructure to those countries would “certainly evoke a response” on the part of Russia, even if there was “no direct threat to Russia in connection with NATO’s expansion to these countries.”³⁰⁸ Undeterred by this statement, Finland and Sweden submitted official letters requesting to join NATO on **May 18**.³⁰⁹

³⁰³ Steven Erlanger, “Estonia’s Tough Voice on Ukraine Urges No Compromise With Putin,” *The New York Times*, May 16, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/16/world/europe/estonia-kallas-ukraine-russia.html>].

³⁰⁴ “Statement on Russia’s war against Ukraine - G7 Foreign Ministers,” *Website of the German Foreign Office*, May 14, 2022 [[https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/g7-russias-war-against-ukaine/2531274](https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/newsroom/g7-russias-war-against-ukraine/2531274)].

³⁰⁵ “Russian fighter jets take part in Baltic Sea drills, Interfax reports,” *Reuters*, May 14, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russian-fighter-jets-take-part-baltic-sea-drills-interfax-2022-05-14/>].

³⁰⁶ Anton Troianovski and Valerie Hopkins, “With Ukraine Taking Firmer Stance, Peace Talks Grind to a Halt,” *The New York Times*, May 17, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/17/world/europe/ukraine-russia-peace-talks.html>].

³⁰⁷ Vivian Salama and Max Colchester, “Ukraine’s Military Gains Raise Kyiv’s War Aims as Russia Shells Eastern Cities,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 16, 2022 [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraines-military-regains-ground-in-northeast-targets-another-russian-river-crossing-11652695700>].

³⁰⁸ “The Kremlin hosted a meeting of the heads of state of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation,” *Website of the Russian Embassy in Germany*, May 17, 2022 [<https://russische-botschaft.ru/de/2022/05/17/the-kremlin-hosted-a-meeting-of-the-heads-of-state-of-the-collective-security-treaty-organisation/>], and “Putin Says Russia Has No Problem With Sweden or Finland,” *YouTube account of Bloomberg Markets and Finance*, May 16, 2022 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCA_kSDIOfA].

³⁰⁹ “Finland and Sweden submit applications to join NATO,” *Website of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, May 18, 2022 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_195468.htm].

In Washington, the bipartisan consensus on helping Ukraine militarily remained strong. On **May 19**, the US Senate passed an aid package worth 40 billion US dollars for Ukraine. This aid “goes far beyond charity,” explained Republican Senator **Mitch McConnell**. “The future of America’s security and core strategic interests will be shaped by the outcome of this fight,” which was why there should be a “bipartisan supermajority” for this package.³¹⁰ In this context, media cited US officials suggesting that the White House was considering to send more advanced anti-ship missiles, notably the Harpoon and Naval Strike Missile, to Ukraine, possibly through a European ally. However, according to an anonymous US official, European countries did not want to send Harpoons to Ukraine first, fearing a Russian reaction should these missiles sink a Russian vessel.³¹¹

Instead, there were more indications, some European states were keen to see a rapid end of the conflict. On **May 19**, media reported of a four-step peace plan the Italian government had submitted to UN Secretary General Guterres, which would require Ukraine to become a neutral country with security guarantees.³¹²

UK and US officials, however, took a stance against calls for quick ceasefire negotiations and concessions. On **May 19**, UK Foreign Secretary **Truss** declared that she did “not agree with this idea of an exit ramp” voiced by Macron. “Putin must lose in Ukraine and we must see its sovereignty and territorial integrity restored, on this we are very clear,” she explained. The United Kingdom was “not looking for regime change,” but it wanted to “make sure that Russia [was] no longer capable of committing these acts of aggression.” With regard to Russia’s nuclear rhetoric, Truss noted that Moscow’s “various threats ... such as those against Sweden and Finland” could not be “taken into consideration.” And: “What we have to do is support Sweden and Finland in joining NATO, and continue to supply arms to Ukraine to help them regain their territory,” she elaborated.³¹³ In a similar vein the US Ambassador to NATO **Julianne Smith** stated on **May 20** that the US government wanted to see “a strategic defeat for Russia.” She added: “We want Russia to leave Ukraine, we want Russia to stop the violence, stop these indiscriminate brutal attacks on civilians.”³¹⁴

In a guest op-ed on **May 21** in the *New York Times*, Republican Senator **Mitt Romney** argued that “Russia’s use of a nuclear weapon would unarguably be a redefining, reorienting geopolitical event.” Romney suggested that Putin might escalate should he lose in Ukraine and thus fail to achieve “his life’s ambition” to restore Russia’s great power status and face “significant internal challenges to his leadership.” And: “In such a circumstance, he may be able to convince himself that the United States and the West are the reason he invaded Ukraine and that the propaganda he has deployed to justify this immoral invasion

³¹⁰ Jeniffer Scholtes and Connor O’Brien, “Senate clears \$40B Ukraine aid package,” *Politico*, May 19, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/05/19/senate-40-billion-ukraine-aid-bill-00033719>].

³¹¹ Mike Stone, “Exclusive: U.S. aims to arm Ukraine with advanced anti-ship missiles to fight Russian blockade,” *Reuters*, May 20, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/exclusive-us-aims-arm-ukraine-with-advanced-anti-ship-missiles-fight-russian-2022-05-19/>].

³¹² Tommaso Ciriaco, “La pace in 4 tappe. Sul tavolo dell’Onu arriva il piano del governo italiano (Peace in 4 stages. The plan of the Italian government reaches the UN table),” *La Repubblica*, May 19, 2022 [https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2022/05/19/news/piano_pace_governo_italiano_4_tappe-350167027/], and Eric Sylvers, “Italy Circulates 4-Point Peace Plan,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 20, 2022 [<https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/russia-ukraine-latest-news-2022-05-20/card/italy-circulates-4-point-peace-plan-h2o9EfwULf6P1mwDbjdn>].

³¹³ Luigi Ippolito, “Intervista Liz Truss: ‘Non umiliare Putin? Sbagliato: per noi deve perdere’ (Interview Liz Truss: ‘Don’t humiliate Putin? Wrong: for us he must lose’),” *Corriere della sera*, May 19, 2022 [https://www.corriere.it/esteri/22_maggio_19/truss-ministra-esteri-regno-unito-putin-deve-pagare-crimini-b18f80d0-d7a7-11ec-baec-5e239f3efe1e.shtml?refresh_ce].

³¹⁴ Camille Gijs and Hannah Roberts, “Western allies ramp up rhetoric against Russia, want ‘defeat’ of Moscow,” *Politico*, May 20, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/western-allies-nato-us-uk-eu-against-russia-want-to-see-defeat-moscow/>].

was true from the beginning,” wrote Romney. Nevertheless, the West should not “avoid provoking Russia” but rather “continue to give Ukraine all the support it needs to defend itself and win.” For the scenario of a potential nuclear use, the US and NATO Allies “should develop and evaluate a broad range of options,” Romney argued.³¹⁵

European governments, however, appeared split on what military equipment to deliver. On **May 22**, Parliamentary State Secretary in the German Ministry of Defence **Sientje Möller** explained that Germany was not delivering Marder tanks because of an agreement among Western countries not to deliver any Western style infantry fighting vehicles or battle tanks.³¹⁶ The statement, which was thought by analysts to be a voluntary or involuntary leak of an internal agreement among NATO Allies on the kinds of weapons they would not deliver to avoid becoming embroiled in the conflict, was not confirmed by either the German government or by NATO spokespeople. Yet, such an agreement would explain why the Germany Chancellery seemed to be blocking the delivery of such vehicles, despite the Foreign Minister Baerbock and Economics Minister Habeck reportedly advocating such a step, media speculated.³¹⁷ Czech officials, however, denied the existence of such an understanding. Going on record on **May 27**, Czech Deputy Defense Minister **Jan Havranek** explained that there was “no such thing as an informal agreement or ‘ban’ on delivery of particular weapon systems. The Czech government would not support or be part of any such thing.”³¹⁸ In a joint press conference with Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs **Jan Lipavský** on the same day, British Foreign Secretary **Liz Truss** also denied rumors of a NATO agreement to that effect.³¹⁹

Meanwhile, some encouraging signals came out of Berlin. On **May 26**, **Scholz** called Russia a “major nuclear power” engaged in “imperialism” and noted that it was “clear” that Putin would “only seriously negotiate a peace” when he would realize “that he cannot break Ukraine’s defenses.” Scholz reaffirmed Germany’s support for Ukraine, while at the same time emphasizing that he will not do anything “that could make NATO a party to the conflict.” The reason: “That would mean a direct confrontation between atomic powers.” In contrast, the aim was to “make it clear to Putin that there will be no victor’s peace. Ukraine will not accept that – and neither will we.”³²⁰

However, the debate on what military aid to deliver continued in Washington. On **May 27**, Pentagon speaker **Kirby** commented Ukrainian calls for multiple-launch rocket systems (MLRS) stating that the US was “mindful and aware” of these public and private requests from Ukraine but that the decision had not been made.³²¹ US outlets wrote that the White House was likely to send advanced systems, including possibly the MLRS and the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) to Ukraine. However, it was

³¹⁵ Mitt Romney, “We Must Prepare for Putin’s Worst Weapons,” *The New York Times*, May 21, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/21/opinion/putin-nuclear-weapons.html>].

³¹⁶ Mathis Feldhoff, “Panzer aus Deutschland: Wer lügt? (Tanks from Germany: who is lying?),” *ZDF*, May 25, 2022 [<https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/nato-panzer-waffen-ukraine-krieg-russland-100.html>].

³¹⁷ Georg Ismar, “Blockiert Scholz Panzer für die Ukraine?: Der Kanzler und die informelle Nato-Absprache (Is Scholz blocking tanks for Ukraine?: The Chancellor and the informal NATO agreement),” *Tagesspiegel*, May 27, 2022 [<https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/blockiert-scholz-panzer-fuer-die-ukraine-der-kanzler-und-die-informelle-nato-absprache/28377748.html>].

³¹⁸ Tweet by @JanHavranek2, *Twitter*, May 27, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/JanHavranek2/status/1530168599608012800>].

³¹⁹ “Right Now - UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss meets Czech foreign minister Jan Lipavský in Prague,” *YouTube account of Newsfeed, gerade jetzt*, May 27, 2022 [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ECfpAgfKzo>] (ab 11:20)].

³²⁰ „Special Address at Davos 2022 by Olaf Scholz, Federal Chancellor of Germany, in full,” *Website of the World Economic Forum*, May 27, 2022 [<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/05/olaf-scholz-speech-to-davos-2022-in-full/>].

³²¹ “Pentagon Press Secretary John F. Kirby Holds a Press Briefing,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, May 27, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3046797/pentagon-press-secretary-john-f-kirby-holds-a-press-briefing/>].

reportedly only considering short-range ammunition options with a range of up to 45 miles, which would reach further than previously delivered M777 howitzer shells with a range of 15 miles, but fall short of the MLRS' maximum range of 190 miles. Yet, the US government reportedly had already provided funding to Ukraine for the purchase of a Soviet Smerch MLRS with a range of 50 miles from a US allied country.³²²

67.	Warning
Meanwhile, despite – or maybe because – of the ongoing conflict, Russia went ahead with the testing of various systems. On May 28 , it test-launched a nuclear-capable hypersonic Zircon cruise missile, which reached a range of about 1,000km. ³²³	

68.	De-escalatory
Yet, Russian mid-level officials continued to downplay Moscow's nuclear narratives. On May 29 , Russia's ambassador to the United Kingdom Andrey Kelin confirmed that Russia would not use nuclear weapons over Ukraine. According to Russian doctrine tactical nuclear weapons were "not used in conflicts like [the one in Ukraine] at all," he explained. As per its "very strict provisions," tactical nuclear weapons would mainly be used "when the existence of the state is endangered." This had "nothing to do with the current operation," which remained a "limited conventional operation" as indicated by Russia not increasing the number of its forces in Ukraine, he added. ³²⁴	

In Washington, the debate on the range of missiles to be delivered to Kyiv continued. On **May 30**, **Biden** told reporters that the US government was "not going to send to Ukraine rocket systems that can strike into Russia."³²⁵ The statement, which seemed to conflict with previous media reports according to which the White House was likely to send MLRS to Ukraine, was subsequently explained by an anonymous Administration official. Accordingly, a decision on MLRS was still outstanding but "nothing is on the table with long-range strike capabilities," said the official.³²⁶ "Ukraine will get new shipments of precision-guided missiles with longer ranges than Ukrainians have now, but not rockets that can strike deep into Russia," summed up **Michael McFaul**, the Obama Administration's ambassador to Russia.³²⁷ **Medvedev** reportedly called Biden's statement "reasonable" explaining that Russia would have attacked whoever took the "criminal" decision to strike Russian cities.³²⁸

³²² Kyle Balluck and Alexander Bolton, "Biden rules out sending Ukraine rockets that can strike into Russia," *The Hill*, May 30, 2022 [<https://thehill.com/news/administration/3506032-biden-rules-out-sending-ukraine-rockets-that-can-strike-into-russia/>], and John Hudson, "U.S. is preparing to send long-range rocket systems to Ukraine," *The Washington Post*, May 27, 2022 and [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/05/27/artillery-long-range-ukraine-rocket-system/>], and Paul McLeary and Lara Seligman, "U.S. leans toward sending rocket systems to Ukraine," *Politico*, May 27, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/05/27/u-s-sending-rocket-systems-ukraine-00035698>].

³²³ "Тосиспытания в России гиперзвуковой ракеты 'Циркон' с надводного носителя завершены (State tests in Russia of the 'Zircon' hypersonic missile from a surface carrier are completed)," TASS, May 31, 2022 [https://n.tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/14774757?utm_source=t.co&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=t.co&utm_referrer=t.co].

³²⁴ "Russia won't use tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine, says ambassador to UK," *BBC News*, May 29, 2022 [<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61618902>].

³²⁵ Alex Backus, "White House Walks Back Biden Ruling Out Rockets for Ukraine," *Newsweek*, May 30, 2022 [<https://www.newsweek.com/white-house-walks-back-biden-ruling-out-rockets-ukraine-1711491>].

³²⁶ Alex Backus, "White House Walks Back Biden Ruling Out Rockets for Ukraine," *Newsweek*, May 30, 2022 [<https://www.newsweek.com/white-house-walks-back-biden-ruling-out-rockets-ukraine-1711491>], and Dan Sabbagh, "Biden will not supply Ukraine with long-range rockets that can hit Russia," *The Guardian*, May 30, 2022 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/30/biden-will-not-supply-ukraine-with-long-range-rockets-that-can-hit-russia>].

³²⁷ Tweet by @McFaul, *Twitter*, May 30, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/McFaul/status/1531367206948261888>].

³²⁸ Alex Backus, "White House Walks Back Biden Ruling Out Rockets for Ukraine," *Newsweek*, May 30, 2022 [<https://www.newsweek.com/white-house-walks-back-biden-ruling-out-rockets-ukraine-1711491>], and Dan Sabbagh, "Biden

69.	Warning
<p>Finally, the White House attempted to settle the debate in a very public manner. On May 31, President Biden clarified what the US “will and will not do in Ukraine” in an Op-Ed, promising advanced rocket systems to Ukraine but emphasizing that the US would not intervene in the conflict directly. Regarding Russia’s nuclear threats, the US President emphasized the lack of concrete Russian steps towards using nuclear weapons. Yet, he also confirmed previous leaks suggesting that it was the US position that any use of nuclear weapons would have “severe consequences.”</p> <p><i>I’ve decided that we will provide the Ukrainians with more advanced rocket systems and munitions that will enable them to more precisely strike key targets on the battlefield in Ukraine. ...</i></p> <p><i>We do not seek a war between NATO and Russia. As much as I disagree with Mr. Putin, and find his actions an outrage, the United States will not try to bring about his ouster in Moscow. So long as the United States or our allies are not attacked, we will not be directly engaged in this conflict, either by sending American troops to fight in Ukraine or by attacking Russian forces. We are not encouraging or enabling Ukraine to strike beyond its borders. We do not want to prolong the war just to inflict pain on Russia. ...</i></p> <p><i>If Russia does not pay a heavy price for its actions, it will send a message to other would-be aggressors that they too can seize territory and subjugate other countries. It will put the survival of other peaceful democracies at risk. And it could mark the end of the rules-based international order and open the door to aggression elsewhere, with catastrophic consequences the world over.</i></p> <p><i>I know many people around the world are concerned about the use of nuclear weapons. We currently see no indication that Russia has intent to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine, though Russia’s occasional rhetoric to rattle the nuclear saber is itself dangerous and extremely irresponsible. Let me be clear: Any use of nuclear weapons in this conflict on any scale would be completely unacceptable to us as well as the rest of the world and would entail severe consequences.³²⁹</i></p>	

June 2022: Bringing Belarus into the nuclear fold?

According to subsequent media reporting on **June 1**, the **Biden Administration** had been conducting tabletop exercises to assess potential US responses should Russia use tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine or the Black Sea region. Reportedly, it also considered a potential Russian nuclear test. According to intelligence officials, the risk of nuclear use remained low but was “higher than what anyone was projecting before the invasion.” US officials further emphasized that any US response to the use of nuclear weapons would “almost certainly be nonnuclear,” the goal being to “signal immediate de-escalation” but ensure international condemnation. This could mean some mix of economic, diplomatic and military measures.³³⁰

will not supply Ukraine with long-range rockets that can hit Russia,” *The Guardian*, May 30, 2022 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/30/biden-will-not-supply-ukraine-with-long-range-rockets-that-can-hit-russia>].

³²⁹ Joseph R. Biden Jr., “President Biden: What America Will and Will Not Do in Ukraine,” *The New York Times*, May 31, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/31/opinion/biden-ukraine-strategy.html?referringSource=articleShare>].

³³⁰ David E. Sanger and William J. Broad, “Putin’s Threats Highlight the Dangers of a New, Riskier Nuclear Era,” *The New York Times*, June 1, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/01/us/politics/nuclear-arms-treaties.html>].

On the other side of the Atlantic, decisions on weapons deliveries intermingled with energy concerns. On **May 31**, media reported **EU** leaders had reached an agreement to ban the import of Russian oil to the European Union “in principle.”³³¹ However, “Russia’s pipeline oil exports to the EU [would be allowed] to continue temporarily, while seaborne shipments are blocked by the end of the year.” There would also be further exceptions for Hungary and the Czech Republic.³³² On the same day Slovak President **Zuzana Čaputová** announced that Bratislava would provide howitzers to Ukraine “within the next few days,” in addition to the S-300 air defense system and de-mining equipment it had already supplied to Kyiv.³³³ In parallel, German Chancellor **Scholz** declared the German government would backfill military vehicles for Greece to send Soviet-era tanks to Ukraine. “This will now be discussed in very concrete terms between the defense ministries and can then also be implemented quickly,” he explained.³³⁴

Meanwhile, discussions on the NATO-Russia Founding Act resurfaced with US Ambassador to NATO **Smith** stating on **June 1** that the Founding Act did not constrain “decisions that we’re taking as it relates to force posture and Central and Eastern Europe.”³³⁵

Debates on weapons deliveries also continued. On the same **June 1**, media reported the US government might sell MQ-1C Gray Eagle drones to Ukraine, which could be used for “multiple deep strikes on the battlefield against Russia for the first time.”³³⁶ While this was not confirmed by the White House, **Biden** formally announced further military assistance for Ukraine worth 700 million US dollars on the same day, including the HIMARS, an advanced rocket system and munition with a 48 miles range – one of the shorter-range option.³³⁷ According to anonymous US officials, the decision was made only after Ukrainian leaders promised not to strike targets within Russia with these systems.³³⁸ The following day, media reported that UK officials had asked the US government for permission to supply Ukraine with the MLRS, a similar US-made rocket system. According to anonymous sources privy to internal discussions, the United States had in fact decided to send the HIMARS partly to encourage allies to provide similar

³³¹ “EU leaders agree ‘in principle’ on Russia oil embargo - von der Leyen,” *Reuters*, May 31, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-leaders-agree-principle-russia-oil-embargo-von-der-leyen-2022-05-30/>].

³³² Jacopo Barigazzi and Barbara Moens, “EU leaders agree on Russian oil embargo,” *Politico*, May 31, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-leaders-agree-on-russian-oil-embargo/>].

³³³ “Slovakia to provide Ukraine with howitzers - Slovak president,” *Yahoo news*, May 31, 2022 [<https://news.yahoo.com/slovakia-ukraine-howitzers-slovak-president-174626214.html>].

³³⁴ Hans von der Burchard, “Germany announces new deal with Greece to send tanks to Ukraine,” *Politico*, May 31, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-to-enable-ukraine-tank-swap-deal-with-greece-scholz-says/>].

³³⁵ Lara Seligman, Alexander Ward and Quint Forgy, “How a breach at Andrews led to the seizure of a reporter’s phone,” *Politico*, June 1, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/06/01/how-a-breach-at-andrews-led-to-the-seizure-of-a-reporters-phone-00036421>].

³³⁶ Mike Stone, “US plans to sell armed drones to Ukraine in coming days –sources,” *Reuters*, June 1, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/exclusive-us-plans-sell-armed-drones-ukraine-coming-days-sources-2022-06-01/>].

³³⁷ “Statement by President Joe Biden on Additional Security Assistance to Ukraine,” *Website of the White House*, June 1, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/06/01/statement-by-president-joe-biden-on-additional-security-assistance-to-ukraine-2/>], and Alexander Ward, Lara Seligman and Paul McLeary, “U.K. seeks U.S. approval to send rocket systems to Ukraine,” *Politico*, June 1, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/06/01/u-k-seeks-u-s-approval-to-send-rocket-system-to-ukraine-00036328>].

³³⁸ Michael D. Shear, “U.S. to Send Ukraine \$700 Million in Military Aid, Including Advanced Rockets,” *The New York Times*, May 31, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/31/us/politics/biden-ukraine-rockets.html>], and Michael R. Gordon and Nancy A. Youssef, “U.S. to Send Guided Rockets to Help Ukraine in Donbas Fight,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 31, 2022 [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/guided-u-s-rockets-could-double-ukraines-strike-range-11653989401>].

systems.³³⁹ Meanwhile, in an address to the parliament of Luxemburg on **June 2**, **Zelenskyy** called for more weapons and sanctions against Moscow, declaring that Russia now controlled 20 percent of Ukrainian territory.³⁴⁰

70.	De-escalatory
Returning to nuclear issues, on June 2 , US President Joe Biden stressed the importance of discussions on the future of arms control, writing: “Our progress must continue beyond the New START extension. Even as we rally the world to hold Russia accountable for its brutal and unprovoked war on Ukraine, we must continue to engage Russia on issues of strategic stability. Today—perhaps more than any other time since the Cold War—we must work to reduce the risk of an arms race or nuclear escalation.” ³⁴¹	

71.	Warning
On June 3 , Medvedev responded to the US decision to provide advanced rocket systems to Ukraine in an interview, emphasizing that attacks on Russian territory could trigger retaliation against countries supplying these weapons. “If, God forbid, these weapons are used against Russian territory then our armed forces will have no other choice but to strike decision-making centers,” he stressed. “Of course, it needs to be understood that the final decision-making centers in this case, unfortunately, are not located on the territory of Kyiv.” Medvedev also alluded to the risk of nuclear apocalypse suggesting that “the Horsemen of the Apocalypse are already on their way and all hope now is with Lord God the Almighty.” ³⁴²	

Against this backdrop, transatlantic views on dealing with Russia remained split. On **June 3**, **Macron** reiterated his warning against humiliating Russia. Asked about escalation risks, he stated that the situation was “worrying,” which was why he “put so much time and energy into it ... [losing] count of the conversations [he had] had with Vladimir Putin since December.” His bottom line: “We must not humiliate Russia so that the day the fighting stops, we can build a way out through diplomatic channels,” he added, stating that “it is the role of France, to be a mediating power.”³⁴³ This was followed by a swift reaction from Ukraine’s **Kuleba**, who declared such “calls to avoid humiliation of Russia can only humiliate France and every other country that would call for it. Because it is Russia that humiliates itself.” Thus: “We all better focus on how to put Russia in its place,” he added. “This will bring peace and save lives.”³⁴⁴

On the same day a call for MiGs for Ukraine resurfaced in the United States. California National Guard adjutant **David Baldwin** described the Soviet-era jets as “the best immediate solution to support the

³³⁹ Alexander Ward, Lara Seligman and Paul McLeary, “U.K. seeks U.S. approval to send rocket systems to Ukraine,” *Politico*, June 1, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/06/01/u-k-seeks-u-s-approval-to-send-rocket-system-to-ukraine-00036328>].

³⁴⁰ “Speech by the President of Ukraine in the Chamber of Deputies of Luxembourg,” *Website of the President of Ukraine*, June 2, 2022 [<https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/promova-prezidenta-ukrayini-v-palati-deputativ-lyuksemburgu-75533>].

³⁴¹ Joe Biden, “Message from the President on ACA’s 50th Anniversary,” *Website of the Arms Control Association*, June 2, 2022 [<https://www.armscontrol.org/armscontrol2022/POTUSmessage>].

³⁴² Julian O’Shaughnessy, “Russia will strike West if US rockets hit us, says Putin ally,” *The Times*, June 4, 2022 [https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/russia-will-strike-west-if-us-rockets-hit-us-says-putin-ally-l3gd673lh?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1654330210].

³⁴³ Christelle Bertrand, “Emmanuel Macron à La Dépêche du Midi : ‘La réforme des retraites entrera en vigueur dès l’été 2023’ (Emmanuel Macron to La Dépêche du Midi: ‘The pension reform will come into force in summer 2023’),” *La Dépêche*, June 3, 2022 [<https://www.ladepeche.fr/2022/06/03/exclusif-emmanuel-macron-a-la-depeche-du-midi-la-reforme-des-retraites-entrera-en-vigueur-des-lete-2023-10336654.php>].

³⁴⁴ Tweet by @DmytroKuleba, *Twitter*, June 4, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/DmytroKuleba/status/1533073469570789377>].

Ukrainians,” although “US or western fighters are options that should be explored as soon as possible” as well.³⁴⁵

Few days later, Western states started moving towards delivering long-range options to Ukraine. On **June 6**, UK Defense Secretary **Ben Wallace** confirmed the United Kingdom would send the M270 MLRS with a range of 80 km. “As Russia’s tactics change, so must our support to Ukraine. These highly capable multiple-launch rocket systems will enable our Ukrainian friends to better protect themselves against the brutal use of long-range artillery,” he stated, emphasizing that “Ukraine can win” with international support.³⁴⁶ On **June 8**, US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff **Mark A. Milley** announced that the US and UK military would train Ukrainian soldiers to use the multiple-launch rocket systems delivered to them by these two states. “We’ve got to start this thing with a program that is rational and deliberate and gets them trained to a standard where they become effective,” explained Milley, emphasizing that “it will do no good to just throw this weapon system into the battle,” Given that “you’ve got to be trained on it to get the maximum effective use out of the weapon as a precision system.”³⁴⁷ Finally, on **June 9**, US Ambassador to NATO **Smith** emphasized once again that there was “no pressure” on weapons deliveries within NATO, although “we’ve seen many, many NATO allies individually come forward and provide security assistance.”³⁴⁸

Meanwhile, with the war in Ukraine seemingly reaching a deadlock, the Kremlin’s rhetoric became increasingly prodigal. On **June 9**, **Putin** likened himself to Peter the Great, noting that the tsar “did not take anything” in the great northern war against Sweden, but only “returned” to Russia. Hence: “It seems that it has also fallen to us to return and strengthen [the sovereignty of the country and its ancestral territories], and if we proceed from the fact that these basic values form the basis of our existence, we will certainly succeed in meeting the challenges that are before us,” he added.³⁴⁹

Statements related to nuclear arms control ran parallel to such bluster. On **June 11**, Russian ambassador to the United States **Anatoly Antonov** called on Washington and Moscow to start discussing a replacement for the New START treaty, which would expire in 2026. It was “in the national interest of the United States” to have military and diplomatic contacts on strategic stability, said Antonov. “Time is running out,” he emphasized, yet “if the Americans do not need the relationship that we offer, we will not run after them.” Whereas currently the US government did not appear ready to resume talks, Moscow could wait for the US side to “mature,” Antonov explained.³⁵⁰

Certain nuclear narratives retained their own dynamic however. On **June 12**, Polish member of the European Parliament and former Foreign Minister **Radosław Sikorski** reportedly stated that “Russia has

³⁴⁵ Lara Seligman, “U.S. general calls on West to send fighter jets to Ukraine ‘as soon as possible’,” *Politico*, June 3, 2020 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/06/03/u-s-general-west-should-send-jets-to-ukraine-asap-00037173>].

³⁴⁶ “UK to gift multiple-launch rocket systems to Ukraine,” *Website of the UK Government*, June 6, 2022 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-to-gift-multiple-launch-rocket-systems-to-ukraine>].

³⁴⁷ Dan Lamothe and Cate Cadell, “Top general details plan to train Ukrainians on rocket artillery,” *The Washington Post*, June 8, 2022 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/06/08/severodonetsk-fighting-ukraine/>].

³⁴⁸ Nahal Toolsi, Alexander Ward and Joseph Gedeon, “Good news from Yemen! (Seriously.),” *Politico*, June 9, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/06/09/good-news-from-yemen-seriously-00037083>].

³⁴⁹ Andrew Roth, “Putin compares himself to Peter the Great in quest to take back Russian lands,” *The Guardian*, June 10, 2022 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/10/putin-compares-himself-to-peter-the-great-in-quest-to-take-back-russian-lands>], and “Путин заявил, что Петр I в годы Северной войны у Швеции ничего не отторгал, ‘он возвращал’ (Putin said that Peter I did not take anything away from Sweden during the Northern War, ‘he returned’),” TASS, June 9, 2022 [<https://tass.ru/obschestvo/14870521>].

³⁵⁰ “Посол Антонов предложил США обсудить с РФ договор о СНВ уже сейчас (Ambassador Antonov invited the United States to discuss the START treaty with Russia now),” *Izvestia*, June 11, 2022 [<https://iz.ru/1348217/2022-06-11/posol-antonov-predlozil-ssha-obsudit-s-rf-dogovor-ob-snv-uzhe-seichas>].

violated [the Budapest] memorandum and therefore the West can give Ukraine the opportunity to defend its independence,” including with nuclear warheads.³⁵¹ These remarks were condemned by Chairman of Russia’s State Duma **Vyacheslav Volodin** on **June 13**, who declared that “Sikorski provokes a nuclear conflict in the center of Europe. He does not think about the future of either Ukraine or Poland. If his proposals are implemented, these countries will disappear, as well as Europe,” Volodin added. “With such deputies, the Europeans will have much more serious problems than those they have already faced today (refugees, record inflation, energy crisis),” he also stated.³⁵²

In Washington, some worried that the bipartisan consensus on Ukraine was slowly collapsing. For instance, former NATO Supreme Allied Commander **Philip Breedlove** warned on **June 13** of “a growing group of appeasers in Washington,” as “we are now, I believe, entering into a phase where we’re contemplating playing this game with Ukraine’s chips and thinking about Ukraine making large concessions in order to move forward,” he explained.³⁵³

US allies continued to work together on supplying Ukraine, despite some diverging views on a potential end-game. On **June 15**, representatives from 50 states met up to agree on further military support for Ukraine.³⁵⁴ The US Department of Defense subsequently announced additional security assistance for Kyiv worth 1 billion US dollars, including in the field of more advanced systems, notably “additional ammunition for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems; ... [and] two Harpoon coastal defense systems.”³⁵⁵ On the same day, **Macron** suggested that the West must “have the lucidity to note that [it is] not waging war on Russia. The only desirable outcome of the conflict is either a military victory for Ukraine or at some point a discussion because the fire will have ceased, which allows for an agreement between Ukraine and Russia.” Although he no longer warned of a humiliation of Russia, he still emphasized that “at some point we’ll have to talk.”³⁵⁶

Despite this Western stance, Chinese President **Xi Jinping** offered the most unambiguous declaration of support to Russia since the invasion of Ukraine, vowing to support Moscow’s “sovereignty and security.” China was willing to “push for the steady and long-term development of bilateral pragmatic cooperation,” Xi said, and “mutually support Russia on core interests and matters of paramount concern, such as sovereignty and security,” as well as achieve “closer strategic cooperation.” Xi also told Putin that the “Ukraine crisis” should be “reasonably resolved.”³⁵⁷

³⁵¹ Tweet by @nexta_tv, Twitter, June 12, 2022 [https://twitter.com/nexta_tv/status/1535839743975510016].

³⁵² Giulia Carbonaro, “Russia Warns Europe Would ‘Disappear’ if West Gives Nuclear Weapons to Ukraine,” *Newsweek*, June 13, 2022 [<https://www.newsweek.com/russia-threatens-nuclear-hit-poland-rest-europe-1715088>].

³⁵³ Nahal Toolsi and Joseph Gedeon, “An unsettled matter in Biden’s Middle East,” *Politico*, June 13, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/06/13/an-unsettled-matter-in-bidens-middle-east-00039222>].

³⁵⁴ Paul McLeary and Quint Forgey, “Biden’s summer travel schedule has one missing stop,” *Politico*, June 15, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/06/15/bidens-summer-travel-schedule-has-one-missing-stop-00039923>].

³⁵⁵ “\$1 Billion in Additional Security Assistance for Ukraine,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, June 15, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3064351/1-billion-in-additional-security-assistance-for-ukraine/>].

³⁵⁶ “Guerre en Ukraine : en Roumanie, Emmanuel Macron ne confirme pas de visite à Kiev mais veut des ‘nouvelles discussions’ (War in Ukraine: in Romania, Emmanuel Macron does not confirm a visit to kyiv but wants ‘new discussions’),” *La Dépêche*, June 15, 2022 [<https://www.ladepeche.fr/2022/06/15/guerre-en-ukraine-en-roumanie-emmanuel-macron-ne-confirme-pas-de-visite-a-kiev-mais-veut-des-nouvelles-discussions-10367107.php>].

³⁵⁷ Stuart Lau, “China’s Xi gives most direct backing to Putin since invasion,” *Politico*, June 15, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/china-xi-give-most-direct-backing-putin-invasion-ukraine/>].

72.	Warning
Nuclear narratives on Russian television once again developed their own dynamic. On <i>Rossiya-1</i> , Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said on June 15 that he was certain that the US government and “its military planners” were “characterized by the ideology of a limited nuclear war.” “The use of nuclear weapons by the United States due to the crisis in Ukraine will become an irreversible event, Russia rejects the concept of a limited nuclear strike. I hope that ... the remnants of common sense will allow these politicians, these applicants for the role of world conductors, to refrain from making such decisions.” According to Ryabkov, Western countries “are trying to accuse us of allegedly playing some kind of rhetorical game.” “This is completely untrue. These are useless arguments, but we are used to the fact that the West has nothing left but distortion and fakes,” he stressed. ³⁵⁸	

By now, arms control had become a frequent talking point. On **June 16**, Kremlin spokesperson **Peskov** emphasized the need for discussions with the United States on an extension of the New START treaty. This was “a topic that cannot be avoided.” One could “of course, like an ostrich, try to bury your head in the sand, referring to a special military operation, but it is Russia and the United States that should discuss this topic.” Hence: “It should have been discussed yesterday. And this discussion is important not only for the peoples of our two countries, but also for the whole world, for global security.”³⁵⁹

Mixed signals rendered it almost impossible for outside observers to gauge the level of political support for Ukraine. On the one hand, for instance, US media reported on **June 16** that **anonymous US and European officials** had suggested Zelenskyy might have to “dial it back a bit” regarding his red line on not making any territorial concessions. Nevertheless, a **US official** also reiterated Washington’s position that no one could pressure Ukraine “to make concessions, as some Europeans are. We would never ask them to cede territory.”³⁶⁰ On the other hand, on the same **June 16**, Italian Prime Minister **Mario Draghi**, **Macron** and **Scholz** for the first time since the beginning of the war visited Kyiv. In a joint press conference with Romanian President **Klaus Iohannis** they all expressed their support for Ukrainian (and Moldovan) EU membership;³⁶¹ and on the following day, the **European Commission** formally recommended to the European Council to confirm “Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia’s perspective to become members of the EU.”³⁶²

73.	De-escalatory
In turn, Moscow’s nuclear rhetoric softened. On June 17 , when asked about Russia’s nuclear allusions, Putin claimed Moscow was only responding to Western threats. “Of course, we can hear such [nuclear] rhetoric. Where does it come from? It comes from their own [the West’s] statements. One	

³⁵⁸ Mikhail Dobrunov, “В МИДе надеялись, что США не применят ядерное оружие из-за Украины (The Foreign Ministry hopes that the United States would not use nuclear weapons because of Ukraine),” *RBC*, June 15, 2022 [<https://www.rbc.ru/politics/15/06/2022/62a9c0439a79473b4aec362c>], and “Разговор Путина и Си, обещание генсека НАТО и интервью Рябкова (The conversation between Putin and Xi, the promise of the NATO Secretary General and Ryabkov’s interview),” *Rossiya-1*, June 15, 2022 [https://smotrim.ru/video/2426585?utm_source=player&utm_campaign=blocked_embed (from 01:04:29)].

³⁵⁹ “Песков заявил, что России и США не избежать обсуждения продления СНВ (Peskov said that Russia and the United States cannot avoid discussing the extension of START),” *RIA Novosti*, June 16, 2022 [<https://ria.ru/20220616/snv-1795631951.html>], and “Russia, U.S. must discuss nuclear treaty extension - RIA quotes Kremlin,” *Reuters*, June 16, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-us-must-discuss-nuclear-treaty-extension-ria-quotes-kremlin-2022-06-16/>].

³⁶⁰ Carol E. Lee et al., “When the secretaries of Defense and State said publicly the U.S. wants Ukraine to win and weaken Russia, Biden said tone it down,” *NBC News*, June 16, 2022 [<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/secretaries-defense-state-said-publicly-us-wanted-ukraine-win-biden-sa-rcna33826>].

³⁶¹ Hans von der Burchard et al., “Germany, France and Italy back EU candidate status for Ukraine,” *Politico*, June 16, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/leaders-germany-france-italy-back-eu-candidate-status-ukraine-georgia/>].

³⁶² “EU Commission’s Recommendations for Ukraine’s EU candidate status,” *Website of the European External Action Service*, June 17, 2022 [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ukraine/eu-commissions-recommendations-ukraines-eu-candidate-status_en?s=232].

irresponsible politician blurts out something, and another one follows suit at a very high level. For example, top foreign ministry officials talk profusely on this subject. Are we going to keep silent? We reply accordingly. Following our reply, they start finding fault with us and saying that Russia is making threats. We are not threatening anyone. However, everyone should know what resources we have, and what we will use, if need be, to defend our sovereignty. This is an obvious thing.”³⁶³

74.	Warning
US officials also appeared less concerned with the dangers of nuclear escalation. Hence, on June 17 , US Strategic Command announced that the US military had successfully launched “scheduled missile test flights of four unarmed Trident II (D5LE) missiles ... from an Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine off the coast of southern California.” ³⁶⁴	

The German government once again stressed its commitment to Ukraine on **June 18**. In an interview, Chancellor **Scholz** pledged that the G7 states would “support Ukraine for as long as necessary,” noting that “Putin obviously hopes that everything will fall into place once he has conquered enough land and the international community will return to business as usual.” But: “That is an illusion,” he stressed.³⁶⁵

With the review conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to be held in August, Russian diplomats sought to signal that they wanted the war in Ukraine kept as far as possible from the proceedings. On **June 18**, the Russian embassy in the United States wrote on Telegram that “Washington plans to raise topics at [the review conference] that do not relate to the essence of the NPT problem.” This was “a serious mistake that will aggravate an already difficult situation in the context of the tasks facing the international community to strengthen the non-proliferation regime.” The Russians “urged” their “colleagues” not to “forget” the NPT’s “key role” in “ensuring global security and stability.” It was “important” to “work on creating the conditions for a non-confrontational and depoliticized dialogue.” Money line: “We hope that Washington and its allies will have enough political will and common sense to put the interests of preserving the NPT above opportunistic goals.” Moscow was “determined to cooperate with all interested countries” to strengthen the treaty.³⁶⁶

The NATO leadership reiterated its position on the balance between assistance and escalation. In an interview with German media on **June 19**, **Stoltenberg** promised that “NATO will continue supporting Ukraine in its self-defense,” but emphasized that NATO “is not a part of the conflict.” NATO would “help the country, but it would not send NATO soldiers to Ukraine.” Asked about the risk of nuclear war, Stoltenberg explained that NATO “does not see a higher alert level of the Russian nuclear forces.” However, “Russia’s nuclear saber-rattling is dangerous and irresponsible,” he stressed. “Putin must know: A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought,” added the Secretary General. NATO was sending a

³⁶³ “St Petersburg International Economic Forum Plenary session,” *Website of the President of Russia*, June 17, 2022 [<http://en.special.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/68669>].

³⁶⁴ Tweet by @US_STRATCOM, *Twitter*, June 17, 2022 [https://twitter.com/US_STRATCOM/status/1537848521910525952].

³⁶⁵ Sven Gösmann, Michael Fischer and Friederike Heine, “Scholz will Gesamtkonzept zum Einsparen von Energie und springt Merkel bei (Scholz wants an overall concept for saving energy and defends Merkel),” *Stern*, June 18, 2022 [<https://www.stern.de/politik/deutschland/olaf-scholz--der-bundestkanzler-will-gesamtkonzept-zum-einsparen-von-energie-31962160.html>].

³⁶⁶ Post on Telegram channel of the Embassy of Russia in the USA, *Telegram*, June 18, 2022 [<https://t.me/EmbUSA/344>], and “Russia Hopes for US Common Sense in NPT Review Conference Matter: Embassy,” *Tasnim News Agency*, June 18, 2022 [<https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2022/06/18/2730476/russia-hopes-for-us-common-sense-in-npt-review-conference-matter-embassy>].

“clear signal to Russia” that it protects all its member states, he concluded. He evaded a question about how realistic NATO membership for Ukraine was.³⁶⁷

In an article published on the same day, **Boris Johnson** laid out four priorities for the further war efforts. Accordingly, the West must 1) “ensure that Ukraine receives weapons, equipment, ammunition and training more rapidly than the invader, and build up its capacity to use our help;” 2) “help preserve the viability of the Ukrainian state” through “funding and technical help;” 3) “develop the alternative overland routes that already exist” to bypass Russia’s naval blockade and keep Ukraine’s economy afloat; and 4) get food out of Ukraine. Johnson added that all of this served the overall purpose of strengthening “the hand of our Ukrainian friends to finish this war on the terms that President Zelensky has laid out. That should be the definition of success. The Ukrainian people have been clear they will not be forced into accepting less than that.”³⁶⁸

Meanwhile, an increasing number of reports suggested that Ukraine now had insufficient weaponry to withstand the Russian offensive.³⁶⁹ Conversely, throughout the month of June, Russian forces had made slow but steady advances in the Eastern Luhansk and Donetsk regions.³⁷⁰

Escalation between NATO and Russia seemed to emerge from a different domain. Over the weekend of **June 18 and 19**, the Lithuanian government partially blocked Russian railway transports across its territories to the Russian Kaliningrad enclave under EU sanctions. Russian Security Council Secretary **Nikolai Patrushev** condemned this decision on **21 June**, warning of “serious consequences” and stating that “appropriate measures ... will be taken in the near future” and that the “consequences will have a serious negative impact on the population of Lithuania.”³⁷¹

Statements from Moscow suggested an ongoing Russian debate on the need for arms control negotiations with the United States. On **June 20**, **Medvedev** pushed back on Peskov’s call for New START negotiations with the US government, suggesting that first “Washington should truly appreciate the need for a strategic arms dialogue and ask Moscow for it.” He noted: We don’t have any relations with the USA now. They are at zero degrees. And you don’t need to defrost them today. And there is no need to negotiate with them yet. This is bad for Russia. Let them run or crawl themselves and ask for it. And they appreciate it as a special favor.”³⁷²

³⁶⁷ Lydia Rosenfelder and Burkhard Uhlenbroich, “‘Der Krieg könnte Jahre dauern’ (‘The war could last for years’),” *Bild*, June 19, 2022 [<https://www.bild.de/politik/ausland/politik-ausland/nato-chef-jens-stoltenberg-der-krieg-koennte-jahre-dauern-80442594.bild.html>].

³⁶⁸ Boris Johnson, “Boris Johnson: We will never be secure if we turn our backs on valiant Ukraine,” *The Times*, June 18, 2022 [<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/boris-johnson-we-will-never-be-secure-if-we-turn-our-backs-on-valiant-ukraine-education-commission-9sd5z2bxq>].

³⁶⁹ Tim Lister, Denis Lapin and Julia Kesaieva, “Western support for Kyiv must not cease, say NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson,” *CNN*, June 20, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/06/19/europe/ukraine-russia-war-stoltenberg-johnson-intl-gbr/index.html>].

³⁷⁰ Tim Lister, “Tide turns in the Ukraine war as Russia makes progress in the east,” *CNN*, June 28, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/06/27/europe/russia-ukraine-war-tide-turning-lister-intl-hnk/index.html>].

³⁷¹ Daniel Boffey, “Russia threatens ‘serious consequences’ as Lithuania blocks rail goods,” *The Guardian*, June 21, 2022 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/21/kaliningrad-russia-threatens-serious-consequences-as-lithuania-blocks-rail-goods>].

³⁷² “Зампред СБ счел неподходящим время для переговоров с США по ЧВБ (Deputy Chairman of the Security Council considered the time unsuitable for negotiations with the United States on START),” *Izvestia*, June 20, 2022 [<https://iz.ru/1352528/2022-06-20/zampred-sb-schel-nepodkhodiaschim-vremia-dlia-peregovorov-s-ssha-po-snv>].

A number of concurrent developments are worth noting. On **June 21**, the German government made its weapons deliveries to Ukraine to date public. Accordingly, deliveries already included 500 stinger rockets and the government was *inter alia* still planning to supply 30 Gepard tanks.³⁷³ On the same day, **Putin** announced that the Russian military would deploy the new nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile Sarmat by the end of the year.³⁷⁴ At the same time, media reports suggested that Ukrainian officials were concerned that US bipartisan support for military assistance to Ukraine might be waning amid rising energy prices and other domestic concerns in the United States.³⁷⁵

However, support for Ukraine remained strong. On **June 23**, the **European Parliament** adopted a resolution calling on EU Heads of State and Government to grant EU candidate status to Ukraine.³⁷⁶ On the same day, the European Council granted EU candidate status to Ukraine. EU leaders also promised continued “military, financial, humanitarian and political support” for Ukraine.³⁷⁷ Also on **June 23**, the **Pentagon** announced military assistance for Ukraine worth 450 million US dollars, including four additional HIMARS.³⁷⁸

Military developments in Ukraine remained impossible to predict. On **June 24**, Ukrainian forces were reported to have started withdrawing from Severodonetsk, one of “the last remaining strongholds in the Luhansk region.” An anonymous US defense official however pointed out that Russian forces were “just eking out inch by inch of territory here” paying significant costs for “very small, very incremental gain.”³⁷⁹

On the same **June 24**, Russian rhetoric again intensified. Foreign minister **Lavrov** reportedly declared that the West was preparing for war with Russia. “Hitler rallied a significant part, if not most, of the European nations under his banner for a war against the Soviet Union,” and “now, the EU together with NATO are forming another—modern—coalition for a standoff and, ultimately, war with the Russian Federation,” said Lavrov.³⁸⁰

³⁷³ “Welche Waffen liefert Deutschland an die Ukraine – und welche sollen noch folgen? (What weapons is Germany supplying to Ukraine – and which ones are to follow?),” *Spiegel*, June 21, 2022 [<https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/ukraine-bundesregierung-geht-geheimhaltung-bei-waffenlieferungen-auf-a-7ec6156e-252e-48eb-ba3b-b23502a8cc52>], and “Militärische Unterstützungsleistungen für die Ukraine (Military assistance to Ukraine),” *Website of the German Federal Government*, September 6, 2022 [<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/themen/krieg-in-der-ukraine/lieferungen-ukraine-2054514>].

³⁷⁴ Nataliya Vasilyeva, “Putin threatens to deploy new nuclear missile by year end – and it could hit Britain within three minutes,” *The Telegraph*, June 21, 2022 [<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2022/06/21/vladimir-putin-threatens-unleash-satan-ii-nuclear-missile-year/>].

³⁷⁵ Lara Seligman, Paul McLeary and Quint Forgey, “‘The war is not even half-over’: In Washington, Ukraine’s leaders beg for aid,” *Politico*, June 22, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/06/22/the-war-is-not-even-half-over-in-washington-ukraines-leaders-beg-for-aid-00041436>].

³⁷⁶ “Grant EU candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova without delay, MEPs demand,” *Website of the European Parliament*, June 23, 2022 [<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20220616IPR33216/grant-eu-candidate-status-to-ukraine-and-moldova-without-delay-meps-demand>].

³⁷⁷ “EU response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine,” *Website of the European Council*, September 8, 2022 [<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-response-ukraine-invasion/>].

³⁷⁸ “\$450 Million in Additional Security Assistance for Ukraine,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, June 23, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3072799/450-million-in-additional-security-assistance-for-ukraine/>].

³⁷⁹ Lara Seligman et al., “After Roe’s fall, the Pentagon has no answers for female service members,” *Politico*, June 24, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/06/24/after-roes-fall-the-pentagon-has-no-answers-for-female-service-members-00042320>].

³⁸⁰ Jon Jackson, “Kremlin Official Sees NATO Preparing for War With Russia,” *Newsweek*, June 24, 2022 [<https://www.newsweek.com/kremlin-official-sees-nato-preparing-war-russia-1718934>].

75.	Escalatory
<p>In the same vein, on June 25 at a meeting with Belarusian President Lukashenko in St. Petersburg, Putin announced the transfer of nuclear-capable Iskander-M missiles to Belarus, as well as the re-equipment of Belarusian SU-35 planes to carry nuclear weapons. The move was depicted as a reaction to Lithuania's alleged plan "to stop transit from Russia to Kaliningrad" and to US and NATO exercises with nuclear capable aircraft. Lukashenko noted that Lithuania's "plan to stop transit from Russia through Belarus to Kaliningrad" was "akin to declaring some kind of war." When asking for adapting Belarusian aircraft for nuclear use, he was not "talking about what we will transport tomorrow or whether they will transport nuclear weapons," but he remembered "1941, when we were lulled to sleep," Lukashenko said. Putin answered that Russia was "obliged" to take care of the security of Belarus, and proposed that "the Belarusian army is armed with a fairly large group of Su-25 aircraft, they could be re-equipped accordingly." Hence, "within the next few months we will transfer to Belarus the Iskander-M tactical missile systems, which, as you know, can use both ballistic and cruise missiles, both in conventional and nuclear versions."³⁸¹</p>	

76.	Warning
<p>The G7 states immediately responded to Moscow's decision. On June 26-28, G7 leaders and representatives of the European Union met for a Summit in Germany.³⁸² During a virtual address at the Summit, Zelenskyy asked for more military assistance and suggested the war should end "before winter sets in."³⁸³ In a joint statement of support for Ukraine on June 27, the G7 leaders promised to "continue to provide financial, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support and stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes" and condemned Russian nuclear rhetoric. The G7 reiterated their "condemnation of Russia's unjustified use of nuclear rhetoric and signaling." Russia had to "abide by its international commitments, including those which ban the use of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons." The G7 urged "Russia to behave responsibly and exercise restraint, and reiterate that any use of such weapons would be unacceptable and met with severe consequences. In this regard we express serious concern after the announcement by Russia that it could transfer missiles with nuclear capabilities to Belarus."³⁸⁴</p>	

77.	De-escalatory
<p>The Russian government denied it was planning to also deploy nuclear weapons to Belarus. Responding to the G7's expression of "serious concern" over the transfer of nuclear-capable missiles to Belarus, on June 28, Kremlin spokesperson Peskov denied the Kremlin was planning to station nuclear weapons in Belarus. "The president didn't talk about it. He talked about complexes that are technically capable of carrying different types of weapons," he stressed.³⁸⁵</p>	

³⁸¹ "Встреча с Президентом Белоруссии Александром Лукашенко (Meeting with President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko)," *Website of the President of Russia*, June 25, 2022 [<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/68702>].

³⁸² "G7 Leaders' Communiqué," *Website of the German Federal Government*, June 28, 2022 [<https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/974430/2057828/77d5804dd1ab3047bf0f5f74c1139066/2022-06-28-abschlusserklaerung-eng-web-data.pdf?download=1>].

³⁸³ "Ukraine war: G7 pledges to stay with Ukraine until the end," *BBC News*, June 27, 2022 [<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61954445>].

³⁸⁴ "G7 Statement on Support for Ukraine," *Website of Germany's G7 Presidency*, June 27, 2022 [<https://www.g7germany.de/resource/blob/974430/2057196/4628490eda0863e429c30136ec180feb/2022-06-27-g7-erklarung-ukraine-en-data.pdf?download=1>].

³⁸⁵ "Путин не говорил Лукашенко о передаче Минску ядерных ракет, заявил Песков (Putin did not tell Lukashenko about the transfer of nuclear missiles to Minsk, Peskov said)," *RIA Novosti*, June 28, 2022 [<https://ria.ru/20220628/rakety-1798609427.html>].

In Washington, preparations went ahead for additional support for Ukraine. On **June 27**, US National Security Advisor **Jake Sullivan** confirmed that the US government was “in the process of finalizing a package that includes advanced air defense capabilities” for Ukraine. Asked about Zelenskyy’s remark that the war should end by the winter at the G7 Summit, Sullivan stated that the Ukrainian President “was very much focused on trying to ensure that Ukraine is in as advantageous a position on the battlefield as possible in the next months as opposed to the next years because he believes that a grinding conflict is not in the interest of the Ukrainian people.” Sullivan also confirmed the Russian forces were facing “limitations.” He noted: “Russia faces limitations in terms of its ability to resupply and to fill out its battalion tactical groups. Those limitations are real. They have an impact on Russia’s capacity to achieve its ultimate strategic aims in this conflict, which we do not believe are limited to the Donbas, certainly are not limited to Luhansk.”³⁸⁶

In Brussels, information started to emerge on how NATO planned to strengthen its Eastern Flank, while European Allies continued to be split on how to best support Kyiv. At a pre-Summit press briefing on **June 27**, NATO Secretary General **Stoltenberg** announced that the Alliance would significantly increase its troop presence on the Eastern flank, increasing “the number of [NATO] high readiness forces ... to well over 300,000.”³⁸⁷ On the same day media reported of an Eastern European defense official arguing that “when it comes to weapons aid, there is room to do 10 times more” and “when it comes to sanctions, then there is room to do much more,” suggesting Eastern European Allies preferred stronger support for Ukraine still.³⁸⁸

78.	Warning
Meanwhile, the US military seemed bent to return to its normal testing pattern for new missiles. On June 28 , it conducted an unsuccessful hypersonic missile flight test. Nevertheless, “the information gathered from this event will provide vital insights,” stressed Pentagon spokesperson Tim Gorman . ³⁸⁹ “Experiments and tests, both successful and unsuccessful, are the backbone of developing highly complex, critical technologies at tremendous speed,” he stressed in a statement, suggesting also that “delivering hypersonic weapons remains a top priority and the Department remains confident that it is on track to field offensive and defensive hypersonic capabilities on target dates beginning in the early 2020s.” Russian analyst Alexei Ramm reportedly blamed the failure on the complexity of the tested system. ³⁹⁰	

On **June 29-30**, a NATO Leaders Summit took place in Madrid. At the summit, the Alliance formally invited Finland and Sweden to join the Alliance. Allies also “committed to deploy additional robust in-place combat-ready forces on [the NATO’s] eastern flank, to be scaled up from the existing battlegroups to brigade-size units where and when required” and announced a New Force Model under which over

³⁸⁶ “On-the-Record Press Gaggle by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan,” *Website of the White House*, June 27, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2022/06/27/on-the-record-press-gaggle-by-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan/>].

³⁸⁷ “Pre-Summit press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg,” *Website of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, June 27, 2022 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_197080.htm].

³⁸⁸ Lara Seligman, Alexander Ward and Quint Forgey, “2 years after George Floyd protest, D.C. Guard limits flying,” *Politico*, June 27, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/06/27/2-years-after-george-floyd-protest-d-c-guard-limits-flying-00042549>].

³⁸⁹ Jon Herskovitz and Anthony Capaccio, “US Hypersonic Missile Fails in Test in Fresh Setback for Program,” *Bloomberg*, June 30, 2022 [<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-06-30/us-hypersonic-missile-fails-in-test-in-fresh-setback-for-program>].

³⁹⁰ Brendan Cole, “Russia Reacts to U.S. Hypersonic Missile Failure,” *Newsweek*, July 1, 2022, [<https://www.newsweek.com/russia-reacts-us-hypersonic-missile-failure-pentagon-chgb-test-1721004>].

300,000 troops would be available at high readiness. This was a significant increase from the Alliance's existing high-readiness NATO Response Force (NRF) with 40,000 troops.³⁹¹ On **June 29, Biden** moreover announced significant additional US deployments to Europe including "more destroyers, air defense systems and ... troops."³⁹² According to a White House Fact Sheet from **June 29** this would include the following:

- *Establishment of a permanent V Corps Headquarters Forward Command Post in Poland ...*
- *Commitment to maintaining an additional rotational Brigade Combat Team in Europe, which the United States will position in Romania, with the ability to deploy subordinate elements for training and exercises across the eastern flank.*
- *Enhanced rotational deployments in the Baltic region including armored, aviation, air defense, and special operations forces ...*
- *An agreement to work with Spain to increase the number of U.S. destroyers stationed in Rota from four to six.*
- *Two squadrons of F-35 aircraft to the United Kingdom.*
- *Stationing of additional air defense and other enablers in Germany and Italy.*³⁹³

In addition, various Allies declared what their contributions to the New Force Model would be. On **June 29**, the **German Ministry of Defense** announced it would "assign 15,000 troops, including an armored division with two brigades, 65 combat and transport aircraft, 20 warships and special forces units," while the **British Ministry of Defense** promised "one brigade, an unspecified number of multi-role aircraft and warships, including an aircraft carrier."³⁹⁴ Various Allies also made public statements on how they would implement the promised strengthening of the NATO Battlegroups.

Berlin announced an increase in the Bundeswehr presence in Lithuania to around 1,500 troops, the pre-assignment of an additional 3,500 troops permanently stationed in Germany to reinforce Lithuania in case of need, and the prepositioning of ammunition there. London, in addition to reinforcing the British troops deployed in Estonia up to 1,700 soldiers, will pre-assign a 1,000-strong contingent permanently stationed in the UK. Canada has also pledged to increase its commitments to the battlegroup in Latvia with the pre-assignment of forces up to the size of a brigade. ... President

³⁹¹ "2022 NATO Summit," *Website of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, July 1, 2022 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_196144.htm].

³⁹² Alexander Ward and Quint Forgey, "Congress has F-16 problems and Biden is one," *Politico*, June 29, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/06/29/congress-has-f-16-problems-and-biden-is-one-00043097>], and Jim Garamone, "Biden Announces Changes in U.S. Force Posture in Europe," *Website of the US Department of Defense*, June 29, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3078087/biden-announces-changes-in-us-force-posture-in-europe/>].

³⁹³ "FACT SHEET: The 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid," *Website of the White House*, June 29, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/06/29/fact-sheet-the-2022-nato-summit-in-madrid/>]. For a more detailed overview on how these deployments compared to previous US deployments on the Eastern flank, see: Justyna Gotkowska and Jacek Tarociński, "NATO after Madrid: how much deterrence and defence on the eastern flank?," *Center for Eastern Studies*, July 5, 2022 [https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2022-07-05/nato-after-madrid-how-much-deterrence-and-defence-eastern#_ftn5].

³⁹⁴ See, for instance, Germany here: Florian Manthey, "New Force Model: NATO verstärkt schnelle Eingreifkräfte (New Force Model: NATO Reinforces Rapid Response Forces)," *Website of the German Ministry of Defense*, June 29, 2022 [<https://www.bmvg.de/de/aktuelles/new-force-model-nato-verstaerkt-schnelle-eingreifkraefte-5456976>], and UK here: "UK to make more forces available to NATO to counter future threats," *Website of the UK Government*, June 29, 2022 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-to-make-more-forces-available-to-nato-to-counter-future-threats>].

*Emmanuel Macron announced a similar pre-assignment of French forces to the battlegroup in Romania.*³⁹⁵

More information emerged on NATO's efforts in Eastern Europe. On **June 30, SHAPE** announced that France had deployed the MAMBA surface-to-air missile defense system as well as "an air defense command post to Romania ... since May 16." As such, it was the latest country to strengthen the Alliance's air and missile defense posture at the Eastern flank since the beginning of the war. According to Deputy Chief of Staff Operations at Allied Air Command **Christoph Pliet**, "besides the French deployment to Romania, Germany and the Netherlands have deployed PATRIOT batteries to Slovakia and the United States sent two PATRIOT batteries to Poland in April 2022. These deployments are critical augmentations enhancing the Alliance's IAMD posture in a changed geopolitical environment."³⁹⁶

At the Madrid Summit, Allies also adopted a new Strategic Concept, which strongly condemned Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and described the Russian Federation as "the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area." On Moscow's nuclear threats, the document noted that Russia was "modernizing its nuclear forces and expanding its novel and disruptive dual-capable delivery systems, while employing coercive nuclear signaling." Also: "The Russian Federation's violations and selective implementation of its arms control obligations and commitments have contributed to the deterioration of the broader security landscape," it added. On NATO's own nuclear capability, the Concept stated that "NATO's deterrence and defense posture is based on an appropriate mix of nuclear, conventional and missile defense capabilities, complemented by space and cyber capabilities." Overall: "The fundamental purpose of NATO's nuclear capability is to preserve peace, prevent coercion and deter aggression. Nuclear weapons are unique. The circumstances in which NATO might have to use nuclear weapons are extremely remote. Any employment of nuclear weapons against NATO would fundamentally alter the nature of a conflict. The Alliance has the capabilities and resolve to impose costs on an adversary that would be unacceptable and far outweigh the benefits that any adversary could hope to achieve."³⁹⁷

In the Madrid Summit declaration, Allies also pledged to "continue to counter Russia's lies and reject its irresponsible rhetoric," apparently alluding to Moscow's nuclear threats.³⁹⁸

The Kremlin responded reiterating its position on Finland and Sweden joining NATO. On **June 29, Putin** explained that Russia did "not have territorial issues and disputes [with those two countries]." Hence: "We have nothing that could bother us in terms of Finland's membership and Sweden to NATO," declared Putin. "If they want [to join NATO] – please. Only they should clearly understand that there were no threats to them before, but now, if military contingents and infrastructure are deployed there, we will

³⁹⁵ Justyna Gotkowska and Jacek Tarociński, "NATO after Madrid: how much deterrence and defence on the eastern flank?," *Center for Eastern Studies*, July 5, 2022 [https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2022-07-05/nato-after-madrid-how-much-deterrence-and-defence-eastern#_ftn5] (This source also has an appendix with an overview of all Allied military presence on the Eastern flank as of end of June 2022)].

³⁹⁶ "France deploys MAMBA missile defence system to bolster NATO defensive posture on eastern flank," *Website of NATO Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe*, June 30, 2022 [<https://shape.nato.int/news-archive/2022/france-deploys-mamba-missile-defence-system-to-bolster-nato-defensive-posture-on-eastern-flank#:~:text=Jun%2030%202022-,France%20deploys%20MAMBA%20missile%20defence%20system%20to%20bolster%20NATO%20defensive,pote>].

³⁹⁷ "NATO 2022 Strategic Concept," *Website of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, June 29, 2022 [<https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>].

³⁹⁸ "Madrid Summit Declaration," *Website of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, June 29, 2022 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_196951.htm].

have to respond in a mirror manner and create such threats to the territories from which threats are created to us,” he added.³⁹⁹

Overall, Moscow’s rhetoric appeared to become less belligerent. On **June 30, Putin** declared that a “multipolar system of international relations” was “being actively formed,” and announced that Russia was “open to dialogue on ensuring strategic stability, preserving non-proliferation regimes for weapons of mass destruction and improving the situation in the field of arms control.” However, there were currently “unfortunately ... no tangible plans” for strategic stability talks, the Russian leader noted.⁴⁰⁰

Western support for Ukraine in turn remained strong, but many asked themselves how long this would last. On **June 30, Biden** announced another assistance package for Ukraine worth 800 million US dollars, “including a new advanced Western air defense system for Ukraine, more artillery and ammunition, counter-battery radars, additional ammunition for the HIMARS multiple launch rocket system we’ve already given Ukraine and more HIMARS coming from other countries as well.” When asked how long the US government would continue supporting Ukraine, Biden explained that the United States and NATO would “stick with Ukraine as long as it takes to, in fact, make sure that they are not defeated ... by Russia.”⁴⁰¹ Still, at the NATO Summit, Estonian Prime Minister **Kaja Kallas** reportedly expressed concern over growing war fatigue. “We can’t be tired, because we have to help Ukraine defend their country,” she was quoted as saying.⁴⁰²

July 2022: Nuclear narratives loose steam

On **July 5**, NATO allies signed the Accession Protocols for Finland and Sweden, which then had to be ratified by every Ally.⁴⁰³

In Ukraine, the outcome of hostilities remained unclear. On **July 5**, media reported that although Russian forces had now occupied most of the Luhansk province, they had done so at a high price. The question was whether the Russian troops would be able to quickly regather their strength in order to capture the rest of the Donbas, which could then “free up its forces to grab even more land and dictate the terms of any peace agreement;” or whether Ukrainian forces could “pin the Russians down for a protracted period [and] build up the resources for a counteroffensive.”⁴⁰⁴ According to a Ukrainian officer the high number of casualties and territorial losses were starting to negatively impact the morale of Ukrainian

³⁹⁹ “Путин предупредил о зеркальном ответе на размещение баз НАТО в Финляндии и Швеции (Putin warned of a mirror response to the deployment of NATO bases in Finland and Sweden),” TASS, June 29, 2022 [<https://tass.ru/politika/15077991>].

⁴⁰⁰ “Russia Open to Dialogue on Nuclear Non-Proliferation, Putin Says,” *US News*, June 30, 2022 [<https://www.us-news.com/news/world/articles/2022-06-30/russia-open-to-dialogue-on-nuclear-non-proliferation-putin-says>], and “Путин заявил о формировании многополярной системы мира (Putin announced the formation of a multipolar system of the world),” TASS, June 30, 2022 [<https://tass.ru/politika/15082807>].

⁴⁰¹ “Remarks by President Biden in Press Conference | Madrid, Spain,” *Website of the White House*, June 30, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/06/30/remarks-by-president-biden-in-press-conference-madrid-spain/>].

⁴⁰² Alexander Ward and Quint Forgey, “NATO is unified now. Will ‘war fatigue’ set in later?,” *Politico*, July 1, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/07/01/war-fatigue-is-coming-everywhere-00043793>].

⁴⁰³ “NATO Allies sign Accession Protocols for Finland and Sweden,” *Website of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, July 5, 2022 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_197763.htm].

⁴⁰⁴ “High cost of Russian gains in Ukraine may limit new advance,” *AP News*, July 5, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-moscow-government-and-politics-5ef5dae6aa76addea66cc24c460d2877>].

troops.⁴⁰⁵ Meanwhile, Senate Armed Services Committee Chair **Jack Reed** suggested US supplied multiple-rocket launcher systems “could be decisive in terms of stopping the Russian assault and maybe even regaining momentum.”⁴⁰⁶

79.	Warning
Against this background, Medvedev once again alluded to Russia’s nuclear capability. Referring to calls “to create tribunals or courts for a so-called investigation of Russia’s actions,” he suggested on July 6 that “the idea of punishing a country that has one of the largest nuclear potential is absurd. And potentially poses a threat to the existence of humanity.” ⁴⁰⁷	

80.	De-escalatory
However, another Russian official again played down Moscow’s nuclear narratives. On July 7 , Valentina Matvienko , speaker of the Russian Federation Council, stated that it was “unacceptable to even talk about the possibility of a nuclear war at all.” “Any sane person, especially a politician and statesman, understands that a nuclear war, if God forbid it happened, generally means the end of human civilization,” she added. “Russia views nuclear weapons only as a deterrent,” Matvienko explained. “We have clearly and strictly prescribed those exceptional cases when it can be used only in response to (God forbid that this never happens) a nuclear attack.” Also: “We behave like a civilized country, and we do it openly, we declare this publicly and strictly follow our obligations, and we are doing everything to ensure that nothing like this happen,” she stressed. She also referred to alleged Ukrainian attempts to obtain a nuclear weapon, stating that this would be “like giving a grenade to a madman.” ⁴⁰⁸	

At times, it remained unclear whether information releases on Russia’s military acquisitions were intentional political signals or just ordinary developments. For instance, on **July 8**, the Belgorod submarine capable of carrying a Poseidon strategic nuclear drone was delivered to the Russian Navy. An official press statement however called the Belgorod a “research submarine” and made no mention of the Poseidon drone.⁴⁰⁹

In Washington, support for Ukraine remained strong. On **July 8**, a senior Pentagon official declared that “the President has decided to provide another round of presidential drawdown authority [including]

⁴⁰⁵ Alecander Ward, Nahal Toolsi and Quint Forgey, “U.S. ambassadors to Blinken: Send the weapons,” *Politico*, July 5, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/07/05/u-s-ambassadors-to-blinken-send-the-weapons-00043971>].

⁴⁰⁶ Eric Schmitt, “Senate Armed Services Committee chair says the multiple-rocket launcher system provided by the U.S. is crucial to Ukraine’s campaign,” *The New York Times*, July 5, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/07/05/world/russia-ukraine-war-news?smid=url-share-senate-armed-services-committee-chair-says-multiple-rocket-launcher-system-is-crucial-to-ukraines-campaign>].

⁴⁰⁷ “Russia’s Medvedev warns United States: messing with a nuclear power is folly,” *Reuters*, July 6, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/russias-medvedev-warns-united-states-messing-with-nuclear-power-is-folly-2022-07-06/>], and Post on Telegram channel of Dmitry Medvedev, *Telegram*, July 6, 2022 [https://t.me/s/medvedev_telegram].

⁴⁰⁸ Elena Teslova, “Russian top official says even talks about possibility of nuclear war unacceptable,” *Anadolu Agency*, July 7, 2022 [<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/russian-top-official-says-even-talks-about-possibility-of-nuclear-war-unacceptable/2632520>], and “Недопустимо вообще говорить о возможности ядерной войны - Матвиенко (It is unacceptable to talk about the possibility of nuclear war at all – Matvienko),” *Interfax*, July 7, 2022 [<https://www.interfax-russia.ru/rossiya-i-mir/ne-dopustimo-voobshche-govorit-o-vozmozhnosti-yadernoy-voyny-matvienko>].

⁴⁰⁹ Thomas Nilsen, “World’s longest nuclear submarine handed over to the Russian Navy,” *The Barents Observer*, July 8, 2022 [<https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2022/07/worlds-longest-nuclear-submarine-handed-over-russian-navy>], and “Севмаш передал исследовательскую подводную лодку ‘Белгород’ Военно-морскому флоту РФ (Sevmash handed over the ‘Belgorod’ research submarine to the Russian Navy),” *Sevmash*, July 8, 2022 [<https://sevmash.ru/rus/news/3255-c-----lr-.html>].

four high-mobility artillery rocket systems.” Ukraine had been “successfully striking Russian locations in Ukraine, deeper behind the front lines, and disrupting Russia’s ability to conduct that artillery operation,” the official declared. Asked about Russia’s war goals, the official explained that “the objective remains the same, which is to prevent the existence of a sovereign, independent Ukraine.” Only “the specific military objectives have shifted,” the official stated. “On Russia’s broader intentions, ... we take very seriously the threats that Russia poses to NATO allies and the NATO alliance, and that is why, at the Madrid Summit last week, the United States announced this set of significant additions to our posture and capability in Europe,” the official added.⁴¹⁰

In Moscow, the leadership was employing harsh words, but keeping away from nuclear narratives. In a speech on **July 7**, **Putin** once again blamed the “collective West” for the war in Ukraine and declared that Russia had “not started anything in earnest yet” in Ukraine. He concluded: “We are not rejecting peace talks, but those who are rejecting them should know that the longer it goes on, the harder it will be for them to negotiate with us.”⁴¹¹

In Ukraine, political leaders were less than keen to negotiate on Moscow’s terms. On **July 9**, Ukrainian Minister of Defense **Oleksii Reznikov** tweeted that “HIMARS have already made a HUUUGE difference on the battlefield.”⁴¹² Over the following weekend, however, the Russian forces continued attacks on three fronts, in the Northeast, East and South of Ukraine, media reported on **July 11**.⁴¹³

81.	Warning
The following day, July 12 , Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zakharova once again alluded to the risk of nuclear escalation. “After provoking an escalation of the Ukrainian crisis and unleashing a violent hybrid confrontation with Russia, Washington and its allies are dangerously teetering on the brink of an open military confrontation with our country, which means a direct armed conflict between nuclear powers. Clearly, such a confrontation would be fraught with nuclear escalation,” Zakharova noted. At the same time, she denied Russia was threatening the use of nuclear weapons, criticizing a statement by Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida as “anti-Russian.” She said: “It is unacceptable to try to distort the logic of deterrence, which is what Russia’s official statements on nuclear issues are based on, for propaganda reasons, as well as to depict us as a country threatening to use nuclear weapons.” ⁴¹⁴	

The Biden Administration displayed strong support for the government in Kyiv. On **July 12**, **Jake Sullivan** pointed out that Russia had “already substantially failed to achieve its strategic objectives in Ukraine ... to take Kyiv, the capital; to end Ukraine as a country; to eliminate Ukrainian identity from the map; and to subsume Ukraine to within Russia.” Although Russia had also “been able to grind out, kilometer by kilometer, inch by inch, some territory in the east,” he stressed that “the Ukrainians [had] made Russia pay a dear price for that [and] the sanctions have made Russia pay a dear price for that.”

⁴¹⁰ “Senior Defense Official Holds a Background Briefing,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, July 8, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3088129/senior-defense-official-holds-a-background-briefing/>].

⁴¹¹ “Meeting with State Duma leaders and party faction heads,” *Website of the President of Russia*, July 7, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/68836>].

⁴¹² Tweet by @oleksiireznikov, *Twitter*, July 9, 2022 [https://twitter.com/oleksiireznikov/status/1545847314044129287?s=20&t=0WReKYV0bEnjaoZaw5_J0Q].

⁴¹³ Matthew Mpoke Bigg, “Russia’s military presses its plan on three fronts,” *The New York Times*, July 11, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/07/11/world/russia-ukraine-war-news?smid=url-share#putin-plans-to-press-on-in-ukraine-on-three-fronts>].

⁴¹⁴ “US, allies teetering on brink of military confrontation with Moscow, says diplomat,” *TASS*, July 12, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1478711>].

Further Sullivan affirmed that the US government would “continue to work with the Ukrainian military and Ukrainian government on a strategy that ultimately achieves their objectives, both on the battlefield and at the negotiating table ... for as long as it takes.” Asked about the extent to which the Biden Administration would support Ukraine in reclaiming territory occupied by Russia, Sullivan only reiterated that “the fundamental purpose of [the US] strategy is to put the Ukrainians in as strong a position as possible on the battlefield so that they are in as strong a position as possible at the negotiating table when diplomacy comes.” Also: “As President Zelenskyy himself has said: Ultimately, this conflict will have to be pursued through diplomacy. And that’s where the United States’ thrust and purpose — that’s where the nature of our policy stands and will go,” added Sullivan. US support for Ukraine was not limited in terms of time, but by “a benefit-risk analysis” regarding in terms of “exactly the types of systems [that the US government is] prepared to provide.” Sullivan further pointed out “the severe costs that Russia has had to endure on the battlefield as it tries to grind out territory in the east,” which “is coming at a cost to the sustainment of its own weapons.” To illustrate these costs, he pointed to the fact that “the Iranian government is preparing to provide Russia with up to several hundred UAVs,” which he thought was “pretty newsworthy and noteworthy.”⁴¹⁵

82.	Warning
Both Russia and the United States made public advances in missile technology. On July 12 , the head of Roscosmos Dmitry Rogozin declared that Russia’s Sarmat, “the world’s most powerful nuclear missile with a global range is preparing for new tests and serial production.” ⁴¹⁶	

83.	Warning
On the same day, July 12 , the US military conducted two successful hypersonic missile test. ⁴¹⁷	

US weapons systems appeared to be making an impact on Ukraine’s battlefield. On **July 13**, media reported of a series of Ukrainian strikes “against high-value targets such as ammunition depots and command posts since multiple-launch rocket systems known as Himars began arriving from the US” in June. “The occupiers have already felt very well what modern artillery is,” Zelenskyy commented on the attacks. “They will not have a safe rear anywhere on our land,” he added.⁴¹⁸ However, on **July 14**, media reported that Russia had “stepped up long-range missile attacks far from the frontlines in eastern Ukraine over the past few weeks.”⁴¹⁹

The first signs of a nearing crisis at the Zaporizhzhia power plant emerged. On **July 15**, the president of the Ukrainian nuclear agency Energoatom **Pedro Kotin** suggested Russian forces were storing weapons

⁴¹⁵ “Press Briefing by Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan,” *Website of The White House*, July 12, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2022/07/12/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-karine-jean-pierre-and-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan/>].

⁴¹⁶ Post on Telegram channel of Dmitry Rogozin, *Telegram*, July 12, 2022 [https://t.me/rogozin_do/3313].

⁴¹⁷ Alexander Ward and Quint Forgey, “Biden to look beyond Khashoggi in Saudi Arabia,” *Politico*, July 14, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/07/14/biden-to-look-beyond-khashoggi-in-saudi-arabia-00045780>], and “Air Force completes another successful hypersonic test,” *Website of the United States Air Force*, July 13, 2022 [<https://www.eglin.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/3091814/air-force-completes-another-successful-hypersonic-test/>], and “Operational Fires Program Successfully Completes First Flight Test,” *Website of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency*, July 13, 2022 [<https://www.darpa.mil/news-events/2022-07-13a>].

⁴¹⁸ Isabel Coles and Evan Gershkovich, “Ukraine Strike on Russian Air-Defense Unit Shows Impact of New Weapons From West,” *The Wall Street Journal*, July 13, 2022 [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-strike-on-russian-air-defense-unit-shows-impact-of-new-weapons-from-west-11657708988>], and “Himars precision rockets shift the balance in Ukraine: experts,” *France24*, July 15, 2022 [<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220715-himars-precision-rockets-shift-the-balance-in-ukraine-experts>].

⁴¹⁹ Alexander Ward and Quint Forgey, “Biden to look beyond Khashoggi in Saudi Arabia,” *Politico*, July 14, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/07/14/biden-to-look-beyond-khashoggi-in-saudi-arabia-00045780>].

at the Zaporizhzhia power plant. “The occupiers bring their machinery there, including missile systems, from which they already shell the other side of the river Dnipro and the territory of Nikopol,” he said.⁴²⁰

Russia seemed to be reacting to Ukraine’s enhanced military capabilities. On **July 16**, **Shoigu** reportedly “gave the necessary instructions to further increase the actions of groups in all operational areas in order to exclude the possibility of the Kyiv regime launching massive rocket and artillery strikes on civilian infrastructure and residents of settlements in Donbas and other regions.”⁴²¹ Two days later, on **July 18**, he directed Russian forces in Ukraine “to prioritize the use of high-precision armament for eliminating the missile and artillery means” of the Ukrainian forces.⁴²²

Nuclear narratives returned to the foreground, but in a much more muted fashion. On **July 18**, **Lavrov** picked up a statement by German Air Force chief **Ingo Gerhartz**. At the end of June, Gerhartz had warned Putin of competing with the West and suggested that “credible deterrence” required “both the means and the political will to implement nuclear deterrence if necessary.”⁴²³ The fact that “no one in NATO and the EU reprimanded ... Gerhartz” for these remarks, indicates that Europe “is complacently forgetting Germany’s role in its history,” claimed Lavrov. He also noted that “NATO instructors and gunners of the MLRS are already, apparently, directing the actions of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the national battalions directly ‘on the ground.’” He concluded: “I hope that among the Europeans there are responsible politicians who are aware of the consequences this is fraught with,” added Lavrov.⁴²⁴

Support for Ukraine remained high. On **July 18**, **EU foreign ministers** pledged military assistance for Ukraine worth another 500 million euros. “Ukraine needs more arms; we will provide them,” explained **Josep Borrell**.⁴²⁵

Russia seemed bent to enhance its control over the territory it had occupied. On **July 19**, **Kirby** warned Russia was beginning to lay the “the groundwork to annex Ukrainian territory that it controls, in direct violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty ... installing illegitimate proxy officials in areas of Ukraine that are under its control.” If Russia proceeded with its apparent “annexation plans,” the United States would “respond swiftly and severely and in lockstep with [its] allies and partners,” he stressed. “Russia will face additional sanctions and become even more of a global pariah than it is now,” Kirby noted. The United States would “remind” Putin that Russia “may prove unable to hold this territory.”⁴²⁶

⁴²⁰ “Russia accused of shelling from Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant in Ukraine,” *France24*, July 16, 2022 [<https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20220716-live-russia-accused-of-shelling-from-zaporizhzhia-nuclear-plant>].

⁴²¹ “Russian defence minister orders ‘units in all areas’ to step up Ukraine operations,” *Reuters*, July 16, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-russia-shoigu-idINS8N268038>].

⁴²² “Russian Defence Minister General of the Army Sergei Shoigu inspects Eastern group of troops involved in special military operation in Ukraine,” *Website of the Russian Ministry of Defense*, July 18, 2022 [https://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12429510@egNews].

⁴²³ Maximilian Both, “‘Putin, leg dich nicht mit uns an!’ (‘Putin, don’t mess with us!’),” *Bild*, June 18, 2022 [<https://www.bild.de/politik/inland/politik-inland/klare-ansage-vom-luftwaffen-chef-putin-leg-dich-nicht-mit-uns-an-80433286.bild.html>].

⁴²⁴ Sergey Lavrov, “Об инсценировках как методе политики Запада (About dramatizations as a method of Western policy),” *Izvestia*, June 18, 2022 [<https://iz.ru/1366164/sergei-lavrov/ob-instcenirovках-kak-metode-politiki-zapada>].

⁴²⁵ “Foreign Affairs Council, 18 July 2022,” *Website of the European Council*, July 18, 2022 [<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2022/07/18/>].

⁴²⁶ “Press Briefing by Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre and NSC Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby,” *Website of the White House*, July 19, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2022/07/19/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-karine-jean-pierre-and-nsc-coordinator-for-strategic-communications-john-kirby-3/>].

Indeed, on **July 20**, media reported of an interview with **Lavrov**, in which he declared Western deliveries of long-range weaponry to Ukraine were contributing to expand the geographical scope of Russia's military operation. "Now the geography has changed [compared to March when Russia scaled back its war goals]," he explained. "It's not just Donetsk and Luhansk, it's Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, and several other territories. And this process continues, consistently and persistently." Moscow "cannot allow the part of Ukraine that Zelensky will control or whoever replaces him to have weapons that will pose a direct threat to [Russian] territory and the territory of those republics that have declared their independence, those who want their own future," he added.⁴²⁷

Meanwhile **Austin** showed himself unimpressed by Lavrov's statements, declaring he was sure the "Ukrainian leadership will be pleased to hear Lavrov's confirmation of the effectiveness of not only that system [the HIMARS], but how they're using that system." Washington and its allies had known Putin had "greater ambitions," he added and also confirmed that Ukraine would receive "four additional HIMARS advanced rocket systems for a total of 16 ... [and] additional GLMRS ... rockets that ... are used on a HIMARS" as part of the next military assistance package.⁴²⁸

84.	De-escalatory
<p>Against this background, US military officials noted fighter jets could be supplied, but clarified the restricted nature of nuclear deterrence. On the same July 20, US Air Force Chief of Staff Charles Q. Brown declared the United States might be willing provide fighter jets to Kyiv. "There's U.S. [fighter jets], there's Gripen out of Sweden, there's the Eurofighter or the Rafale. So there's a number of different platforms that could go to Ukraine," explained Brown.</p> <p>Asked what the United States would do if Putin decided to use a tactical nuclear weapon inside Ukraine, he declared that this was a policy question "for the President to decide." The US military's responsibility was "to provide the President options." Whatever these options might be, "it's all about deterrence. The goal is not to get into a conflict broader than the conflict that's already going on today and definitely not into a nuclear conflict," Brown stressed. "Because of our strategic deterrence we provide umbrella security with many of our allies and partners and we've got to be responsible about how we do that ... there's a range of options that you could do but by the same token there's a lot of risk," he explained. The US government would need to make sure that these options would not lead it down a "slippery slope that we can't recover from."⁴²⁹</p>	

The upcoming NPT review conference spurred additional statements. On **July 21**, **Adam Scheinman**, the US Special Representative for Nuclear Nonproliferation, wrote that Washington will "spare no effort to not only preserve but also strengthen" the NPT. He noted the **January 2022 P5 statement** affirming that "a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought."⁴³⁰ Yet he added that "Russia's unjustified

⁴²⁷ "Лавров: поставки дальнего оружия Киеву расширят географию спецоперации (Lavrov: deliveries of long-range weapons to Kyiv will expand the geography of the special operation)," *RIA Novosti*, July 20, 2022 [<https://ria.ru/20220720/spetsoperatsiya-1803701411.html>].

⁴²⁸ "Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Army General Mark A. Milley Hold a Press Conference," *Website of the US Department of Defense*, July 20, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3100301/secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-and-chairman-of-the-joint-chiefs-of-sta/>].

⁴²⁹ "Fireside Chat with General Charles Q. Brown," *YouTube account of The Aspen Institute*, July 20, 2022 [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSBUoRP8eDw>].

⁴³⁰ "Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races," *Website of the White House*, January 3, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/01/03/p5-statement-on-preventing-nuclear-war-and-avoiding-arms-races/>].

war against Ukraine, dangerous actions, and escalatory nuclear rhetoric seriously call into question its commitment to that January joint statement.”⁴³¹

In Washington, some worried about declining support for Ukraine. Also on **July 21**, Democratic lawmaker **Brendan Boyle** suggested that bipartisan and public support in the United States to invest extensive resources in defending Ukraine might be waning as “the shock [of the war] has worn off” and domestic issues, including soaring price and supply chain issues, have been growing. “I would very much caution anyone who assumes that this [Congressional] unity will last forever and that the support of the American people will last forever,” he stressed, suggesting US support for Kyiv was already being challenged by roughly “a third” of Republican Congress members. This “movement will grow” as long as the West faces an “inflation crisis,” he explained.⁴³²

However, on **July 22**, **Jake Sullivan** rejected such concerns about the staying power of the United States, pointing to the 40 billion US dollars military assistance package for Ukraine already passed by Congress, which would allow US support to continue for a “considerable amount of time.” Even if public attention for the war might diminish eventually, sufficient executive/elite support to continue this policy of supporting Ukraine would likely remain beyond that package as well, he added. Sullivan also believed this to be true for European countries, despite the growing energy crisis across the continent. Asked about his overall assessment of the current state of the conflict, Sullivan explained that Putin had “not [been] able to achieve [his] basic strategic objectives ... which were to seize the capital city of Kyiv and to end Ukraine as a going concern.” Russia was now “facing significant difficulties constituting the kind of force necessary for them to achieve the objectives which have not fundamentally changed,” partially due to “the fact that [the United State has] ... provided an enormous amount of sophisticated weaponry and training [to Ukraine].” As for the US objectives with respect to Ukraine, Sullivan elaborated that the White House wants “to see a sovereign independent viable Ukraine that ... can repel any future Russian aggression;” put the Ukrainians in “the strongest possible position on the battlefield so that they are in the strongest possible position at the negotiating table;” “ensure that Putin is stymied in his goal to weaken and divide the West;” and finally, “ensure that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is a strategic failure for Putin,” meaning that he should both “be denied his objectives in Ukraine and ... pay a longer term price in terms of the elements of [Russia’s] national power.” Nevertheless, Sullivan also admitted that “there are certain capabilities [Biden] has said he is not prepared to provide,” including long-range missiles with a range of 300 kilometers, because the Administration wanted to “ensure that we do not end up in a circumstance where we’re heading down the road towards a third world war.”⁴³³

Other announcements in Washington buttressed Sullivan’s claims. On the same **July 22**, the Pentagon “announced \$270 million in additional security assistance for Ukraine,” including the previously announced additional four HIMARS.⁴³⁴ White House spokesperson **Kirby** reportedly also confirmed the US government was considering whether it could supply fighter jets to Ukraine, although this would “not”

⁴³¹ “Countries Prepare for Critical Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference,” *Website of the US Department of State*, July 21, 2022 [<https://www.state.gov/countries-prepare-for-critical-nuclear-non-proliferation-treaty-review-conference/>].

⁴³² Alexander Ward, Nahal Toolsi and Quint Forgey, “‘Skeptical’ Iran wants renewed nuclear deal, MI6 chief says,” *Politico*, July 21, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/07/21/skeptical-iran-wants-renewed-nuclear-deal-mi6-chief-says-00047105>].

⁴³³ “Closing Fireside Chat with Jake Sullivan,” *YouTube Account of The Aspen Institute*, July 22, 2022 [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KOM4vYSPUO4>].

⁴³⁴ “\$270 Million in Additional Security Assistance for Ukraine,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, July 22, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3102984/270-million-in-additional-security-assistance-for-ukraine/>].

be “something that would be executed in the near-term.”⁴³⁵ Conversely, the Administration reportedly had refrained from approving a Ukrainian request for long-range drones. According to anonymous officials, this was due to “a number of concerns, ranging from the potential loss of advanced technology from the battlefield to the need to train Ukrainians to operate the drones.”⁴³⁶

On **July 24**, **Lavrov** suggested Russia was aiming for regime change in Ukraine, stating, “we are determined to help the people of eastern Ukraine to liberate themselves from the burden of this absolutely unacceptable regime” and “will certainly help the Ukrainian people to get rid of the regime, which is absolutely anti-people and anti-historical.”⁴³⁷

Pressure mounted for the US government to supply Ukraine with longer-range weapons. Returning to Washington from a trip to Kyiv, Democrat House Armed Services Committee chair **Adam Smith** said President Zelenskyy had urgently asked for more assistance to help Ukraine recapture Russian occupied territories before the cold winter months, media reported on **July 25**. “The next three to six weeks are crucial,” Smith explained. Given this time constraint and in light of Russia’s brutal tactics, “there’s pressure mounting from a lot of people to try to get [the Biden Administration] to change their mind on [their refusal to provide longer-range missiles and drones to Kyiv],” Smith noted. “The administration is not prepared to do that at this point,” he explained, “but there are good arguments being made.”⁴³⁸ On **July 26**, media reported on a number of calls on the Administration by Republican lawmakers, including from **Michael Waltz** and **Joni Ernst**, for increased US and NATO allied support to Zelenskyy, who they believed would not be able to win the war without such further support.⁴³⁹

On **July 25**, the MiG debate resurfaced once again with Slovakian Defense Minister **Jaroslav Nad’** suggesting Slovakia could provide eleven of the Soviet era jets to Ukraine at the end of August. However, this would only be possible if allies provided financial compensation or replacement aircraft to Slovakia.⁴⁴⁰

The situation in Ukraine seemed to escalate. On **July 28**, an explosion in Eastern Ukraine reportedly killed Ukrainian prisoners of war in a Russian detention facility. The Ukrainian and Russian side accused each other of attacking the site. Russian Defense Ministry spokesperson **Igor Konashenkov** claimed, Kyiv had targeted the location with HIMARS.⁴⁴¹ On **July 31**, media reports suggested the war in Ukraine was “moving to the south, where a potentially decisive phase of the conflict will play out ... as Ukraine

⁴³⁵ “U.S. discussing America-made fighter jets for Ukraine,” *Reuters*, July 23, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/biden-oks-up-175mln-ukraine-defense-aid-white-house-says-2022-07-22/>].

⁴³⁶ Nancy A. Youssef, Gordon Lubold and Vivian Salama, “Biden Administration Holds Off on Sending Long-Range Armed Drones to Ukraine,” *The Wall Street Journal*, July 22, 2022 [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/biden-administration-holds-off-on-sending-long-range-armed-drones-to-ukraine-11658491058>].

⁴³⁷ Susie Blann, “Russia says it wants to end Ukraine’s ‘unacceptable regime’,” *AP News*, July 25, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-zelenskyy-kyiv-black-sea-arab-league-b5c583e8d057897cfdef6b407e113339>].

⁴³⁸ Alexander Ward and Quint Forgey, “HASC Chair Smith: Ukraine needs urgent help next 3-6 weeks,” *Politico*, July 25, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/07/25/hasc-chair-smith-ukraine-needs-urgent-help-next-3-6-weeks-00047662>].

⁴³⁹ Alexander Ward and Quint Forgey, “‘We’re approaching a crisis’ over Taiwan,” *Politico*, July 26 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/07/26/were-approaching-a-crisis-over-taiwan-00047921>].

⁴⁴⁰ Tweet by @haynesdeborah, *Twitter*, July 25, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/haynesdeborah/status/1551542980913373186>].

⁴⁴¹ Brett Forrest and Evan Gershkovich, “Explosion Kills Ukrainian POWs Held by Russian-Backed Forces,” *The Wall Street Journal*, July 29, 2022 [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/explosion-kills-ukrainian-pows-held-by-russian-backed-forces-11659097747>].

says it is mounting a counteroffensive to take back the Southern port city of Kherson.”⁴⁴² The next day, anonymous US officials denied Russian claims that the Ukrainian prisoners of war had been targeted with HIMARS. Accordingly, the site did not have “the indications it would have if it was hit with HIMARS.”⁴⁴³

The US Administration enhanced its support of Ukraine. On **July 29**, **Blinken** announced military assistance for Ukraine worth 550 million US dollars, including additional HIMARS ammunition.⁴⁴⁴

August 2022: Everything was misunderstood?

On **August 1**, the acting deputy head of Kyiv’s military intelligence **Vadym Skibitsky** commended the intelligence support provided by the United States and Britain to Ukraine, including to target Russian agents. “As far as military intelligence is concerned [Britain and the United States have provided] almost everything from information to equipment,” he explained. While Washington was “not providing direct targeting information, which would potentially undermine their case for not being direct participants in the war, ... there was a level of consultation between intelligence officials of both countries prior to launching missiles that would allow Washington to stop any potential attacks if they were unhappy with the intended target,” he reportedly stated.⁴⁴⁵

Also on **August 1**, a senior US official was cited by the *New York Times* as claiming that **Biden** “personally told President **Xi Jinping** that if China entered the war in Ukraine on Russia’s side, Beijing would be risking access to its two most important export markets — the United States and the European Union.” And: China “responded by not providing military aid to Putin — at a time when the US and NATO have been giving Ukraine intelligence support and a significant number of advanced weapons that have done serious damage to the military of Russia, China’s ostensible ally,” anonymous official sources reportedly added. Finally, senior US officials still believed that Putin was “quite prepared to consider using a small nuclear weapon against Ukraine if he sees his army facing certain defeat,” the article noted.⁴⁴⁶

The US bipartisan consensus on Ukraine faced a lonely challenger. Junior Republican Senator **Josh Hawley** wrote on **August 1**: “Until our European allies make the necessary commitments to their own national defense, we must not put more American lives at risk in Europe while allowing China’s power to grow unchecked,” he stressed. “US resources are not unlimited,” he explained, and the United States’ main adversary was China, not Russia.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴² Stephen Fidler and Daniel Michaels, “War With Russia Enters New Phase as Ukraine Readies Southern Counterblow,” *The Wall Street Journal*, July 31, 2022 [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/war-ukraine-russia-kherson-11659281575>].

⁴⁴³ Lara Seligman, “American-made rocket launchers not used in Ukraine prison strike, U.S. assesses,” *Politico*, August 1, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/08/01/us-rockets-not-used-ukraine-prison-strike-00048948>].

⁴⁴⁴ “Biden-Harris Administration Announces \$550 Million in New U.S. Military Assistance for Ukraine,” *Website of the US Department of State*, August 1, 2022 [<https://www.state.gov/biden-harris-administration-announces-550-million-in-new-u-s-military-assistance-for-ukraine/>].

⁴⁴⁵ Dominic Nicholls, “Britain helps Ukraine hunt for Russian spies eyeing Western military aid,” *The Telegraph*, August 1, 2022 [<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2022/08/01/britain-helps-ukraine-hunt-russian-spies-eyeing-western-military/>].

⁴⁴⁶ Thomas L. Friedman, “Why Pelosi’s Visit to Taiwan Is Utterly Reckless,” *The New York Times*, August 1, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/01/opinion/nancy-pelosi-taiwan-china.html>].

⁴⁴⁷ Josh Hawley, “Why I Won’t Vote to Add Sweden and Finland to NATO,” *The National Interest*, August 1, 2022 [<https://national-interest.org/feature/why-i-won%E2%80%99t-vote-add-sweden-and-finland-nato-203925>].

Discussions on potential arms control negotiations returned. On **August 1**, the NPT Review Conference started at the UN in New York. The **White House** released a statement just ahead of the conference, stating that it was “ready to expeditiously negotiate a new arms control framework to replace New START when it expires in 2026. But negotiation requires a willing partner operating in good faith. And Russia’s brutal and unprovoked aggression in Ukraine has shattered peace in Europe and constitutes an attack on fundamental tenets of international order. In this context, Russia should demonstrate that it is ready to resume work on nuclear arms control with the United States.”⁴⁴⁸

In the context of the conference, numerous actors condemned Russia’s nuclear rhetoric. **Britain**, the **United States**, and **France** released a ministerial statement condemning “those who would use or threaten to use nuclear weapons for military coercion, intimidation, and blackmail. Such actions are profoundly dangerous and contrary to the purposes of the NPT and the UN Charter.”⁴⁴⁹ At the conference, **Antony Blinken** called out Moscow’s “reckless, dangerous nuclear saber-rattling.” Russia’s aggression was “a brazen violation of international law,” and “contrary to the rules-based international order that we all seek to uphold.” It was also “contrary to the assurances that it provided to Ukraine in 1994 in the so-called Budapest Memorandum,” assurances that were “vital to giving Ukraine the confidence” to give up nuclear weapons. There was no place in the world for “nuclear deterrence based on coercion, intimidation, or blackmail,” he stressed.⁴⁵⁰ Similar statements came on **August 1-2** from, for instance, Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister **Mykola Tochytskyi**;⁴⁵¹ German Foreign Minister **Annalena Baerbock**;⁴⁵² Swedish Foreign Minister **Ann Christin Linde**;⁴⁵³ Belgian Foreign Minister **Hadja Lahbib**;⁴⁵⁴ Japanese

⁴⁴⁸ “President Biden Statement Ahead of the 10th Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons,” *Website of the White House*, August 1, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/08/01/president-biden-statement-ahead-of-the-10th-review-conference-of-the-treaty-on-the-non-proliferation-of-nuclear-weapons/>].

⁴⁴⁹ “Joint ministerial statement by the UK, US and France on the importance of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty,” *Website of the UK Government*, August 1, 2022 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/continued-importance-of-the-nuclear-non-proliferation-treaty-npt-uk-us-and-france-joint-statement/joint-ministerial-statement-by-the-uk-us-and-france-on-the-importance-of-the-nuclear-non-proliferation-treaty>].

⁴⁵⁰ “Secretary Antony J. Blinken’s Remarks to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference,” *Website of Reaching Critical Will*, August 1, 2022 [https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/revcon2022/statements/1Aug_USA.pdf].

⁴⁵¹ “Statement by H.E. Mr. Mykola Tochytskyi, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine,” *Website of Reaching Critical Will*, August 1, 2022 [https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/revcon2022/statements/1Aug_Ukraine.pdf].

⁴⁵² “Statement by Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock at the 10th Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons,” *Website of the German Foreign Office*, August 1, 2022 [<https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/-/2545450>].

⁴⁵³ “Statement delivered by H.E Ann Linde, Minister for Foreign Affairs,” *Website of Reaching Critical Will*, August 1, 2022 [https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/revcon2022/statements/1Aug_Sweden.pdf].

⁴⁵⁴ “Statement by H.E. Hadja Lahbib, Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Affairs and Foreign Trade,” *Website of Reaching Critical Will*, August 1, 2022 [https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/revcon2022/statements/1Aug_Belgium.pdf].

Prime Minister **Fumio Kishida**;⁴⁵⁵ the **EU**;⁴⁵⁶ Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland **Marcin Przydacz**;⁴⁵⁷ and Dutch Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs **Thijs van der Plas**.⁴⁵⁸

85.	De-escalatory
<p>Meanwhile, Russian representatives rejected these accusations. Moscow “consistently follows” the NPT’s “letter and spirit,” starting “from the premise that there can be no winners in a nuclear war and it must never be unleashed,” Putin declared on August 1.⁴⁵⁹</p> <p>In its prepared statement from August 2, Russia argued that the fact that “the international security and strategic stability situation has been deteriorating rapidly” was not its fault. Moscow had been and remained committed to “freeing the world from the threat posed by WMDs.” Russia had been committed to security and stability, but these “positive achievements” had been “devalued” by the “US policy of ignoring Russia’s <i>red lines</i> in the field of security.” Nuclear powers had to “behave with restraint and responsibility” and Moscow was “strongly convinced that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.” Hence, it would not deploy INF systems where the United States refrained from doing so. Also, it had “significantly reduced the role of nuclear weapons in its defense policy, which is purely defensive in nature and is aimed at protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country.” Regarding Ukraine, Russia wanted to “strongly reject all allegations.” The Ukrainian “regime” had come to power “as a result of a coup” and persecuted the Russian-speaking population. For eight years, “Ukrainian nationalists were killing civilians on this territory with near impunity and preparing a large-scale military invasion of the republics that, in fact, broke away from Ukraine.”⁴⁶⁰</p> <p>Subsequently, the Russian delegation also took the floor in a right of reply to talk about the nuclear dimension of the Ukraine crisis. First, Moscow stated that it was fulfilling its obligations with the Budapest Memorandum, including “a commitment not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons.” This was “fully implemented with respect to Ukraine, including in recent months.” Second, the Russian delegation underlined the defensive nature of Russia’s nuclear doctrine. A nuclear reaction would occur “solely as a response to aggression involving weapons of mass destruction” or when a conventional attack threatened “the very existence of the state.” But: “None of these two hypothetical scenarios is relevant to the situation in Ukraine.” Third, the Russians noted that their warning was related to a</p>	

⁴⁵⁵ “General Debate at the Tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT),” *Website of Reaching Critical Will*, August 1, 2022 [https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/revcon2022/statements/1Aug_Japan.pdf].

⁴⁵⁶ “General Statement,” *Website of Reaching Critical Will*, August 1, 2022 [https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/revcon2022/statements/1Aug_EU.pdf].

⁴⁵⁷ “Statement of the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland His Excellency Mr Marcin Przydacz,” *Website of Reaching Critical Will*, August 2, 2022 [https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/revcon2022/statements/2Aug_Poland.pdf].

⁴⁵⁸ “General Debate Statement by the Kingdom of the Netherlands,” *Website of Reaching Critical Will*, August 2, 2022 [https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/revcon2022/statements/2Aug_Netherlands.pdf].

⁴⁵⁹ Vladimir Putin, “Участникам и гостям X Конференции по рассмотрению действия Договора о нераспространении ядерного оружия (To the participants and guests of the 10th Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons),” *Website of the President of Russia*, August 1, 2022 [<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/letters/69093>], and Tweet by @mission_rf, Twitter, August 1, 2022 [https://twitter.com/mission_rf/status/1554150853543616515?s=20&t=3JgqUf_HgkrbSK0sDP_w1Q].

⁴⁶⁰ “Statement by Mr. Igor Vishnevetskii, Deputy Head of the Delegation of the Russian Federation at the 10th NPT Review Conference (General Debate),” *Website of Reaching Critical Will*, August 2, 2022 [https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/revcon2022/statements/2Aug_Russia.pdf], and “Statement by Representative of the Russian Delegation Mr. Alexander Trofimov in Exercise of the Right of Reply at the 10th NPT Review Conference,” *Website of the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations*, August 2, 2022 [<https://russiaun.ru/en/news/020822o>].

conflict with NATO potentially leading to nuclear exchanges. “Any military confrontation between nuclear rivals must be prevented, since it is fraught with the risk of escalation to the nuclear level,” the argument went. A NATO intervention in Ukraine “would be able to trigger one of the two emergency scenarios described in our doctrine. We obviously stand for preventing this, but if Western countries try to test our resolve, Russia will not back down. And this is not the language of threats at all, but a statement of what is possible – such is the logic of deterrence.”⁴⁶¹

Media reports from **August 2** noted that Russian diplomat **Alexander Trofimov** rejected “utterly unfounded, detached from reality and unacceptable speculations that Russia allegedly threatens to use nuclear weapons, particularly in Ukraine.” However, Moscow could decide to use its nuclear arsenal in response to “direct aggression” by NATO countries. Yet, Russia would only use nuclear weapons in response to weapons of mass destruction or a conventional weapons attack that threatened the existence of the Russian state. “None of these two hypothetical scenarios is relevant to the situation in Ukraine,” the Russian delegate said. However, he accused NATO countries of a “fierce hybrid confrontation” against Russia that now “dangerously balances on the edge of open military clash.” Such a clash would “be able to trigger one of the two emergency scenarios described in our doctrine,” Trofimov said. “We obviously stand for preventing this, but if Western countries try to test our resolve, Russia will not back down.”⁴⁶²

Also on **August 2**, the **Russian Defense Ministry** responded to Skibitsky’s statements on military intelligence sharing between the United States and Ukraine. “All this undeniably proves that Washington, contrary to White House and Pentagon claims, is directly involved in the conflict in Ukraine,” a statement reportedly read. “It is the Biden administration that is directly responsible for all Kiev-approved rocket attacks on residential areas and civilian infrastructure in populated areas of Donbas and other regions, which have resulted in mass deaths of civilians.”⁴⁶³

Pressure from the Baltic states on supporting Ukraine continued. On **August 2 and 3**, Estonian foreign minister **Urmas Reinsalu** reportedly called for significant additional military assistance for Kyiv, both in a phone call with his US counterpart Blinken and talking to the media. “The price tag of aggression now is not high enough,” he reportedly told journalists. “The war will not end by itself. The war will only end if Putin ends the war;” and this will only happen once “the price tag is ... threatening [Putin’s] power mechanisms,” Reinsalu added. “Now we have to show the aggressor our determination and the fact that our willpower is stronger than Putin’s.”⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶¹ “Statement by the Representative of the Delegation of the Russian Federation in Exercise of the Right of Reply,” *Website of Reaching Critical Will*, August 2, 2022 [https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/revcon2022/statements/2Aug_Russia_RoR.pdf], and “Statement by Representative of the Russian Delegation Mr. Alexander Trofimov in Exercise of the Right of Reply at the 10th NPT Review Conference,” *Website of the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations*, August 2, 2022 [<https://russiaun.ru/en/news/020822o>].

⁴⁶² Michelle Nichols, “West could trigger nuclear war over Ukraine, Russia says at U.N.,” *Reuters*, August 3, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/west-could-trigger-nuclear-war-over-ukraine-russia-says-un-2022-08-02/>].

⁴⁶³ “Russia says United States is directly involved in Ukraine war,” *Reuters*, August 2, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-says-united-states-is-directly-involved-ukraine-war-2022-08-02/>].

⁴⁶⁴ Christopher Miller and Alexander Ward, “‘Not enough’: Estonia’s FM wants more support for Ukraine,” *Politico*, August 3, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/08/03/not-enough-estonias-fm-wants-more-support-for-ukraine-00049563>].

On **August 3**, media reported of Ukrainian strikes with US HIMARS on “several Russian bases and arms warehouses” near Kherson. The Ukrainian counteroffensive in the South of the country seemed to be taking shape.⁴⁶⁵

On **August 4**, **US officials** reportedly warned, Russia might “try to frame” Ukraine for the killing of Ukrainian prisoners of war at the end of July. “We have reason to believe that Russia would go so far as to make it appear that Ukrainian HIMARS were to blame before journalists arrive,” an anonymous official was quoted as saying.⁴⁶⁶ On the same day, media reported Western officials believed severe shortages likely would slow down the Russian military, thereby opening up a window of opportunity for Ukraine. “The Russians are exhausted, and you don’t want to give them time to regroup and rest,” suggested Democrat US lawmaker **Elissa Slotkin**.⁴⁶⁷

86.	De-escalatory
On August 5 , Russia reiterated the defensive nature of its nuclear arsenal at the NPT Review Conference. Moscow was “consistently reducing the place and role of nuclear weapons in its Military Doctrine.” Russia’s policy was “aimed exclusively at protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country.” ⁴⁶⁸	
87.	Warning
US officials in turn suggested that the Administration’s declaratory nuclear policy was, to some degree, linked to Russia’s nuclear narratives. On the same August 5 , Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Colin Kahl gave a briefing at the United Nations on US nuclear policy. While “a sole purpose declaratory policy has long been supported by President Biden ... the NPR concluded that now is not the time for making that change” in light of, for example, Russia’s nuclear rhetoric, Kahl said. ⁴⁶⁹	

In the following days there were growing concerns, intensified fighting near the Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant could lead to a nuclear accident.⁴⁷⁰ On **August 8**, White House spokesperson **Karine Jean-Pierre** called “on Russia to cease all military operations at or near Ukrainian nuclear facilities and return full control to Ukraine.”⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁵ James Bickerton, “Ukraine HIMARS Strike Russian Bases During Major Counter-Attack,” *Newsweek*, August 3, 2022 [<https://www.newsweek.com/ukraine-himars-strike-russian-bases-counter-attack-kherson-artillery-1730303>].

⁴⁶⁶ Alexander Ward, “The White House Situation Room is getting a makeover,” *Politico*, August 4, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/08/04/exclusive-the-white-house-situation-room-is-getting-a-makeover-00049820>].

⁴⁶⁷ Julian E. Barnes and Eric Schmitt, “Russia’s Shortfalls Create an Opportunity for Ukraine, Western Officials Say,” *The New York Times*, August 4, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/04/us/politics/russia-weapons-ukraine.html>].

⁴⁶⁸ “Statement by the Deputy Head of the Delegation of the Russian Federation,” *Website of Reaching Critical Will*, August 5, 2022 [https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/revcon2022/statements/5Aug_MCI_Russia.pdf].

⁴⁶⁹ Paul McLeary, Lara Seligman and Alexander Ward, “What the U.S. and China learn from the live-fire exercise,” *Politico*, August 5, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/08/05/what-the-u-s-and-china-learn-from-the-live-fire-exercise-00050071>], and Greg Hadley, “‘Sole Purpose’ Policy Didn’t Make It Into Nuclear Posture Review, but Biden Wants It in the Future,” *Air Force Magazine*, August 5, 2022 [<https://www.airforcemag.com/sole-purpose-policy-nuclear-posture-review-biden-wants-it-future/>].

⁴⁷⁰ Pavel Polityuk, “Shells hit power lines at Ukraine nuclear plant, fighting in east,” *Reuters*, August 6, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/shelling-hits-power-lines-ukraine-nuclear-plant-both-sides-trade-blame-2022-08-05/>], and Andrew E. Kramer, “Fighting Around Ukrainian Nuclear Plant Heightens Safety Fears,” *The New York Times*, August 6, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/06/world/europe/russia-ukraine-war-nuclear-plant.html>].

⁴⁷¹ “US calls on Russia to stop military activity at nuclear sites,” *France24*, August 8, 2022 [<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220808-us-calls-on-russia-to-stop-military-activity-at-nuclear-sites>].

Arms control prospects continued to appear unencouraging. On **August 8**, Russia announced that it was temporarily withholding permission for New START inspections, blaming the United States for creating difficulties in air transportation for Russian inspectors, but also the pandemic situation in the United States. However, the inspections had already been suspended since 2020, and the US government had nonetheless been able to assess that Russia was in compliance with its treaty obligations.⁴⁷²

The tone at the NPT Review Conference also remained harsh. On the same **August 8**, **Russia** stated US nuclear deployments in Europe had a “significant negative factor for international and European security, but also increase the risk of nuclear conflict and generally hampered nuclear disarmament efforts.” Moscow said the weapons should be withdrawn, the infrastructure eliminated, and the NATO “joint nuclear missions” had to be stopped.⁴⁷³ In another statement it accused Ukraine of having committed “several criminal acts in the form of artillery and rocket attacks” on the Zaporizhzhia power plant. Russia had “evidence confirming that the Kiev regime is the organizer and executor of these crimes” and was “ready to share them with the international community.”⁴⁷⁴

In Washington, the US government boosted its support for Ukraine. On **August 8**, the **Pentagon** announced security assistance for Ukraine worth another 1 billion US dollars.⁴⁷⁵ Commenting on this additional aid, **Colin Kahl** said it was meant “to help the Ukrainians repel the Russian offensive in the east, and also to address evolving developments in the south and elsewhere.” So far, the Russians had “achieved none of Vladimir Putin’s objectives at the beginning of the war ... to overrun the entire country, to engage in regime change in Kyiv, to snuff out Ukraine as an independent, sovereign and democratic nation,” he added. In this context, Kahl confirmed “the HIMARS effectiveness,” which had “made it more difficult for the Russians to move forces around the battlefield.” This slowed down the Russian forces, “made it harder for them to resupply their forces.” Asked why the new assistance package did not include more HIMARS, he stated that the United States had already sent 16 systems, “which is actually quite a lot.” Hence: “These are not systems that we assess you need in the hundreds to have the type of affects they are. These are precision guided systems for very particular types of targets and the Ukrainians are using them as such,” he explained. Further, he confirmed that it was “not inconceivable that down the road, Western aircraft could be part of the mix on that, but the final analysis has not been done” and this was a question for the long term.⁴⁷⁶

On **August 9**, the **Ukrainian delegation** responded to the Russian accusations regarding the Zaporizhzhia power plant at the NPT Review Conference. Russia had “attacked Ukraine’s civilian infrastructure, including its critical facilities, thus creating unprecedented nuclear safety and security threats to Ukraine and the international community.” There was “no doubt” that “all Russian actions [were] of deliberate, coordinated, and well-planned nature.” Thus, “Russia’s nuclear terrorism has no limits,” the

⁴⁷² “Заявление МИД России о ситуации с Договором о мерах по дальнейшему сокращению и ограничению стратегических наступательных вооружений (ДСНВ) (Statement by the Russian Foreign Ministry on the situation of the Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (START)),” *Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, August 8, 2022 [https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1825525/].

⁴⁷³ “Statement by the Deputy Head of the Delegation of the Russian Federation,” *Website of Reaching Critical Will*, August 8, 2022 [https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/revcon2022/statements/8Aug_MCII_Russia.pdf].

⁴⁷⁴ “Statement by Mikhail Kondratenkov, Member of the Delegation of the Russian Federation,” *Website of Reaching Critical Will*, August 8, 2022 [https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/revcon2022/statements/8Aug_MCIII_Russia.pdf].

⁴⁷⁵ “\$1 Billion in Additional Security Assistance for Ukraine,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, August 8, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3120059/1-billion-in-additional-security-assistance-for-ukraine/>].

⁴⁷⁶ “USD (Policy) Dr. Kahl Press Conference,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, August 8, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3120707/usd-policy-dr-kahl-press-conference/>].

delegation concluded and called “on the international community to close the sky over the nuclear power plants of Ukraine and to provide air defense systems.”⁴⁷⁷

Also on **August 9**, US President **Biden** signed the instruments of ratification for Sweden and Finland’s accession to NATO.⁴⁷⁸

On the same day, media reported, the **Biden Administration** was considering but hesitating to send advanced MQ-1C Gray Eagle drones to Ukraine, for fear the technology could fall into Moscow’s hands.⁴⁷⁹

In parallel, information emerged suggesting Ukraine had started a counteroffensive that would involve Crimea. On **August 9**, media reported of several explosions in Russian-annexed Crimea at a Russian air base.⁴⁸⁰ While one anonymous Ukrainian official reportedly denied responsibility for the explosion, another claimed the opposite.⁴⁸¹ The **Ukrainian Defense Ministry** wrote that it could “not establish the cause of the fire, but once again reminds of the rules of fire safety and the prohibition of smoking in unspecified places,” while Zelenskyy advisor **Mykhailo Podolyak** tweeted that the “demilitarization of the Russian Federation [was] an integral part of global security ... the future of the Crimea is to be a pearl of the Black Sea, a national park with unique nature and a world resort. Not a military base for terrorists. It is just the beginning.”⁴⁸² The following day, an anonymous Ukrainian official reportedly confirmed that the explosion had been an attack carried out by Kyiv’s special forces.⁴⁸³ According to Ukrainian sources and satellite imagery, nine Russian aircraft were destroyed in the blast, although this was denied by the Russian side.⁴⁸⁴

Meanwhile, concern over the safety of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant remained. On **August 10**, meeting in Berlin, the foreign ministers of the **G7** called on Russia to “immediately withdraw its troops

⁴⁷⁷ “Statement of the Delegation of Ukraine,” *Website of Reaching Critical Will*, August 9, 2022 [https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/revcon2022/statements/9Aug_MCIII_Ukraine.pdf].

⁴⁷⁸ Zeke Miller, “Biden formalizes US support for Finland, Sweden joining NATO,” *AP News*, August 9, 2022 [<https://ap-news.com/article/russia-ukraine-nato-biden-finland-6a04422190bdd7e75440f7e176a88109>].

⁴⁷⁹ Alexander Ward and Lee Hudson, “Why the Gray Eagle still hasn’t landed in Ukraine,” *Politico*, August 9, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/08/09/why-the-gray-eagle-still-hasnt-landed-in-ukraine-00050499>].

⁴⁸⁰ Alexander Ward and Lee Hudson, “Why the Gray Eagle still hasn’t landed in Ukraine,” *Politico*, August 9, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/08/09/why-the-gray-eagle-still-hasnt-landed-in-ukraine-00050499>], and Michael Schwartz, “Explosions kill 1 and injure 9 at a Russian air base in Crimea,” *The New York Times*, August 9, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/08/09/world/ukraine-russia-news-war?smid=url-share#ukraine-claims-a-rare-attack-in-crimea>].

⁴⁸¹ Alexander Ward and Lee Hudson, “Why the Gray Eagle still hasn’t landed in Ukraine,” *Politico*, August 9, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/08/09/why-the-gray-eagle-still-hasnt-landed-in-ukraine-00050499>], and Michael Schwartz, “Explosions kill 1 and injure 9 at a Russian air base in Crimea,” *The New York Times*, August 9, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/08/09/world/ukraine-russia-news-war?smid=url-share#ukraine-claims-a-rare-attack-in-crimea>].

⁴⁸² Alexander Ward and Lee Hudson, “Why the Gray Eagle still hasn’t landed in Ukraine,” *Politico*, August 9, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/08/09/why-the-gray-eagle-still-hasnt-landed-in-ukraine-00050499>], and Tweet by @Podolyak_M, *Twitter*, August 9, 2022 [https://twitter.com/Podolyak_M/status/1557032929703956481?s=20&t=X2ManLWaaOIs_tMAZVqzuA].

⁴⁸³ Isabelle Khurshudyan, Liz Sly and Adela Suliman, “Crimea airfield blast was work of Ukrainian special forces, official says,” *The Washington Post*, August 10, 2022 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/08/10/ukraine-russia-crimea-beach-blast/>].

⁴⁸⁴ Susie Blann, “Ukraine says 9 Russian warplanes destroyed in Crimea blasts,” *AP News*, August 11, 2022 [<https://ap-news.com/article/russia-ukraine-zelenskyy-kyiv-crimea-81a08f492db4683275d4aa3928cb3c43>].

from within Ukraine's internationally recognized borders and respect Ukraine's territory and sovereignty" and "immediately hand back full control to its rightful sovereign owner, Ukraine, of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant as well as of all nuclear facilities within Ukraine's internationally recognized borders to ensure their safe and secure operations."⁴⁸⁵ On the same day, Ukraine accused Russia of firing rockets from the Zaporizhzhia power plant, killing and wounding two dozen people in Marhanets. Russia had previously claimed that Ukraine was using the town to shell Russian forces at the plant.⁴⁸⁶

Kyiv also appeared concerned over recent statements regarding Crimea. On **August 11**, the Ukrainian government reprimanded Ukrainian officials who had told US media that Kyiv was behind attacks on the Russian-controlled peninsula. "It's frankly irresponsible," **Zelenskyy** stated, adding that "war is definitely not the time for vanity and loud statements. The fewer details you divulge about our defense plans, the better it will be for the implementation of those defense plans." According to Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister **Hanna Malyar** the concerned officials were being investigated. "A leak like this disrupts the plans of the Ukrainian armed forces since the enemy adjusts its actions and uses this information against us," explained Malyar.⁴⁸⁷

88.	Warning
The US military apparently returned to its normal pattern of testing nuclear-capable missiles. On August 16, the US Air Force successfully conducted a scheduled test launch of the Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile. ⁴⁸⁸	

On **August 16**, **Putin** offered more comments on the rationales behind the war in Ukraine, but refrained from inserting a nuclear dimension. He claimed that "the outlines of a multipolar world order" were "taking shape" but "Western globalist elites" opposing this development were provoking "chaos, fanning long-standing and new conflicts and pursuing the so-called containment policy, which in fact amounts to the subversion of any alternative, sovereign development options." Hence: "The United States and its vassals grossly interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign states by staging provocations, organizing coups, or inciting civil wars. By threats, blackmail, and pressure, they are trying to force independent states to submit to their will and follow rules that are alien to them. This is being done with just one aim in view, which is to preserve their domination," he added. Putin also accused the West of "deliberately undermining the European security system and knocking together ever new military alliances" as NATO was "crawling east and building up its military infrastructure." "They need conflicts to retain their hegemony," he explained and "it is for this reason that they have destined the Ukrainian people to being used as cannon fodder ... and continued to pour weapons, including heavy weapons, for use by the Kiev regime." It was in this context, he suggested, that Russia had "taken the decision to conduct a special military operation in Ukraine, a decision which is in full conformity with the Charter of the United Nations." Thus: "It has been clearly spelled out that the aims of this operation are to ensure the security of Russia

⁴⁸⁵ "G7 foreign ministers urge Russia to hand Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant back to Ukraine," *Reuters*, August 10, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/g7-foreign-ministers-urge-russia-hand-zaporizhzhia-nuclear-plant-back-ukraine-2022-08-10/>].

⁴⁸⁶ "Ukraine accuses Russia of shelling near nuclear plant, killing 13 civilians," *The Guardian*, August 10, 2022 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/10/thirteen-civilians-killed-in-russian-shelling-near-ukrainian-nuclear-plant>].

⁴⁸⁷ David Ljunggren, "Zelenskiy tells officials to stop discussing tactics, probe opens into leak," *Reuters*, August 12, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/zelenskiy-tells-officials-stop-talking-about-ukraines-tactics-2022-08-11/>].

⁴⁸⁸ "Minuteman III test launch showcases readiness of U.S. nuclear force's safe, effective deterrent," *Website of the US Air Force Global Strike Command*, August 16, 2022 [<https://www.afgsc.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/3128925/minuteman-iii-test-launch-showcases-readiness-of-us-nuclear-forces-safe-effecti/>].

and its citizens and protect the residents of Donbass from genocide,” he added, but “the situation in Ukraine shows that the United States is attempting to draw out this conflict.”⁴⁸⁹

89.	De-escalatory
<p>On the same August 16, Shoigu again downplayed the nuclear dimension of the conflict. He declared that “in Ukraine, Russian military personnel are confronted by the combined forces of the West, who control the leadership of this country in a hybrid war against Russia,” pointing at Western financial assistance, weapons, training and intelligence provided to Kyiv. Somewhat cryptically, he also claimed that the “special military operation has dispelled the myth of the ‘superweapon’ that the West is supplying to Ukraine and which is capable of radically changing the situation at the front.” These weapons “have not had a significant impact on the situation.” Further, he pointed out the “huge loss of personnel of the armed forces and formations of the territorial defense of Ukraine.”</p> <p>Shoigu also dismissed Western concerns over a potential use of nuclear or chemical weapons as “information provocations” to divert attention from an alleged US biological weapons program in Ukraine. “From a military point of view, there is no need to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine to achieve the set goals. The main purpose of Russian nuclear weapons is to deter a nuclear attack,” he stressed. “Allegations about the possible use of chemical weapons in Ukraine are also absurd,” added Shoigu. On arms control, he expressed concern over the “difficult situation” regarding a possible follow-on agreement for the New Start treaty. The West’s policy did not “imply the fulfillment of treaty obligations in the traditional sense,” he claimed, and “US statements that Russia must earn the right to continue dialogue with the United States do not hold water. Arms control is a two-way street.”⁴⁹⁰</p>	

Also on **August 16**, there were reports of new explosions at an ammunition depot on the Russian-occupied peninsula of Crimea. Both Russian and Ukrainian officials blamed the strike on Ukrainian saboteurs.⁴⁹¹ **Zelenskyy** did not assume responsibility for the attack but warned “all our people in Crimea, in other regions in the south of the country, in the occupied areas of Donbas, in the Kharkiv region to be very careful. Please do not approach the military objects of the Russian army and all those places where they store ammunition and equipment, where they keep their headquarters.”⁴⁹²

Yet, Ukraine indeed seemed to be behind the attacks in Crimea. On **17 August**, an anonymous Ukrainian official leaked a government report confirming Ukrainian responsibility for previous strikes on Russian military targets on Crimea.⁴⁹³ On the same day Ukrainian Defense Minister **Oleksii Reznikov** told *Voice of America* that Kyiv had “no ... restrictions” targeting “temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine where the enemy is,” including with Western supplied weapons. According to an official source from the

⁴⁸⁹ “Address to participants and guests of the 10th Moscow Conference on International Security,” *Website of the President of Russia*, August 16, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69166>].

⁴⁹⁰ “Russia says ‘no need’ to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine,” *Reuters*, August 16, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/defence-minister-shoigu-says-russia-has-no-need-use-nuclear-weapons-ukraine-2022-08-16/>], and “Конец однополярности и миф о ‘супероружии’. Шойгу выступил на конференции по безопасности (The end of unipolarity and the myth of the ‘superweapon.’ Shoigu spoke at a security conference),” *TASS*, August 16, 2022 [<https://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/15482761>].

⁴⁹¹ James Marson, Ann M. Simmons and Matthew Luxmoore, “Explosions Hit Russian Ammunition Depot in Crimea,” *The Wall Street Journal*, August 16, 2022 [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/explosions-hit-russian-ammunition-depot-in-crimea-11660635257>].

⁴⁹² “For us to expel the occupiers from Ukraine, every day must make it more and more difficult for Russia to wage a war - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy,” *Website of the President of Ukraine*, August 16, 2022 [<https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/shob-mi-vignali-okupantiv-z-ukrayini-rosiyi-maye-stavati-skl-77081>].

⁴⁹³ Vasco Cotovio and Tara John, “Ukraine admits it was behind three explosions in Crimea. Here's what we know,” *CNN*, August 17, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/08/17/europe/crimea-explosions-russia-ukraine-intl/index.html>].

Biden Administration, the White House had greenlit Ukrainian attacks on Crimea. “We don’t select targets, of course, and everything we’ve provided is for self-defense purposes,” said the official. But: “Any target they choose to pursue on sovereign Ukrainian soil is by definition self-defense” and “Crimea is Ukraine.”⁴⁹⁴ The following day, **Reznikov** explained Kyiv was hitting targets far behind the front lines in an attempt to weaken Russian forces, while it was waiting for the required arms and ammunition to liberate occupied territories. As there were mixed messages as to whether Western weapons had been used in attacks on Crimea, **Reznikov** “neither confirm[ed] nor den[ied] Ukrainian involvement in the Crimea attacks,” though “striking such targets does form a part of Ukraine’s current military strategy, and Ukraine lacks weapons systems with the range to reach targets in Crimea from Ukrainian-controlled territory.” At the same time, he suggested that “for our American partners it’s an absolutely convenient situation, because we didn’t use American weapons.” Meanwhile Ukrainian presidential advisor **Mykhailo Podolyak** explained that “Ukraine’s Western backers have been involved in training the special forces that are responsible for the attacks” and spoke of a new strategy of “de-occupation” in which US HIMARS “are being used to strike similar targets but are confined by their maximum 50-mile reach.”⁴⁹⁵

On **18 August**, the Russian Defense Ministry announced it had deployed “3 MiG-31i [fighter jets] with Kinzhal hypersonic missiles ... to Chkalovsk airfield in Kaliningrad Region as part of additional strategic deterrence measures.”⁴⁹⁶

On **August 19**, the Pentagon nonetheless announced additional military assistance for Ukraine worth 775 million US dollars, including for the first time 15 Scan Eagle drones and additional HIMARS ammunition,⁴⁹⁷ which led media to speculate, whether the long-awaited Ukrainian counteroffensive in the South was finally coming.⁴⁹⁸ On the same day, the head of the National Security Council of Ukraine **Oleksiy Danilov** acknowledged Kyiv was indeed trying to retake the Russian-occupied peninsula of Crimea.⁴⁹⁹

In Germany, the debate on weapons deliveries and associated escalation risks continued. On **August 21**, three German MPs of all government coalition parties, **Kristian Klinck, Alexander Müller** and **Sara Nanni**, published an opinion piece suggesting that giving in to Russia’s blackmail attempts would make future nuclear threats “more likely” and calling for additional military assistance for Kyiv.⁵⁰⁰ The article

⁴⁹⁴ Alexander Ward, “U.S. approves of Ukraine striking Russian-occupied Crimea,” *Politico*, August 17, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/08/17/u-s-approves-of-ukraine-striking-russian-occupied-crimea-00052364>].

⁴⁹⁵ Liz Sly, John Hudson and David L. Stern, “Crimea attacks point to Ukraine’s newest strategy, official says,” *The Washington Post*, August 18, 2022 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/08/17/ukraine-defense-minister-special-forces-new-strategy/>].

⁴⁹⁶ “Three MiG-31 with Kinzhal hypersonic missiles relocate to Kaliningrad region,” *Website of the Russian Ministry of Defence*, August 18, 2022 [https://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12434136@egNews].

⁴⁹⁷ “\$775 Million in Additional Security Assistance for Ukraine,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, August 19, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3134457/775-million-in-additional-security-assistance-for-ukraine/>].

⁴⁹⁸ Lee Hudson, Paul McLeary and Alexander Ward, “U.S. sending new drones to Ukraine ahead of southern push,” *Politico*, August 19, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/08/19/u-s-sending-new-drones-to-ukraine-ahead-of-southern-push-00052856>].

⁴⁹⁹ Marc Santora, “A Ukrainian official says forces will continue to strike in Crimea,” *The New York Times*, August 19, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/08/19/world/ukraine-russia-news-war/ukrainian-overnight-attacks-aim-to-undermine-moscows-fighting-capacity?smid=url-share>].

⁵⁰⁰ Kristian Klinck, Alexander Müller and Sara Nanni, “Mehr deutsche Waffen für die Ukraine – so geht’s (More German weapons for Ukraine – this is how it works),” *Spiegel*, August 21, 2022 [<https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/mehr-deutsche->

caused a controversy in Berlin. The following day, Chancellor **Scholz's** office "took note" but warned of escalating the war. The Defense Ministry declared that the German Armed Forces had reached a limit in terms of what they could deliver and "must not be further weakened."⁵⁰¹ Such escalation concerns at least to some degree still appeared to exist across the Atlantic too. Indeed, on **August 22**, media outlets suggested that the Biden Administration might have supplied additional weapons types to Kyiv, notably High-Speed Anti-Radiation Missiles, but refrained from making those deliveries public.⁵⁰²

90.	De-escalatory
<p>De-escalation also appeared to be on Russian minds. In an interview on August 22, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov confirmed a restrictive approach to any potential use of nuclear weapons. Referring back to Lavrov's statement from April 25 that the nuclear risks were real but should not be "inflated," he noted that "one of the most important tasks ... is to maintain adherence by all the nuclear five states to the postulate of the inadmissibility of any war between countries possessing nuclear weapons." In this context he condemned the NATO countries' "destructive course" to "ignore" Russian "red lines" and "get involved in a confrontation with Russia in Ukraine, balancing on the brink of direct armed conflict." This was "extremely risky" and "fraught with further escalation, up to a military clash of nuclear powers with dire consequences," he explained. "This must be prevented." He then also referred to Russian doctrine, which clearly laid down that "Russia hypothetically allows a nuclear response only in response to aggression using WMD against us or our allies, or aggression using conventional weapons, when the very existence of the state is threatened." Hence: "The key word in both scenarios is <i>aggression</i>," meaning that "the use of nuclear weapons by Russia is possible only in response to an attack - for self-defense in emergency circumstances," he explained. "There is no place for conjectures or fantasies here."⁵⁰³</p> <p>Finally, Ryabkov added, Moscow remained "open in principle to serious, pragmatic and result-oriented interaction aimed at reducing tensions and risks, preventing a dangerous escalation and arms race, and strengthening strategic stability, including through arms control." The START Treaty "ideally should be replaced by a new agreement or agreements." However, he blamed the United States on the lack of progress in this regard. The resumption of bilateral strategic talks between Moscow and Washington was unlikely due to the latter's "deliberately destructive course."⁵⁰⁴</p>	

On **August 23**, escalation concerns notwithstanding, the German government agreed to supply Slovakia with 14 Leopard tanks to enable Bratislava to provide 30 of its infantry fighting vehicles to Kyiv, confirmed Slovak Defense Minister **Jaroslav Nad'**.⁵⁰⁵

waffen-fuer-die-ukraine-so-geht-s-meinung-a-3a08af51-3b65-47b1-8bb6-a0756575a08d?sara_ecid=soci_upd_KsBF0AFjflf0DZCxpPYDCQgO1dEMph].

⁵⁰¹ Marina Kormbaki, "Heftige Kontroverse nach SPIEGEL-Gastbeitrag (Heated controversy after SPIEGEL guest commentary)," *Spiegel*, August 22, 2022 [<https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/folgen-des-spiegel-gastbeitrags-ampel-trio-loest-mitforderungen-nach-mehr-waffen-fuer-die-ukraine-heftige-kontroverse-aus-a-cd2dd130-a95b-4691-92ee-702e44b22c9e>].

⁵⁰² Alexander Ward, Lee Hudson and Paul McLeary, "Is the U.S. giving Ukraine some weapons secretly?," *Politico*, August 22, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/08/22/is-the-u-s-giving-ukraine-some-weapons-secretly-00053079>], and Michael Weiss and James Rushton, "Why Ukraine probably has long-range missiles," *Yahoo news*, August 21, 2022 [<https://news.yahoo.com/ukraine-atacms-himars-missiles-161843626.html>].

⁵⁰³ Ekaterina Postnikova, "'Применение ядерного оружия возможно только в порядке ответа на нападение'" ("The use of nuclear weapons is possible only in response to an attack"), *Izvestia*, August 22, 2022 [<https://iz.ru/1381726/ekaterina-postnikova/primeneniye-iadernogo-oruzhiia-vozmozhno-tolko-v-poriadke-otveta-na-napadeniye>].

⁵⁰⁴ Ekaterina Postnikova, "'Применение ядерного оружия возможно только в порядке ответа на нападение'" ("The use of nuclear weapons is possible only in response to an attack"), *Izvestia*, August 22, 2022 [<https://iz.ru/1381726/ekaterina-postnikova/primeneniye-iadernogo-oruzhiia-vozmozhno-tolko-v-poriadke-otveta-na-napadeniye>].

Six months after the launch of Russia's large-scale invasion, on **August 24**, Ukraine celebrated its Independence Day. On the occasion, the **Pentagon** announced "approximately \$3 billion in additional security assistance," including "additional National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS)" and Puma drones.⁵⁰⁶ Unlike previous assistance announcements, these weapons however would "[not] come from existing US military stockpiles but rather ... be made by industry" and serve long-term needs, the US government declared.⁵⁰⁷ More support came from US allies on the same day. The United Kingdom announced an additional military assistance package worth 54 million pounds sterling, while Prime Minister **Boris Johnson** reaffirmed his country's support during a visit to Kyiv. "What happens in Ukraine matters to us all, which is why I am here today to deliver the message that the United Kingdom is with you and will be with you for the days and months ahead, and you can and will win," Johnson said.⁵⁰⁸

On **August 25**, **Biden** confirmed continued US support for Ukraine in a phone call with **Zelenskyy**. Both leaders also called on the Kremlin to return full control of the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant to Ukraine and for International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) access to the plant.⁵⁰⁹ On the same day, concerns over the safety of the plant resurfaced as two reactors were disconnected from the electricity grid due to fires and Russian shelling, according to the Ukrainian nuclear energy agency **Energoatom**.⁵¹⁰ Zaporizhzhya was reconnected to the Ukrainian power grid the following day.⁵¹¹ However, shelling around the plant continued, with Russia and Ukraine blaming each other.⁵¹²

In Geneva on **August 25**, there were nonetheless some cooperative signals from Russia's Deputy Permanent Representative **Andrey Belousov**, who called on the nuclear powers to "intensify" their interactions. The P5 was "currently the only format in which the nuclear-weapon states discuss a range of issues directly related to the NPT," and "under certain favorable circumstances, this format could become a prototype for a multilateral arms control and disarmament negotiation process," said Belousov.⁵¹³

⁵⁰⁵ "Slovakia to donate 30 infantry fighting vehicles to Ukraine –minister," *Reuters*, August 23, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/slovakia-donate-30-infantry-fighting-vehicles-ukraine-minister-2022-08-23/>].

⁵⁰⁶ "Nearly \$3 Billion in Additional Security Assistance for Ukraine," *Website of the US Department of Defense*, August 24, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3138105/nearly-3-billion-in-additional-security-assistance-for-ukraine/>].

⁵⁰⁷ Lara Seligman, Alexander Ward and Lawrence Ukenye, "Ryder takes the DOD mic," *Politico*, August 24, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/08/24/ryder-takes-the-dod-mic-00053483>].

⁵⁰⁸ "Prime Minister tells Ukraine 'they will win' as he marks Independence Day: 24 August 2022," *Website of the UK Government*, August 24, 2022 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-tells-ukraine-they-will-win-as-he-marks-independence-day-24-august-2022>].

⁵⁰⁹ "Readout of President Biden's Call with President Zelenskyy of Ukraine," *Website of the White House*, August 25, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/08/25/readout-of-president-bidens-call-with-president-zelenskyy-of-ukraine-9/>].

⁵¹⁰ "Overhead line cut-off caused changes in ZNPP operation," *Website of Energoatom*, August 25, 2022 [<https://www.energoatom.com.ua/app-eng/eng-2508221.html>].

⁵¹¹ Marc Santora, "The Zaporizhzhia plant is back online while talks on access for U.N. inspectors gain momentum," *The New York Times*, August 26, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/08/26/world/ukraine-russia-war-news/zaporizhzhia-nuclear-plant?smid=url-share>], and "Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant is connected to the grid and generates electricity for Ukraine's needs," *Website of Energoatom*, August 26, 2022 [<https://www.energoatom.com.ua/app-eng/eng-2608222.html>].

⁵¹² Marc Santora, Andrew Higgins and Toms Dapkus, "Shells hit Zaporizhzhia plant site as the U.N.'s nuclear watchdog assembles a team of experts to visit," *The New York Times*, August 27, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/08/27/world/ukraine-russia-war-news/the-uns-nuclear-watchdog-agency-assembles-a-team-of-experts-to-visit-the-besieged-ukrainian-plant?smid=url-share>].

⁵¹³ "Russian envoy believes dialogue between five nuclear weapon states should be intensified," *TASS*, August 26, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1498425>].

Still, the **NPT Review Conference** came to an end without a final document on **August 26**, as Russia blocked consensus over passages expressing “grave concern for the military activities” near the Zaporizhzhya power plant and stressed “the paramount importance of ensuring control by Ukraine’s competent authorities.”⁵¹⁴ **Belousov** blamed other nations for attempting to “settle scores with Russia” by raising issues that were “not directly related to the treaty.”⁵¹⁵ **Western officials** meanwhile sharply criticised Russia for blocking the compromise.⁵¹⁶

There were further cooperative signals from Moscow on **August 31**, as Russian Deputy Foreign Minister **Ryabkov** signalled that Russia was prepared to hold a meeting of the New START bilateral consultative commission.⁵¹⁷ The following day, however, a **White House spokesperson** told the media that the first step would need to be to “resume inspections under the existing New START Treaty.”⁵¹⁸

September 2022: Placing annexed provinces under a nuclear umbrella?

On **September 1**, **Rafael Grossi** announced the establishment of a permanent IAEA presence in Zaporizhzhya, adding that it was “obvious that the plant and physical integrity of the plant have been violated several times.”⁵¹⁹

On the same day, **Russia** launched the weeklong Vostok 2022 military exercise with China as well as other allies.⁵²⁰

91.	De-escalatory
Meanwhile, also on September 1 , Macron promised continued support for Ukraine, stressing that Russia could not “win this war militarily” and that “we need to prepare for a long war.” The French President explained: “We want to establish conditions that will enable Ukraine, at a time of its choosing, to either achieve a military victory or a negotiated peace, in terms that would not simply be those	

⁵¹⁴ Edith M. Lederer, “Russia blocks final document at nuclear treaty conference,” *AP News*, August 27, 2022 [<https://ap-news.com/article/russia-ukraine-covid-health-china-fb34d7221d0afe726cc0b89dbdac277c>].

⁵¹⁵ “Statement by Mr. Andrei Belousov, Deputy Head of the Russian Delegation at Closing Meeting of the 10th NPT Review Conference,” *Website of the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations*, August 26, 2022 [<https://rus-siaun.ru/en/news/260822d>].

⁵¹⁶ Cassandra Vinograd and Matt Surman, “Western officials criticize Russia for blocking a joint U.N. document on nuclear disarmament,” *The New York Times*, August 27, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/28/world/europe/western-officials-criticize-russia-for-blocking-a-joint-un-document-on-nuclear-disarmament.html?smid=url-share>], and Tweet by @MJvanDeelenEU, *Twitter*, August 27, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/MJvanDeelenEU/status/1563423163702456320?s=20&t=UeHimC0kB5C0eHUWiMBRnQ>], and Tweet by @UnderSecT, *Twitter*, August 27, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/UnderSecT/status/1563343171664297985>].

⁵¹⁷ “Senior diplomat signals Russia, US may start discussing New START commission talks,” *TASS*, August 31, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1500495>].

⁵¹⁸ Jonathan Landay and Simon Lewis, “U.S.-Russia nuclear weapons inspections must resume before new arms talks, says U.S.,” *Reuters*, September 2, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/us-russia-nuclear-weapons-inspections-must-resume-before-new-arms-talks-says-us-2022-09-01/>].

⁵¹⁹ Andrew E. Kramer, “The inspectors braved shelling as they crossed the front line between Ukrainian and Russian forces,” *The New York Times*, September 1, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/09/01/world/ukraine-russia-war-news/un-team-crosses-buffer-zone-as-fighting-intensifies?smid=url-share>], and Tweet by @rafaelmgrossi, *Twitter*, September 1, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/rafaelmgrossi/status/1565381009364893699>].

⁵²⁰ “Russia starts massive war games with China and other ally states,” *Al Jazeera*, September 1, 2022 [<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/1/russia-starts-war-games-with-china-and-other-ally-states>].

it would be forced to accept if we abandoned it to its fate.” However, Ukraine’s supporters had to “act in a way that avoids escalation and prepares peace.” In detail: “Avoiding escalation is, in my view, France’s role: avoiding any nuclear escalation, or any geographical escalation. So we must do everything possible for countries not to get engaged in the conflict carelessly, leading to geographical extension. And we must do everything we can through our diplomacy to stop civil nuclear power, or nuclear threats, leading to a *vertical* escalation,” Macron said.⁵²¹

Amid renewed reports of Zaporizhzhya being cut off from the power grid, UN Secretary General **Guterres** called for a demilitarized zone around the nuclear plant on **September 6**.⁵²² According to reports from the following day, shelling near the plant continued.⁵²³

92.	Warning
On the following day, September 7 , the US air force conducted another test launch of the Minuteman III missile. ⁵²⁴ According to Pentagon spokesperson Pat Ryder , the US government had “transmitted a prelaunch notification pursuant to the Hague Code of Conduct, and notified the Russian government in advance pursuant to treaty obligations.” ⁵²⁵	

On the same **September 7** in Moscow, **Putin** once again condemned Western sanctions as “economic, financial and technological aggression of the West,” all the while stressing that these measures were having no significant effect on Russia. “I am talking about a real aggression; there is no other word for it,” he emphasized.⁵²⁶

In Kyiv, in turn, Ukrainian defense chiefs **Valeriy Zaluzhnyi** and **Mykhailo Zabrotskyi** warned of nuclear escalation risks, stressing that there was “a direct threat of the use, under certain circumstances, of tactical nuclear weapons by the Russian Armed forces.” It was “impossible to completely rule out the possibility of the direct involvement of the world’s leading countries in a *limited* nuclear conflict, in which the prospect of World War Three is already directly visible,” they added. Despite these apparent escalation concerns, in the same text Zaluzhnyi and Zabrotskyi confirmed earlier Ukrainian attacks on

⁵²¹ “Speech by the President of the French Republic at the conference of ambassadors,” *Website of the Élysée*, September 1, 2022 [<https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2022/09/01/speech-by-the-president-of-the-french-republic-at-the-conference-of-ambassadors-1>].

⁵²² “Update 97 – IAEA Director General Statement on Situation in Ukraine,” *Website of the IAEA*, September 3, 2022 [<https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/pressreleases/update-97-iaea-director-general-statement-on-situation-in-ukraine>], and “Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant: Link lost to main power line,” *BBC News*, September 3, 2022 [<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-627824979>], and Marc Santora, “Ukraine’s besieged nuclear plant loses its connection to outside power, renewing fears,” *The New York Times*, September 5, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/09/05/world/ukraine-russia-war/four-of-the-six-un-inspectors-complete-their-work-at-ukraines-russian-occupied-nuclear-power-plant?smid=url-share>], and “Ukraine: Guterres calls for safety and security of Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant,” *Website of the United Nations*, September 6, 2022 [<https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/09/1126131>].

⁵²³ Yuras Karmanau, “Shelling resumes near Ukraine nuclear plant, despite risks,” *AP News*, September 8, 2022 [<https://ap-news.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-nuclear-plant-shelling-continues-d12ded8c3d79fe6f2a062546e5ced95b>].

⁵²⁴ Stephen Losey, “See the US Air Force test launch a nuclear missile,” *Defense News*, September 6, 2022 [<https://www.defense-news.com/training-sim/2022/09/06/us-air-force-to-test-launch-nuclear-missile-wednesday-morning/>].

⁵²⁵ “Pentagon Press Secretary Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder Holds an On-Camera Press Briefing,” *Website of the U.S.* [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3149972/pentagon-press-secretary-air-force-brig-gen-pat-ryder-holds-an-on-camera-press/>].

⁵²⁶ “Eastern Economic Forum plenary session,” *Website of the President of Russia*, September 7, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/69299>].

Crimea. Accordingly, Kyiv's forces had conducted missile strikes on the Russian Saki airbase on the peninsula on August 9.⁵²⁷ In the immediate aftermath of the attack, which reportedly killed one person and destroyed several Russian aircraft, Ukraine had not formally confirmed its role.⁵²⁸

In a similar vein, still on **September 7**, Washington confirmed that its military assistance had contributed to the sinking of Russian ships. According to media reports, Undersecretary of defense for acquisition and sustainment, **William LaPlante**, had stated that the United States had "worked with an undisclosed country to train Ukrainian forces on firing anti-ship Harpoon missiles over Memorial Day weekend," that is during the last days of May 2022. Few days later, the Ukrainians had sunk a Russian naval supply ship using these missiles and another unspecified ship later on, LaPlante confirmed.⁵²⁹

Meanwhile, Western support for Kyiv continued. On **September 8**, the **Ukraine Defense Contact Group**, consisting of the United States and allies, met in Ramstein to discuss further military assistance to Ukraine. In this context, **Biden** and **Austin** approved additional military aid for Ukraine worth 675 million US dollars, including "105-millimeter howitzers, artillery ammunition, vehicles, anti-armor weapons and guided rockets."⁵³⁰ In this context, Austin stressed Washington's resolve to support Kyiv on the long run. "We will work together to upgrade our defense industrial basis to meet Ukraine's requirements for the long haul," he explained.⁵³¹ In parallel, **Blinken** visited Ukraine and pledged a separate package of more than 2 billion US dollars of additional military assistance for Ukraine and 18 "other regional security partners potentially at risk of future Russian aggression," reiterating that Washington would support Kyiv "as long as it takes."⁵³² While **Administration officials** reportedly still believed there was Congressional backing for these far-reaching measures, they also expressed some concern that more critical, notably Republican voices "could grow louder if the conflict stretches into next year and gas prices spike again."⁵³³

⁵²⁷ Valeriy Zaluzhnyi and Mykhailo Zabrodskyi, "Prospects for running a military campaign in 2023: Ukraine's perspective," *UKRINFORM*, September 7, 2022 [<https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-ato/3566404-prospects-for-running-a-military-campaign-in-2023-ukraines-perspective.html>].

⁵²⁸ Alexander Ward and Lee Hudson, "Why the Gray Eagle still hasn't landed in Ukraine," *Politico*, August 9, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/08/09/why-the-gray-eagle-still-hasnt-landed-in-ukraine-00050499>], and Michael Schwartz, "Explosions kill 1 and injure 9 at a Russian air base in Crimea," *The New York Times*, August 9, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/08/09/world/ukraine-russia-news-war?smid=url-share#ukraine-claims-a-rare-attack-in-crimea>], and Susie Blann, "Ukraine says 9 Russian warplanes destroyed in Crimea blasts," *AP News*, August 11, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-zelenskyy-kyiv-crimea-81a08f492db4683275d4aa3928cb3c43>].

⁵²⁹ Alexander Ward and Lawrence Ukenye, "The nuke speculation train has left the station," *Politico*, September 7, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/09/07/the-uke-speculation-train-has-left-the-station-00055147>], and Marcus Weisgerber, "US Trained Ukrainian Missileers Who Sunk Russian Warship, Pentagon Official Says," *Defense One*, September 7, 2022 [<https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2022/09/us-trained-ukrainian-missileers-who-sunk-russian-warship-pentagon-official-says/376808/>].

⁵³⁰ John Ismay, "The U.S. will send an additional \$675 million in military supplies to Ukraine, Austin says," *The New York Times*, September 8, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/09/world/europe/the-us-will-send-an-additional-675-million-in-military-supplies-to-ukraine-austin-says.html?smid=url-share>], and "\$675 Million in Additional Security Assistance for Ukraine," *Website of the US Department of Defense*, September 8, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3152071/675-million-in-additional-security-assistance-for-ukraine/>].

⁵³¹ "\$2.8 Billion in Additional U.S. Military Assistance for Ukraine and Its Neighbors," *Website of the US Department of State*, September 8, 2022 [<https://www.state.gov/2-8-billion-in-additional-u-s-military-assistance-for-ukraine-and-its-neighbors/>], and "U.S. approves up to \$675M in further military aid to Ukraine," *AP News*, September 8, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-biden-germany-lloyd-austin-db464df8a50e9ca418a1092af3bb>].

⁵³² "Ukraine: Blinken makes surprise visit to Kyiv," *Deutsche Welle*, September 8, 2022 [<https://www.dw.com/en/russia-ukraine-updates-blinken-visits-kyiv-as-us-pledges-billions-in-new-military-aid/a-63052888>], and "\$2.8 Billion in Additional U.S. Military Assistance for Ukraine and Its Neighbors," *Website of the US Department of Defense*, September 8, 2022 [<https://www.state.gov/2-8-billion-in-additional-u-s-military-assistance-for-ukraine-and-its-neighbors/>].

⁵³³ Alexander Ward and Jonathan Lemire, "Biden's next big Ukraine challenge," *Politico*, September 8, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/09/08/bidens-next-big-ukraine-challenge-00055627>].

Following these announcements and amid reports of further Ukrainian advances, on **September 8, Russia** called an emergency meeting at the UN Security Council “to discuss threats to peace caused by foreign governments supplying arms and military goods to Ukraine.”⁵³⁴ At the meeting, Moscow’s ambassador to the UN **Vasily Nebenzya** claimed that Western weaponry was “not playing a decisive role on the battlefield regardless of what the Ukrainians and their vassals are saying,” but warned of potential diversion of Western-supplied weapons to smugglers.”⁵³⁵ He had convened the meeting to highlight the cynicism and mendacity of Western countries, he explained. Several other member states however questioned the need for the meeting, with US representative **Richard M. Mills, Jr.**, characterizing it as a Russian attempt to distract from a UN meeting on forced displacements amid Russian abuses in Ukraine the day before. “We will not stop our support to Ukraine just because Russia is frustrated that its attempt at regime change has not gone to plan,” stressed Mills.⁵³⁶

On the same **September 8**, CIA Director **Burns** told a public conference audience in Washington that Putin’s war was not going according to plan and would do “long-term damage” to Russia’s economy and “generations of Russians.” Right now, “Putin’s bet” was that he was going to be “tougher than the Ukrainians, the Europeans, the Americans,” Burns explained and stressed that the Russian President was “wrong about that.”⁵³⁷ Indeed, on **September 10, Ukrainian forces** liberated the key town of Iziurm in another sign that Ukraine’s counteroffensive was fast advancing. Yet the **Russian Defence Ministry** characterized the development as a planned withdrawal.⁵³⁸

The situation around Zaporizhzhya continued to cause concern. On **September 11**, it was the subject of a phone call between **Putin** and **Macron**, during which Putin reportedly reiterated accusations that Ukraine was shelling the plant, while Macron called on Russia to “withdraw their heavy and light weapons and that the IAEA’s recommendations be followed to ensure safety at the site.”⁵³⁹ On the same day, Kyiv began shutting down the last reactor in operation at the plant.⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁴ Max Hunder and Tom Balmforth, “Ukraine retakes territory in Kharkiv region as Russian front crumbles,” *Reuters*, September 9, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/blinden-visits-ukraine-pivotal-moment-kyiv-claims-gains-2022-09-08/>], and John Ismay, “The U.S. will send an additional \$675 million in military supplies to Ukraine, Austin says,” *The New York Times*, September 8, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/09/world/europe/the-us-will-send-an-additional-675-million-in-military-supplies-to-ukraine-austin-says.html?smid=url-share>], and Edith M. Lederer, “Russia and US clash over Western weapons for Ukraine,” *AP News*, September 9, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-united-states-nations-ed07e77d97b2400d81d200f845ec53d3>].

⁵³⁵ “Russia, United States spar at UN over arms to Ukraine,” *Al Jazeera*, September 9, 2022 [<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/9/russia-united-states-spar-at-un-over-arms-to-ukraine>], and Edith M. Lederer, “Russia and US clash over Western weapons for Ukraine,” *AP News*, September 9, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-united-states-nations-ed07e77d97b2400d81d200f845ec53d3>].

⁵³⁶ “While Millions of Ukrainian Civilians Suffer, Russian Federation’s Delegate Tells Security Council ‘Destructive Process in Ukraine Far from Over’,” *Website of the United Nations*, September 8, 2022 [<https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc15024.doc.htm>].

⁵³⁷ Julian E. Barnes, “Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine Looks Like a ‘Failure,’ C.I.A. Director Says,” *The New York Times*, September 8, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/08/world/europe/putin-russia-ukraine-cia.html>], and “CIA Director on Cyber Threats,” *C-Span*, September 8, 2022 [<https://www.c-span.org/video/?522718-4/cia-director-cyber-threats&event=522718&playEvent>] (from 03:55)].

⁵³⁸ Marc Santora and Anna Lukinova, “Russia withdraws its forces from Iziurm, a logistics hub in the northeast,” *The New York Times*, September 10, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/09/10/world/ukraine-russia-war/ukrainian-forces-push-deeper-into-kharkiv-region-capturing-more-towns?smid=url-share>].

⁵³⁹ Isobel Koshiw, “Putin and Macron trade blame over risk at Ukraine’s Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant,” *The Guardian*, September 11, 2022 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/11/reactor-ukraine-zaporizhzhia-nuclear-plant-shut-down-operator>].

⁵⁴⁰ Marc Santora and David E. Sanger, “Ukraine begins to shut down the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant as a safety measure,” *The New York Times*, September 11, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/11/world/europe/zaporizhzhia-nuclear-plant-shut-down.html?smid=url-share>].

Meanwhile, Ukraine shared another list of weapons requirements with US lawmakers, media reported on **September 12**. The list included “the Army Tactical Missile System, or ATACMS,” which the Biden administration had previously refused to deliver, arguing that the the system with a 190-miles range could be used to strike targets on Russian territory and thus potentially spark an escalation of the conflict.⁵⁴¹

Indeed, amid the fast Ukrainian advances on the ground, escalation concerns were once again on the rise. On the same **September 12**, former US National Security Advisor **John Bolton** told the media that the world was now “a lot closer” to nuclear weapons use. Yet, “the potential risk of the use of a nuclear weapon [by Russia was] not so much to change the battlefield but to strengthen Putin’s position at home.” And: Putin was in “more trouble now than he’s been since the invasion,” Bolton explained.⁵⁴² The following day, former US and NATO official, **Rose Gottemoeller**, expressed a similar view, noting that, in light of the Ukrainian advances, Russia would “strike back now in really unpredictable ways,” which could include “a nuclear strike of some kind.” She was particular concerned over a potential nuclear demonstration strike aimed at terrifying Ukraine and its allies. While “the Ukrainians [might] seem well prepared to stay the course ... we will all have to be ready to stay the course, come what may,” she stressed. Yet, a Western response to Russian nuclear use could be carried out with cyber or conventional, rather than nuclear, means, she explained.⁵⁴³ Current **US officials** also confirmed that “the Russians are in trouble” and that “the question will be how the Russians will react.”⁵⁴⁴ Yet, despite these apparent escalation concerns, **US officials** confirmed to media that US and UK officials, including **Jake Sullivan** and **Mark Milley**, had advised Ukraine as it planned its counteroffensive.⁵⁴⁵

Also on **September 13**, in another phone call with **Putin, Scholz** “urged the Russian President to find a diplomatic solution as soon as possible, based on a ceasefire, a complete withdrawal of Russian troops and respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine.” Further he “stressed that any further Russian annexation moves would not go unanswered and would not be recognized under any circumstances.”⁵⁴⁶

Meanwhile, Western support for Kyiv continued unabated. On **September 14**, **Ursula von der Leyen** reaffirmed EU support to Ukraine in her 2022 State of the Union Address. “I want to make it very clear — the sanctions are here to stay. This is the time for us to show resolve, not appeasement,” she declared, announcing that the EU would provide 100 million euros of aid to rehabilitate Ukrainian schools, “bring

⁵⁴¹ Warren P. Strobel and Michael R. Gordon, “Ukraine Signals Major Weapons Request for Long-Term Offensive Against Russia,” *The Wall Street Journal*, September 12, 2022 [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-signals-major-weapons-request-for-long-term-offensive-against-russia-11662998386>].

⁵⁴² Chloe Folmar, “John Bolton says threat of Russia using nuclear weapon ‘closer’ than before,” *The Hill*, September 12, 2022 [<https://thehill.com/policy/international/3639612-john-bolton-says-threat-of-russia-using-nuclear-weapon-closer-than-before/>].

⁵⁴³ Brendan Cole, “Putin May Hit Back With Nuclear Weapons Amid Ukraine Counter: Ex-NATO Chief,” *Newsweek*, September 13, 2022 [<https://www.newsweek.com/russia-ukraine-nato-nuclear-gottemoeller-1742533>].

⁵⁴⁴ Shane Harris and Ellen Nakashima, “‘The Russians are in trouble,’ U.S. official says of latest war analysis,” *The Washington Post*, September 12, 2022 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/09/12/ukraine-russia-retreat-us-intelligence/>].

⁵⁴⁵ Julian E. Barnes, Eric Schmitt and Helene Cooper, “The Critical Moment Behind Ukraine’s Rapid Advance,” *The New York Times*, September 13, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/13/us/politics/ukraine-russia-pentagon.html>].

⁵⁴⁶ Hans von der Burchard, “Scholz tells Putin to withdraw as Germany faces calls to send Ukraine tanks,” *Politico*, September 13, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/scholz-urge-putin-withdraw-troop-germany-face-call-send-ukraine-tank-russia-war/>], and “Bundeskanzler Scholz telefoniert mit dem russischen Präsidenten Putin (Chancellor Scholz talks on the phone with Russian President Putin),” *Website of the German Federal Government*, September 13, 2022 [<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/suche/bundeskanzler-scholz-telefoniert-mit-dem-russischen-praesidenten-putin-2125516>].

Ukraine into our European free roaming area,” and “work with Ukraine to ensure seamless access to the Single Market.” “Putin will fail and Europe will prevail,” she concluded.⁵⁴⁷ The following day, the German Defence Minister **Lambrecht** announced Berlin would “send two multiple rocket launching systems, 200 rockets and 50 armored personnel carriers” to Kyiv.⁵⁴⁸ In parallel, the **Pentagon** announced another 600 million US dollars of security assistance for Ukraine, including additional HIMARS ammunition.⁵⁴⁹ “We will support the people of Ukraine for as long as it takes,” reaffirmed **Blinken** in a statement. “The capabilities we are delivering are carefully calibrated to make the most difference on the battlefield and strengthen Ukraine’s hand at the negotiating table when the time is right,” he added.⁵⁵⁰ However, media noted that the announcement did not include the long-range systems like ATACMS that Ukraine had requested.⁵⁵¹

93.	Warning
On the same September 14 , Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova explicitly warned Washington against sending longer-range missiles to Ukraine. This would “be crossing a red line” and would make the United States “a direct party to the conflict,” she said. ⁵⁵²	

Also on **September 14**, Former Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe of NATO, **Richard Shirreff**, reportedly warned that NATO was not ready to fight a war with Russia in a potential “worst case” scenario.⁵⁵³

In Washington, officials highlighted US contributions to Ukraine’s air and missile defense. On **September 16**, Pentagon spokesperson **Patrick Ryder** announced that the United States would supply two National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS) to Kyiv, “within the next two months or so,” which would “further contribute to protecting Ukrainians from enemy air threats, to include aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles and missiles.”⁵⁵⁴ On the same day, the Commander of the US Air Forces in Europe, **James B. Hecker**, confirmed in an interview that the US air force was “sharing information about

⁵⁴⁷ “2022 State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen,” *Website of the European Commission*, September 14, 2022 [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/ov/SPEECH_22_5493].

⁵⁴⁸ Christopher F. Schuetze and Chris Cameron, “Germany announces more weapons for Ukraine amid criticism it isn’t doing enough,” *The New York Times*, September 15, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/09/15/world/ukraine-russia-war/germany-announces-more-weapons-for-ukraine-amid-criticism-it-isnt-doing-enough?smid=url-share>], and Kai Küstner, “Raketenwerfer und Dingos für Kiew (Rocket launchers and Dingos for Kyiv),” *Tagesschau*, September 15, 2022 [<https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/innenpolitik/waffenlieferung-ukraine-113.html>].

⁵⁴⁹ “\$600 Million in Additional Security Assistance for Ukraine,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, September 15, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3160503/600-million-in-additional-security-assistance-for-ukraine/>].

⁵⁵⁰ “\$600 Million in Additional Security Assistance for Ukraine,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, September 15, 2022 [<https://www.state.gov/600-million-in-additional-u-s-military-assistance-for-ukraine/>].

⁵⁵¹ Eric Schmitt, “The U.S. will send \$600 million in additional military supplies to Ukraine,” *The New York Times*, September 15, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/15/world/europe/biden-ukraine-military-aid.html?smid=url-share>].

⁵⁵² “Russia says longer-range U.S. missiles for Kyiv would cross red line,” *Reuters*, September 15, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-says-longer-range-us-missiles-kyiv-would-cross-red-line-2022-09-15/>].

⁵⁵³ Brendan Cole, “NATO Nowhere Near Ready for Direct War With Russia: Ex-General,” *Newsweek*, September 15, 2022 [<https://www.newsweek.com/nato-general-shirreff-ukraine-russia-war-1742977>].

⁵⁵⁴ “Pentagon Press Secretary Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder Holds an On-Camera Press Briefing,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, September 16, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3161477/pentagon-press-secretary-air-force-brig-gen-pat-ryder-holds-an-on-camera-press/>].

Russian air-launched missiles and other airborne threats with their Ukrainian counterparts in real time.”⁵⁵⁵

Meanwhile, there were further concerns over potential war crimes committed by Russian forces in their ongoing war. On **September 15**, a **Ukrainian official** stated that a mass grave had been discovered in the recently liberated town of Iziium.⁵⁵⁶

Still on the same **September 15**, Putin and China’s Xi Jinping met in Uzbekistan at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit. At this first meeting between the two leaders since the beginning of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, **Putin** acknowledged Beijing had “questions” and “concerns” regarding the “Ukrainian crisis,” which he pledged to clarify. Observers interpreted the statement as an indication that Chinese support for the Russian regime was not unconditional.⁵⁵⁷

94.	Warning
Conversely, at a news conference the following day, September 16 , Putin took a less cautious stance. Referring to the Ukrainian counteroffensive, he suggested to wait and see “how it unfolds” and implied that the Russia could intensify recent attacks on Ukrainian infrastructure. “Recently, Russian Armed Forces delivered a couple of sensitive blows to that area. Let’s call them warning shots,” he said. “If the situation continues like that, our response will be more impactful.” Moscow’s main goal was “to liberate the entire territory of Donbass,” he added. ⁵⁵⁸ On the same day, Russia conducted nuclear drills dubbed Umka-2022 in the Arctic Ocean opposite from Alaska, firing cruise missiles from submarines. Per the Russian Defence Ministry , the goal of the drill was to test the “ability and readiness to defend the Russian arctic by military means.” ⁵⁵⁹	

95.	Warning
Against this backdrop, Biden warned Putin against nuclear use on the same September 16 . When asked what he would say to Putin if he were “considering using chemical or tactical nuclear weapons,” Biden responded: “Don’t. Don’t. Don’t. You will change the face of war unlike anything since World War II.” Asked what the United States would do if Russia did use nuclear weapons, the President stressed the response would be “consequential,” but refused to elaborate what it would entail exactly. Russia would “become more of a pariah in the world than they ever have been,” he stressed, adding that the response would be determined “depending on the extent of what they do.” ⁵⁶⁰	

⁵⁵⁵ Eric Schmitt, “The U.S. is warning Ukraine about Russian air threats in real time, a top American general says,” *The New York Times*, September 18, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/09/18/world/ukraine-russia-war/the-us-is-warning-ukraine-about-russian-air-threats-in-real-time-a-top-american-general-says?smid=url-share>].

⁵⁵⁶ “Mass grave of more than 440 bodies found in Iziium, Ukraine, police say,” *Reuters*, September 15, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/mass-grave-more-than-440-bodies-found-izium-ukraine-police-2022-09-15/>].

⁵⁵⁷ Stuart Lau, “Putin admits China has ‘questions’ and ‘concerns’ about Ukraine war,” *Politico*, September 15, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/putin-admits-china-has-questions-and-concerns-about-ukraine-war/>].

⁵⁵⁸ “With a grin, Putin warns Ukraine: the war can get more serious,” *Reuters*, September 16, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-putin-says-west-wants-breakup-russia-he-invaded-ukraine-stop-it-2022-09-16/>], and “News conference following visit to Uzbekistan,” *Website of the President of Russia*, September 16, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69366>].

⁵⁵⁹ “Russia conducts military drills in Arctic sea opposite Alaska,” *Reuters*, September 16, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-conducts-military-drills-arctic-sea-opposite-alaska-2022-09-16/>].

⁵⁶⁰ “President Biden warns Vladimir Putin not to use nuclear weapons: ‘Don’t. Don’t. Don’t.’,” *CBS News*, September 16, 2022 [<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/president-joe-biden-vladimir-putin-60-minutes-2022-09-16/>].

Nuclear concerns of a different kind arose on **September 19**, when “a powerful Russian missile exploded less than 900 feet from the reactors at the South Ukraine Nuclear Power Plant ... narrowly avoiding a possible nuclear calamity,” according to **Ukrainian officials**. The head of the Ukrainian energy company Energoatom, **Petro Kotin**, characterised the incident as “nuclear terrorism.”⁵⁶¹

Meanwhile in Washington, congressional support for Ukraine aid remained intact. On **September 19**, **Chuck Schumer**, the Senate Majority Leader called for military assistance worth an additional 12 billion US dollars. “Mass graves, attacks that target civilians, and other unspeakable acts reinforce how critical aid like this is, and how it actually helps change what is happening on the ground in a way that can save innocent lives,” he explained.⁵⁶²

From **September 19** to **23**, world leaders came together under the shadow of the war in Ukraine at the United Nations General Assembly. While UN Secretary General **Guterres** condemned the war as having “unleashed widespread destruction with massive violations of human rights and international humanitarian law,” both **Erdogan** and **Macron** “cast themselves as would-be peacemakers,” and Putin did not attend.⁵⁶³

Instead, the Kremlin launched what media called “a tightly choreographed display” to annex four partially occupied regions of Ukraine. On **September 19-20**, representatives of the occupying authorities in the Ukrainian regions of Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizka announced referenda to “join” the Russian Federation.⁵⁶⁴

96.	Escalatory
Commenting on the developments via Telegram on September 20 , Medvedev assessed that the step was “of great importance” and issued a new veiled nuclear warning. Accordingly, Russia could defend itself with “all the forces of self-defense” in case of an encroachment of its territory and “not a single future leader of Russia, not a single official [would] be able to reverse these decisions [to annex the Ukrainian territories].” ⁵⁶⁵	

Conversely, Western officials strongly condemned the Russian decision. On **September 20**, **Jake Sullivan** stressed that the United States would never recognize Russia’s claims to any purportedly annexed parts of Ukraine” and rejected “Russia’s actions unequivocally.”⁵⁶⁶ On the same day, the Defence Minister of Norway, **Bjorn Arild Gram** promised long-term support for Ukraine. “We have to help Ukraine as long as it takes,” he explained. There would now be “a confrontational Russia for a long time.” He also

⁵⁶¹ Marc Santora, “A Russian missile hits less than 900 feet from nuclear reactors,” *The New York Times*, September 19, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/09/19/world/ukraine-russia-war/a-russian-missile-hits-near-a-nuclear-energy-site-in-southern-ukraine?smid=url-share>].

⁵⁶² Lara Seligman and Lawrence Ukenye, “U.S. in talks to swap former Afghan aircraft for help hunting terrorists,” *Politico*, September 19, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/09/19/u-s-in-talks-to-swap-former-afghan-aircraft-for-help-hunting-terrorists-00057475>].

⁵⁶³ Farnaz Fassihi and Alan Yuhas, “Russia’s invasion casts a shadow over the U.N. General Assembly,” *The New York Times*, September 20, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/09/20/world/ukraine-russia-war/russias-invasion-casts-a-shadow-over-the-un-general-assembly?smid=url-share>].

⁵⁶⁴ Farnaz Fassihi and Alan Yuhas, “Russia’s invasion casts a shadow over the U.N. General Assembly,” *The New York Times*, September 20, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/09/20/world/ukraine-russia-war/russias-invasion-casts-a-shadow-over-the-un-general-assembly?smid=url-share>].

⁵⁶⁵ Post on Telegram channel of Dmitry Medvedev, *Telegram*, September 20, 2022 [https://t.me/medvedev_telegram/178].

⁵⁶⁶ “US rejects Russia’s plans to hold referendums in parts of Ukraine,” *Reuters*, September 20, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/us-rejects-russias-plans-hold-referendums-parts-ukraine-2022-09-20/>].

expressed nuclear escalation concerns in the context of Russian losses in Ukraine. “A weakened Russia doesn’t necessarily mean a less dangerous Russia, because they are more dependent on their nuclear capabilities now, so we have we have to continue to monitor this in the High North,” said Gram.⁵⁶⁷

On the following day, **September 21, Putin** took another escalatory step, announcing a “partial mobilisation” of 300,000 additional troops for the war in Ukraine.⁵⁶⁸ In the same speech, he once again accused the West of attempting “to weaken, divide and ultimately destroy” Russia and particularly condemned “plans to organize the delivery of long-range offensive weapons to Ukraine, which could be used to deliver strikes at Crimea and other Russian regions. ... Washington, London and Brussels are openly encouraging Kiev to move the hostilities to our territory,” he lamented. “They openly say that Russia must be defeated on the battlefield by any means.”⁵⁶⁹

97.	Escalatory
<p>When mentioning nuclear weapons in his September 21 speech, Putin accused the West of nuclear blackmail and vowed to “make use of all weapon systems available to us” in case of “a threat to the territorial integrity” of Russia and “to defend Russia.”</p> <p><i>They [the West] have even resorted to the nuclear blackmail. I am referring not only to the Western-encouraged shelling of the Zaporozhye Nuclear Power Plant, which poses a threat of a nuclear disaster, but also to the statements made by some high-ranking representatives of the leading NATO countries on the possibility and admissibility of using weapons of mass destruction – nuclear weapons – against Russia.</i></p> <p><i>I would like to remind those who make such statements regarding Russia that our country has different types of weapons as well, and some of them are more modern than the weapons NATO countries have. In the event of a threat to the territorial integrity of our country and to defend Russia and our people, we will certainly make use of all weapon systems available to us. This is not a bluff.</i>⁵⁷⁰</p>	

Ukrainian officials immediately declared these threats ineffective. “Threatening with nuclear weapons... to Ukrainians? Putin has not yet understood who he is dealing with,” tweeted Zelenskyy adviser **Mykhailo Podolyak** on **September 21**.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁷ Alexander Ward et al., “‘If other countries did as much ... the war would be over’,” *Politico*, September 20, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/09/20/if-other-countries-did-as-much-the-war-would-be-over-00057820>].

⁵⁶⁸ “Address by the President of the Russian Federation,” *Website of the President of Russia*, September 21, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69390>], and Alexander Ward and Lawrence Ukenye, “Planning for a post-post-Putin world,” *Politico*, September 21, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/09/21/planning-for-a-post-post-putin-world-00057956>].

⁵⁶⁹ “Address by the President of the Russian Federation,” *Website of the President of Russia*, September 21, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69390>].

⁵⁷⁰ “Address by the President of the Russian Federation,” *Website of the President of Russia*, September 21, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69390>].

⁵⁷¹ Tweet by @Podolyak_M, *Twitter*, September 21, 2022 [https://twitter.com/Podolyak_M/status/1572590669683638279].

98.	Warning
Western representatives showed themselves similarly unimpressed by Putin's renewed nuclear rhetoric. The speech demonstrated that the war was "not going according to President Putin's plans," explained Stoltenberg on the same day, adding that "the only way to end this war is to prove that President Putin will not win on the battlefield." Stoltenberg acknowledged that the mobilization of additional Russia troops escalated the conflict, but also stressed that NATO would support Ukraine for the "long haul." Regarding Putin's nuclear rhetoric, Stoltenberg emphasized that the allies would "not engage in that same kind of reckless and dangerous nuclear rhetoric" and that the Alliance would "make sure that there is no misunderstanding in Moscow about the seriousness of using nuclear weapons." That was the reason why the Alliance had been "so clear" in its "communications with Russia about the unprecedented consequences, about the fact that the nuclear war cannot be won by Russia," added Stoltenberg. ⁵⁷²	

Biden strongly condemned Russian behavior in a speech at the UN General Assembly on the same **September 21**, which observers interpreted as an attempt to rally both international and domestic support for continued assistance to Ukraine, but sought to downplay the nuclear aspects.⁵⁷³ Concretely, Biden accused Russia of "shamelessly violat[ing] the core tenets of the United Nations Charter;" of "organizing a sham referenda to try to annex parts of Ukraine;" of making "overt nuclear threats against Europe" and showing "a reckless disregard for the responsibilities of the non-proliferation regime."⁵⁷⁴

99.	De-escalatory
On nuclear issues, Biden also called on all countries to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime, stressed that the United States was "ready to pursue critical arms control measures," and reiterated that "a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought." The five permanent members of the Security Council had just reaffirmed that commitment in January, Biden said. "But today, we're seeing disturbing trends. Russia shunned the Non-Proliferation ideals embraced by every other nation at the 10th NPT Review Conference. And again, today, as I said, they're making irresponsible nuclear threats to use nuclear weapons," the US President said. However, he refrained from any warnings or counter-threats. ⁵⁷⁵	

On the same day, there were calls in Washington for further support for Ukraine. According to media reports, a bipartisan group of 17 lawmakers, including **Andy Harris**, **Brian Fitzpatrick**, **Marcy Kaptur**, and **Mike Quigley**, sent a letter to Austin demanding that the Pentagon "speed up its monthslong review of whether to supply Ukraine with Gray Eagle drones."⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷² Humeyra Pamuk and John Chalmers, "Exclusive: NATO chief calls Putin's nuclear threat a 'dangerous' escalation," *Reuters*, September 21, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/exclusive-nato-chief-says-putins-ukraine-escalation-dangerous-reckless-2022-09-21/>].

⁵⁷³ Alexander Ward and Lawrence Ukenye, "Planning for a post-post-Putin world," *Politico*, September 21, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/09/21/planning-for-a-post-post-putin-world-00057956>].

⁵⁷⁴ "Remarks by President Biden Before the 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly," *Website of the White House*, September 21, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/09/21/remarks-by-president-biden-before-the-77th-session-of-the-united-nations-general-assembly/>].

⁵⁷⁵ "Remarks by President Biden Before the 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly," *Website of the White House*, September 21, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/09/21/remarks-by-president-biden-before-the-77th-session-of-the-united-nations-general-assembly/>].

⁵⁷⁶ Alexander Ward and Lara Seligman, "U.S. ambassador: Finland and Sweden in NATO by Christmas," *Politico*, September 22, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/09/22/u-s-ambassador-finland-and-sweden-in-nato-by-christmas-00058404>].

100.	De-escalatory
<p>On September 22, Blinken echoed Biden's statement from the day before, strongly condemning Russia's nuclear rhetoric and recalling the P5 statement that nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. Putin had said that "Russia would not hesitate to use, and I quote, <i>all weapons systems available</i>, end quote, in response to a threat to its territorial integrity, a threat that is all the more menacing given Russia's intention to annex large swaths of Ukraine in the days ahead. When that's complete, we can expect President Putin will claim any Ukrainian effort to liberate this land as an attack on so-called <i>Russian territory</i>," Blinken said. "This from a country that in January of this year, in this place, joined other permanent members of the Security Council in signing a statement affirming that, and I quote, <i>nuclear war can never be won and must never be fought</i>." Thus, Blinken concluded, "every council member should send a clear message that these reckless nuclear threats must stop immediately."⁵⁷⁷</p>	

Amid these renewed tensions, hopes for arms control progress were damped. US Undersecretary for arms control **Bonnie Jenkins** told media that resuming nuclear arms control talks with Russia would be challenging. Moscow had not yet shown that it was "ready to resume work on nuclear arms control with the United States" as Biden had called for in August. "Nothing has happened since then," Jenkins explained and added that she was concerned by current allusions to nuclear weapons. "We want to impress upon them [Russia] the gravity of the situation, and not getting to that point," she stressed.⁵⁷⁸

Russian threat making however continued. On **September 22**, **Lavrov** once again claimed the West was already involved in the war against Ukraine through its military assistance for Kyiv.

The position of the states that are pumping Ukraine with weapons and combat equipment and training its armed forces is particularly cynical ... The goal is obvious ... – to drag out the hostilities as much as possible ... in order to exhaust and weaken Russia. This implies the direct involvement of Western countries in the Ukrainian conflict, which is turning them into its party. ...

We have no illusions that today the armed forces of Russia ... are opposed not only by the neo-Nazi units of the Kiev regime but also by the war machine of the "collective West." NATO is supplying the Ukrainian armed forces with real-time intelligence information using modern systems, aircraft, ships, satellites and strategic drones. Ukraine is incited to defeat Russia on the battlefield (as EU officials openly say) and Russia must be deprived of any sovereignty by way of punishment.⁵⁷⁹

101.	Escalatory
<p>In parallel, Medvedev issued another nuclear threat on the same September 22, explaining that "any Russian weapons, including strategic nuclear weapons and weapons based on new principles, could be used" to protect "all the territories that have joined [Russia]." The West, he said, needed "to understand that Russia has chosen its own path." There was "no way back."⁵⁸⁰</p>	

⁵⁷⁷ "Secretary Antony J. Blinken at the United Nations Security Council Ministerial Meeting on Ukrainian Sovereignty and Russian Accountability," *Website of the U.S. Department of State*, September 22, 2022 [<https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-at-the-united-nations-security-council-ministerial-meeting-on-ukrainian-sovereignty-and-russian-accountability/>].

⁵⁷⁸ Ryo Nakamura, "U.S. arms control talks with Russia a 'challenge' after Ukraine: diplomat," *Nikkei*, September 24, 2022 [<https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/Interview/U.S.-arms-control-talks-with-Russia-a-challenge-after-Ukraine-diplomat>].

⁵⁷⁹ "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks at a meeting of the UN Security Council on Ukraine, New York, September 22, 2022," *Website of the Russian Embassy to Germany*, September 23, 2022 [<https://russische-botschaft.ru/de/2022/09/23/foreign-minister-sergey-lavrovs-remarks-at-a-meeting-of-the-un-security-council-on-ukraine-new-york-september-22-2022/>].

⁵⁸⁰ Post on Telegram channel of Dmitry Medvedev, *Telegram*, September 22, 2022 [https://t.me/s/medvedev_telegram].

Western intelligence officials provided some context to the Russian rhetoric. Anonymous sources told reporters that Russia's military was "divided over how best to counter Ukraine's unexpected battlefield advances" with "Putin ... himself giving directions directly to generals in the field, ... Russian officers arguing among themselves and complaining to friends and relatives back home about decision-making from Moscow," and "significant disagreements on strategy with military leaders struggling to agree on where to focus their efforts to shore up defensive lines."⁵⁸¹

In Ukraine, the Russian threats appeared to spark concern. On the same **September 22**, the deputy military intelligence head of Ukraine, **Vadym Skibitskyi**, warned Russia might consider nuclear use in order to "stop our offensive activity and to destroy our state."⁵⁸² At the same time, media reported Ukraine was "asking urgently for modern tanks," notably the "more modern American-made M-1 Abrams and German-made Leopard tanks" to consolidate its gains in the face of Russia's partial mobilization. Yet, both Washington and Berlin "hesitated to provide the tanks, in part due to the training and logistics challenges involved."⁵⁸³

102.	De-escalatory
Russia's rhetoric also caused concern in Western capitals. On September 23 , media reported that for several months, Washington had "been sending private communications to Moscow warning Russia's leadership of the grave consequences that would follow the use of a nuclear weapon." Yet, US officials reportedly also emphasized that Putin's recent threats were only the latest in a long series of similar statements since the beginning of the invasion and that there was still "no indication Russia [was] moving its nuclear weapons in preparation for an imminent strike." ⁵⁸⁴ Still, some US officials "noted a change in the tone, scope and seriousness of Mr. Putin's latest threats" and expressed concern over a potential tactical nuclear weapons use by Putin "perhaps in a demonstration blast over the Black Sea or Arctic Ocean, or in Ukrainian territory," media reported on September 24 . However, these sources also stressed that there was "no evidence yet" that Putin was "moving those weapons or preparing such a strike." ⁵⁸⁵	

103.	Escalatory
Another implicit Russian nuclear statement followed on the same September 24 . At a press conference after the UN General Assembly, Lavrov declared that "the entire territory of the Russian Federation, which is confirmed and can be further confirmed in the Russian Constitution, [was] certainly under the state's full protection," and that "all laws, doctrines, concepts, strategies of the Russian Federation apply to its entire territory." On potential nuclear use scenarios, Lavrov pointed at the Russian doctrine: "As for the Russian Federation, the president and other Kremlin representatives	

⁵⁸¹ Katie Bo Lillis, "Russia's military divided as Putin struggles to deal with Ukraine's counteroffensive, US sources say," *CNN*, September 22, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/09/22/politics/russia-military-divided-ukraine-putin/index.html>].

⁵⁸² Paul Sonne and John Hudson, "U.S. has sent private warnings to Russia against using a nuclear weapon," *The Washington Post*, September 22, 2022 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/09/22/russia-nuclear-threat-us-options/>].

⁵⁸³ Lara Seligman, Paul McLeary and Erin Banco, "'These are not rental cars': As Ukraine pleads for tanks, the West holds back," *Politico*, September 22, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/09/22/ukraine-requests-american-tanks-counteroffensive-00058303>].

⁵⁸⁴ Paul Sonne and John Hudson, "U.S. has sent private warnings to Russia against using a nuclear weapon," *The Washington Post*, September 22, 2022 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/09/22/russia-nuclear-threat-us-options/>].

⁵⁸⁵ Eric Schmitt and Jim Tankersley, "The U.S. says Russia isn't preparing to use nuclear weapons, yet," *The New York Times*, September 24, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/25/world/europe/the-us-says-russia-isnt-preparing-to-use-nuclear-weapons-yet.html>].

have stated this on numerous occasions, we have our nuclear security doctrine, it is a document available to the public, everything is written down in it. I invite you to look once again at absolutely clearly specified cases when our use of nuclear weapons is allowed.”⁵⁸⁶

Ukrainian representatives reacted with outrage. On **September 25**, **Kuleba** declared that Moscow’s “irresponsible statements on the possible use of nuclear weapons” were “absolutely unacceptable.” “Ukraine won’t give in,” he added. “We call on all nuclear powers to speak out now and make it clear to Russia that such rhetorics put the world at risk and will not be tolerated.”⁵⁸⁷ In a similar vein, **Zelenskyy** noted that Putin was trying to “scare the whole world” with his nuclear threats but that the world was “detering ... and containing this threat. We need to keep putting pressure on him and not allow him to continue.”⁵⁸⁸

104.	Escalatory
Meanwhile Washington issued further warnings to Moscow. On September 25 , Jake Sullivan stressed that “the possible use of nuclear weapons for the first time since the Second World War” was “a matter that we have to take deadly seriously” and which would trigger “catastrophic consequences.” The US government had “communicated directly, privately and at very high levels to the Kremlin that any use of nuclear weapons will be met with catastrophic consequences for Russia, that the US and our allies will respond decisively, and we have been clear and specific about what that will entail,” Sullivan said. ⁵⁸⁹ Sullivan also stressed that Moscow could not dissuade Western military assistance for Ukraine with its threats. “Nothing that Russia has done with this mobilization of troops, with the sham referenda in the occupied regions” would “deter” the United States from “providing Ukraine with the necessary means and technologies they need to defend themselves.” ⁵⁹⁰ Indeed, on the same day, Zelenskyy announced that the United States had supplied the previously announced advanced air defence system NASAMS to Ukraine. ⁵⁹¹	

On the following day, **Peskov** refused to comment on Sullivan’s warning. “There are channels for dialogue, but they are quite sporadic, though they at least allow for some urgent reports on each other’s positions,” he only explained. These contacts were at the “proper level,” he said.⁵⁹²

105.	Warning
A stronger reaction came from Ryabkov on September 26 . On Russian TV, he warned the United States against continuing its allegedly “irresponsible, extremely aggressive, extremely pushy course,”	

⁵⁸⁶ “All potential new Russian territories will be under state’s protection — Lavrov,” TASS, September 24, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1512901>].

⁵⁸⁷ Tweet by @DmytroKuleba, Twitter, September 25, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/dmytrokuleba/status/1573795699598282753>].

⁵⁸⁸ “Full transcript: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on ‘Face the Nation,’ Sept. 25, 2022,” CBS News, September 26, 2022 [<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/volodymyr-zelenskyy-ukraine-president-face-the-nation-transcript-09-25-2022/>].

⁵⁸⁹ “Transcript: National security advisor Jake Sullivan on ‘Face the Nation,’ Sept. 25, 2022,” CBS News, September 25, 2022 [<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/jake-sullivan-face-the-nation-transcript-09-25-2022/>].

⁵⁹⁰ “Transcript: National security advisor Jake Sullivan on ‘Face the Nation,’ Sept. 25, 2022,” CBS News, September 25, 2022 [<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/jake-sullivan-face-the-nation-transcript-09-25-2022/>].

⁵⁹¹ “Full transcript: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on ‘Face the Nation,’ Sept. 25, 2022,” CBS News, September 26, 2022 [<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/volodymyr-zelenskyy-ukraine-president-face-the-nation-transcript-09-25-2022/>].

⁵⁹² “Contacts between Russia and US are at ‘proper level’ — Kremlin,” TASS, September 26, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1513489>].

which was “bringing everyone closer to a dangerous line.” Yet, he also emphasized that Russian nuclear doctrine had not changed. “Everything remains in the same and within the same framework as set forth in our military doctrine and the foundations of the state policy in the area of nuclear deterrence.”⁵⁹³

In the context of these high tensions, UN Secretary General **Guterres** strongly warned against the use of nuclear weapons and expressed concern over recent nuclear rhetoric on **September 26**. Decades after the Cold War’s end, the world could once again hear the “rattling of nuclear sabres.” The “era of nuclear blackmail” had to end. “The idea that any country could fight and win a nuclear war is deranged. Any use of a nuclear weapon would incite a humanitarian Armageddon,” Guterres said. He urged “all States to use every avenue of dialogue, diplomacy and negotiation to ease tensions, reduce risk and eliminate the nuclear threat.”⁵⁹⁴

On **September 26**, media reported of three leaks on two Nord Stream gas pipelines from Russia to Germany in the Baltic Sea. On the same day, Denmark’s Prime Minister **Mette Frederiksen**, Sweden’s Prime Minister **Magdalena Andersson** and Poland’s Prime Minister **Mateusz Morawiecki** stated that the leaks were likely the result of sabotage.⁵⁹⁵

106.	Escalatory
<p>Meanwhile, Russian nuclear rhetoric continued. On September 27, Medvedev issued another strongly worded threat and questioned whether the West would respond to Russian nuclear use, but also recalled that the preconditions for nuclear use were laid down in Russia’s nuclear doctrine. Russia had “the right to use nuclear weapons if necessary,” he said. “In predetermined cases. In strict accordance with the Fundamentals of State Policy in the Field of Nuclear Deterrence. If we or our allies are attacked using this type of weapon. Or if aggression with the use of conventional weapons threatens the very existence of our state.” He also noted that Russia would “do everything to prevent the appearance of nuclear weapons in our hostile neighbors. For example, in Nazi Ukraine, which is directly controlled today by NATO countries. It is pointless to count on the reason and political will of the Kyiv regime. But there is still a fragile hope for common sense and a sense of self-preservation of the enemy countries condoning them. They understand that if the threat to Russia exceeds the established danger limit, we will have to respond. Without asking anyone’s permission, without long consultations. And it’s definitely not a bluff.” If Russia was “forced to use the most formidable weapon against the Ukrainian regime,” he believed that “NATO will not directly intervene in the conflict even in this situation” as “overseas and European demagogues are not going to perish in a nuclear apocalypse.”⁵⁹⁶</p>	

107.	De-escalatory
<p>In Western capitals, concern over nuclear use was rife, but officials were still pointing out that they saw no Russian preparations. On September 27, media reported that according to US officials, West-</p>	

⁵⁹³ “Senior diplomat says Russia didn’t change its doctrinal approaches to nuclear weapons,” *TASS*, September 26, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1513565>].

⁵⁹⁴ “Secretary-General’s remarks for the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons,” *Website of the United Nations*, September 26, 2022 [<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2022-09-26/secretary-generals-remarks-for-the-international-day-for-the-total-elimination-of-nuclear-weapons>].

⁵⁹⁵ America Hernandez and Charlie Duxbury, “Sweden and Denmark say Nord Stream pipeline blasts were deliberate attacks,” *Politico*, September 26, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/gas-leak-detected-near-nord-stream-2/>].

⁵⁹⁶ Post on Telegram channel of Dmitry Medvedev, *Telegram*, September 27, 2022 [https://t.me/medvedev_telegram/181].

ern intelligence services were “stepping up efforts to detect any Russian military moves or communications that might signal that Vladimir Putin has ordered the use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine,” though such warnings might come “too late.” Reportedly, “over the past week, flight-tracking radar websites [had also] shown multiple U.S. Air Force RC-135 Rivet Joint electronic surveillance planes circling [Kaliningrad], ostensibly collecting data.” Yet, so far there was no evidence of Russia preparing for nuclear use, explained US Strategic Command spokesperson **Joshua Kelsey**. “We take these threats very seriously, but we have not seen any reason to adjust our own nuclear posture at this time,” he said. According to another **US official**, Russia would “never use a strategic nuclear weapon” but rather “short-range weapons” with lower yields. Preparations for the use of such smaller nuclear weapons could be difficult to detect for Western intelligence services, despite overall good penetration of the Russian system, officials reportedly told media.⁵⁹⁷

On the same day, Poland’s Foreign Minister **Zbigniew Rau** called for a “devastating” NATO response in case Russia used nuclear weapons. “NATO should respond decisively and firmly,” he explained, but added that “the response should be conventional.” He said: “To the best of our knowledge, Putin is threatening to use tactical nuclear weapons on Ukrainian soil, not to attack NATO, which means that NATO should respond in a conventional way. But the response should be devastating.”⁵⁹⁸

Another warning from the UN came on **September 27**. At the UN Security Council, UN Undersecretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs **Rosemary DiCarlo** reiterated Guterres’ “appeal for all nuclear-armed states, including the Russian Federation, to recommit to the non-use and progressive elimination of nuclear weapons.”⁵⁹⁹

Meanwhile, Kyiv sought to show resolve. Also on **September 27**, **Podolyak** stressed that Ukraine would not give in to Russia’s nuclear threats. “The world’s nuclear powers should warn Russia that any use of strategic or tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine would be met with concrete action, and that Kyiv lacked the technology to respond symmetrically itself,” he told media, stressing that Kyiv would “continue [its] work to de-occupy [its] territory regardless.”⁶⁰⁰ On the same day, French Foreign Minister **Catherine Colonna** visited Kyiv.⁶⁰¹

108.	Warning
Moscow, in turn, blamed the West for nuclear tensions, but seemed bent to walk back some of the earlier escalation. On September 28 , Zakharova claimed that the West talked “with ease” about nuclear weapons and used “manipulative methods in order to pull us into this agenda.” Western coun-	

⁵⁹⁷ Bryan Bender, “U.S. steps up intel, surveillance after Putin’s nuke threats,” *Politico*, September 27, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/09/27/putin-nuke-russia-ukraine-intel-surveillance-00059020>].

⁵⁹⁸ “‘Response should be devastating’ if Russia uses nuclear weapons, Polish foreign minister says,” *NBC News*, September 27, 2022 [<https://www.nbcnews.com/video/-response-should-be-devastating-if-russia-uses-nuclear-weapons-polish-foreign-minister-says-149381189714>].

⁵⁹⁹ “USG DiCarlo: ‘so-called *referenda*’ held by Russian Federation on occupied Ukrainian territory ‘cannot be called a genuine expression of the popular will,’” *Website of the United Nations*, September 27, 2022 [<https://dppa.un.org/en/usg-dicarlo-so-called-referenda-held-russian-federation-occupied-ukrainian-territory-cannot-be-0>].

⁶⁰⁰ Tom Balmforth and Margaryta Chornokondratenko, “Ukraine says it won’t be swayed by Russian nuclear threats, annexation votes,” *Reuters*, September 28, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/ukraine-will-not-be-swayed-by-russian-nuclear-threats-annexation-votes-kyiv-2022-09-27/>].

⁶⁰¹ Paul McLeary, Alexander Ward and Lawrence Ukenye, “‘Big wars take a lot of bullets,’” *Politico*, September 28, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/09/28/big-wars-take-a-lot-of-bullets-00059210>].

tries were “engaged in total destruction,” she added. Allegedly, there had been “many attempts to dialogue with the United States. But what Washington has brought it all to is a world on the brink of catastrophe,” she claimed.⁶⁰²

In Ukraine, according to media reports from **September 28**, **US officials** were seeing first “small numbers” of Russian troops mobilized under Putin’s partial mobilization order arriving, but expected that it would be “difficult” for the Kremlin to generate the 300,000 forces it had aimed for.⁶⁰³

Western military assistance for Ukraine continued. On **September 28**, the national armaments directors of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group came together to discuss how to supply aid for Ukraine on the long-term. According to media reports, “officials in Europe’s east” were continuing “to push France and Germany to arm Kyiv, giving Ukraine the firepower it needs and smaller countries enough time to re-grow their arsenals.”⁶⁰⁴ In Washington, the **Pentagon** announced another 1.1 billion US dollars of additional military aid for Ukraine, including funds for 18 HIMARS and HIMARS ammunition.⁶⁰⁵ The aid reportedly was geared towards fulfilling Ukraine’s long-term needs, with the HIMARS likely to arrive in “a few years.”⁶⁰⁶

109.	Warning
Further US statements appeared to be geared to confirm unwavering US support for Ukraine and push back on Medvedev’s claims of lacking Western resolve. On the same September 28 , State Department spokesperson Ned Price explained that the results of the “sham referenda” held by Russia in four Ukrainian regions were “completely fabricated” and announced “additional measures” as well as continued support for Kyiv.	
<i>The United States will never recognize Russia’s attempts to annex parts of Ukraine. ... We will continue to work with allies and partners to bring even more pressure on Russia and the individuals and entities that are helping support its attempted land grab. ... At the same time, we will not be deterred from supporting Ukraine, and ... we will continue to provide security assistance to Ukraine so it can defend itself and its sovereign territory for as long as it takes.</i> ⁶⁰⁷	
Price also reiterated that the response to a potential Russian nuclear use would be “real” and “extraordinary.”	
<i>When it comes to the contingency planning that we’ve engaged in for the potential use of a nuclear weapon by Russia in Ukraine, we have spoken very clearly of the implications for Russia</i>	

⁶⁰² “US uses all kinds of manipulations to drag Russia into nuclear agenda — diplomat,” TASS, September 28, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1514473>].

⁶⁰³ Lolita C. Baldor and Matthew Lee, “US announces \$1.1 billion more in military aid for Ukraine,” *AP News*, September 28, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-government-and-politics-746ae5a7113e9bb78562ee3a943c9260>].

⁶⁰⁴ Paul McLeary, Alexander Ward and Lawrence Ukenye, “‘Big wars take a lot of bullets,’” *Politico*, September 28, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/09/28/big-wars-take-a-lot-of-bullets-00059210>].

⁶⁰⁵ “\$1.1 Billion in Additional Security Assistance for Ukraine,” *Website of the U.S. Department of Defense*, September 28, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3173378/11-billion-in-additional-security-assistance-for-ukraine/>].

⁶⁰⁶ Lolita C. Baldor and Matthew Lee, “US announces \$1.1 billion more in military aid for Ukraine,” *AP News*, September 28, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-government-and-politics-746ae5a7113e9bb78562ee3a943c9260>].

⁶⁰⁷ “Department Press Briefing – September 28, 2022,” *Website of the U.S. Department of State*, September 28, 2022 [<https://www.state.gov/briefings/departments-press-briefing-september-28-2022/>].

*were that to happen. We've used a number of adjectives. We have said there would be catastrophic, severe, strong, profound implications for Russia. All of those are accurate. We are – we stand by all of those descriptors. The point that we have made both publicly and privately to the Russians is that the consequences would be real, and they would be extraordinary.*⁶⁰⁸

In a similar vein, White House spokesperson **Karine Jean-Pierre** emphasized that Washington would “continue to stand with the Ukrainian people and provide them with the security assistance they need to defend themselves for as long as it takes.” Asked about Medvedev’s claim that NATO would not respond to a Russian use of nuclear weapons, **Jean-Pierre** at first evaded the question, emphasizing that this was “Putin’s war.” After repeated questions, she declared: “We take Russia’s threat to use nuclear weapons seriously. ... But we have not seen any reason to adjust our own nuclear posture. And to be clear, we will not be deterred from supporting Ukraine.” In addition, she recalled statements by other administration officials warning that Russian nuclear use would trigger “catastrophic, severe, and decisive” consequences. These consequences would “be real” and “extraordinary.” Jake Sullivan had also “communicated [this] privately to the Russians, and they understand what the consequences will be,” she added. “We are not going to lay them out here in public.”⁶⁰⁹

Also on **September 28**, there were reports of calls inside the Biden administration to rally the world, notably China and India, against Russia in case it used nuclear weapons. Washington “could let Mr. Putin know what a disastrously bad idea any use of nuclear weapons would be,” one **official** told reporters.⁶¹⁰ Meanwhile, additional statements confirmed sabotage had caused the damage on the gas pipelines in the Baltic Sea few days earlier. On **September 28**, **Josep Borrell** said that the leaks at the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines were likely “the result of a deliberate act” and warned that “any deliberate disruption of European energy infrastructure is utterly unacceptable and will be met with a robust and united response.”⁶¹¹ On the same day, Norwegian Prime Minister **Jonas Gahr Støre** announced that Norway’s military would “be more visible at Norwegian oil and gas installations.”⁶¹² The following day, **NATO** issued a statement declaring that “all currently available information” suggested that these leaks were “the result of deliberate, reckless, and irresponsible acts of sabotage.” The statement added: “We, as Allies, have committed to prepare for, deter and defend against the coercive use of energy and other hybrid tactics by state and non-state actors. Any deliberate attack against Allies’ critical infrastructure would be met with a united and determined response.”⁶¹³

⁶⁰⁸ “Department Press Briefing – September 28, 2022,” *Website of the U.S. Department of State*, September 28, 2022 [<https://www.state.gov/briefings/departments-press-briefing-september-28-2022/>].

⁶⁰⁹ “Press Briefing by Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre, September 28, 2022,” *Website of the White House*, September 28, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2022/09/28/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-karine-jean-pierre-september-28-2022/>].

⁶¹⁰ Bryan Bender, “Calls grow for China and India to talk sense into Putin,” *Politico*, September 28, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/09/28/china-and-india-on-putin-in-ukraine-00059382>].

⁶¹¹ “Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union on leaks in the Nord Stream gas pipelines,” *Website of the Council of the European Union*, September 28, 2022 [<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/09/28/declaration-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-european-union-on-leaks-in-the-nord-stream-gas-pipelines/>].

⁶¹² Nora Buli, “Norway to deploy military to protect its oil and gas installations,” *Reuters*, September 28, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/norway-beefs-up-security-across-oil-gas-sector-2022-09-28/>].

⁶¹³ “Statement by the North Atlantic Council on the damage to gas pipelines,” *Website of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, September 29, 2022 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_207733.htm].

Amid tensions, Russia sent some cooperative signals on arms control talks. On **September 29, Zakharova** declared Moscow was open to consider resuming New START inspections and that “the possibilities for holding a face-to-face session of the bilateral advisory commission are being studied.”⁶¹⁴

On **September 29**, a **Russian fighter jet** nearly shot down a British surveillance plane off the coast of Crimea, media reported in April 2023, relying on a leaked US military document. UK defense secretary Wallace disclosed the incident to parliament in October 2022, saying that a Russian fighter jet had “released a missile” in the vicinity of an unarmed British spy plane patrolling in international airspace over the Black Sea. Wallace said at the time that the UK did not consider the case as a deliberate escalation, but that it had been down to a technical malfunction. He also accused Moscow of acting recklessly. However, the leaked Pentagon document reported on in April 2023 referred to the incident as a “near-shoot down of UK RJ,” a reference to the Rivet Joint moniker common for RC-135 reconnaissance planes. It also detailed several other encounters between Russian jets and US, British and French aircraft on surveillance flights between October and February 2022.⁶¹⁵

110.	Escalatory
<p>At a ceremony on September 30, Putin finally announced the formal annexation of four Ukrainian regions: Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhya. In the speech, Putin once again claimed that the West wanted to destroy Russia and was “waging a hybrid war” against Moscow, blamed the pipeline leaks in the Baltic Sea on “Anglo-Saxons,” and contended that the United States had created a “precedent” by using nuclear weapons in the Second World War.⁶¹⁶</p> <p><i>The West ... continues looking for another chance to strike a blow at us, to weaken and break up Russia, which they have always dreamed about, to divide our state and set our peoples against each other, and to condemn them to poverty and extinction. ...</i></p> <p><i>The United States is the only country in the world that has used nuclear weapons twice, destroying the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. And they created a precedent. Recall that during WWII the United States and Britain reduced Dresden, Hamburg, Cologne and many other German cities to rubble, without the least military necessity. ... They had only one goal, as with the nuclear bombing of Japanese cities: to intimidate our country and the rest of the world.</i>⁶¹⁷</p>	

⁶¹⁴ “Russia open to in-person talks with U.S. on nuclear arms treaty,” *Reuters*, September 29, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-open-in-person-talks-with-us-nuclear-arms-treaty-2022-09-29/>].

⁶¹⁵ Dan Lamothe, “On foreign policy, Biden’s gut is his guide,” *Washington Post*, April 9, 2023 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/04/09/leaked-documents-surveillance-plane-rivet-joint/>]; Thomas Gibbons-Neff and Eric Schmitt, “Miscommunication Nearly Led to Russian Jet Shooting Down British Spy Plane, U.S. Officials Say,” *New York Times*, April 12, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/12/world/europe/russian-jet-british-spy-plane.html>].

⁶¹⁶ “Signing of treaties on accession of Donetsk and Lugansk people’s republics and Zaporozhye and Kherson regions to Russia,” *Website of the President of Russia*, September 30, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69465>].

⁶¹⁷ “Signing of treaties on accession of Donetsk and Lugansk people’s republics and Zaporozhye and Kherson regions to Russia,” *Website of the President of Russia*, September 30, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69465>].

Reactions to the annexation were swift. Zelenskyy declared that Ukraine was applying for fast-track NATO membership on the same day.⁶¹⁸ The United States and the United Kingdom announced additional sanctions against Russian officials also on **September 30**.⁶¹⁹

October 2022: Threats and warnings everyday

111.	Warning
For an article published at the end of February 2023, former Russian and US officials revealed that Washington, London, and Paris had delivered a joint message to Moscow after Putin's nuclear threats made when annexing the Ukrainian provinces, vowing to retaliate with conventional weapons if Putin decided to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine – it was unclear when exactly this message had been delivered. ⁶²⁰	

Journalists revealed on **October 3** that in an effort to overcome **Biden Administration** resistance to providing Ukraine with a set of long-range rocket systems, the government in Kyiv was offering full and ongoing access to its list of intended Russian targets. At issue were the Army Tactical Missile Systems, or ATACMS, surface-to-surface missiles that can fly around 300 kilometers, about four times the distance of the HIMARS rockets. The US government so far had not approved these weapons, but announced funding for 18 more HIMARS. "We essentially described exactly what specific targets we need to hit on our territory which are not reachable with what we have now," said a senior Ukrainian official. Ukraine had given assurances that it would not use HIMARS against Russian territory, and had held its word, the Ukrainian official continued. However, the Administration argued the ATACMS were "low reward and high risk," a US official told journalists. "We believe that we're providing the Ukrainians with the range of capabilities that are commensurate with the fight that they're executing based on the requirements that they've identified for us," the Pentagon's Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy **Sasha Baker** explained.⁶²¹

The same day, **British media** had reported that NATO had warned members, Russia was set to demonstrate its willingness to use nuclear weapons by carrying out a test on Ukraine's border. The UK newspapers' allegations notwithstanding, a NATO official told reporters that the alliance had not observed changes in Russia's nuclear posture, while a Western diplomat said that NATO had not issued such warnings.⁶²²

⁶¹⁸ "We are taking our decisive step by signing Ukraine's application for accelerated accession to NATO - address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy," *Website of the President of Ukraine*, September 30, 2022 [<https://president.gov.ua/en/news/mi-robimo-svij-viznachalnij-krok-pidpisuyuchi-zayavku-ukrayi-78173>].

⁶¹⁹ Victoria Guida and Katy O'Donnell, "U.S. cracks down on top Russian officials with new sanctions," *Politico*, September 30, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/09/30/u-s-russia-financial-sanctions-00059744>], and "Sanctions in response to Putin's illegal annexation of Ukrainian regions," *Website of the UK Government*, September 30, 2022 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/sanctions-in-response-to-putins-illegal-annexation-of-ukrainian-regions>].

⁶²⁰ Max Seddon et al, "How Putin blundered into Ukraine — then doubled down," *Financial Times*, February 23, 2023 [<https://www.ft.com/content/80002564-33e8-48fb-b734-44810afb7a49>].

⁶²¹ Alex Marquardt, "In bid for new long-range rockets, Ukraine offers US targeting oversight," *CNN*, October 3, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/10/03/politics/ukraine-weapons-us-atacms-targeting-veto/>].

⁶²² Guy Faulconbridge, "Kremlin dismisses UK media report on Russian nuclear test," *Reuters*, October 4, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/kremlin-dismisses-uk-media-report-russian-nuclear-test-2022-10-04/>].

On **October 4**, on a trip to Warsaw, **Baerbock** said that Putin's nuclear threats were "irresponsible" and had to be taken "seriously," but were also an attempt to "blackmail" the West, as "we know from the more than past 200 days of this brutal war of aggression."⁶²³

112.	De-escalatory
In Moscow, Peskov dismissed the allegation that Russia was preparing to use a nuclear weapon on the same October 4 . "The Western media, Western politicians and heads of state are engaging in a lot of exercises in nuclear rhetoric right now," he claimed. "We do not want to take part in this." ⁶²⁴	

113.	De-escalatory
Other Russian officials also downplayed the nuclear rhetoric. On October 6 , Russian ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said on Russian television that the United States and NATO had an "ill sense of fear in the context of [Russia's] possession of nuclear weapons." ⁶²⁵ At the Foreign Ministry, spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told journalists that "Washington and other Western capitals" could be interested in "dangerous escalation" that could be "blamed" on Russia. "This is being done within the framework of Washington's policy, harmful to international security and strategic stability, of securing global dominance at any cost regardless of the risks of provoking a direct armed clash between the largest nuclear powers, which would be fraught, as we all understand, with catastrophic consequences," Zakharova said. However, she repeated that there could be no winners in a nuclear war and "it should never be unleashed." Western media was following "hints" by politicians or the intelligence services and was trying to create a public narrative. Every Russian statement was "turned inside out." ⁶²⁶	

114.	Warning
On the other side of the Atlantic, US policymakers seemed worried about nuclear escalation. In New York, Biden said at a Democratic fundraiser on October 6 that the United States had not "faced the prospect of Armageddon" since Kennedy had been mired in the Cuban missile crisis. Putin was "not joking" when he talked about "potential use of tactical nuclear weapons or biological or chemical weapons, because his military is, you might say, significantly underperforming," Biden said. "I'm trying to figure out what is Putin's off ramp?" he added. "Where does he find a way out? Where does he find himself in a position that he does not only lose face but lose significant power within Russia?" Biden concluded: "We have the threat of a nuclear weapon if, in fact, things continue down the path they are going." ⁶²⁷ Months later, in March 2023 , media reported that a senior White House official had said Biden's comment reflected in part his frustration with experts who dismissed the nuclear danger. ⁶²⁸	

⁶²³ Miranda Murray, "Russia's nuclear threat must be taken seriously - German foreign minister," *Reuters*, October 4, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-nuclear-threat-must-be-taken-seriously-german-foreign-minister-2022-10-04/>].

⁶²⁴ "Kremlin dismisses UK media report on Russian nuclear test," *Reuters*, October 4, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/kremlin-dismisses-uk-media-report-russian-nuclear-test-2022-10-04/>].

⁶²⁵ "US, NATO have ill sense of fear over Russia's possession of nuclear weapons - ambassador," *TASS*, October 6, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1518457>].

⁶²⁶ "US wishes to fan tensions over nuclear arms, blame Russia — MFA," *TASS*, October 6, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1518807>].

⁶²⁷ Christopher Cadelago, "Biden invokes Cuban missile crisis in addressing Russia's nuclear threats," *Politico*, October 6, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/10/06/biden-cuban-missile-crisis-russia-nuclear-00060877>].

⁶²⁸ Yasmeen Abutaleb, "On foreign policy, Biden's gut is his guide," *Washington Post*, April 3, 2023 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/04/03/biden-foreign-policy-instinct/>].

115.	De-escalatory
<p>However, the Pentagon saw no signs of Russia planning to use a nuclear weapon any time soon. For now, the United States had no reason to change its strategic posture, US officials told reporters on Friday, October 7, after Biden's comment.⁶²⁹ White House spokeswoman Jean-Pierre agreed that there were no signs of an imminent nuclear threat, adding that Biden was addressing Russia's "reckless and irresponsible" rhetoric.⁶³⁰ Also, multiple US officials told journalists that Biden's statement was not based on any new intelligence about Putin's intentions. It was still "not probable" that Russia would use nuclear weapons, US policymakers assessed.⁶³¹ On October 9, Pentagon spokesperson Kirby confirmed on US television that Biden's comments had not been based on "fresh intelligence or new indications that Mr Putin has made a decision to use nuclear weapons," Kirby said.⁶³²</p>	

116.	De-escalatory
<p>Commenting on his earlier statements, Biden said on Tuesday, October 11, that he did not think Putin would use nuclear weapons. "I don't think he will. But I think that it's irresponsible for him to talk about it."⁶³³</p>	

Earlier on, in Kyiv, **Zelenskyy** told British journalists on **October 7**, that Russian officials were starting to "prepare their society" for nuclear use, which was "very dangerous." However, while Moscow was beginning to "communicate," Russia was "not ready" to use nuclear weapons. "They don't know whether they'll use or not use it" but it was "dangerous to even speak about it."⁶³⁴ However, Zelenskyy believed that Putin understood that the "world will never forgive" a Russian nuclear strike. "He understands that after the use of nuclear weapons he would be unable any more to preserve, so to speak, his life, and I'm confident of that," Zelenskyy said.⁶³⁵

The weekend of **October 8-9** came with significant conventional escalation in Ukraine. Shortly before dawn on **October 8**, a huge explosion took place on the **Kerch bridge** linking Crimea to the Russian mainland. In response, Russia launched a series of missile attacks across Ukraine. By midday the same

⁶²⁹ Lara Seligman, "Pentagon: No sign Putin is planning to use nukes after Biden's 'Armageddon' comment," *Politico*, October 7, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/10/07/pentagon-no-sign-putin-is-planning-to-use-nukes-after-biden-armageddon-comment-00060922>].

⁶³⁰ "Biden says risk of 'nuclear Armageddon' highest in 60 years," *Al Jazeera*, October 7, 2022 [<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/10/7/biden-says-nuclear-armageddon-risk-highest-in-60-years>].

⁶³¹ Phil Mattingly, Jeremy Diamond and Kevin Liptak, "Biden's nuclear warning not based on new intelligence but opens a window into real worries inside the White House," *CNN*, October 7, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/10/07/politics/joe-biden-nuclear-weapons-russia-vladimir-putin/index.html>].

⁶³² Sam Levine, "Pentagon spokesperson tamps down concerns over nuclear 'Armageddon'," *The Guardian*, October 9, 2022 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/09/biden-armageddon-russia-nuclear-threat-pentagon>].

⁶³³ Olivia Olander, "Biden: I don't think Putin will use nuclear weapons," *Politico*, October 11, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/10/11/biden-putin-nuclear-weapons-00061355>].

⁶³⁴ Hugo Bachega and John Simpson, "Ukraine war: World must act now to stop Russia nuclear threat – Zelensky," *BBC*, October 7, 2022 [<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-63173443>].

⁶³⁵ Julian Borger, "Biden warns world would face 'Armageddon' if Putin uses a tactical nuclear weapon in Ukraine," *Guardian*, October 7, 2022 [<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/oct/07/biden-warns-world-would-face-armageddon-if-putin-uses-a-tactical-nuclear-weapon-in-ukraine>].

day, some 80 missiles had been fired at infrastructure in a dozen cities, according to Ukrainian authorities.⁶³⁶ On **October 10, Russia** launched its heaviest missile barrage in months. Ukraine's extensive network of local air defenses, largely older Soviet S-300 systems, intercepted 41 of the 75 Russian missiles, Kyiv's armed forces said.⁶³⁷ In Moscow, **Putin** said that Kyiv had "put itself on a par with the most odious terrorist groups," which had prompted the subsequent "massive strike with precision-guided weapons on Ukrainian infrastructure – energy infrastructure, military command and communications."⁶³⁸

On **October 11, Zelenskyy** asked for additional air-defense systems, and said he had reiterated his request when talking over the phone to **Biden** on **October 10**. At the White House, **Kirby** said that the Biden Administration was working to deliver the first two of eight National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems that Washington had promised Kyiv in September. Kirby noted that the two systems would arrive "in the very near future."⁶³⁹

117.	Warning
A virtual meeting of the G7 with Zelenskyy took place on the same day, October 11 . Where the Ukrainian leaders asked for more weapons, the G7 pledged in a joint statement continued "financial, humanitarian, military, diplomatic and legal support ... for as long as it takes." They reaffirmed that "any use of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons by Russia would be met with severe consequences." More important, the G7 agreed that they "welcomed" Zelenskyy's "readiness" for a "just peace," that included Ukraine's territorial integrity and ensured its "recovery and reconstruction." ⁶⁴⁰	

In Moscow, **Lavrov** said Russia was open to dialogue with Western nations on Ukraine but had yet to receive any proposals for a meeting. The Kremlin would not turn down a meeting between Putin and Biden, Lavrov affirmed. In Washington, however, State Department spokesperson **Ned Price** explained the Administration had "very little confidence" the Russian offer was legitimate, given that Lavrov's comments came within hours of Russia's missile strikes. "We see this as posturing. We do not see this as a constructive, legitimate offer to engage in the dialogue and diplomacy that is absolutely necessary to see an end to this brutal war of aggression," Price said.⁶⁴¹ In Brussels, US ambassador to NATO **Julianne Smith** confirmed to reporters that, as a consequence of Russia's barrage of missiles, sending air defense systems to Ukraine was at the top of everyone's agenda.⁶⁴² At the same time in Moscow,

⁶³⁶ Tim Lister and Gianluca Mezzofiore, "The Crimea attack triggered a wave of strikes on Ukraine. But mystery swirls over who blew up Putin's bridge," *CNN*, October 10, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/10/10/europe/russia-ukraine-strikes-crimea-bridge-analysis-cmd-intl/index.html>].

⁶³⁷ "Russia strikes Kyiv, multiple Ukrainian cities; many dead," *AP*, October 10, 2022 [<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20221010/p2g/00m/0in/019000c>].

⁶³⁸ "Putin vows tough response if Kiev continues terror attacks on Russian territory," *TASS*, October 10, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1520393>].

⁶³⁹ Eric Schmitt, Katie Rogers and Michael Schwartz, "The U.S. signals urgency to deploy an air defense system to Ukraine that it uses to protect the White House," *New York Times*, October 11, 2022, [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/10/12/world/russia-ukraine-war-news#the-united-states-signals-urgency-to-deploy-an-air-defense-system-to-ukraine-that-it-uses-to-protect-the-white-house>].

⁶⁴⁰ "Zelenskyy asks for 'air shield' as G7 pledges continued support," *Al Jazeera*, October 11, 2022 [<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/10/11/g7-leaders-ukraine-president-to-hold-talks>].

⁶⁴¹ "Lavrov says Russia open to talks with West, U.S. dismisses comments as 'posturing'," *Reuters*, October 11, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-open-putin-meeting-biden-g20-lavrov-says-2022-10-11/>], and "Department Press Briefing," *Website of the US Department of State*, October 11, 2022 [https://www.state.gov/page/2/?post_type=state_briefing&app=92333Assignment].

⁶⁴² Lara Seligman and Alexander Ward, "NATO pivots to sending Ukraine air defenses after Russian missile attacks," *Politico*, October 11, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/10/11/nato-sending-ukraine-air-defenses-russian-missile-attacks-00061223>].

Medvedev was writing that the fastest way to bring the conflict in Ukraine to a “point of no return” was to “arms the psychos in Kiev” with long range weapons. He warned the “elderly leaders in Washington” and “NATO upstarts” to “use their softened brains at least sometimes.”⁶⁴³

118.	Warning
Meanwhile, NATO said it would go ahead with its annual nuclear preparedness exercise dubbed “Steadfast Noon” the following week, in which NATO air forces practiced the use of US nuclear bombs based in Europe with training flights, but without live weapons. Cancelling the drills because of the war in Ukraine would send a “very wrong signal,” Stoltenberg stressed on October 11 . “It’s an exercise to ensure that our nuclear deterrent remains safe, secure and effective,” he explained, adding NATO’s military strength was the best way to prevent any escalation of tensions. ⁶⁴⁴	

On **October 12-13**, the NATO Defense Ministerial took place in Brussels. Western officials told journalists that **NATO** was developing a 10-year plan to rebuild the Ukrainian defense industry. “We will be looking at defense planning requirements to get Ukraine fully interoperable with NATO,” said a NATO official. “It’s about shifting away from Soviet equipment ... to NATO-compatible Western equipment.” US officials continued to show strong support for Ukraine: “We will do as much as we can for as long as we can and we will do as much as it takes for as long as it takes,” to help Ukraine push Russian troops out of their country, US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chair **Mark Milley** told reporters.⁶⁴⁵

119.	Warning
In Moscow on the same October 12 , the Kremlin scolded Western policymakers for engaging in “provocative” rhetoric. “We express our daily regret that Western heads of state, in the United States and Europe, engage in nuclear rhetoric every day,” Peskov said of Biden’s “Armageddon” comments. “We consider this a very harmful and provocative practice.” ⁶⁴⁶	

120.	De-escalatory
US Defense Secretary Austin , speaking to reporters at NATO headquarters on October 12 confirmed once again that the United States was monitoring any indications of a worrying change in Russia’s nuclear posture that would suggest Putin might move ahead with a nuclear strike. “We’ve not seen any indicators at this point that would lead us to believe that,” Austin said. ⁶⁴⁷	

Also in Brussels on **October 13**, following the NATO Defense Ministerial, **fifteen allies** announced a European air-defense network led by Germany. Called the Joint Air Defense Initiative, and known more commonly as European Sky Shield Initiative, it had been accelerated by Russia’s missile attacks against

⁶⁴³ Tweet by @MedvedevRussiaE, *Twitter*, October 11, 2022, [<https://twitter.com/MedvedevRussiaE/status/1579878720164474880?s=20&t=BSAyyWegYNUqO-1PMKmQrA>]

⁶⁴⁴ “Pre-ministerial press conference,” *Website of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, October 11, 2022 [https://www.nato.int/cps/ru/natohq/opinions_208037.htm?selectedLocale=en].

⁶⁴⁵ Paul McLeary, “NATO sets sights on rebuilding Ukraine’s defense industry,” *Politico*, October 12, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/10/12/pentagon-chief-ukraine-support-00061387>].

⁶⁴⁶ Guy Faulconbridge, “Kremlin scolds West for ‘provocative’ nuclear rhetoric,” *Politico*, October 12, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/kremlin-scolds-west-provocative-nuclear-rhetoric-2022-10-12/>].

⁶⁴⁷ Sabine Siebold and Phil Stewart, “Russian nuclear strike likely to provoke ‘physical response,’ NATO official says,” *Reuters*, October 12, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/russian-nuclear-strike-would-almost-certainly-draw-physical-response-nato-2022-10-12/>].

Ukraine. It was intended to standardize an air-defense network of short, medium and long-range missiles and radars for use in defending against a potential attack by Russia.⁶⁴⁸

In addition, NATO coordination of missile defense systems for Ukraine bore fruit. **Germany** announced the first delivery of a new air defense system, and **France** and **Spain** pledged new donations to knock Russian missiles and Iranian drones.⁶⁴⁹

121.	Warning
NATO's nuclear planning group was scheduled to meet on October 13 . On the eve of the meeting, an anonymous senior NATO official told journalists that a Russian nuclear strike would change the course of the conflict and "almost certainly be drawing a physical response from many allies, and potentially from NATO itself." Any use of nuclear weapons by Moscow would have "unprecedented consequences" for Russia, the official said. Moscow appeared to be using its nuclear threats mainly to deter NATO and other countries from directly entering its war on Ukraine, he added. ⁶⁵⁰	

122.	Warning
Stoltenberg underlined this message one day later, October 13 , after the NPG meeting. Asked what NATO would do if Russia launched a nuclear attack, Stoltenberg said: "We will not go into exactly how we will respond, but of course this will fundamentally change the nature of the conflict. It will mean that a very important line has been crossed." He added that "even any use of a smaller nuclear weapon will be a very serious thing, fundamentally changing the nature of the war in Ukraine, and of course that would have consequences." ⁶⁵¹	

123.	Warning
On the same October 13 , EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell also warned Putin not to cross that threshold. "Any nuclear attack against Ukraine will create an answer, not a nuclear answer but such a powerful answer from the military side that the Russian Army will be annihilated," he said in a speech in Bruges, Belgium. ⁶⁵²	

124.	Warning
Medvedev reacted to this statement the following day, October 14 . Neither Americans nor Europeans wanted to die for Ukraine in "a nuclear apocalypse." Hence, they would respond to a Russian nuclear use in a "careful and balanced" manner, Medvedev argued. ⁶⁵³	

⁶⁴⁸ John Ismay, "Fifteen nations join European air-defense network spurred by Russia's missile strikes in Ukraine," *New York Times*, October 13, 2022 [https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/14/world/europe/15-nations-join-european-air-defense-network-spurred-by-russias-missile-strikes-in-ukraine.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare&mc_cid=455ed2eea3].

⁶⁴⁹ Paul McLeary, "NATO rushing to build up air defenses for Ukraine — and itself," *Politico*, October 13, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/10/13/nato-rushing-to-build-air-defenses-for-ukraine-and-itself-00061697>], and "Spain to Send Air Defense Systems to Ukraine: NATO Chief," *The Defense Post*, October 13, 2022 [<https://www.thedefensepost.com/2022/10/14/spain-air-defense-system-ukraine/>].

⁶⁵⁰ Sabine Siebold and Phil Stewart, "Russian nuclear strike likely to provoke 'physical response,' NATO official says," *Reuters*, October 12, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/russian-nuclear-strike-would-almost-certainly-draw-physical-response-nato-2022-10-12/>].

⁶⁵¹ Lorne Cook, "NATO chief warns Russia not to cross 'very important line,'" *AP News*, October 13, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-nato-government-and-politics-moscow-4b8db123007dde5c1f859bb8134b7dd5>].

⁶⁵² Lorne Cook, "NATO chief warns Russia not to cross 'very important line,'" *AP News*, October 13, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-nato-government-and-politics-moscow-4b8db123007dde5c1f859bb8134b7dd5>].

⁶⁵³ "Medvedev dismisses EU foreign policy chief's nuclear strike remark as 'paranoia,'" *TASS*, October 14, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1522547>].

In Moscow, **Peskov** said that Russia was ready to “negotiate” to achieve its goals, but its aims had not changed. “The direction has not changed, the special military operation continues, it continues in order for us to achieve our goals,” Peskov was quoted as saying. “However, we have repeatedly reiterated that we remain open to negotiations to achieve our objectives.” Yet, Peskov added that he did not see any prospects for talks with the West in the near future because of its “hostile” attitude towards Russia.⁶⁵⁴

125.	Warning
Also in Moscow, Alexander Venediktov , the deputy secretary of Russia's Security Council, noted that Kyiv was well aware that Ukraine joining NATO “would mean a guaranteed escalation to World War Three.” Such an attempt would be “suicidal” for existing NATO member states, he said. ⁶⁵⁵	

126.	De-escalatory
Meanwhile in France, Macron seemed to confirm doubts about Western resolve, stating in a televised interview that Paris would “evidently” not use nuclear weapons in response to a Russian nuclear attack on Ukraine. “France has a nuclear doctrine, that is based on the vital interests of the country and which are clearly defined. These would not be at stake if there was a nuclear ballistic attack in Ukraine or in the region,” the French president said. Both political opponents and French analysts criticized the statement, noting that ambiguity was the better approach. ⁶⁵⁶	

On **October 14**, in Washington, National Security Council spokesperson **Kirby** said that Russia’s “routine” Grom drills would involve large scale maneuvers of its strategic nuclear forces. He thought Moscow “probably” believed that the exercises would “help it project power,” but stressed that it was widely known that Russian units trained “extensively at this time of year.” The United States would “monitor that accordingly,” he added. A US defense official nevertheless noted that Russia’s nuclear rhetoric and its decision to proceed with its Grom exercise “while at war with Ukraine” was “irresponsible.” NATO’s annual nuclear exercise had been planned before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, **Western officials** repeatedly emphasized, having been held regularly around the same time of the year for over a decade. Fourteen NATO nations were involved in the drill, which include fighter jets capable of carrying nuclear warheads but no nuclear weapons. US defense officials also underlined in advance that there would be no “special messaging” around the exercise, arguing that Russia was playing a “reckless and irresponsible” saber rattling game, but that Washington would not do the same.⁶⁵⁷

In Astana on **October 14**, **Putin** seemed to be striking a softer tone, saying he saw no need for continued massive air strikes against Ukraine and that the troop mobilization would soon end. There was “no need for massive strikes” now because most of the designated targets had been hit and “we have not set ourselves the task of destroying Ukraine.”⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁴ “Kremlin says its goals in Ukraine can be achieved through talks,” *Reuters*, October 13, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/kremlin-says-its-goals-ukraine-may-be-achieved-through-talks-2022-10-13/>].

⁶⁵⁵ Guy Faulconbridge and Lidia Kelly, “Russian Official Warns of World War Three if Ukraine Joins NATO,” *Reuters*, October 13, 2022 [<https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2022-10-13/admission-of-ukraine-to-nato-can-lead-to-third-world-war-russian-official>].

⁶⁵⁶ Clea Caulcutt, “Macron under fire for saying France wouldn’t respond in kind if Russia launched nuclear attack on Ukraine,” *Politico*, October 13, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/france-emmanuel-macron-nuclear-attack-russia-ukraine/>].

⁶⁵⁷ Phil Stewart, “Is this a drill? Upcoming Russian nuclear exercises a challenge for the West,” *Reuters*, October 14, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/article/instant-article/idAFKBN2R824E>].

⁶⁵⁸ “Putin Says No Need For Further Massive Air Strikes On Ukraine, Foresees End To Mobilization,” *RFERL*, October 14, 2022 [<https://www.rferl.org/a/putin-end-mobilization-air-strikes-ukraine-war/32083657.html>].

127.	Warning
On October 16, Sullivan told US media that the seriousness of nuclear weapons use did not depend on the size of the weapon. “The use of a nuclear weapon on the battlefield in Ukraine is the use of a nuclear weapon on the battlefield in Ukraine and we are not going to slice the salami,” he explained. ⁶⁵⁹	

128.	Warning
On October 17, NATO’s Steadfast Noon nuclear exercises commenced. The drills were a “routine, recurring training activity” that had been planned before Russia invaded Ukraine. Hence, the exercise was “not linked to any current world events,” a NATO statement read. The exercise ran until 30 October 2022, taking place mostly in Belgium, the UK, and the North Sea. It involved US B-52 bombers as part of 60 total aircraft participating in training flights. Also among the aircraft involved in the drills were fourth and fifth generation fighter jets, as well as surveillance and tanker aircraft, the alliance said in a press release. ⁶⁶⁰	

Meanwhile in **Luxembourg, EU foreign ministers** agreed on a mission to train 15,000 Ukrainian troops in Poland and Germany from November 2022.⁶⁶¹

129.	Warning
The next day, October 18 , Kremlin spokesman Peskov made another nuclear allusion. Asked by reporters whether the four annexed Ukrainian regions were under Moscow’s nuclear umbrella, he explained: “All these territories are inalienable parts of the Russian Federation and they are all protected. Their security is provided for at the same level as [it is for] the rest of Russia’s territory.” ⁶⁶²	

130.	Warning
On the same day, October 18, Stoltenberg said that Medvedev was wrong when he claimed (on 27 September 2022) that NATO would not risk nuclear war and would not join the war even if Moscow struck Ukraine with nuclear weapons. “He is not right,” Stoltenberg noted. “We have stated clearly that there will be severe consequences.” NATO had “many ways to respond.” All NATO allies agreed on the seriousness of the use of any nuclear weapons, he stressed, adding that this had been clearly conveyed to Russia. ⁶⁶³	

One day later, on **October 19, Putin** declared martial law in the four occupied regions of Ukraine, moved to put the economy on a wartime footing, and imposed restrictions in more than two dozen areas

⁶⁵⁹ “Sullivan: ‘Dangerous’ to distinguish between possible Russian nuclear attacks,” *CNN*, October 16, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/videos/politics/2022/10/16/sotu-jake-sullivan.cnn>].

⁶⁶⁰ “NATO starts nuclear drills amid Russia tensions,” *Deutsche Welle*, October 17, 2022 [<https://www.dw.com/en/nato-starts-nuclear-drills-amid-russia-tensions/a-63461390>].

⁶⁶¹ Sabine Siebold, “EU set to train 15,000 Ukrainian troops, provide more arms funding for Kyiv,” *Reuters*, October 17, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-set-train-15000-ukrainian-troops-provide-more-arms-funding-kyiv-2022-10-17/>].

⁶⁶² Mark Trevelyan, “Russia says seized Ukrainian lands are under its nuclear protection,” *Reuters*, October 18, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/kremlin-annexed-ukrainian-lands-protected-by-russian-nuclear-weapons-2022-10-18/>].

⁶⁶³ “NATO Secretary General interview at Berlin Foreign Policy Forum, 18 OCT 2022,” *YouTube Account of NATO News*, October 18, 2022 [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RHXoJH1560&t=803s>], and Joel Gehrke, “NATO chief hints allies would intervene in war if Russia uses nuclear weapons in Ukraine,” *Washington Examiner*, October 18, 2022 [<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/restoring-america/courage-strength-optimism/nato-chief-hints-allies-would-intervene-in-war-if-russia-uses-nuclear-weapons-in-ukraine>].

across Russia. Moscow also ordered the evacuation of Kherson. Analysts concluded that the Kremlin was struggling to mobilize necessary resources and was enhancing its control over Russia.⁶⁶⁴

On **October 20, Zelenskyy** thanked Scholz for the delivery of the Iris-T air defense system. The first system had arrived a week earlier. Three additional systems were scheduled for delivery.⁶⁶⁵

131.	Warning
In Washington, Blinken told US media that the Administration was watching Russia's nuclear threats "very, very carefully," but had found no reason to change its nuclear posture toward Moscow yet. Washington had been "very clear" with Putin "directly and privately" about the "severe consequences that would follow from any use of a nuclear weapon," Blinken stressed. He also noted that Washington wanted to have "the strongest possible hand at a negotiating table if one emerges," since Zelenskyy had said he believed diplomacy would play a part in ending the war eventually. ⁶⁶⁶	

On **October 21**, at the initiation of the US side, **Austin** and **Shoigu** spoke over the phone for the first time since May 2022. "Austin emphasized the importance of maintaining lines of communication amid the ongoing war against Ukraine."⁶⁶⁷

During the **October 22-23** weekend, Russian armed forces withdrew from Kherson under Ukrainian pressure, but Russia used long-range options to target power plants and heating stations across Ukraine. "The geography of this new massive strike is very wide," **Zelenskyy** said on **22 October**.⁶⁶⁸

132.	Escalatory
In the early morning of October 23 , Russian Defense Minister Shoigu wrote on Telegram that Ukraine could escalate the conflict with a dirty bomb. "The purpose of the provocation is to accuse Russia of using weapons of mass destruction in the Ukrainian theatre of operations and thereby launch a powerful anti-Russian campaign in the world aimed at undermining confidence in Moscow." More: "The calculation of the organizers of the provocation is that if it is successfully implemented, most countries will react extremely harshly to the 'nuclear incident' in Ukraine," the post said. "As a result, Moscow will lose the support of many of its key partners." ⁶⁶⁹	
On the afternoon of Sunday, October 23 , the Russian Ministry of Defense requested phone calls with the US, British, French, and Turkish counterparts. Shoigu told his counterparts that Ukraine could be planning to use a "dirty bomb," but provided no evidence to back his claims. During the call with French Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu , Shoigu pointed to a "rapidly deteriorating" situation in	

⁶⁶⁴ Andrew E. Kramer and Neil MacFarquhar, "Putin Declares Martial Law in 4 Illegally Annexed Ukrainian Regions," *The New York Times*, October 19, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/19/world/europe/russia-putin-ukraine-martial-law.html>].

⁶⁶⁵ "Ukraine updates: Zelensky calls for more air defense systems," *Deutsche Welle*, October 20, 2022 [<https://www.dw.com/en/russia-ukraine-updates-zelensky-calls-for-more-air-defense-systems/a-63500372>].

⁶⁶⁶ Tweet by @GMA, *Twitter*, October 20, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/GMA/status/1583053444008804353?s=20&t=MsV-LkXah119ZxhltzDc1A>].

⁶⁶⁷ "Readout of Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III's Phone Call With Russian Minister of Defense Sergey Shoigu," *Website of the US Department of Defense*, October 21, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3195784/readout-of-secretary-of-defense-loyd-j-austin-iiis-phone-call-with-russian-min/>].

⁶⁶⁸ Zach Schonfeld, "Zelensky: Russia targeted Ukraine energy grid in 'new massive strike'," *The Hill*, October 23, 2022 [<https://www.yahoo.com/news/zelensky-russia-targeted-ukraine-energy-130042395.html>].

⁶⁶⁹ "False flag? Russia says Ukraine plans to detonate a 'dirty bomb'" *Al Jazeera*, October 23, 2022 [<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/10/23/false-flag-russia-says-ukraine-plans-to-detonate-a-dirty-bomb>], and Post on Telegram channel of Ria Novosti, *Telegram*, October 23, 2022 [https://t.me/rian_ru/182910].

Ukraine, according to the Russian readout of the call. He conveyed “his concerns about possible provocations by Ukraine with the use of a *dirty bomb*,” the Russian ministry said without giving any further detail.⁶⁷⁰ In the phone call between **Shoigu** and the UK Defense Minister, **Ben Wallace**, the Russian official “alleged that Ukraine was planning actions facilitated by Western countries, including the UK, to escalate the conflict in Ukraine,” the British read-out stated.⁶⁷¹

133.	Warning
According to the same read-out, Wallace “refuted” Shoigu’s claims and “cautioned that such allegations should not be used as a pretext for greater escalation.” ⁶⁷² Subsequent to his phone conversation, Austin also noted publicly that he had “rejected any pretext for Russian escalation and reaffirmed the value of continued communication amid Russia’s unlawful and unjustified war against Ukraine.” ⁶⁷³	
During the night to October 24 , the US, UK, and French foreign ministers issued a common statement, “rejecting Russia’s transparently false allegations about Ukraine.” The three governments remained “committed to continue supporting Ukraine’s efforts to defend its territory for as long as it takes.” The common statement further read: “Our countries made clear that we all reject Russia’s transparently false allegations that Ukraine is preparing to use a dirty bomb on its own territory. The world would see through any attempt to use this allegation as a pretext for escalation. We further reject any pretext for escalation by Russia.” ⁶⁷⁴	

As the phone calls became public, **Kuleba** wrote on Twitter that “Russian lies about Ukraine allegedly planning to use a *dirty bomb* [were] as absurd as they [were] dangerous.” Ukraine was “a committed NPT member,” and it neither had any dirty bombs nor planned to acquire any. “Russians often accuse others of what they plan themselves,” Kuleba concluded.⁶⁷⁵

In Washington, NSC spokesperson **Adrienne Watson** rejected Shoigu’s allegations, calling the accusations of Ukraine preparing to use dirty bombs “transparently false.” Watson added that the world would “see through any attempt” by Russia to use the allegation to escalate the invasion of Ukraine.⁶⁷⁶

In Kyiv, **Zelenskyy** noted in his nightly address that if Russia called and said that Ukraine was “allegedly preparing something,” this meant “one thing:” That Russia “has already prepared all this,” Zelenskyy said. “I believe that now the world should react in the toughest possible way,” he said.⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷⁰ “Russian Defence Minister holds telephone talks with his French counterpart,” *Website of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation*, October 23, 2022 [https://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12442779@egNews].

⁶⁷¹ “Statement on Defence Secretary’s call with Russian Defence Minister,” *Website of the UK Government*, October 23, 2022 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/statement-on-defence-secretarys-call-with-russian-defence-minister>].

⁶⁷² “Statement on Defence Secretary’s call with Russian Defence Minister,” *Website of the UK Government*, October 23, 2022 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/statement-on-defence-secretarys-call-with-russian-defence-minister>].

⁶⁷³ “Readout of Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III’s Phone Call With Russian Minister of Defense Sergey Shoigu,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, October 23, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3196822/readout-of-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iiis-phone-call-with-russian-min/>].

⁶⁷⁴ “Russian war in Ukraine: P3 statement,” *Website of the UK Government*, October 24, 2022 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/russian-war-in-ukraine-p3-statement>].

⁶⁷⁵ Tweet by @DmytroKuleba, *Twitter*, October 23, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/DmytroKuleba/status/1584201364259115008?s=20&t=aty-80Jlt10TqFaBc9-QPA>].

⁶⁷⁶ Carlie Porterfield, “Russian Defense Chief Claims—Without Evidence—Ukraine Could Use ‘Dirty Bomb,’” *Forbes*, October 23, 2022 [<https://www.forbes.com/sites/carlieporterfield/2022/10/23/russian-defense-chief-claims-without-evidence-ukraine-could-use-dirty-bomb/?sh=5c04d9e05a1b>].

A few hours later, **Kuleba** noted that he had phoned **Blinken**. “We both agreed Russia’s *dirty bomb* disinformation campaign might be aimed at creating a pretext for a false flag operation,” the Ukrainian official noted. “We also discussed further practical steps to boost Ukraine’s air defense. Secretary affirmed the US spares no effort to this end.”⁶⁷⁸

In Washington, an anonymous US official told journalists that Russia turning to Iranian drones and Putin’s “increasingly escalatory references to nuclear weapons” indicated that “a desperate Russia was looking for other tools ... to use.”⁶⁷⁹

On the same day, **Stoltenberg** also confirmed this position, telling journalists that Russia’s claims were “absurd.” Yet, NATO was concerned that such statements were “part of a pattern we have seen before from Russia — in Syria, but also at the start of the war, or just before the war started in February. And that is that Russia is accusing others [of] doing what they intend to do themselves,” Stoltenberg continued.⁶⁸⁰

Meanwhile in Washington, a group of **30 Democratic lawmakers** urged Biden to alter the US strategy towards Ukraine and pursue negotiations with Moscow.⁶⁸¹

Also on **October 24**, the commander of Ukraine’s ground forces General **Oleksandr Syrskiy** confirmed the apparent concerns, telling journalists that the world should be worried about Russian President Vladimir Putin’s threat to use nuclear weapons. Ukraine was however winning the conventional war against Russia, he stressed.⁶⁸² Indeed, the Ukrainian military assessed **Russia** was pulling out the occupation administration from **Kherson** and preparing its forces to defend the province.⁶⁸³

On the same day, **Kuleba** talked to IAEA Secretary General Grossi over the phone and invited the Agency to send experts to Ukrainian facilities to check whether there was any illegal activity.⁶⁸⁴

⁶⁷⁷ Jacopo Barigazzi, “Russia defense chief makes unfounded claims of Kyiv ready to use ‘dirty bomb’,” *Politico*, October 23, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/ukrainw-russia-vladimir-putin-volodymyr-zelenskyy-defense-chief-claims-of-kyiv-dirty-bomb/>].

⁶⁷⁸ Tweet by @DmytroKuleba, *Twitter*, October 23, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/DmytroKuleba/status/1584276670294679552>].

⁶⁷⁹ Helene Cooper, “In a call, U.S. and Russian officials discuss Russia’s escalating threats against Ukraine,” *The New York Times*, October 23, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/10/24/world/-russia-ukraine-war-news/in-a-call-us-and-russian-officials-discuss-russias-escalating-threats-against-ukraine?smid=url-share>].

⁶⁸⁰ Lili Bayer, “Russia’s dirty bomb claim ‘absurd,’ says NATO chief,” *Politico*, October 24, 2022, [<https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-ukraine-dirty-radioactive-bomb-claim-absurd-says-nato-chief-jens-stoltenberg/>].

⁶⁸¹ Patricia Zengerle, “U.S. liberal Democrats urge Biden to seek negotiated Ukraine settlement,” *Reuters*, October 25, 2022, [<https://www.reuters.com/world/us-liberal-democrats-urge-biden-seek-negotiated-ukraine-settlement-2022-10-24/>].

⁶⁸² Ian Pannell and Teddy Grant, “‘We are and should be worried’ of Putin’s nuclear threat, Ukrainian general says: Exclusive,” *ABC News*, October 24, 2022 [<https://abcnews.go.com/International/worried-putins-nuclear-threat-ukrainian-general-exclusive/story?id=91962124>].

⁶⁸³ Marc Santora and Eric Nagourney, “Russian Officials Flee Kherson as Russian Troops Dig In for a Battle,” *The New York Times*, October 24, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/24/world/europe/russia-ukraine-kherson-war.html>].

⁶⁸⁴ “Dmytro Kuleba had a telephone call with IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi,” *Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine*, October 24, 2022 [<https://mfa.gov.ua/en/news/dmytro-kuleba-had-telephone-cjall-iaea-director-general-rafael-grossi>].

134.	Escalatory
<p>Russia nevertheless doubled down on its allegations. Still on October 24, Moscow put forces on alert to respond to a potential chemical, biological or nuclear weapons attack, according to the Russian Ministry of Defense.⁶⁸⁵</p> <p>In addition, Igor Kirillov, the head of the Radiation, Chemical and Biological Defense Forces of the Russian Armed Forces, posted a presentation on Telegram. In the video, Kirillov briefed that Kyiv was planning a false-flag operation that would involve launching a dirty bomb or low-power nuclear war-head on its own soil. “The detonation of a radiological explosive device will inevitably lead to radioactive contamination of the area over an area of up to several thousand square meters,” Kirillov said.⁶⁸⁶</p> <p>In the evening of October 24, Russia doubled down once again, sending a letter on its assertion about Kyiv to the United Nations, and diplomats said Moscow planned to raise the issue with the Security Council at a closed meeting on the following day. “We will regard the use of the dirty bomb by the Kyiv regime as an act of nuclear terrorism,” Russia’s UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia wrote to Guterres and the Security Council.⁶⁸⁷</p>	

135.	De-escalatory
<p>At the very same time, Russian officials also played down the nuclear threat. Also in Moscow, the director of Russia’s foreign intelligence service SVR, Sergey Naryshkin, told the media that Russia found extremely worrisome the Western rhetoric regarding the possibility of using nuclear weapons. It was very clear that Zelenskyy wished to possess nuclear weapons and “the world should not let this happen.” However, asked whether Russian rhetoric “left room” for the possibility of using nuclear weapons, he said “no, absolutely not.”⁶⁸⁸</p>	

136.	Warning
<p>Meanwhile in Washington, US officials argued Moscow’s allegations were another Russian attempt to prepare the ground for their own actions. “We have seen a pattern in this conflict, in this war, in the lead-up to this war, where the Russians have engaged in mirror imaging,” Ned Price, the State Department spokesman, said. “The Russians have accused the Ukrainians, the Russians have accused other countries of what it itself was planning. That is our concern.” But he also cautioned: “We’ve been very clear with the Russians [...] about the severe consequences that would result from nuclear use,” Price said. “There would be consequences for Russia whether it uses a dirty bomb or a nuclear bomb.”⁶⁸⁹</p>	

⁶⁸⁵ Lara Seligman, “West rejects Russia’s ‘dirty bomb’ claim as Moscow activates counter-WMD forces,” *Politico*, October 24, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/10/24/russia-dirty-bomb-moscow-wmd-forces-00063115>].

⁶⁸⁶ Lara Seligman, “West rejects Russia’s ‘dirty bomb’ claim as Moscow activates counter-WMD forces,” *Politico*, October 24, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/10/24/russia-dirty-bomb-moscow-wmd-forces-00063115>], and “Минобороны России привело в готовность силы и средства для работы в условиях радиоактивного заражения (The Russian Defence Ministry has put forces and equipment on standby to work in radioactively contaminated conditions),” *Kommersant*, October 24, 2022 [<https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5632591>].

⁶⁸⁷ Michelle Nichols and Pavel Polityuk, “Russia brings Ukraine ‘dirty bomb’ warning to U.N. as it evacuates Kherson,” *Reuters*, October 25, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-hits-ukraine-homes-evacuates-kherson-warns-escalation-2022-10-24/>]. For Lavrov’s announcement of the letter, see [<https://tass.com/politics/1526717>].

⁶⁸⁸ “Russia finds Western nuclear weapons rhetoric worrisome — intelligence chief,” *TASS*, October 24, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1526609>], and Steve Rosenberg, “Ukraine war: Russian spy chief blames West for nuclear tension,” *BBC News*, October 24, 2022 [<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-63373728>].

⁶⁸⁹ Ned Price, “Department Press Briefing – October 24, 2022,” *Website of the US State Department*, October 24, 2022 [<https://www.state.gov/briefings/department-press-briefing-october-24-2022/>].

137.	De-escalatory
Yet at the same time, Western officials relativised concerns. A Pentagon official told journalists that the US government had no indication that Russia was preparing to deploy nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons. ⁶⁹⁰ “We continue to see nothing in the way of preparations by the Russian side for the use of nuclear weapons,” White House national security spokesman John Kirby also confirmed to reporters on the same day. ⁶⁹¹ Also on the same October 24 , two Western officials told journalists that they believed the threats were a means to maintain fears in the west of a potential nuclear event in Ukraine, given the orchestrated nature of the warning, and to test how western capitals would respond. ⁶⁹²	

In parallel some communication channels reportedly remained open. On the same **October 24**, **Mark Milley**, the US chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, spoke with his Russian counterpart, **Valery Gerasimov**, the chief of the Russian General Staff; and Gerasimov called **Antony Radakin**, the head of the UK military, according to the Russian ministry of defense.⁶⁹³

Two **US officials** also told reporters in February 2023 that the **October 24, 2022** phone conversation between Milley and Gerasimov had relieved tensions. Russia’s chief of the general staff had outlined a use of nuclear weapons consistent with Washington’s understanding of Russia’s nuclear doctrine.⁶⁹⁴

Finally, US officials reaffirmed continued Western support for Ukraine. **Austin** talked over the phone with Ukrainian Minister of Defense **Oleksii Reznikov** to “reaffirm the unwavering US commitment to support Ukraine’s ability to counter Russian aggression.” Austin rejected the “false allegations by Russia about Ukraine and any attempt to use them as a pretext for further Russian escalation of its unlawful and unjustified war against Ukraine.”⁶⁹⁵ **Kuleba** also wrote on Twitter that he had a discussion with **Blinken** on “ways to end Russia’s nuclear blackmail.”⁶⁹⁶

138.	Warning
The Russian warnings were met by US rebukes. On October 25 , Biden warned Russia against using nuclear weapons. “Let me just say: Russia would be making an incredibly serious mistake for it to use a tactical nuclear weapon,” Biden said in response to a reporter’s question about whether Russia was	

⁶⁹⁰ Lara Seligman, “West rejects Russia’s ‘dirty bomb’ claim as Moscow activates counter-WMD forces,” *Politico*, October 24, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/10/24/russia-dirty-bomb-moscow-wmd-forces-00063115>].

⁶⁹¹ Michelle Nichols and Pavel Polityuk, “Russia brings Ukraine ‘dirty bomb’ warning to U.N. as it evacuates Kherson,” *Reuters*, October 25, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-hits-ukraine-homes-evacuates-kherson-warns-escalation-2022-10-24/>].

⁶⁹² Henry Foy et al, “West sees Russia’s ‘dirty bomb’ claims as pretext for possible Ukraine escalation,” *Financial Times*, October 24, 2022 [<https://www.ft.com/content/b5deaec3-91d8-4035-be2c-1a7c06ae8ba9>].

⁶⁹³ Lara Seligman, “West rejects Russia’s ‘dirty bomb’ claim as Moscow activates counter-WMD forces,” *Politico*, October 24, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/10/24/russia-dirty-bomb-moscow-wmd-forces-00063115>].

⁶⁹⁴ This event could potentially be coded as de-escalatory. However, as we could not ascertain whether Russian behaviour was purposeful or not, we decided against coding the event. Julian E. Barnes and David E. Sanger, “Fears of Russian Nuclear Weapons Use Have Diminished, but Could Re-emerge,” *New York Times*, February 3, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/03/us/politics/russia-nuclear-weapons.html?searchResultPosition=1>].

⁶⁹⁵ “Readout of Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III’s Call With Ukrainian Minister of Defence Oleksii Reznikov,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, October 24, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3198205/readout-of-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iiis-call-with-ukrainian-ministe/>].

⁶⁹⁶ Tweet by @DmytroKuleba, *Twitter*, October 24, 2022 [https://twitter.com/DmytroKuleba/status/1584662313415901185?s=20&t=1cUjTlaIkEbMa_2j3XdKg].

preparing a dirty bomb. “I’m not guaranteeing you that it’s a false flag operation yet, don’t know, but it would be a serious, serious mistake.”⁶⁹⁷

On the same day, **Austin** speaking to **Stoltenberg** also condemned “Russia’s false claim that Ukraine is preparing to use a dirty bomb on its own soil.” Washington rejected “any attempt to create pretexts for Russian escalation.”⁶⁹⁸

According to press reports, **US intelligence officials** were divided about Russia’s intentions. Some believed that the repeated threats were a bluff. Others thought they were preparations to use a small nuclear device in order to warn adversaries to stay away.⁶⁹⁹

Meanwhile in Vienna, the **IAEA** announced it was preparing an inspection in Ukraine to follow up on Russian allegations.⁷⁰⁰

Against the backdrop of this level of apprehension, the previously mentioned group of **30 progressive Democratic lawmakers** in Washington retracted their letter from the day before, calling on Biden to engage in direct talks with Mocow on a ceasefire in Ukraine.⁷⁰¹

Also on **October 25**, the **Pentagon** made public that Russia had notified the United States that its annual nuclear exercise would run October 26-29 and that it would include launches of nuclear capable missiles. Russia was conducting a “routine annual exercise” and “complying with its arms control obligations and its transparency commitments,” the Pentagon noted. Also, the Pentagon’s spokesperson noted that the US government had no “indication that Russia has made a decision to employ those types of [nuclear] capabilities, nor have we seen any need to change our own strategic forces posture.”⁷⁰²

On the same day, German President **Frank-Walter Steinmeier** arrived in Ukraine, where he would meet Zelenskyy on his first visit since Russia invaded in February. “My message to the Ukrainians is that we are not only standing by your side. We will continue to support Ukraine, economically, politically and also militarily,” Steinmeier said after his arrival.⁷⁰³

⁶⁹⁷ David Sanger, “Biden issues a stark warning to Russia,” *The New York Times*, October 25, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/10/25/world/russia-ukraine-war-news>].

⁶⁹⁸ Tweet by @SecDef, *Twitter*, October 25, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/secdef/status/1584712525815373825?s=43&t=7Gnwh9ynAGHDSH6HWhi3ig>].

⁶⁹⁹ David Sanger, “Biden issues a stark warning to Russia,” *The New York Times*, October 25, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/10/25/world/russia-ukraine-war-news>].

⁷⁰⁰ Francois Murphy and Ronald Popeski, “IAEA preparing to inspect two sites in Ukraine over ‘dirty bomb’ claims,” *Reuters*, October 25, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/iaea-preparing-inspect-two-sites-ukraine-over-dirty-bomb-claims-2022-10-24/>].

⁷⁰¹ “Amid Backlash, Liberal House Democrats Retract Call to Pursue Ukraine Ceasefire,” *The New York Times*, October 26, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/25/world/europe/democrats-biden-ukraine.html>].

⁷⁰² David Martin and Eleanor Watson, “Russia has notified the U.S. its annual nuclear exercise has begun, U.S. officials say,” *CBS News*, October 25, 2022 [<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/russia-nuclear-exercise-annual-nuclear-capable-missiles-launch-american-officials-say/?ftag=CNM-00-10aab7e&linkId=187000112>], and “Pentagon Press Secretary Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder Holds an On-Camera Press Briefing,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, October 25, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3199583/pentagon-press-secretary-air-force-brig-gen-pat-ryder-holds-an-on-camera-press/>].

⁷⁰³ “Ukraine: German President Steinmeier visits Kyiv,” *Deutsche Welle*, October 25, 2022 [<https://www.dw.com/en/ukraine-german-president-frank-walter-steinmeier-visits-kyiv/a-63543018>].

In New York, the **UN Security Council** met. “We’ve seen and heard no new evidence,” Britain’s Deputy UN Ambassador **James Kariuki** told reporters after the meeting, referring to Russia’s “transparently false allegations.” He added: “This is pure Russian misinformation of the kind of we’ve seen many times before and it should stop.” Russian representatives saw the meeting in a different light. “We’re quite satisfied because we raised the awareness,” Russia’s Deputy UN Ambassador **Dmitry Polyanskiy** told reporters. “I don’t mind people saying that Russia is crying wolf if this doesn’t happen because this is a terrible, terrible disaster that threatens potentially the whole of the Earth.”⁷⁰⁴

The nuclear rhetoric was taking place against the background of Russian forces having been driven back in earlier weeks from the southern region of Kherson. Russia’s military was preparing to defend the largest city under its control in Ukraine. The Russian authorities had been encouraging residents to flee to the eastern bank of the Dnipro river, as Russian forces appeared to be strengthening their regrouping. “The heaviest of battles is going to take place for Kherson,” Ukrainian officials told Western journalists.⁷⁰⁵

139.	Warning
On October 26 , Putin monitored a series of nuclear drills described by Shoigu as simulation of a “massive nuclear strike” in retaliation for a nuclear attack on Russia. A Yars land-based intercontinental ballistic missile was test-fired from the northern Plesetsk launch site. A Russian nuclear submarine in the Barents Sea also launched a Sineva ICBM at the Kura firing range on the far-eastern Kamchatka Peninsula, and Tu-95 strategic fired cruise missiles at practice targets. The exercise, which involved multiple practice launches of ballistic and cruise missiles, was a success, Moscow said. ⁷⁰⁶ Putin also repeated the dirty bomb claim. “We know about the plans to use the so-called dirty bomb for provocations,” he said. ⁷⁰⁷	

In a Pentagon briefing on the following day, **Austin** however stressed that the US government had not seen anything to indicate Russia was using the exercise as a cover to launch a nuclear strike. He added that the Administration was concerned about the conflict in Ukraine escalating but said there were still no indications Russia was planning to use a nuclear weapon.⁷⁰⁸

After Shoigu called his Chinese and Indian counterparts to discuss the allegation, which Ukraine and its Western allies had strongly rejected, India’s defense minister **Rajnath Singh** tweeted that he pointed out to Shoigu that “the nuclear option should not be resorted to by any side as the prospect of the usage of nuclear or radiological weapons goes against the basic tenets of humanity.”⁷⁰⁹

⁷⁰⁴ Michelle Nichols, “Russia raises accusation at U.N. of Ukraine ‘dirty bomb’ plans,” *Reuters*, October 25, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-raises-accusation-un-ukraine-dirty-bomb-plans-2022-10-25/>].

⁷⁰⁵ Jonathan Landay, “Russia digging in for ‘heaviest of battles’ in Kherson - Ukrainian official,” *Reuters*, October 26, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-hits-ukraine-homes-evacuates-kherson-warns-escalation-2022-10-24/>].

⁷⁰⁶ “Putin monitors practice launches by Russia’s nuclear forces,” *AP News*, October 26, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-europe-moscow-sergei-shoigu-752933fd7c59c22226ef377363955de8>].

⁷⁰⁷ “Putin monitors practice launches by Russia’s nuclear forces,” *AP News*, October 26, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-europe-moscow-sergei-shoigu-752933fd7c59c22226ef377363955de8>].

⁷⁰⁸ Lloyd J. Austin, “Press Conference,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, October 27, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3202353/secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-holds-a-press-conference/>].

⁷⁰⁹ “Putin monitors practice launches by Russia’s nuclear forces,” *AP News*, October 26, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-europe-moscow-sergei-shoigu-752933fd7c59c22226ef377363955de8>], and “India defence minister warns against nuclear weapons in Ukraine,” *Gulf News*, October 26, 2022 [<https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/india/india-defence-minister-warns-against-nuclear-weapons-in-ukraine-1.91519512>].

140.	Warning
There appeared to be continued concern in Washington. On October 26, Blinken repeated that the Administration had “communicated directly and very clearly to the Russians, President Putin about the consequences” of using nuclear weapons. The State Department’s spokesperson suggested the message had not been conveyed to Putin directly, but to other Russian officials. The “dirty bomb” allegations were “another fabrication and something that is also the height of irresponsibility coming from a nuclear power,” Blinken said. Also: “The reason this particular allegation gives us some concern is because Russia has a track record of projecting, which is to say, accusing others of doing something that they themselves have done or are thinking about doing,” Blinken said. ⁷¹⁰	

Concern was also rife in Poland, where Deputy Defense Minister **Marcin Ociepa** claimed that faced with military setbacks, the Kremlin “may reach for nuclear or chemical weapons.”⁷¹¹

141.	De-escalatory
On October 27, Putin denied the Kremlin had any intentions to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine. “We have no need to do so,” Putin told international foreign policy experts at the Valdai club. “There is no sense in [using nuclear weapons] for us, neither political, nor military.” Moscow had “never said anything proactively about Russia potentially using nuclear weapons,” Putin claimed. Condemning once again Liz Truss’ statement from February 27, he claimed that “all” Russia had done “was hint in response to statements made by Western leaders. He also repeated unsubstantiated allegations that Ukraine was preparing a false flag attack involving a radioactive bomb that it would try to pin on Russia.” ⁷¹²	

142.	Warning
On the same day, in Syracuse, New York, Biden commented on Putin’s statements. If the Russian leader had “no intention” to use nuclear weapons, “why does he keep talking about it,” Biden asked. “Why does he talk about the ability to use a tactical nuclear weapon?” ⁷¹³ Observers noted that Putin had in fact never talked about using tactical nuclear weapons. Putin had been “very dangerous” in how he “approached” the nuclear question, Biden said. ⁷¹⁴	

On **October 28**, in Moscow, **Shoigu** announced that the draft was over and that no more enlistment notices would be sent to men to fight in Ukraine. Speaking at a meeting with Putin, the Russian Defense Minister said 82,000 troops had already been deployed to Ukraine, and the rest were undergoing training. Putin told Shoigu that there was a need “to make corrections” in the design of the Russian army and asked the defense minister to quickly prepare the “necessary decisions.”⁷¹⁵

⁷¹⁰ Jennifer Hansler and Kylie Atwood, “Blinken says the consequences for using a nuclear weapon have been conveyed to Putin,” *CNN*, October 27, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/10/26/politics/blinking-putin-nuclear-consequences/index.html>].

⁷¹¹ “Putin monitors practice launches by Russia’s nuclear forces,” *AP News*, October 26, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-europe-moscow-sergei-shoigu-752933fd7c59c22226ef377363955de8>].

⁷¹² “Valdai International Discussion Club meeting,” *Website of the Kremlin*, October 27, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/69695>], and “Russia’s Putin says he won’t use nuclear weapons in Ukraine,” *AP News*, October 27, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/putin-europe-government-and-politics-c541449bf88999c117b033d2de08d26d>].

⁷¹³ Hyder Abbasi, “Biden questions Putin’s claim Russia won’t use nuclear weapons in Ukraine, criticizes ‘dangerous’ rhetoric,” *CBS News*, October 28, 2022 [<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/biden-questions-putin-russia-use-nuclear-weapons-ukraine-dangerous-rcna54476>].

⁷¹⁴ Eric Beech “Biden: Putin’s talk of possible use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine is ‘dangerous,’” *Reuters*, October 28, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/biden-putins-talk-possible-use-nuclear-weapons-ukraine-is-dangerous-2022-10-27/>].

On the same day, **Stoltenberg** noted in Brussels that a “victorious Russia” would “be bad for all of us in Europe and North America, in the whole of NATO, because that will send a message to authoritarian leaders — not only Putin but also China — that by the use of brutal military force they can achieve their goals.”⁷¹⁶

On **October 29**, Russia’s Black Sea flagship vessel, the **Admiral Makarov**, was damaged and possibly disabled during a Ukrainian drone attack on the Crimean port of Sevastopol, media reported. Three Russian ships were apparently hit. In the wake of the attack, **Russia** announced that it was pulling out of the UN brokered deal that allowed Ukrainian grain and fertilizer to be shipped through the Black Sea.⁷¹⁷ In addition, on **October 31**, Russian missile strikes took out critical infrastructure in several Ukrainian cities, leaving 80 percent of Kyiv without water supplies.⁷¹⁸ **Putin** told journalists that the attack was “partly” a response to Ukraine’s actions in Sevastopol, and warned that the strikes were “not all we could do.”⁷¹⁹

The UN sought to continue the flow of grain without Russian support. Turkey also remained committed to the deal. In Moscow, **Peskov** said on **October 31**, that it would be risky for Ukraine to continue exporting. Russia could not “guarantee” the “safety of shipping in these areas,” the spokesperson said.⁷²⁰

143.	Warning
In an interview for a Russian state television documentary on the Cuban missile crisis on the following day of October 30 , Lavrov said the current crisis bore similarities with 1962. Today Western weapons in Ukraine threatened Russia, he claimed. “I hope that in today’s situation, President Joe Biden will have more opportunities to understand who gives orders and how,” but “this situation is very disturbing,” he added. “The difference is that in the distant 1962, Khrushchev and Kennedy found the strength to show responsibility and wisdom, and now we do not see such readiness on the part of Washington and its satellites,” he said. Yet Lavrov also noted that Russia and Putin’s “readiness” for negotiations remained “unchanged.” ⁷²¹	

144.	Warning
The following day, UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly told UK lawmakers that Russia would face severe consequences if it used nuclear weapons. Putin “should be clear that for the UK and our allies, any use, at all, of nuclear weapons would change the nature of the conflict. There would be severe consequences for Russia,” Cleverly said. Claims that Ukraine was preparing a dirty bomb attack were	

⁷¹⁵ Ivan Nechepurenko, “Russia’s defense minister says the recent draft is finished, and no more are planned,” *The New York Times*, October 28, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/28/world/europe/russia-draft-war.html>].

⁷¹⁶ Lili Bayer, “Don’t let Russia win, NATO chief warns US,” *Politico*, October 28, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/dont-let-russia-win-nato-chief-warns-us/>].

⁷¹⁷ Luke Harding and Isobel Koshiw, “Russia’s Black Sea flagship damaged in Crimea drone attack, video suggests,” *The Guardian*, October 30, 2022 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/30/russias-black-sea-flagship-damaged-in-crimea-drone-attack-video-suggests>].

⁷¹⁸ Francesca Ebel, “Missiles slam Ukraine as Russia strikes infrastructure in new air barrage,” *The Washington Post*, October 31, 2022 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/10/31/airstrikes-missiles-infrastructure-russia-ukraine/>].

⁷¹⁹ Kostan Nechyporenko et al, “Russian missiles bombard cities across Ukraine, hitting power and water infrastructure,” *CNN*, October 31, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/10/31/europe/russian-missile-strikes-ukraine-intl/index.html>].

⁷²⁰ Nigel Hunt, Reuters, “UN’s Black Sea grain deal continues without Russia,” *Reuters*, October 31, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/uns-black-sea-grain-deal-continues-without-russia-2022-10-31/>].

⁷²¹ Guy Faulconbridge, “Russia’s Lavrov needles Biden over Cuban missile crisis and Ukraine,” *Reuters*, October 30, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-lavrov-needles-biden-over-cuban-missile-crisis-ukraine-2022-10-30/>].

“absurd” and Putin’s nuclear rhetoric was “irresponsible talk.” He concluded: “No other country is talking about nuclear use. No country is threatening Russia or President Putin.”⁷²²

November 2022: The sudden demise of nuclear rhetoric

In early November, further details on the background of recent Western concern were revealed. On **November 1, British defense officials** made public that Russia had deployed air-launched hypersonic missiles to a base in Belarus by mid-October. UK analysts had spotted on satellite imagery MiG-31K jets, as well as a possible canister containing Kinzhal hypersonic missiles at Machulishchy Airfield, just outside of Minsk. Given that stationing the jets in Belarus did not increase the number of targets that could be reached in Ukraine, UK officials believed that Moscow had carried out the deployment “mainly” as a “message to the West.”⁷²³

145.	De-escalatory
<p>In addition, on November 2, US journalists reported that senior Russian military leaders had recently held conversations to discuss when and how Moscow might use a tactical nuclear weapon in Ukraine. Putin had not been part of the conversations. The intelligence about these Russian discussions was circulated as a National Intelligence Council product inside the US government in mid-October. American officials were “profoundly concerned” about these “intense discussions” in Russia – “especially if Russia’s army in the south of Ukraine were to collapse.” The risk of further escalation remained “troublingly high,” Biden Administration officials and US allies told journalists, but they also said that the phone calls between Western and Russian counterparts in late October had helped ease some of the nuclear tensions.⁷²⁴ White House spokesperson Kirby said that the Administration had no indications that Putin had decided to use a nuclear weapon, but that “we have grown increasingly concerned about the potential as these months have gone on.” The United States, he said, continued to monitor Russia’s nuclear signaling “as best we can.”⁷²⁵</p> <p>Anonymous US officials also told journalists that Russia was unlikely to be cowed into a complete retreat anytime soon, even as Ukraine’s battlefield victories put Moscow’s forces on the back foot. And as Russia exhausted its troops and its conventional arsenal, the danger was rising of Moscow turning to more-insidious tactics and weapons to beat back Ukraine’s counteroffensives, officials said. “The practical effect of their depletion of their conventional forces is unfortunately an even greater reliance on their nuclear forces,” a senior defense official had already told reporters at the end of October, media reports revealed.⁷²⁶</p>	

⁷²² William James and Alistair Smout, “UK warns Russia of severe consequences if nuclear weapons used in Ukraine,” *Reuters*, October 31, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-warns-russia-severe-consequences-if-nuclear-weapons-used-ukraine-2022-10-31/>].

⁷²³ Arthur Scott-Geddes, “Russia deploys hypersonic missiles to Belarus in ‘message to the West,’” *The Telegraph*, November 1, 2022 [<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2022/11/01/russia-deploys-hypersonic-missiles-belarus-message-west/>].

⁷²⁴ Helene Cooper, Julian E. Barnes and Eric Schmitt, “Russian Military Leaders Discussed Use of Nuclear Weapons, U.S. Officials Say,” *The New York Times*, November 2, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/02/us/politics/russia-ukraine-nuclear-weapons.html>].

⁷²⁵ Karoun Demirjian and Shane Harris, “Russian military leaders’ talk of nuclear attack rattles U.S. calculus,” *The Washington Post*, November 2, 2022 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/11/02/us-russia-ukraine-nuclear-weapons/>].

⁷²⁶ Karoun Demirjian and Shane Harris, “Russian military leaders’ talk of nuclear attack rattles U.S. calculus,” *The Washington Post*, November 2, 2022 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/11/02/us-russia-ukraine-nuclear-weapons/>].

146.	De-escalatory
Meanwhile, Russia continued to walk back its nuclear rhetoric. On November 2 , the Russian Foreign Ministry published a statement refuting any nuclear use. Nuclear war could not be won and had to be avoided. Russia's doctrine mandated only "defensive goals" and did not permit an "expansive interpretation." The world's "top priority" was to avoid a clash of nuclear powers that could lead to "catastrophic consequences." The other "nuclear five" were urged to "give up the dangerous attempts to infringe on vital interests" of others. ⁷²⁷	

Also on the same day in Moscow, **Russia** rejoined the agreement allowing the shipment of Ukrainian grain through the Black Sea – participation it had suspended the weekend before after blaming Ukraine for an attack on Russian warships in Sevastopol. It was unclear why the Kremlin reversed course so quickly, but President Vladimir V. Putin said in televised remarks that the agreement was tied to Ukraine's ensuring the safety of Russian vessels. "Russia retains the right to leave these agreements if these guarantees from Ukraine are violated," he said. Russian officials noted that they had received "written guarantees" over the safety of Russian vessels. Ukrainian officials suggested that Russia had reconsidered after seeing that other parties, including Turkey and the UN, were committed to continuing with or without Moscow's involvement.⁷²⁸

In contrast, also in Moscow, Secretary of the Russian Security Council **Nikolai Patrushev** said the West was using a possible provocation with a nuclear weapon to recruit additional countries to its coalition against Russia.⁷²⁹

In New York, the **UN Security Council** rejected the establishment of a formal inquiry into Russia's accusation that the United States and Ukraine had biological weapons programs in Ukraine. Only China voted with Russia in favor of a UNSC resolution. The United States, Britain and France voted against it, while the remaining 10 council members abstained.⁷³⁰ The following day in Vienna, the **IAEA** said that its inspection had not found evidence of illegal nuclear activity at three sites that figured in Russia's allegations against Ukraine either.⁷³¹

Nonetheless, on the same **November 3**, a **Western official** told journalists that support for the war remained "fairly consistent in the Russian leadership group and debate is over the means." Hence, Western officials did not see "at this stage that debates within the top of the Russian system over the conduct of the war reflect any serious threats to Putin's position."⁷³² Another **Western official** told reporters that there had been "spectacular changes in the territorial control" of Ukraine as Russian troops strug-

⁷²⁷ Statement of the Russian Federation on preventing nuclear war," *Website of the Russian Foreign Ministry*, November 2, 2022 [https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1836575/?lang=en].

⁷²⁸ Ivan Nechepurenko and Matthew Mpoke Bigg, "Russia Rejoins Grain Deal, but Warns It Could Pull Out Again," *The New York Times*, November 2, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/02/world/europe/ukraine-russia-grain-black-sea.html>].

⁷²⁹ "Запад использует ядерную провокацию для набора коалиции, заявил Патрушев (West uses nuclear provocation to recruit coalition, says Patrushev)," *Ria Novosti*, November 3, 2022 [<https://ria.ru/20221103/patrushev-1828870675.html>].

⁷³⁰ Michelle Nichols, "Russia fails at U.N. in bid for Ukraine, U.S. bioweapons inquiry," *Reuters*, November 2, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-fails-un-bid-ukraine-us-bioweapons-inquiry-2022-11-02/>].

⁷³¹ Matthew Mpoke Bigg, "The U.N.'s nuclear watchdog finds no evidence for Russia's claim that Ukraine is readying a 'dirty bomb'," *The New York Times*, November 3, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/03/world/europe/iaea-ukraine-dirty-bomb.html>].

⁷³² Tweet by @shashj, *Twitter*, November 3, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/shashj/status/1588169649459695616?s=20&t=NElw3dNYxrfLbkk05k4jAg>].

gled to fight with a dwindling supply of low-quality weapons. Moscow's retreat from Kherson had almost been completed. "The most glaring failure in Russia's inventory is its increasingly critical shortage of artillery ammunition," the official said. "In the Russian way of war, artillery enables everything else."⁷³³

147.	De-escalatory
Still, Moscow's officials continued to walk back nuclear rhetoric. In London, Russian ambassador Kelin repeated his claim that Russia would not use nuclear weapons in Ukraine. "We will not use nuclear weapons because they are designed for other purposes," he told journalists. "A nuclear war cannot be won and it should never be fought. And we stick strongly to this statement." The "world" had "every assurance" that Russia was not going to use tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine, he added.	
In Moscow, Peskov had noted before that Western leaders' engaged in nuclear rhetoric daily and underscored that Russia had no desire to partake in this exercise, Russian media reported. He also reiterated that Moscow could use nuclear weapons only in accordance with its nuclear doctrine. ⁷³⁴	

On **November 4**, with German Chancellor **Scholz** visiting Beijing, Chinese leader Xi Jinping expressed criticism towards Russia's nuclear rhetoric. The international community should "jointly oppose the use of, or threats to use, nuclear weapons," a statement read. The world should also "advocate that nuclear weapons cannot be used, a nuclear war cannot be waged, in order to prevent a nuclear crisis" in Europe or Asia, Xi added. However, Xi also "asked" Germany and Europe to "play an important part in calling for peace and facilitating negotiations." China's outgoing Premier Li Keqiang told the press: "We cannot afford any further escalation." Referring to Scholz who was standing next to him, Li said: "Both of us hope the crisis ends soon." Scholz referred to our meeting with Xi: "We have agreed that threatening nuclear attacks is irresponsible and dangerous," Scholz told reporters. "I have told President Xi the importance for China to exert its influence on Russia."⁷³⁵

148.	Warning
Meanwhile Western support for Ukraine and a clear line vis-à-vis Russia's nuclear rhetoric continued. Concluding a two-day meeting in Northern Germany, the G7 foreign ministers expressed "unwavering commitment" to Ukraine's defense. Russia's "irresponsible nuclear rhetoric" was "unacceptable," the statement read. "Any use of chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons by Russia would be met with severe consequences." The G7 pledged to continue to aid Ukraine, to impose costs on Russia, and to establish a coordination mechanism to rebuild Ukraine. "We're aligned, we're united and we're working together as never before," Blinken told journalists. ⁷³⁶	

⁷³³ Alexander Ward and Matt Berg, "Why Biden isn't changing course on North Korea," *Politico*, November 3, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/11/03/why-biden-isnt-changing-course-on-north-korea-00064912>].

⁷³⁴ "Moscow to eschew use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine, Russian envoy reiterates," *TASS*, November 3, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1532329>].

⁷³⁵ Stuart Lau, "China's Xi warns Putin not to use nuclear arms in Ukraine," *Politico*, November 4, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/china-xi-jinping-warns-vladimir-putin-not-to-use-nuclear-arms-in-ukraine-olaf-scholz-germany-peace-talks/>].

⁷³⁶ "G7 Foreign Ministers' Statement," *Website of the French Foreign Ministry*, November 4, 2022, [<https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/europe/western-balkans-62918/article/g7-foreign-ministers-statement-4-november-2022-munster>], and Matthew Lee, "G-7 ministers back Ukraine support, are suspicious of China," *AP News*, November 4, 2022 [<https://ap-news.com/article/russia-ukraine-iran-china-germany-north-korea-a308db7e340fed2e4c09a6303368de96>].

In Washington, the **Pentagon** announced that it was setting up a new command to oversee how the United States and its allies trained and equipped the Ukrainian military. The Defense Department also unveiled a new package of \$400 million in security assistance, bringing the total since Russia invaded to \$18.9 billion. The command would ensure that Washington was “postured to continue supporting Ukraine over the long term,” the Pentagon’s spokesperson said, suggesting that the US government was not expecting that the conflict would end soon. The additional assistance included funding for refurbishing 45 tanks from the Czech Republic, which would arrive in Ukraine by the end of December 2022.⁷³⁷

In Moscow, **Putin** used a National Unity Day appearance to announce that 318,000 soldiers had been recruited to join the Russian Army before recruiting had stopped, with 49,000 of those already in combat.⁷³⁸

149.	Warning
There was also renewed nuclear rhetoric coming from Russia. Medvedev claimed that Russia was fighting “crazy Nazi drug addicts” in Ukraine backed by Westerners who he said had “saliva running down their chins from degeneracy.” He went on to stress that Moscow had various weapons and could “send all enemies” to hell, though this was “not” its task. Russia had to “stop the supreme ruler of Hell, whatever name he uses - Satan, Lucifer or Iblis.” ⁷³⁹	

Back in Berlin, **Scholz** said on **November 5**, that his and Xi’s joint statement opposing the use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine had been reason enough for the visit. “Because the Chinese government, the president and I were able to declare that no nuclear weapons should be used in this war, that alone made the whole trip worthwhile,” Scholz said during an SPD event.⁷⁴⁰

In Washington, US media reported that the **Biden Administration** had been privately encouraging Ukraine’s leaders to signal an openness to negotiate with Russia and drop their public refusal to engage in peace talks unless President Vladimir Putin was removed from power. The request was not aimed at pushing Ukraine to the negotiating table, but rather a calculated attempt to ensure the government in Kyiv maintains the support of other nations facing constituencies wary of fueling a war for many years to come. “Ukraine fatigue is a real thing for some of our partners,” said one US official.⁷⁴¹

On **November 6**, US media reported that US National Security Advisor **Jake Sullivan** had been engaged in confidential conversations with Russian counterparts over the preceding months. He had talked to **Yuri Ushakov**, a foreign-policy adviser to Putin, and to his direct counterpart in the Russian govern-

⁷³⁷ Andrew E. Kramer “Russia Sends Ill-Trained Draftees Into Combat Amid Losses, Analysts Say,” *The New York Times*, November 4, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/04/world/europe/russia-ukraine-conscripts-combat.html>].

⁷³⁸ Andrew E. Kramer “Russia Sends Ill-Trained Draftees Into Combat Amid Losses, Analysts Say,” *The New York Times*, November 4, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/04/world/europe/russia-ukraine-conscripts-combat.html>].

⁷³⁹ “Medvedev says Russia is fighting a sacred battle against Satan,” *Reuters*, November 4, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/medvedev-says-russia-is-fighting-sacred-battle-against-satan-2022-11-04/>], and Post on Telegram channel of Dmitry Medvedev, *Telegram*, November 4, 2022 [https://t.me/medvedev_telegram/206].

⁷⁴⁰ Andreas Rinke, “Xi opposing nuclear weapons in Ukraine was reason enough to visit China, Scholz says,” *Reuters*, November 5, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/scholz-xi-opposing-nuclear-weapons-ukraine-reason-enough-visit-china-2022-11-05/>].

⁷⁴¹ Missy Ryan, John Hudson and Paul Sonne, “U.S. privately asks Ukraine to show it’s open to negotiate with Russia,” *The Washington Post*, November 5, 2022 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/11/05/ukraine-russia-peace-negotiations/>].

ment, **Nikolai Patrushev**. The aim had been to guard against the risk of escalation and keep communications channels open, and not to discuss a settlement of the war in Ukraine, US officials told journalists.⁷⁴²

In Kyiv, **Zelenskyy** put forward in his nightly address on **November 7**, a set of conditions for negotiations – the same the G7 had listed on 11 October 2022: the restoration of his country's territorial integrity, compensation for the damage caused by Russia's war and prosecutions for war crimes. However, he did not repeat his prior refusal to negotiate with a Russian government let by Putin.⁷⁴³

On **November 8**, Ukraine held exercises to prepare for a potential Russian nuclear attack. According to Ukrainian officials, drills included running through ways to ensure effective communication of all emergency services, and action plans for evacuations, should officials be in danger.⁷⁴⁴

On the same day, **India's** foreign minister **Subrahmanyam Jaishankar** met with **Lavrov** in **Moscow**. India "strongly advocates a return to dialogue and diplomacy," the Indian diplomat said, as the global economy was "simply too interdependent" for a conflict not to have "major consequences" in other parts of the world. However, India would expand economic ties with Russia and continue to buy oil from Moscow, he noted, as India's "fundamental obligation" was to ensure that Indian consumers had the "best possible access on the most advantageous terms to international markets."⁷⁴⁵

On **November 9**, **Shoigu** and **Sergei Surovikin**, the commander of Russian forces in Ukraine, announced a withdrawal from Kherson.⁷⁴⁶ In Moscow, **Zakharova** said that the Kremlin was "open to negotiations" and had never "refused to have them." But negotiations had to "take into account the realities" that were "emerging at the moment."⁷⁴⁷ Also in Moscow, **individuals close to the Kremlin** speculated to Western reporters that the withdrawal was aimed at enabling a "stabilization" of the front line that could set the stage for a ceasefire agreement.⁷⁴⁸

In Washington, rumors about potential negotiations were ripe. Media reported that some **US and Western officials** were "eyeing the expected winter slowdown in fighting as an opportunity for diplomacy to begin between Russia and Ukraine."⁷⁴⁹ Indeed, US Joint Chiefs of Staff chair **Milley** told an audience in

⁷⁴² Vivian Salama and Michael R. Gordon, "Senior White House Official Involved in Undisclosed Talks With Top Putin Aides," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 6, 2022 [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/senior-white-house-official-involved-in-undisclosed-talks-with-top-putin-aides-11667768988>].

⁷⁴³ Andrew Kramer and Shashank Bengali, "Ukraine wants Russia to return territory and pay damages," *The New York Times*, November 7, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/11/08/world/ukraine-war-news-russia-updates#ukrainian-officials-signal-openness-to-talks-with-russia-but-with-strict-conditions>].

⁷⁴⁴ Isabel van Brugen, "Ukraine Prepares for Nuclear Strike by Russia," *Newsweek*, November 8, 2022 [<https://www.newsweek.com/ukraine-prepares-nuclear-strike-weapons-russia-putin-1757836>], and Telegram channel of Ruslan Zaparanyuk, *Telegram*, November 8, 2022 [<https://t.me/chernivetskaODA/2231>].

⁷⁴⁵ Anjana Pasricha, "India to Bolster Economic Ties with Russia," *VOA*, November 9, 2022 [<https://www.voanews.com/a/india-to-bolster-economic-ties-with-russia/6826582.html>].

⁷⁴⁶ Tristan Fiedler and Sergei Kuznetsov, "Russian troops retreat from Kherson in new blow to Putin," *Politico*, November 9, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-withdraw-troops-kherson-ukraine-war-sergei-surovikin/>].

⁷⁴⁷ "Russia ready to conduct talks with Ukraine based on realities — MFA," *TASS*, November 9, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1534305>].

⁷⁴⁸ Anton Troianovski, "Putin stays silent on the Kherson withdrawal order, as others parse his motive," *The New York Times*, November 9, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/09/world/europe/putin-ukraine-russia-kherson.html>].

⁷⁴⁹ Courtney Kube, Carol E. Lee and Josh Lederman, "Some U.S. and Western officials think neither side can win and see winter as a shot at diplomacy in Ukraine-Russia war," *NBC News*, November 9, 2022 [<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/ukraine-russia-war-winter-diplomacy-rcna56190>].

New York that Russia's retreat in preparation for reestablishing defensive lines south of the Dnieper and a spring offensive provided "a window of opportunity for negotiation." However, both parties would have to reach a "mutual recognition" that military victory was not "achievable."⁷⁵⁰ However, by the evening of **November 9**, other **European and US officials** were telling reporters that serious peace talks between Ukraine and Russia were "unlikely in the near future" as both sides thought continued fighting would strengthen their eventual negotiating positions – for the moment, terms of a settlement that both Ukraine and Russia would accept were hard to envision. In addition, Ukraine's population was not disposed to accept a compromise, even if leaders were prepared to make concessions.⁷⁵¹ In turn, **Biden** told reporters that it remained to be seen "whether or not there'll be a judgement made as to whether or not Ukraine is prepared to compromise with Russia."⁷⁵²

On **November 10**, US journalists revealed a disagreement at the highest levels within the US government over whether negotiations in Ukraine were due. **Milley** had made the case in internal meetings that the Ukrainians had achieved about as much as they could reasonably expect on the battlefield before winter set in, and should try to cement their gains at the bargaining table. Other **senior Biden officials**, while believing a negotiated peace would come in due time, argued that neither side was ready to negotiate, that a pause would give Russia a chance to regroup when Ukraine was having momentum, and that Washington should not be seen as pressuring Kyiv.⁷⁵³

In this context, **Milley** elaborated on his **November 9** New York speech in an interview on the following day: There was great uncertainty about the future, and he saw "some possibilities here for some diplomatic solutions."⁷⁵⁴ There were also members of the **Administration beyond those at the Pentagon** who believed neither side could win militarily and that the winter provided an opportunity to reach a political settlement to end the war, a US official told journalists.⁷⁵⁵ At the White House, however, **Sullivan** said it was ultimately up to the Ukrainians on when the timing was right. But the US goal was to put Ukraine in the strongest possible position for talks;⁷⁵⁶ and **Biden** said he did not think the conflict could be resolved "until Putin gets out of Ukraine."⁷⁵⁷

⁷⁵⁰ Tara Copp, "100,000 Russian troops killed or injured in Ukraine, US says," *AP News*, November 10, 2022 [<https://ap-news.com/article/russia-ukraine-zelenskyy-europe-army-joint-chiefs-of-staff-688e99d37f25ac8340b6a96a79a89abf>].

⁷⁵¹ Michael Crowley, Edward Wong and Julian E. Barnes, "Ukraine Peace Talks Remain Distant Even as Moscow Signals a Retreat," *The New York Times*, November 9, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/09/us/politics/ukraine-russia-peace-talks.html>].

⁷⁵² "Remarks by President Biden in Press Conference," *Website of the White House*, November 9, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/11/09/remarks-by-president-biden-in-press-conference-8/>].

⁷⁵³ Peter Baker, "Top U.S. General Urges Diplomacy in Ukraine While Biden Advisers Resist," *The New York Times*, November 10, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/10/us/politics/biden-ukraine-russia-diplomacy.html>].

⁷⁵⁴ "Gen. Mark Milley: U.S. will continue to supply Ukraine with the equipment to defeat Russia," *CNBC*, November 10, 2022 [<https://www.cnn.com/video/2022/11/10/gen-mark-milley-the-u-s-will-continue-to-supply-ukraine-with-equipment-to-defeat-russia.html>].

⁷⁵⁵ Lara Seligman et al, "DoD's new spox gives us his first interview," *Politico*, November 11, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily>].

⁷⁵⁶ "Press Briefing by Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan," *YouTube account of the White House*, November 10, 2022 [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBsZhAr7XVU>], and "Press Briefing by Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan," *Website of the White House*, November 10, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2022/11/10/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-karine-jean-pierre-and-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan-november-10-2022/>].

⁷⁵⁷ "Remarks by President Biden Before Marine One Departure," *Website of the White House*, November 10, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/11/10/remarks-by-president-biden-before-marine-one-departure-24/>].

In the meantime Western support for Ukraine continued. Also on **November 10**, the **Pentagon** announced that it would send another \$400 million to Ukraine, but not advanced drones. The shipment would include an air defense system (AADS) and ammunition for HIMARS.⁷⁵⁸ However, despite pleas from Ukraine and members of Congress, the Administration did not budge on sending Gray Eagle MQ-1C drones, due to concerns that these weapons could escalate the conflict, US officials told journalists. The Administration did not want the Kremlin to believe that the United States was providing weapons that could strike targets in Russia.⁷⁵⁹

At the same time on **Capitol Hill**, **House Republicans** were discussing how to alter a Ukraine aid package in a way that was acceptable to the party's populist wing after midterm elections had granted a majority to the GOP. Journalists reported that many Republicans were looking to cut much of the economic assistance, while keeping or even increasing the military component.⁷⁶⁰ The government in Kyiv held a similar assessment vis-à-vis the future of US aid for Ukraine.⁷⁶¹

In Kyiv, Ukraine's defense minister **Oleksii Reznikov** told reporters that he did not think Russia would use nuclear weapons. "I don't think they will use it. But again, when you have a monkey with a grenade for a neighbor you have to estimate all kinds of risks. But I think this is not a pragmatic and practical step for them," Reznikov said.⁷⁶²

On **November 11**, Ukrainian troops entered Kherson after Russia had withdrawn its soldiers. Moscow thereby lost the only regional capital it had managed to capture in nine months of war. Having crossed the Dnipro River, the Russian forces blew up the Antonivsky Bridge.⁷⁶³ **US officials** told reporters that pushing the Russians further would be "very costly and difficult." Ukraine was going to have to fight across the river, which was an extremely difficult military maneuver, the official said.⁷⁶⁴ In turn, **Sullivan** told reporters on Air Force One that the Administration would not "pressure" Ukraine. "Nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine," he said. The Administration believed in a "just peace." In turn, Russia was doubling down on its rhetoric, which was not a "sign of seriousness about negotiating." Finally, the US government was still doing "everything" it could to "put Ukraine in the best possible position on the battlefield so that when they make their determination to proceed, they're in the best possible position at the negotiating table."⁷⁶⁵

⁷⁵⁸ "\$400 Million in Additional Assistance for Ukraine," *Website of the US Department of Defense*, November 10, 2022 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3216287/400-million-in-additional-assistance-for-ukraine/>].

⁷⁵⁹ Gordon Lubold and Nancy Youssef, "US Refuses Advanced Drones for Ukraine to Avoid Escalation With Russia," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 9, 2022 [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-wont-give-ukraine-advanced-drones-to-avoid-escalation-with-russia-11668042100>].

⁷⁶⁰ Josh Rogin, "The next Congress could cause Ukraine to lose the war," *The Washington Post*, November 10, 2022 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/11/10/republican-congress-us-aid-ukraine/>].

⁷⁶¹ Alexander Ward and Nahal Toosi, "Ukraine tells GOP it 'can't just be about guns'," *Politico*, November 10, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/10/31/ukraines-gop-more-than-weapons-00064092>].

⁷⁶² Tom Balmforth and Max Hunder, "Ukraine defence chief plays down Russian nuclear strike threat," *Reuters*, November 10, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-defence-chief-plays-down-russian-nuclear-strike-threat-2022-11-10/>].

⁷⁶³ Marc Santora and Anna Lukinova, "An explosion on a crucial bridge severed Kherson City's last major crossing," *The New York Times*, November 11, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/11/world/europe/kherson-bridge-russia-ukraine-war.html>].

⁷⁶⁴ Lara Seligman et al, "DoD's new spox gives us his first interview," *Politico*, November 11, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily>].

⁷⁶⁵ "Press Gaggle by Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan En Route Phnom Penh, Cambodia," *Website of the White House*, November 11, 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2022/11/11/press-gaggle-by-press-secretary-karine-jean-pierre-and-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan-en-route-phnom-penh-cambodia/>].

On **November 14**, CIA director **William Burns** met with **Sergei Naryshkin**, the head of Russia's foreign intelligence service, in Ankara. The meeting had been requested by Washington, **Peskov** said. US officials stated that they had briefed the leadership in Kyiv beforehand, and that the purpose of the meeting was not to discuss the negotiations option, but to convey a "message on the consequences of the use of nuclear weapons by Russia, and the risk of escalation to strategic stability." It remained unclear whether this was the main or even real reason of the meeting.⁷⁶⁶ On **November 17**, Turkish President **Erdogan** told reporters that Ankara's intelligence agencies believed there was agreement at the Burns-Naryshkin meeting that "as of now, neither party will have any attempts at nuclear weapons." He believed nuclear weapons use might "lead to a new world war." Erdogan concluded: "Let's not allow for it."⁷⁶⁷

150.	Warning
<p>Burns noted in a speech on February 2, 2023 that the purpose of his meeting with Naryshkin on November 14, 2022 in Ankara had been to "make very clear the serious consequences of any use of tactical nuclear weapons." Also in February 2023, US officials told reporters that the meeting had opened up a new line of communication with Russia's leadership.⁷⁶⁸ On February 26, 2023 Burns repeated the same claim. Biden had asked Burns to make clear to Naryshkin and through him to Putin that there would be "serious consequences" if Russia "ever" chose to use nuclear weapons of "any kind." Burns added: "I think it's also been very valuable that the Chinese leadership, that Prime Minister Modi in India have also made clear their opposition to any use of nuclear weapons." With regard to Russian resolve, Burns noted that "Putin's view of Americans, of us, has been that we have attention deficit disorder, and we'll move on to some other issue eventually," an assessment that made Naryshkin and Putin have a "defiant attitude," a "sense of cockiness and hubris."⁷⁶⁹</p>	

In Washington, reacting to Milley's comments about possible opportunities for negotiations, **US officials** told reporters that they had conveyed to their Ukrainian counterparts that they did not expect talks to happen immediately, and that the Administration would continue to support Kyiv as it launched the next phase of advances on the battlefield. Reports revealed that the split within the Administration was real. There was a broad sense within the Defense Department that the winter could offer an opportunity to discuss a political settlement. Conversely, political appointees, especially within the NSC, seemed wary of giving the impression that Washington was pushing Kyiv into concessions.⁷⁷⁰

In Indonesia, **Biden** met Chinese leader **Xi Jinping**. Subsequently, the White House said that the two leaders jointly condemned Russia's threats of using nuclear weapons in Ukraine, arguing that "nuclear war should never be fought and can never be won." A Chinese spokesperson said Xi was "highly concerned" about the conflict in Ukraine. The Chinese leader had told Biden that "nuclear weapons should not be

⁷⁶⁶ Felicia Schwartz and Max Seddon, "CIA director warns Russia against use of nuclear weapons," *Financial Times*, November 14, 2022 [<https://www.ft.com/content/7bcee5c1-99be-45fa-bea0-8ef10648b31c>], and Jim Tankersley and Edward Wong, "The C.I.A. director meets with his Russian counterpart to warn against the use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine," *The New York Times*, November 14, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/14/world/europe/cia-burns-ukraine-russia-nuclear.html>].

⁷⁶⁷ "Turkish president says neither Russia nor U.S. to resort to nuclear weapons," *Xinhua*, November 17, 2022 [<https://english.news.cn/20221117/23a8d82e1822421a9d499108ee1cd245/c.html>].

⁷⁶⁸ Julian E. Barnes and David E. Sanger, "Fears of Russian Nuclear Weapons Use Have Diminished, but Could Re-emerge," *New York Times*, February 3, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/03/us/politics/russia-nuclear-weapons.html?searchResultPosition=1>].

⁷⁶⁹ Danielle Wallace, "CIA director says he warned Russian counterpart against using nuclear weapons in Ukraine," *Fox News*, February 26, 2023 [<https://www.foxnews.com/world/cia-director-warned-russian-counterpart-using-nuclear-weapons-ukraine>].

⁷⁷⁰ Alexander Ward, Lara Seligman, and Erin Banco, "U.S. scrambles to reassure Ukraine after Milley comments on negotiations," *Politico*, November 14, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/11/14/u-s-ukraine-milley-negotiations-00066777>].

used and nuclear wars should not be fought,” Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who was at the meeting, told reporters.⁷⁷¹

On **November 15, Russian missiles** struck targets in four Ukrainian cities. Russia fired at least 85 missiles, Ukrainian sources reported, most of them aimed at power facilities in Kharkiv, Kyiv, Lviv and Zhytomyr. While around 70 X-101 and X-555 missiles were shot down, a total of 15 energy targets were damaged, and many cities were blacked out. The power grid had already been battered by earlier attacks that had destroyed forty percent of the country’s energy infrastructure.⁷⁷²

On the same day, a Russian-made missile fell in the eastern part of Poland, killing two – the exact circumstances remained unclear for hours if not days, including who had fired the missile and from where. Warsaw said it was investigating and raising the level of its military preparedness. **G7** and **NATO leaders** in Bali met to discuss the situation. **Biden** called **Duda** to express his condolences. Russia denied any involvement. Polish Foreign Minister **Zbigniew Rau** summoned the Russian ambassador to Warsaw.⁷⁷³ One day later, on **November 16**, it became increasingly clear that the missiles were Russian-made SA-10 systems operated by Ukraine. Within two days, Western and, ultimately, even Ukrainian leaders seemed to accept this assessment.⁷⁷⁴

Still on **November 15**, in Bali, the **G20** continued to negotiate a final declaration, attempting to bridge the gap between the Russian unwillingness to be called out and Western desire to denounce Moscow’s actions. **Lavrov** claimed that “all problems” were “on the Ukrainian side,” who “categorically” refused “to hold any talks and comes up with conditions obviously unrealistic and inadequate to this situation.” **Zelenskyy** addressed the meeting, reiterating conditions for ending the conflict, among them a complete withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukrainian territory. After **Macron** met with **Xi**, the French government said they had agreed to call for the “respect of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine” and to express “deep concern over Russia’s choice to continue the war in Ukraine.”⁷⁷⁵ However, Western sources reported that China had joined Russia to oppose using “war” to describe Ukraine’s invasion in the G20 communique. China’s readout of Xi’s meeting with Macron merely stated that China advocated “cease-fire, cessation of fighting and peace talks.”⁷⁷⁶

⁷⁷¹ “Biden and Xi condemn nuclear threats in hourslong meeting,” *Deutsche Welle*, November 14, 2022 [<https://www.dw.com/en/biden-and-xi-condemn-nuclear-threats-in-hourslong-meeting/a-63750022>].

⁷⁷² John Leicester and James Laporta, “Poland: Russian-made missile fell on our country, killing 2,” *AP News*, November 15, 2022 [https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-zelenskyy-kherson-9202c032cf3a5c22761ee71b52ff9d52?utm_source=homepage&utm_medium=TopNews&utm_campaign=position_02], and Marc Santora and Maria Verenikova, “Strikes targeted Kyiv, the capital, and other cities across the country,” *The New York Times*, November 15, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/11/14/world/russia-ukraine-war-news-g20/kyiv-struck-by-missiles-as-russia-launches-a-major-aerial-attack?smid=url-share>].

⁷⁷³ John Leicester and James Laporta, “Poland: Russian-made missile fell on our country, killing 2,” *AP News*, November 15, 2022 [https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-zelenskyy-kherson-9202c032cf3a5c22761ee71b52ff9d52?utm_source=homepage&utm_medium=TopNews&utm_campaign=position_02].

⁷⁷⁴ Daniel Michaels, Laurence Norman and Drew Hinshaw, “Missile Blast in Poland Risked Russia-NATO Clash Before Both Sides Dialed Back,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 16, 2022 [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/missile-that-hit-poland-likely-launched-by-ukraine-in-air-defense-western-officials-say-11668589786>], and John Hudson, “Blinken denies missile incident shows communication rift with Ukraine,” *The Washington Post*, November 17, 2022 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/11/17/blinker-bangkok-poland-missile-ukraine/>], and Natasha Bertrand et al, “Inside the US scramble to run down the facts as the Russia-Ukraine war spills into NATO territory,” *CNN*, November 17, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/11/17/politics/ukraine-missile-poland-russia-biden-officials-scramble/index.html>].

⁷⁷⁵ Seung Min Kim et al, “G-20 to condemn Russia’s Ukraine invasion, urge an end,” *AP News*, November 15, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/g20-summit-russia-ukraine-war-28ec9b6a9c0e7efd829e91d731fb4e21>].

On the next day, **November 16, Milley** upheld his view on the endgame in Ukraine. Ukraine's military was unlikely to force out Russia "unless the Russian army completely collapses," he told reporters. "The probability of a Ukrainian military victory, defined as kicking the Russians out of all of Ukraine, to include [...] Crimea, the probability of that happening anytime soon is not high, militarily," he said. "There may be a political solution," he concluded. US and allied support had not diminished and Kyiv's success in countering Russia's invasion put it in a better position to begin talks. "The Russian military is suffering tremendously. So, you want to negotiate at a time when you're at your strength and your opponent is at weakness."⁷⁷⁷

In Bali, the **G20 declaration** noted that Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which it called "war," was hurting the global economy, pressuring Moscow to end the war – the notable fact being that China signed on to it, a subtle shift in Beijing's messaging on Ukraine.⁷⁷⁸ The meeting between **Lavrov** and Chinese foreign minister Wang Yion on Tuesday, **November 15**, had also suggested that China was becoming more guarded about the war. "China has noted that Russia recently reaffirmed its established position that nuclear war must not and cannot be fought, and this is a rational and responsible stance by Russia," Wang said according to the Chinese summary.⁷⁷⁹

On **November 17, Russian missiles** and shells continued to hit Ukrainian positions – and especially energy infrastructure – in several regions, including Kyiv, Dnipro, and Odesa. On the positive side, the UN-brokered **grain-export deal** was extended for another four months, although Russia said its demands were yet to be fully addressed.⁷⁸⁰

151.	De-escalatory
In Moscow, Peskov explained that "on Russia's behalf, no one has ever speculated on the issue" of using nuclear weapons, as "such matters" were "unacceptable per se." In contrast, speculations were "made in European capitals and other places, stirring up tension in a potentially dangerous realm, where it is unacceptable," he claimed and added: "If you have noticed, no one from the Russian side is discussing this topic and has not discussed it." ⁷⁸¹	

The Russian-occupied regions of Crimea and the Donbas had to be returned to Ukraine before any Kyiv-Moscow peace deal, **Zelenskyy** told a Singapore gathering virtually from Kyiv on the same **November**

⁷⁷⁶ Christian Shepherd, Emily Rauhala and Rebecca Tan, "In G-20 talks, China objects to calling Russian invasion of Ukraine a 'war,'" *The Washington Post*, November 15, 2022 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/11/15/china-xi-ukraine-g20-war-russia/>].

⁷⁷⁷ Alexander Ward et al, "'Remain calm' after Poland missile hit: U.S. Army chief," *Politico*, November 16, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/11/16/remain-calm-after-poland-missile-hit-u-s-army-chief-00067482>].

⁷⁷⁸ "G20 Bali Leaders' Declaration," *Website of the White House*, 16 November 2022 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/11/16/g20-bali-leaders-declaration/>], and Jason Douglas and Chun Han Wong, "G-20 Leaders Agree to Declaration Against War, Pressuring Russia," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 16, 2022 [https://www.wsj.com/articles/g-20-leaders-agree-to-declaration-against-war-pressuring-russia-11668591802?mod=world_lead_pos4].

⁷⁷⁹ Chris Buckley, "China affirms ties with Russia but signals that it's becoming more guarded about the war," *The New York Times*, November 16, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/11/16/world/russia-ukraine-war-news-g20/china-affirms-ties-with-russia-but-signals-it-is-becoming-more-guarded-about-the-war?smid=url-share>].

⁷⁸⁰ Max Hunder, "Ukraine energy supply under persistent Russian attack, heavy fighting in east," *Reuters*, November 18, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-hails-chinas-opposition-nuclear-threats-2022-11-15/>].

⁷⁸¹ "Kremlin considers talk of use of nuclear weapons as unacceptable," *TASS*, November 17, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1538307>], and "Russia is not considering using nuclear weapons - Kremlin says," *Reuters*, November 17, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-is-not-considering-using-nuclear-weapons-kremlin-says-2022-11-17/>].

17. “Unless we liberate our whole territory, we will not bring peace,” he said.⁷⁸² On the following day, he told a Canadian conference in a recorded statement that Russia was seeking a “short truce” with Ukraine, but he opposed the proposal because it would allow Moscow to regroup and attack again. An “honest peace” could only be achieved by the “complete demolition of Russian aggression.”⁷⁸³

In Washington, **Kirby** insisted the Administration was not trying to force Kyiv to cede territory. Nobody from the US was “prodding or nudging [Zelensky] to the table,” Kirby said. However, Kirby also refused to refute Milley’s analysis vis-à-vis Ukraine’s chances to successfully push back against Russian occupation.⁷⁸⁴

Ukraine’s **Zaporizhia** power plant was hit by shelling on **November 19 and 20**, the IAEA said, warning that such attacks risked causing a nuclear disaster. Russia and Ukraine blamed each other for the attack on the facility, which is in Russian-controlled territory. **Rafael Grossi**, the IAEA head, warned “whoever is behind this” that “you’re playing with fire.”⁷⁸⁵

On **November 23**, **Russia** again pounded Ukraine’s energy facilities, with missiles rocking Kyiv, Dnipro, Lviv, Odesa and other cities, plunging large areas of the nation into darkness and shutting down water systems. Ukraine’s air defenses reportedly shot down 51 of 70 Russian cruise missiles and five drones.⁷⁸⁶

In Washington, **US officials** told journalists that the Administration assessed that Russia could use chemical weapons in Ukraine first before resorting to nuclear strikes. The US government was working to ensure that allies were prepared for such an event and on acquiring detection systems to address possible chemical attacks. However, the officials also pointed out that there was no intelligence suggesting that such an attack in Ukraine was imminent. The working assumption was that in case of continued battlefield losses or a complete collapse of the Russian army, Moscow might resort to employing chemical weapons – and would attempt to do so in a concealed manner to avoid identification.⁷⁸⁷

Meanwhile, NATO allies became embroiled in a debate about possible Patriot deliveries to Poland. After a stray Ukrainian missile had crashed in Poland, Berlin had offered Warsaw a Patriot system and Eurofighters to help secure its airspace, defense minister **Christine Lambrecht** said on **November 21** in Berlin.⁷⁸⁸ Later on, a German official argued Berlin thought this would be “an offer that was too good to be refused,” and would help convince Poles that Germany is a reliable ally. After the Polish defense min-

⁷⁸² John Micklethwait and Daryna Krasnolutska, “Zelensky Says No Peace Until Ukraine Gets Crimea, Donbas Back,” *Bloomberg*, November 17, 2022 [<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-11-17/zelenskiy-says-no-peace-until-ukraine-gets-crimea-donbas-back#xj4y7vzkg?leadSource=uverify%20wall>].

⁷⁸³ Volodymyr Zelenskyy, “Speech to the Halifax International Security Forum,” *Website of the President of Ukraine*, November 19, 2022 [<https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/shob-buv-mir-mayemo-zrobiti-nemozhlivimi-vsi-elementi-rosijs-79253>].

⁷⁸⁴ Paul Handley, “US pressures Ukraine to weigh talks with Russia,” *AFP*, November 19, 2022 [<https://news.yahoo.com/us-pres-sures-ukraine-weigh-talks-154836040.html?guccounter=1>].

⁷⁸⁵ “Ukraine nuclear power station shelled, UN nuclear watchdog says,” *CNBC*, November 20, 2022 [<https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/20/ukraine-nuclear-power-station-shelled-un-nuclear-watchdog-says.html>].

⁷⁸⁶ Marc Santora and Thomas Gibbons-Neff, “Russian Missile Barrage Cuts Power and Water Across Ukraine,” *The New York Times*, November 23, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/23/world/europe/russia-ukraine-missiles-power.html>].

⁷⁸⁷ Erin Banco and Lara Seligman, “U.S. concerned Russia could use chemical weapons in Ukraine,” *Politico*, November 23, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/11/23/russia-chemical-weapons-ukraine-00070743>].

⁷⁸⁸ “Germany offers Poland air defense systems,” *Deutsche Welle*, 21 November 2022 [<https://www.dw.com/en/germany-offers-poland-air-defense-systems/a-63829013>].

ister **Mariusz Blaszczak** and president **Andrzej Duda** immediately accepted the German offer, **Jaroslav Kaczynski**, the leader of Poland's governing Law and Justice party, rejected it two days later.⁷⁸⁹ Consequently, **Blaszczak** asked Germany on **November 23** to send the units to Ukraine instead. Yet, **Lambrecht** said on **November 24** that sharing Germany's Patriot units outside NATO would require prior discussion within the Alliance. From Brussels, **Stoltenberg** replied that such deployments should be the decisions of individual nations, taking into account rules around final users. On **November 25**, the Polish president **Andrzej Duda** said it was Germany's decision where its Patriot units were deployed, adding that it would be better for Poland's security if they were stationed on Ukrainian territory near the border, manned by Ukrainian troops. In Berlin, a **spokesperson** told reporters the German government was "talking" to "allies" about how to "handle" Poland's "suggestion."⁷⁹⁰ Subsequent media reports suggested that the kerfuffle had more to do with Polish domestic politics or with Warsaw's unwillingness to become dependent on Berlin than with the war in Ukraine.⁷⁹¹ Analysts later on speculated that since Poland was in an electoral campaign and PIS support had been slipping, **Kaczynski** had used criticism of Germany in order to reinforce his base.⁷⁹²

On **November 26**, British journalist **Owen Matthews** published a series of allegations with respect to China's role within the Ukrainian crisis. The claims were built upon leaks from a source "with longstanding close ties to the top levels of China's political and military leadership." According to this source, the Russians had presented the invasion as a "limited operation to recover a lost Russian province." The source claimed that the public Sino-Russian agreement from February 4 on "friendship without limits" was accompanied by a secret annex which included mutual security assurances – but excluded territories recently annexed in wartime. Surprised by the scale of the invasion and Putin's nuclear rhetoric, Beijing sought to "avoid nuclear escalation." Hence, Chinese officials grew worried by the possibility – albeit mostly of symbolical value – of Poland supplying fighter jets. Beijing struck a deal with Washington: If the United States stopped the MiG deal, Chinese military officials would work to persuade their Russian counterparts to nullify a potential decision by Putin to use nuclear weapons by refusing to implement it on an operational level if it did not follow a direct attack against Russian soil. Later on, Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi conducted shuttle diplomacy to align Beijing with Washington for the mid-November Bali declaration, and Weng had already pledged to NATO leaders since early September that China would use its leverage to "dissuade Putin from using nukes." Given the singular source of the report, its veracity remained questionable.⁷⁹³

Meanwhile, there were no cooperative signs coming out of Moscow. After two days of continued Russian missile attacks against Ukrainian infrastructure and various cities, on **November 28** **Peskov** said that the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant would remain under Russian control – Russian forces were not preparing to leave, despite reporting to the contrary.⁷⁹⁴ On the same day, **Russia** unilaterally postponed

⁷⁸⁹ Steven Erlanger, "Spat Over Patriot Missiles Reveals Deepening Rifts in Europe Over Ukraine," *The New York Times*, December 10, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/10/world/europe/poland-germany-ukraine-patriots-missiles.html/>].

⁷⁹⁰ Sabine Siebold and Alan Charlish, "Germany in talks with allies over Polish push for Patriot deployment to Ukraine," *Reuters*, 25 November 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/decision-over-sending-patriot-air-defence-ukraine-lies-with-nations-nato-2022-11-25/>].

⁷⁹¹ Wojciech Kość, "Poland plays politics with German Patriot missile offer," *Politico*, December 1, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-plays-politics-german-patriot-missile-offer/>].

⁷⁹² Steven Erlanger, "Spat Over Patriot Missiles Reveals Deepening Rifts in Europe Over Ukraine," *New York Times*, December 10, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/10/world/europe/poland-germany-ukraine-patriots-missiles.html/>].

⁷⁹³ Owen Matthews, "The red line: Biden and Xi's secret Ukraine talks revealed," *Spectator*, 26 November 2022 [<https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-red-line-biden-and-xis-secret-ukraine-talks-revealed/>].

the New START consultations. The Bilateral Consultative Commission had been due to meet on the next day in Cairo.⁷⁹⁵ On **November 29**, Ryabkov explained that the decision had been taken at the political level, as the US side had shown no interest to “take note” of Russia’s “signals” and “acknowledge” its “priorities,” suggesting that Moscow had desired broader consultations on arms control, while Washington had insisted on a restricted discussion of technicalities surrounding New START.⁷⁹⁶ Also in Moscow, **Medvedev** warned NATO against providing Ukraine with Patriot missiles. If NATO were to “supply the Ukrainian fanatics with Patriot systems along with NATO personnel, they would immediately become a legitimate target of our armed forces,” Medvedev wrote on Telegram.⁷⁹⁷

On **November 30**, **Kuleba** weighed in on the Patriot debate, saying that Ukraine needed Patriot missiles to protect its civilian infrastructure. He would be working with the German government on this issue, he added.⁷⁹⁸ **Zelenskyy** told a US gathering per digital link that the war would end when Ukraine achieved victory or when Moscow decided it felt “weak, they are isolated and they don’t have any partners on that. Let us have faith that this will end in the next few months.”⁷⁹⁹ In Berlin, **Scholz** said that Russia could no longer win the war in Ukraine on the battlefield. He also noted that Germany had taken Russia’s nuclear rhetoric seriously, but had not been cowed by it.⁸⁰⁰

152.	Warning
Meanwhile, Moscow appeared intent on demonstrating resolve. Shoigu said on television that Russia would pay special attention to building infrastructure for its nuclear forces in 2023, and it would work to improve the combat capabilities of its missile forces and that facilities were being built to accommodate new missile systems. ⁸⁰¹ At the Russian Foreign Ministry, Lavrov stressed that it was “necessary to avoid any military clash between nuclear powers, even with the use of conventional weapons. The escalation may become uncontrollable.” ⁸⁰²	

⁷⁹⁴ Pavel Polityuk, “Russia denies planning to give up vast Ukrainian nuclear plant,” *Reuters*, 29 November 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/zaporizhzhia-nuclear-plant-remains-under-moscow-control-russia-installed-2022-11-28/>].

⁷⁹⁵ “Russia postpones Cairo talks with U.S. under New START nuclear treaty,” *Reuters*, 28 November 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-unilaterally-postpones-nuclear-arms-meeting-with-us-kommersant-2022-11-28/>], and Elena Chernenko, “Комиссия ушла в песок,” *Kommersant*, 28 November 2022 [https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5693436?from=top_main_1].

⁷⁹⁶ “Russia had no choice but to nix New START Treaty talks, says senior diplomat,” *TASS*, 29 November 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1543339>].

⁷⁹⁷ “Russia’s Medvedev warns NATO over supplying Ukraine with Patriot systems,” *Reuters*, 29 November 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-medvedev-warns-nato-over-supplying-ukraine-with-patriot-systems-2022-11-29/>].

⁷⁹⁸ “Ukraine needs Patriot systems to protect civilian infrastructure-minister,” *Reuters*, 30 November 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-kuleba/ukraine-needs-patriot-systems-to-protect-civilian-infrastructure-minister-id-INP6N30Y05C>].

⁷⁹⁹ Carole Landy, “How Zelensky Thinks the War Will End,” *The New York Times*, 30 November 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/30/briefing/russia-ukraine-war-zelensky.html>].

⁸⁰⁰ “Germany’s Scholz: Russia cannot win war in Ukraine on the battlefield,” *Reuters*, 30 November 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/article/germany-security-scholz-idAFS8N2ZK0DE>].

⁸⁰¹ Carole Landy, “How Zelensky Thinks the War Will End,” *The New York Times*, 30 November 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/30/briefing/russia-ukraine-war-zelensky.html>].

⁸⁰² “Russia’s Lavrov: military confrontation between nuclear powers must be avoided,” *Reuters*, 1 December 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/russias-lavrov-military-confrontation-between-nuclear-powers-must-be-avoided-2022-11-30/>].

Also in Moscow, **Naryshkin** confirmed that the discussion with Burns on November 14 had not been about negotiating over Ukraine but about nuclear weapons policy – as **Elizabeth Rood**, the charge d'affaires at the US embassy in Moscow, had earlier stated.⁸⁰³

December 2022: Nuclear diversion from conventional destruction

On **December 1**, in Washington, **Biden** and **Macron** sought to present a united front by meeting each other halfway on their Ukraine priorities during the French President's state visit to the United States. Biden said he would talk to Putin, but only in consultation with NATO allies and only if the Russian leader indicated he was "looking for a way to end the war." Macron said France would increase its military support for Ukraine and "will never urge Ukrainians to make a compromise that will not be acceptable for them." The two leaders agreed that Ukrainian battlefield gains would constitute important leverage in any talks with Moscow.⁸⁰⁴

153.	De-escalatory
At the State Department, Blinken gave an interview to French media. He said there had been contact with Russia during the autumn because "there was a fear that they might use a nuclear weapon." This was still a "fear," especially in "an emergency for them." He stressed that Washington did not want to expand the conflict, that it did not want a "war with Russia" or a "third world war." ⁸⁰⁵	

On the same day, Moscow sought to explain the recent cancellation of the New START BCC. **Lavrov** said that Russia was willing to play a responsible part in nuclear arms control but it was impossible to discuss nuclear stability while ignoring the Western goal in Ukraine to "defeat Russia on the battlefield, or even destroy Russia."⁸⁰⁶ One day later, at the **White House**, **Kirby** called the cancellation of the BCC meeting "deeply regrettable," saying it had "nothing to do with the war in Ukraine."⁸⁰⁷

On **December 2**, **Scholz** called **Putin** for an hour, vowing to continue military support for Ukraine and urging the Russian leader to find a solution that would involve the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine. Putin blamed Western nations for what he called a destructive policy of arming and training the Ukrainian military, and argued that Russia's missile strikes against Ukrainian infrastructure were a consequence of Kyiv's attacks against Russian facilities, particularly in Crimea.⁸⁰⁸

⁸⁰³ "Putin's spy chief says he discussed Ukraine with CIA director," *Reuters*, 30 November 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-idINL8N32Q3MN>].

⁸⁰⁴ Roger Cohen and Zolan Kanno-Youngs, "Biden Says He Is Willing to Talk to Putin About Ukraine, With Conditions," *The New York Times*, December 1, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/01/us/politics/biden-macron-putin-ukraine.html>].

⁸⁰⁵ "Secretary Antony J. Blinken with Thomas Sotto of France 2," *Website of the US Department of State*, December 1, 2022 [<https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-with-thomas-sotto-of-france-2/>].

⁸⁰⁶ "Lavrov says Ukraine war affects prospects for nuclear talks," *Reuters*, December 1, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/lavrov-says-ukraine-war-affects-prospects-nuclear-talks-2022-12-01/>].

⁸⁰⁷ Laura Kelly, "Ukraine war bleeds into Russia-US nuclear talks," *The Hill*, December 5, 2022 [<https://thehill.com/policy/international/3762875-ukraine-war-bleeds-into-russia-us-nuclear-talks/>].

⁸⁰⁸ Erica Solomon, "Germany's leader, in a call with Putin, vows continued support for Ukraine," *The New York Times*, December 3, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/02/world/germany-ukraine-support-putin.html>], and "Telephone conversation with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz," *Website of the President of Russia*, December 3, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69971>], and "Bundeskanzler Scholz telefoniert mit dem russischen Präsidenten Putin (Chancellor Scholz talks on the phone with Russian President Putin)," *Website of the Bundesregierung*, December 2, 2022 [<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/bundeskanzler-scholz-telefoniert-mit-dem-russischen-praesidenten-putin-2148822>].

154.	Warning
On December 3 , in Kyiv, US Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland told reporters that it was US warnings that had convinced Putin not to cross the nuclear threshold in Ukraine. Russia had “already made itself an outcast,” Nuland said, but “we have explained that the use of nuclear weapons will have a response and consequences of an incomparable level. Our response was united, and after that, Russia switched to a fundamentally different weapon, launching attacks on the energy infrastructure.” She rephrased: “After all this talk about nuclear weapons, which were very dangerous, threatening and unacceptable, and when we explained what the price would be for Russia, Putin decided to do something different.” ⁸⁰⁹	

155.	De-escalatory
Moscow meanwhile challenged this Western messaging. Zakharova wrote on her Telegram channel that “nuclear Armageddon” had not happened not because of “tough warnings,” but because “no one on this side of the border was planning it.” ⁸¹⁰	

On the same day, **Macron** said in a televised interview from the United States that security “guarantees to Russia” were an “essential point” in any peace talks. “We need to prepare what we are ready to do, how we protect our allies and member states, and how to give guarantees to Russia the day it returns to the negotiating table,” Macron said. One point that needed to be addressed was Moscow’s “fear that NATO comes right up to its doors, and the deployment of weapons that could threaten Russia.”⁸¹¹ Ukrainian, Eastern European and even German politicians and officials countered that Russia’s aggression had not been caused by the absence of security guarantees.⁸¹²

On **December 5**, the **G7** price cap on Russian seaborne oil came into force, as the West was trying to limit Moscow’s ability to finance its war in Ukraine.⁸¹³ In reaction, Moscow announced it would forbid domestic companies from selling Russian oil under any price cap.⁸¹⁴

On the same day, **Ukraine** executed an attack into Russian territory, targeting two military bases hundreds of miles inside the country with unmanned drones. One drone hit the Engels-2 air base, near the

⁸⁰⁹ “Pressure on Putin over nuclear weapons forced him to change tactics of war,” *Ukrainska Pravda*, 3 December 2022 [<https://news.yahoo.com/pressure-putin-over-nuclear-weapons-175743703.html>].

⁸¹⁰ “Diplomat slams Nuland’s words about Western influence on decisions during special op,” *TASS*, December 4, 2022 [https://tass.com/world/1545339?utm_source=twitter.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=smm_social_share].

⁸¹¹ Roger Cohen, “Security guarantees for Russia are an ‘essential’ part of any peace talks, Macron says,” *The New York Times*, December 4, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/04/world/europe/macron-security-guarantees-russia.html>].

⁸¹² “Ukraine, Baltics rebuke Macron for suggesting ‘security guarantees’ for Russia,” *Reuters*, December 4, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-baltics-rebuke-macron-suggesting-security-guarantees-russia-2022-12-05/>], and Hans Monath and Anja Wehler-Schöck, “Kritik an Idee aus Paris (Criticism of the idea from Paris),” *Tagesspiegel*, December 5, 2022 [<https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kritik-an-paris-macron-ubernimmt-narrative-des-kremls-8976643.html>].

⁸¹³ Nick Starkov, “G7 begins to press Russia on Ukraine with oil price cap,” *Reuters*, December 5, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/zelenskiy-urges-residents-be-strong-ukraine-races-restore-power-2022-12-05/>].

⁸¹⁴ America Hernandez, “Russia to ban oil sales under price cap, Kremlin says,” *Politico*, December 5, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-to-ban-oil-sales-under-price-cap-kremlin-says/>], and “Global oil market currently in better state than two months ago — Russian deputy PM,” *TASS*, December 4, 2022 [<https://tass.com/economy/1545483>].

southwestern city of Saratov, and hosting Russian strategic bombers. A separate explosion at the Dyagilevo military base in the city of Ryazan damaged two planes, killed three people and wounded six others, Russian media reported.⁸¹⁵

Washington sought to distance itself from the attack. At the State Department, **Price** said that the US government was “not enabling Ukraine to strike beyond its borders.”⁸¹⁶ A few hours later, **Blinken** said that the Administration had “neither “encouraged nor enabled the Ukrainians to strike inside of Russia.” But the Administration was determined to equip the Ukrainians to “defend themselves and to defend their territory.”⁸¹⁷ **US media outlets** also reported that the US military had secretly altered both the software and hardware of HIMARS rocket launchers sent to Ukraine to prevent the country from firing long-range into Russian territory in order to reduce the risk of a wider war with Moscow.⁸¹⁸ In turn, **German media outlets** revealed that **Jake Sullivan** had told **Jens Plötner**, the foreign policy advisor of Scholz, already in October 2022 over the phone that the White House would welcome German deliveries of the Leopard 2 tank, but that Washington was not pushing Germany towards this decision. The German government did not refute these claims.⁸¹⁹

Meanwhile on the same **December 5, Moscow** targeted multiple Ukrainian cities with missiles, including Kyiv. Explosions were reported in several parts of the country, including the cities of Odesa, Cherkasy and Kryvyi Rih. More than 60 of the around 70 missiles were shot down, the Ukrainian government stated.⁸²⁰

In New York, at the UN Security Council, **Russia** and the **United States** accused each other of not wanting to seriously negotiate over the conflict in Ukraine. “We confirm our willingness to conduct negotiations,” Russia’s UN Ambassador **Vassily Nebenzia** said, but added that the aim of the negotiations should be to “eradicate the root causes that forced us to start our special military operation.” The Western weapons deliveries were creating “an ongoing war of the West against Russia” that left Moscow no options but to “continue the aims” of its “operation.” In contrast, the US deputy envoy **Lisa Carty** said that Russia’s targeting of Ukraine’s infrastructure was evidence that Putin had no interest in “negotiation or meaningful diplomacy.”⁸²¹

⁸¹⁵ Andrew E. Kramer, Michael Schwartz and Marc Santora, “Ukraine attacks military bases hundreds of miles inside Russia,” *The New York Times*, December 5, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/12/06/world/russia-ukraine-war-news/explosions-rock-two-military-bases-in-russia-according-to-some-russian-media?smid=url-share>].

⁸¹⁶ Michael Cowley, “The U.S. stopped short of condemning attacks inside Russia, but said it did not encourage them,” *The New York Times*, December 6, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/12/07/world/russia-ukraine-war-news/the-state-department-said-it-is-not-encouraging-ukraine-to-attack-targets-inside-of-russia?smid=url-share>].

⁸¹⁷ Andrew E. Kramer, “Ukraine Strikes More Boldly, Seeing Little Room for Russia to Escalate,” *The New York Times*, December 6, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/06/world/europe/ukraine-drone-strikes-russian-bases.html>].

⁸¹⁸ Michael R. Gordon and Gordon Lubold, “U.S. Altered Himars Rocket Launchers to Keep Ukraine From Firing Missiles Into Russia,” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 5, 2022 [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-altered-himars-rocket-launchers-to-keep-ukraine-from-firing-missiles-into-russia-11670214338>].

⁸¹⁹ Konrad Schuller, “USA für Lieferung deutscher Kampfpanzer an Ukraine (USA for delivery of German battle tanks to Ukraine),” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 6, 2022 [<https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/usa-setzte-sich-fuer-lieferung-von-leopard-2-panzer-an-ukraine-ein-18514370.html>].

⁸²⁰ Pavel Polityuk, “Russia unleashes missiles across Ukraine, drones hit bases deep inside Russian territory,” *Reuters*, December 5, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/zelenskiy-urges-residents-be-strong-ukraine-races-restore-power-2022-12-05/>].

⁸²¹ Michelle Nichols, “At U.N., U.S., Russia accuse each other of no interest in Ukraine talks,” *Reuters*, December 6, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/un-us-russia-accuse-each-other-no-interest-ukraine-talks-2022-12-06/>].

156.	Warning
<p>Another nuclear warning from Moscow came on December 7. Putin acknowledged in Moscow that Russia's invasion "might be a long process" and warned of the "growing" threat of nuclear war. "Such a threat is growing, it would be wrong to hide it," Putin warned. The Russian leader said Moscow would "protect its allies" by "all available means at our disposal, if necessary," added that there was a "significant result" from territorial gains, but stressed that there would be no need to mobilize more troops. Putin also stated that Russia had not transferred its nuclear weapons to other territories and was not planning to do so. With respect to nuclear use, Putin's comments were rather convoluted, suggesting the Russian leadership thought launch-on-warning was necessary because of US abilities to eliminate a majority of Russia's nuclear arsenal in a first-strike: "As for the idea that Russia wouldn't use such weapons first under any circumstances, then it means we wouldn't be able to be the second to use them either – because the possibility to do so in case of an attack on our territory would be very limited," he said. "Nevertheless, we have a strategy... namely, as a defense, we consider weapons of mass destruction, nuclear weapons – it is all based around the so-called retaliatory strike," he said. "That is, when we are struck, we strike in response." And yet, he also noted: "We have not gone crazy. We are aware of what nuclear weapons are," he said. "But we are not going to brandish these weapons like a razor, running around the world."⁸²²</p>	

157.	De-escalatory
<p>In Washington, State Department spokesman Price sought to avoid escalation. He said that the Administration believed that "any loose talk of nuclear weapons" was "absolutely irresponsible." All nuclear powers had agreed that "a nuclear war is something that must never be fought and can never be won." Hence, "any rhetoric" was irresponsible – whether it was "nuclear saber-rattling or even raising the specter of the use of tactical nuclear weapons."⁸²³</p>	

158.	Warning
<p>In Brussels, Stoltenberg repeated the NATO stance. Russia's nuclear rhetoric was "reckless" and "dangerous." Also, "Russia must know that any use of nuclear weapons would totally change the character, the nature, of the conflict." However, he admitted that Moscow's nuclear rhetoric during the autumn had "increased concerns among NATO Allies and others about the potential use of these weapons."⁸²⁴</p>	

In Berlin, **Scholz** added that "one thing" had changed: Moscow had "stopped threatening to use nuclear weapons" because the international community, including China, had "drawn a red line" at Russia.⁸²⁵ Germany was committed to aiding Ukraine, but did "everything to avoid a direct war between Russia and NATO." Such a conflict had "only losers – on the entire planet."⁸²⁶

⁸²² Jessie Yeung and Katharina Krebs, "Ukraine war is going to 'take a while,' Putin says as he warns nuclear risk is increasing," CNN, December 8, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/12/07/europe/putin-ukraine-russia-nuclear-intl-hnk/index.html>].

⁸²³ "Department Press Briefing – December 7, 2022," *Website of the US Department of State*, December 7, 2022 [<https://www.state.gov/briefings/departments-press-briefing-december-7-2022/>].

⁸²⁴ "Interview with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in the sixth edition of the Financial Times's Global Boardroom event," *Website of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, December 7, 2022 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_209984.htm?campaign_id=249&emc=edit_ruwb_20221207&instance_id=79584&nl=russia-ukraine-war-briefing®i_id=84159083&segment_id=115315&te=1&user_id=2cb4c889570585074eb0c24422ca8d33].

⁸²⁵ "Ukraine war. Germany's Scholz says nuclear weapons risk has diminished," *Euronews*, December 8, 2022 [<https://www.euronews.com/2022/12/08/ukraine-war-germanys-scholz-says-nuclear-weapons-risk-has-diminished>].

⁸²⁶ "Scholz hält Gefahr von Atomschlag für gesunken, Putin spricht von »Mittel der Verteidigung«, " *Spiegel*, December 8, 2022 [<https://www.spiegel.de/ausland/news-zum-russland-ukraine-krieg-das-geschah-in-der-nacht-zu-donnerstag-8-dezember-a-2b075f76-33dd-4af4-b840-2694452eb92d>].

159.	De-escalatory
<p>However, Russian's nuclear rhetoric continued unabated – with statements in all directions. On December 8, US outlets asked the Russian envoy to Washington to comment on Putin's latest nuclear statements. Antonov argued that "Russia takes seriously its special responsibility as a leading nuclear power to maintain global security and stability and prevent armed conflicts, especially nuclear ones." The US government was not "listening to the substance of our arguments," Antonov noted. Russia's statements about the danger of escalation was not saber-rattling but "classic deterrence in extreme geopolitical circumstances." He concluded: "It works. It is in the world's best interest that it continues to work, preventing a potential nuclear catastrophe."⁸²⁷</p>	

160.	Warning
<p>Russia's leader was less forthcoming. On December 9, on the sidelines of the Eurasian Economic Union summit in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, Putin said it was potentially "worth thinking" about "adopting the ideas developed by our US counterparts, their ideas of ensuring their security" with respect to "a disarming first strike." Russia was "just thinking about it" as US officials "weren't shy to openly talk about it during the past years." Washington had a "theory of a preventive strike" and was "developing a system for a disarming strike" on the basis of its air- and sea-based cruise missiles. Putin claimed that Russia had already commissioned hypersonic weapons capable of carrying out such a strike, while the United States had not yet deployed such systems. "If the potential adversary believes that it can use the theory of a preemptive strike and we don't, it makes us think about the threats posed by such ideas in other countries' defensive posture," he said. Putin also elaborated on his December 7 comment on nuclear retaliation. "When the early warning system receives a signal about a missile attack, we launch hundreds of missiles that are impossible to stop," he said, smiling. "Enemy missile warheads would inevitably reach the territory of the Russian Federation. But nothing would be left of the enemy too, because it's impossible to intercept hundreds of missiles. And this, of course, is a factor of deterrence." Later on, he also raised the possibility of a settlement in Ukraine. The special military operation was still going according to plan, but the "settlement process," while "difficult" and long, would have to be according to "the realities that are taking shape on the ground."⁸²⁸</p>	

161.	De-escalatory
<p>From US Strategic Command, Austin said Putin's repeated threats were irresponsible. Nuclear powers had a "profound responsibility to avoid provocative behavior and to lower the risk of proliferation and to prevent escalation and nuclear war."⁸²⁹ On the same day in Washington, an Administration official viewed Putin's comments as "saber-rattling" and another veiled warning that he could use nuclear weapons in Ukraine.⁸³⁰</p>	

British media reported that the **Pentagon** had indicated to Kyiv that it was not bent of preventing Ukraine from attacking Russian soil. A Pentagon official was quoted saying that the Administration was not telling Ukraine what to do or not do. The Pentagon had "changed its perspective following the recent

⁸²⁷ "Russia, as nuclear power, takes maintaining stability seriously — envoy to US," TASS, December 9, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1548187>], and Tom O'Connor, "Russia Ambassador Says Putin Nuclear Deterrence 'Works'—Biden Would Do Same," *Newsweek*, December 8, 2022 [<https://www.newsweek.com/russia-ambassador-says-putin-nuclear-deterrence-works-biden-would-do-same-1765806>].

⁸²⁸ "News conference following the visit to Kyrgyzstan," TASS, December 9, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70061>].

⁸²⁹ "Putin says Russia could adopt US preemptive strike concept," *AP News*, December 9, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/putin-moscow-strikes-united-states-government-russia-95f1436d23b94fcbc05f1c2242472d5c>].

⁸³⁰ "Putin says Russia could adopt US preemptive strike concept," *AP News*, December 9, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/putin-moscow-strikes-united-states-government-russia-95f1436d23b94fcbc05f1c2242472d5c>].

intensification of Russian missile strikes on Ukrainian civilian infrastructure” and had “become less concerned regarding the risk of escalation.” It remained unclear, how reliable these leaks were.⁸³¹

162.	Warning
Other Russian officials were even more aggressive. On December 10, Konstantin Gavrillov , the head of the Russian delegation in Vienna on arms control, commented to British tabloids that Washington green lighting Ukrainian attacks on Russian territory was “playing with fire, risking a full-scale war which could easily go nuclear.” Another Russian official speculated that Moscow could respond by striking “Ukrainian decision-making centers.” ⁸³²	

On **December 12**, the **G7** repeated its commitment to support Ukraine in its fight against Russia “for as long as it takes” and set up a donor platform to funnel money to Kyiv. Besides the aid required during the war, financial institutions needed to be established to aid reconstruction, the G7 agreed. “The reconstruction of Ukraine will be a human task that is perhaps comparable to the Marshall Plan,” **Scholz** said in Berlin.⁸³³ In Brussels, the **EU** agreed to put another \$2.1 billion in 2023 into a fund used to pay for military support for Ukraine.⁸³⁴

“The reconstruction of Ukraine will be a human task that is perhaps comparable to the Marshall Plan,” **Scholz** said in Berlin. However, the German chancellor also noted that if Russia ended the war, its citizens needed another future to aspire to, and economic cooperation should return. But this was a prospect for the future, while currently sanctions were being tightened.⁸³⁵

In London, British defense minister **Ben Wallace** told parliament that he was “open minded” about supplying Ukraine with longer-range weapons if Russia carried on targeting civilian areas. Britain also had “potential weapons systems that are longer and should the Russians continue to target civilian areas and try and break those Geneva Conventions, then I will be open minded to see what we do next.”⁸³⁶

⁸³¹ Michael Evans and Marc Bennetts, “Pentagon gives Ukraine green light for drone strikes inside Russia,” *The Times*, December 9, 2022 [<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ukraine-drone-warfare-russia-732jsshpx>].

⁸³² Will Stewart and Abul Taher, “Vladimir Putin sends nuclear threat after Ukraine reportedly gets the green light from the US to launch drone strikes in Russia following attacks on Ukrainian cities,” *Mail on Sunday*, December 11, 2022 [<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11525195/Vladimir-Putin-sends-nuclear-threat-Ukraine-gets-green-light-drone-strikes-Russia.html>].

⁸³³ Erika Solomon “The G7 nations agree to set up a donor platform to funnel money to Ukraine,” *The New York Times*, December 12, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/12/12/world/russia-ukraine-news>].

⁸³⁴ Carly Olson and Matthew Mpoke Bigg, “The E.U.’s foreign ministers agreed to give Ukraine 2 billion euros in military aid,” *The New York Times*, December 12, 2022 [https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/12/12/world/russia-ukraine-news/the-g7-nations-agreed-to-set-up-a-donor-platform-to-funnel-money-to-ukraine?campaign_id=249&emc=edit_ruwb_20221212&instance_id=80016&nl=russia-ukraine-war-briefing®i_id=84159083&segment].

⁸³⁵ Erika Solomon “The G7 nations agree to set up a donor platform to funnel money to Ukraine,” *New York Times*, December 12, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/12/12/world/russia-ukraine-news>]. Also, “Scholz stellt Russland Kooperation bei Kriegsende in Aussicht,” *ARD*, December 12, 2022 [<https://www.tagesschau.de/newsticker/liveblog-ukraine-montag-209.html#Scholz>] and “Rede von Bundeskanzler Scholz anlässlich des Festakts “70 Jahre Ost-Ausschuss der deutschen Wirtschaft” am 12. Dezember 2022 in Berlin,” *Website of the Bundesregierung*, December 12, 2022 [<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/rede-von-bundeskanzler-scholz-anlaesslich-des-festakts-70-jahre-ost-ausschuss-der-deutschen-wirtschaft-am-12-dezember-2022-in-berlin-2153334>].

⁸³⁶ Elizabeth Piper, “UK minister is “open minded” over sending longer-range weapons to Ukraine,” *Reuters*, December 12, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/uk-minister-is-open-minded-over-sending-longer-range-weapons-ukraine-2022-12-12/>].

On **December 13**, Western media reported that Ukrainian forces were stepping up efforts to isolate and degrade the Russian military in and around **Melitopol**, ahead of what was widely expected to be the next major phase of the war, a Ukrainian offensive to drive Russian forces from southern Ukraine.⁸³⁷

In Paris, an **international donor conference** racked up around \$1.1 billion promises of financial and in-kind support for Ukraine.⁸³⁸

In Washington, US officials said the **Pentagon** was poised to approve sending a Patriot surface-to-air missiles batterie to Ukraine. It remained unclear who would organize the around 70-90 troops with months of training that would operate the system.⁸³⁹

From **Moscow**, **Peskov** immediately said that US-delivered Patriot batteries would “definitely” be a target for Russian forces. The Russian embassy in Washington wrote that the United States was “responsible for the prolongation and escalation of the Ukrainian conflict.”⁸⁴⁰

163.	Warning
US officials also upkept their nuclear signaling. On the same December 13 and also in Washington, Julianne Smith , the US ambassador to NATO, was asked about Moscow’s potential use of tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine. She said the Administration would “continue to signal to Russia” that if this happens “there will be unprecedented consequences.” She characterized Moscow’s nuclear rhetoric as “loose talk” and “dangerous.” ⁸⁴¹	

On **December 15**, **Zakharova** commented in Moscow on the possible US delivery of Patriot systems. “Any weapons systems supplied to Ukraine, including the Patriot, along with the personnel servicing them, have been and will remain legitimate priority targets for the Russian armed forces,” she declared. Washington had “effectively become a party” to the war by providing Ukraine with weapons and training its troops. Patriot deliveries would be “another provocative move by the US” and broaden its involvement in the hostilities, “entailing possible consequences.”⁸⁴²

In response, Pentagon spokesman **Pat Ryder** said that Washington was not “going to allow comments from Russia to dictate the security assistance that we provide to Ukraine.”⁸⁴³ Also in Washington, another **Pentagon spokesperson** said that the United States was to sharply increase in the number of

⁸³⁷ Marc Santora, “Targeting One Southern City, Ukraine Hints at Next Front in the War,” *New York Times*, December 13, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/13/world/europe/ukraine-russia-melitopol.html?smid=url-share>].

⁸³⁸ Sylvie Corbet, Inna Varenysia, and John Leicester, “Donors pledge millions to get Ukraine through winter, bombs,” *AP*, December 13, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-government-france-b25c89ae62e715531a7470fdc8e489d2>].

⁸³⁹ Lolita C. Baldor and Matthew Lee, “US poised to approve Patriot missile battery for Ukraine,” *AP*, December 14, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-zelenskyy-government-and-politics-ba8468e34e3c7eb78bdc47393c417ecb>].

⁸⁴⁰ “Kremlin: U.S. Patriot systems in Ukraine would be legitimate target,” *Reuters*, December 14, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/kremlin-us-patriot-systems-ukraine-would-be-legitimate-target-2022-12-14/>].

⁸⁴¹ John Grady, “NATO ‘Applying Maximum Pressure on Moscow’ as War in Ukraine Continues, Says U.S. Ambassador,” *USNI News*, December 13, 2022 [<https://news.usni.org/2022/12/13/nato-applying-maximum-pressure-on-moscow-as-war-in-ukraine-continues-says-u-s-ambassador>].

⁸⁴² James Keaten, “Russia: US air defense systems could be targets in Ukraine,” *AP*, December 15, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-politics-donetsk-government-united-states-eed3a0fc72e8197182e78dcc73ade45e>].

⁸⁴³ James Keaten, “Russia: US air defense systems could be targets in Ukraine,” *AP*, December 15, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-politics-donetsk-government-united-states-eed3a0fc72e8197182e78dcc73ade45e>].

Ukrainian troops it instructed at the Grafenwoehr base in Germany.⁸⁴⁴ US media also revealed that the Administration was weighing sending to Ukraine other weapons such as Joint Direct Attack Munition kits, which convert unguided aerial munitions into smart bombs, and Ground-Launched Small Diameter Bombs, which would significantly extend Ukraine's strike range.⁸⁴⁵

Ukrainian officials engaged in what appeared to be a broad, coordinated effort to warn against complacency among Western allies and highlight the continuing threat Russia poses to Ukraine. Defense minister **Oleksii Reznikov** told British media that the Kremlin was preparing a broad new offensive in January or February. This message was underlined by comments from **Zelenskiy**, from **Valerii Zaluzhnyi**, the head of the armed forces, and from **Oleksandr Syrskii**, the chief of ground forces. For instance, Russia was "trying to start the next wave of the offensive probably in February, like last year. That's their plan," Reznikov said. A major new Russian attack, including "another go at Kyiv," could come "in February, at best in March and at worst at the end of January," Zaluzhnyi said.⁸⁴⁶

These Ukrainian comments notwithstanding, **Kirby** told reporters at the White House on **December 16** that the US government did not see signs that Russia would renew its attempt to seize Kyiv soon.⁸⁴⁷

On the same day, **Russia** launched more than 70 missiles on Ukraine in its second mass strike in a matter of days, damaging energy infrastructure in Kyiv, the capital, and elsewhere. Ukrainian forces shot down 60 of 76 missiles, officials said, as more than half of the missiles targeted the capital.⁸⁴⁸

Also, US media reported that an **Administration official** had told members of Congress in **late November** that Ukraine had the military capability to retake Crimea, but some officials were concerned that threatening Russia's hold on the peninsula could push Putin to use nuclear weapons. Another US official told journalists that Ukraine had no "near-term objective" to retake Crimea and that a military offensive was "not imminent." Crimea was a "red line," a former US official told reporters.⁸⁴⁹

From Delhi, India's Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** phoned Putin and reiterated his call for dialogue and diplomacy as being the only way forward in the context of ongoing conflict in Ukraine.⁸⁵⁰

164.	Warning
Biden Administration officials kept reiterating the message to Russia on the costs of nuclear use. On December 18 , Burns emphasized India's and China's role in reducing nuclear dangers stemming	

⁸⁴⁴ Eric Schmitt and Andrew E. Kramer, "The US plans to more than double the number of Ukrainian troops it trains in Germany," *New York Times*, December 16, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/12/15/world/russia-ukraine-news/the-us-plans-to-more-than-double-the-number-of-ukrainian-troops-it-trains-in-germany?smid=url-share>].

⁸⁴⁵ Lara Seligman, Erin Banco, and Paul McLeary, "US eyes new weapons for Ukraine as Kyiv fears new Russian offensive," *Politico*, December 15, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2022/12/15/u-s-eyes-new-weapons-for-ukraine-00074153>].

⁸⁴⁶ Isobel Koshiw and Peter Beaumont "Putin preparing major offensive in new year, Ukraine defense minister warns," *Guardian*, December 15, 2022 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/15/ukraine-says-putin-is-preparing-major-offensive-in-new-year>].

⁸⁴⁷ Alexander Ward et al, "A turning point: What Japan's defense boost means," *Politico*, December 16, 2022 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/12/16/a-turning-point-what-japans-defense-boost-means-00074348>].

⁸⁴⁸ Hanna Arhirova, Vasilisa Stepanenko, and Jamey Keaten, "Russia launches another major missile attack on Ukraine," *AP*, December 16, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-kyiv-5d3e5ee5e93b6402d5214b3cf094fa1c>].

⁸⁴⁹ Carol E. Lee, Courtney Kube and Dan De Luce, "A Biden admin official recently told members of Congress that Ukraine has the military capability to take back Crimea," *NBC News*, December 16, 2022 [<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/biden-official-told-congress-ukraine-can-retake-crimea-rcna61755>].

⁸⁵⁰ Tanvi Mehta, "India's Modi tells Putin dialogue and diplomacy only way forward in Ukraine conflict," *Reuters*, December 16, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/indias-modi-tells-putin-dialogue-diplomacy-only-way-forward-ukraine-conflict-2022-12-16/>].

from Russia. He told reporters that it had been “been very useful that Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Modi in India [had] also raised their concerns about the use of nuclear weapons as well.” Burns thought that was “also having an impact on the Russians.” He also noted that he thought the saber-rattling was “meant to intimidate.” The US government did not see “any clear evidence today of plans to use tactical nuclear weapons.” The Administration had “made very clear, the president has made very clear to the Russians what the serious risks of that would be.”⁸⁵¹

165.	Warning
<p>Yet Russian leaders also kept stressing their nuclear options. On December 19, Putin emphasized the potentially nuclear dimension of Russia’s relationship with Belarus. He visited Belarus and discussed with Lukashenko the need to withstand Western economic pressure and maintain close military ties. Putin said they had discussed a “unified defense space,” without describing what that would entail, and that they would continue joint military exercises.⁸⁵² Putin added that there was room for further cooperation on Su-24 warplanes that had been modified to carry tactical nuclear weapons. It was now possible “to continue the implementation” of Lukashenko’s earlier proposals on these planes, which would mean “the training of the crews of warplanes of the Belarusian army, which have already been modified for the possible use of air-based ammunition with a special warhead,” he noted. Putin also stressed that this had not been the Russian approach to military cooperation, as it was the US government who conducted such activities together with its NATO partners. However, given the precarious security situation, such coordination was particularly important. Lukashenko noted that Belarus had deployed the Russian-made Iskander mobile ballistic missile system with a range of up to 500 kilometers and that Belarus and Russia were training Su-24 crews to operate nuclear munitions. This was no threat to anybody, but security concerns emerged from the West and he had to protect Belarus.⁸⁵³</p>	

On **December 21**, **Zelenskyy** visited Washington. US money was not “charity” but an “investment in the global security and democracy that we handle in the most responsible way,” Zelenskyy told Congress.⁸⁵⁴ In Moscow, **Peskov’s** reaction was that the expansion of Western weapon supplies to Ukraine had led to “an aggravation of the conflict and, in fact, does not bode well for Ukraine.” In Beijing, Medvedev met Xi and discussed, among other topics, also “the conflict in Ukraine.”⁸⁵⁵

Beijing had “always stood on the side of peace and on the side of the UN Charter” when it came to “the Ukraine issue,” Chinese Foreign Minister **Wang Yi** told **Blinken** in a call on **December 23**, according to Beijing’s readout of the discussion. China worked towards “persuading peace and promoting talks.”⁸⁵⁶

⁸⁵¹ “Ukraine War: PM Modi’s Concerns On Nuclear Weapons Impacted Russian Views, Says CIA Chief,” *ABP News*, December 18, 2022 [<https://news.abplive.com/news/world/ukraine-war-pm-modi-s-concerns-on-nuclear-weapons-impacted-russian-views-says-cia-chief-1570362>].

⁸⁵² Anatoly Kurmanaev, “Putin and his closest ally, Lukashenko of Belarus, speak of deepening their collaboration,” *New York Times*, December 20, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/12/18/world/russia-ukraine-news/putin-travels-to-belarus-to-meet-his-closest-ally-as-ukraine-warns-of-a-renewed-threat?smid=url-share>].

⁸⁵³ Sergei Kuznetsov, “Putin bolsters Belarus as Kyiv eyes assault from the north,” *Politico*, December 19, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-ukraine-biden-0cc0e5bece38007e3d9f958f536bf1fe>]. See also “Пресс-конференция по итогам российско-белорусских переговоров,” *Website of the President of Russia*, December 19, 2022 [<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70148>].

⁸⁵⁴ Steve Holland and Pavel Polityuk, “Invoking World War Two, Zelenskiy tells Congress aid is not charity,” *Reuters*, December 22, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-says-situation-extremely-difficult-several-ukrainian-regions-2022-12-20/>].

⁸⁵⁵ Eduardo Castillo, “Kremlin warning: More US arms to Ukraine will aggravate war,” *AP*, December 22, 2022 [<https://ap-news.com/article/ukraine-biden-0cc0e5bece38007e3d9f958f536bf1fe>].

⁸⁵⁶ Nicolas Camut and Zoya Sheftalovich, “China says it’s ‘on the side of peace’ over war in Ukraine,” *Politico*, December 23, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/china-ukraine-war-peace-beijing/>].

166.	Warning
Nuclear signaling continued. Medvedev wrote on December 25 in an article for Rossiiskaya Gazeta that “the only thing” that stopped the West from directly engaging in the war against Russia was nuclear deterrence. “And in the event that a real threat arises, it will act on them,” he noted. ⁸⁵⁷	

Russian officials kept emphasizing “negotiations,” but their remarks revealed that they were, at least publicly, not willing to accept anything but surrender. On **December 25**, **Putin** said that he was ready to “negotiate with everyone involved in this process about acceptable solutions,” but Moscow did not appear ready to move away from maximalist goals. The next day, **December 26**, **Lavrov** said an agreement required the “elimination of threats to Russian security” from the four annexed territories.⁸⁵⁸

On **December 26**, Ukraine again launched a drone attack on the Engels air base in Russia. Three troops were killed, the Kremlin stated. Analysts concluded that these strikes reflected an assessment by Ukraine’s political and military leaders that there was little risk of Moscow escalating its war in retaliation. The Russian military was already fighting at the limits of its conventional capabilities, Ukrainians told reporters, and the Kremlin’s hints of using nuclear weapons rang hollow in Kyiv.⁸⁵⁹ US officials clarified that Washington and Kyiv had agreed that Ukraine would not strike targets in Russia with US provided weapons, but that the Administration would not object to Ukraine targeting Russia with its own weapons.⁸⁶⁰

167.	De-escalating
The up-and-down on the nuclear ladder continued. On December 27 , Lavrov slammed the West for falsely accusing Russia of planning to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine. “We have repeated again and again that there can be no winners in a nuclear war, and it should never be unleashed,” he asserted. He said Russia had taken note of changes in the US nuclear doctrine, including the possibility of a “disarming strike,” and urged the West to “exercise maximum restraint” and be “extremely sensible” when it comes to nuclear weapons. ⁸⁶¹	

Russia’s military was working on new plans to cut off foreign supplies of weapons and ammunition to Ukraine, **Lavrov** told reporters in Moscow on **December 28**. Moscow was going to achieve its goals in Ukraine thanks to “patience” and “perseverance,” and its “absolute priority” were the four annexed regions.⁸⁶²

⁸⁵⁷ David Ljunggren, “Only Russia’s nuclear arms preventing West from declaring war - Putin ally,” *Reuters*, December 25, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/only-russias-nuclear-arms-preventing-west-declaring-war-putin-ally-2022-12-25/>].

⁸⁵⁸ Rob Pincheta, “Despite Putin’s claims, Ukraine peace talks look unlikely in near future,” *CNN*, December 27, 2022 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/12/27/europe/ukraine-russia-negotiations-putin-unlikely-intl/index.html>].

⁸⁵⁹ Eduardo Castillo and Hanna Arhirova, “Russia says it shot down Ukrainian drone near air base,” *AP*, December 26, 2022 [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/russia-shoots-down-ukrainian-drone-near-its-engels-airbase/2022/12/26/942a7f88-84f7-11ed-b5ac-411280b122ef_story.html].

⁸⁶⁰ Andrew E. Kramer, “Attacks inside Russia potentially complicate Moscow’s campaign of striking Ukraine’s energy grid,” *New York Times*, December 26, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/12/26/world/russia-ukraine-news/with-bold-strikes-inside-russian-territory-ukraine-makes-calculation-that-russia-has-reached-its-limit?smid=url-share>].

⁸⁶¹ Elena Teslova, “US, NATO want victory on Ukraine battlefield to destroy Russia: Lavrov,” *Anadolu*, December 27, 2022 [<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/russia-ukraine-war/us-nato-want-victory-on-ukraine-battlefield-to-destroy-russia-lavrov/2773676>].

⁸⁶² “Lavrov warns Russia will disrupt Western arms supplies to Ukraine,” *Al Jazeera*, December 29, 2022 [<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/12/29/russia-aims-to-disrupt-new-western-arms-supplies-to-kyiv-lavrov>].

As the year was coming to an end, cities across Ukraine were targeted by a wave of Russian missile strikes on **December 29**, in one of the largest bombardments since the war began. Ukraine's military said 69 missiles were launched, with air defences intercepting 54 of them.⁸⁶³ The next day, **December 30**, Russia launched another aerial barrage at Ukraine, but the Ukrainian military said it had intercepted all of the attacks.⁸⁶⁴ Russia again rained missiles and exploding drones on Kyiv and other cities on **December 31**. Air defenses shot down 12 of at least 20 cruise missiles. In his New Year's address, **Putin** said Russia was fighting to secure "peace and security guarantees," while the West was using Ukraine "to weaken and split up Russia," but he did not utter other warnings or threats.⁸⁶⁵ He also repeated his narrative that the West was trying to destroy Russia. "The West lied about peace while preparing for aggression," he said. "They are cynically using Ukraine and its people to weaken and divide Russia."⁸⁶⁶

January 2023: Leopards freed; Moscow's nuclear rhetoric silent

On **January 1**, at least around 90 Russian soldiers, were killed in a Ukrainian attack in Makiivka, a Russian-occupied town in the Donbas region. It was one of the worst losses for Russia since the start of its invasion and Ukraine had used the US HIMARS system to conduct the attack. Separately, the latest barrage of Russian strikes on Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, caused electricity and heating shortages. Ukraine's defense ministry said the air force had shot down nearly 40 Iranian-made drones overnight.⁸⁶⁷

Meanwhile, further Western military assistance was forthcoming. **Macron** promised **Zelenskyy** in a **January 4** phone call to provide Ukraine with AMX-10 RC armored fighting vehicles to prepare for "a possible Russian offensive" in the spring. These fighting vehicles have a shorter range and are lighter and less protected than the Leclerc, the system Ukraine had asked for in December.⁸⁶⁸ One day later, the **White House** announced that it planned to send Ukraine 50 Bradley Fighting Vehicles, "a tracked armored combat vehicle that carries an auto cannon and a machine gun." German chancellor **Scholz**, in turn, declared that Berlin would provide 40 Marder Infantry Fighting Vehicles and a Patriot air defense system.⁸⁶⁹ The decision was the result of weeks of coordination between the three capitals and a decision had been made after New Year's, reporters learned.⁸⁷⁰

⁸⁶³ Hugo Bachega and Matt Murphy, "Russia fires dozens of missiles at Ukrainian cities," *BBC*, December 29, 2022 [<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-64114784>].

⁸⁶⁴ Cassandra Vinograd and Richard Pérez-Peña, "Ukraine Defeats Russian Drone Swarm, as NATO Head Says Kyiv Needs More Arms," *New York Times*, December 30, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/30/world/europe/ukraine-russia-drone-attacks.html>].

⁸⁶⁵ Andrew E. Kramer and Anton Troianovski, "Deadly Russian Strikes Hammer Ukraine on New Year's Eve," *New York Times*, December 31, 2022 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/31/world/europe/ukraine-strikes-russia-new-years-eve.html>].

⁸⁶⁶ Anton Troianovski and Anatoly Kurmanaev, "Putin Prepares Russians for a Long Fight Ahead," *New York Times*, January 3, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/03/world/europe/putin-russia-ukraine-war.html>].

⁸⁶⁷ Carole Landry, "A Lethal Start to 2023," *The New York Times*, January 2, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/02/briefing/russia-ukraine-war-bucha.html>], and "Makiivka strike: what we know about the deadliest attack on Russian troops since Ukraine war began," *The Guardian*, January 4, 2022 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/04/makiivka-strike-what-we-know-about-the-deadliest-attack-on-russian-troops-since-ukraine-war-began>].

⁸⁶⁸ Clea Caulcutt, "Macron promises to send first Western tanks to Ukraine," *Politico*, January 4, 2022 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-france-tanks-ukraine-war-volodymyr-zelenskyy-europe/>].

⁸⁶⁹ Laura Seligman and Paul McLeary, "Biden will send Bradley Fighting Vehicles to Ukraine. And tanks could be next," *Politico*, January 4, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/01/05/biden-ukraine-bradley-vehicles-tanks-00076549>].

⁸⁷⁰ Matthias Gebauer und Marina Kormbaki, "Germany Moves Forward with Tank Deliveries to Ukraine," *Spiegel*, January 6, 2023 [<https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/fifty-marders-for-kyiv-germany-moves-forward-with-tank-deliveries-to-ukraine-a-3ac7ce39-3ead-4425-be7e-c7228f00b59f>].

The Russian reaction was swift. A statement of the **Russian embassy in Berlin** decried the new vehicles as “another step toward an escalation of the Ukrainian conflict.”⁸⁷¹

Mediation attempts came from Ankara. In a phone call also on **January 5**, Turkish President **Erdogan** urged Putin to declare a unilateral cease-fire in Ukraine, the first time Turkey called for such a step without asking Kyiv to make a similar commitment.⁸⁷² Indeed, on the same day, **Putin** announced “a cease-fire along the entire line of contact in Ukraine from 12.00 on January 6, 2023 to 24.00 on January 7, 2023,” to allow local residents “to attend church services” on Orthodox Christmas and urged Kyiv to reciprocate.⁸⁷³ The move followed a statement calling for this step on the same day by **Patriarch Kirill I**, who heads the Russian Orthodox Church and is close to the Kremlin.⁸⁷⁴ Yet, Ukrainian officials and analysts described the announcement as a Russian propaganda stunt, and Kyiv refused to accept the cease-fire as fighting continued unabated with both sides blaming each other.⁸⁷⁵

On **January 6**, media reported that Russian hackers going by the name “**Cold River**” had attacked three US nuclear research laboratories at a time of intense Russian nuclear threats in August and September 2022. It remained unclear, however, what they had sought to achieve and whether they had been successful.⁸⁷⁶

Meanwhile, NATO Allies focused on further military support for Kyiv. Also on **January 6**, the **Pentagon** unveiled additional military assistance for Kyiv worth 3 billion US dollars. Part of the package were the Bradley infantry fighting vehicles announced the day before. In addition, the package for the first time included 18 155mm self-propelled Howitzers.⁸⁷⁷ “We absolutely agree that Ukraine does need tanks,” **Laura Cooper**, the assistant secretary of defense for Russia, noted. “This is the right time for Ukraine to take advantage of its capabilities, to change the dynamic on the battlefield.” The aid was aimed at enabling Ukrainians to “not only defend their territory but hopefully take back territory,” said Pentagon spokesperson **Patrick Ryder**.⁸⁷⁸

⁸⁷¹ Steven Erlanger and Thomas Gibbons-Neff, “New Armored Vehicles Will Help Ukraine Take the Fight to Russia,” *The New York Times*, January 6, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/06/world/europe/ukraine-war-armored-vehicles.html>].

⁸⁷² Patrick Sykes and Firat Kozok, “Erdogan Renews Ukraine Peace Push But Putin Sticks to Line,” *Bloomberg*, January 5, 2023 [<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-01-05/turkey-erdogan-urges-vladimir-putin-to-declare-unilateral-cess-fire-in-ukraine>].

⁸⁷³ “President’s instructions to Russian Federation Armed Forces,” Website of the President of Russia, Januar 5, 2023 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70330>].

⁸⁷⁴ Anatoly Kurmanaev and Oleg Matsnev, “Comments by Kremlin allies suggest that Putin’s cease-fire order was motivated by domestic concerns,” *The New York Times*, January 6, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/06/world/russia-ukraine-news/comments-by-kremlin-allies-suggest-that-putins-cess-fire-order-was-motivated-by-domestic-concerns?smid=url-share>].

⁸⁷⁵ Megan Specia, “Continued shelling backs up Ukraine’s doubts about Putin’s cease-fire,” *The New York Times*, January 8, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/06/world/russia-ukraine-news/russias-frontline-attacks-show-no-signs-of-abating-in-the-hours-leading-up-to-putins-cess-fire?smid=url-share>], and Andrew E. Kramer, “There’s no sign of a cease-fire on the war’s most hotly contested front,” *The New York Times*, January 6, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/06/world/russia-ukraine-news/theres-no-sign-of-a-cess-fire-on-the-wars-most-hotly-contested-front?smid=url-share>].

⁸⁷⁶ James Pearson and Christopher Bing, “Exclusive: Russian hackers targeted U.S. nuclear scientists,” *Reuters*, January 6, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/171ussia/171ussian-hackers-targeted-us-nuclear-scientists-2023-01-06/>].

⁸⁷⁷ “More Than \$3 Billion in Additional Security Assistance for Ukraine,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, January 6, 2023 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3261263/more-than-3-billion-in-additional-security-assistance-for-ukraine/>].

⁸⁷⁸ “Pentagon Press Secretary Brigadier General Pat Ryder and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Laura K. Cooper Hold a Press Briefing,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, January 6, 2023 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3261666/pentagon-press-secretary-brigadier-general-pat-ryder-and-deputy-assistant-secre/>], and Lara Jakes and Steven Erlanger, “Western Tanks Appear Headed to Ukraine, Breaking Another Taboo,” *The New York Times*, January 12, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/12/world/europe/ukraine-western-tanks.html>].

There were some indications that Western states might be willing to go further. On **January 9**, an anonymous Western source told reporters that the United Kingdom had for several weeks been considering to send 10 Challenger 2 main battle tanks to Ukraine, which would “mark a significant step-up in Western support to Ukraine” and up the pressure on other Allies to make similar decisions.⁸⁷⁹ US officials, in turn, said Washington was considering to provide Stryker armored combat vehicles for the first time in its next assistance package.⁸⁸⁰ On the following day, Pentagon spokesperson **Patrick Ryder** announced that Ukrainian troops would begin a several months-long training to operate Patriot systems at Fort Sill in Oklahoma “as soon as next week.”⁸⁸¹

At the same time, however, Republican Senator **J.D. Vance** raised questions on the level of US resources spent on Kyiv. “The four Ukraine supplemental spending bills passed since the escalation of the Ukraine/Russia conflict in February of 2022 amount to arguably the 4th largest discretionary appropriations bill,” he wrote in a letter dated **January 9** to the Office of Management and Budget, for which he requested signatures. In the letter, Vance called for further information on the security assistance for Ukraine to be made public “to allow Representatives and Senators to make a determination on the wisdom of additional expenditure in this area.”⁸⁸²

Berlin, in turn, remained sceptical of further stepping up military aid, despite media reports of mounting pressure from Polish and French officials to provide Leopard tanks to Ukraine.⁸⁸³ On **January 9**, **Scholz** pointed to already significant existing German military assistance for Kyiv and once again stressed that Berlin would only make such a decision together with its Allies, notably its transatlantic partner Washington. Anything else would be “irresponsible in such a dangerous situation,” he explained.⁸⁸⁴ The following day, **Baerbock** visited Kharkiv and met with her Ukrainian counterpart **Kuleba**, who once again called for Leopard battle tanks but received no such commitment from the German Foreign Minister.⁸⁸⁵

Discussions on Western battle tank deliveries did not abate however. In a press conference on **January 11**, Scholz spokesperson **Steffen Hebestreit** explained that such UK considerations had not changed the German position. He also denied that any partner countries had officially requested a joint delivery of Leopard tanks to Kyiv.⁸⁸⁶ Yet **Finnish parliamentarians** were reportedly “discussing whether to send

⁸⁷⁹ Deborah Haynes, “UK considering supplying Ukraine with Challenger 2 tanks to fight Russian forces,” *Sky News*, January 9, 2023 [<https://news.sky.com/story/uk-considering-supplying-ukraine-with-challenger-2-tanks-to-fight-russian-forces-12783107>].

⁸⁸⁰ Lara Seligman, Lee Hudson and Paul McLeary, “Pentagon weighs sending Stryker combat vehicles to Ukraine,” *Politico*, January 9, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/01/09/pentagon-stryker-combat-vehicles-ukraine-00077083>].

⁸⁸¹ “Pentagon Press Secretary Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder Holds Press Briefing,” *Website of the US Department of Defense*, January 10, 2023 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3264326/pentagon-press-secretary-air-force-brig-gen-pat-ryder-holds-press-briefing/>].

⁸⁸² Alexander Ward, Matt Berg and Lawrence Ukenye, “U.S. should grant a Brazilian request to extradite Bolsonaro, Kaine says,” *Politico*, January 10, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/01/10/u-s-should-grant-a-brazilian-request-to-extradite-bolsonaro-kaine-says-00077187>], and Letter to Shalanda Young, *Politico*, January 9, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/f/?id=00000185-9d1c-d88f-aba5-bf3d0b840000>].

⁸⁸³ Hans von der Burchard, Clea Caulcutt and Gabriel Rinaldi, “France and Poland push Germany to send Leopard tanks to Ukraine,” *Politico*, January 9, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/france-and-poland-push-germany-to-send-leopard-tanks-to-ukraine/>].

⁸⁸⁴ “Vorwurf der Zögerlichkeit (Accusation of hesitancy),” *Tagesspiegel*, January 9, 2023 [<https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/vorwurfe-der-zogerlichkeit-scholz-verteidigt-seinen-kurs-bei-waffenlieferungen-in-ukraine-9153402.html>].

⁸⁸⁵ “German minister promises Ukraine weapons, EU accession help on surprise trip,” *Reuters*, January 11, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/german-minister-promises-weapons-eu-accession-help-surprise-ukraine-trip-2023-01-10/>].

Kyiv Leopards of their own;⁸⁸⁷ and Polish President **Andrzej Duda** claimed, “a company” of Leopard tanks for Ukraine would be transferred “as part of international coalition building.” Such a decision had already been taken in Poland, he stated. Media however pointed out that any such decision to export the German-made tanks would need to be greenlit by Berlin.⁸⁸⁸

In Germany, meanwhile, there were some signs of diverging views in the governing coalition. On **January 12**, Green Economy Minister and Vice Chancellor, **Robert Habeck**, said Berlin should not “stand in the way” if other countries decided to support Ukraine, regardless of Germany’s own decision, thereby confirming his support for other governments sending Leopard tanks to Kyiv.⁸⁸⁹

Pressure to support Ukraine more quickly and with more advanced weaponry continued to mount. On the same **January 12**, US media reported that **military officials** were concerned delays on a plan to send small precision-guided bombs to Kyiv could render the weapons useless as fighting among Russia and Ukraine continued at a fast pace. The Ground-Launched Small Diameter Bomb (GLSDB) manufactured by Boeing would give Ukraine weapons with twice the range of the already supplied HIMARS munitions and somewhat heavier load than the also already provided Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System (GMLRS) munitions. Washington still refused sending the ATACMS, twice heavier precision rounds with the ability to destroy Russian targets nearly 200 miles from the front lines. But there seemed to be few escalation concerns about the GLSDB, just bureaucratic hiccups preventing a fast delivery.⁸⁹⁰ In London, in turn, a tank decision was made. On **January 15**, **Britain** announced that it would send 14 Challenger-2 tanks to Ukraine. The United Kingdom had about 227 Challengers total, which were reported to have maintenance issues, and analysts argued that it would be hard-pressed to replenish stocks.⁸⁹¹ Meanwhile, the Netherlands was considering sending a Patriot missile system to Ukraine, Dutch Prime Minister **Mark Rutte** announced during a visit in Washington on **January 17**.

In Germany, political pressure was being felt. On **January 16**, **Christine Lambrecht**, the German defense minister, resigned after months of criticism over her Ukraine policy.⁸⁹² On the following day, **Biden** and **Scholz** talked over the phone, discussing their “steadfast support” for Kyiv. Reportedly, the German Chancellor told the US President that he would agree to supply Leopards only if Washington provided Abrams tanks.⁸⁹³ The next day, **January 18**, **NATO defense ministers** began a two-day meeting in Brussels to assess aid needs for Ukraine. To put pressure on Germany, officials from Poland and

⁸⁸⁶ Hans von der Burchard et al., “Never mind Britain: Germany looks for US to lead the way on battle tanks to Ukraine,” *Politico*, January 11, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/britain-germany-us-battle-tanks-ukraine-war/>], and “11. Januar 2023 - Regierungspressekonferenz (11 January 2023 – Government press conference),” *YouTube account of Jung & Naiv*, January 11, 2023 [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2yBTkQ3cNyY>] (from 20:00)].

⁸⁸⁷ Lawrence Ukenye, Alexander Ward and Matt Berg, “Why Israel won’t change course on Ukraine,” *Politico*, January 11, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/01/11/why-israel-wont-change-course-on-ukraine-00077408>].

⁸⁸⁸ Hans von der Burchard et al., “Never mind Britain: Germany looks for US to lead the way on battle tanks to Ukraine,” *Politico*, January 11, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/britain-germany-us-battle-tanks-ukraine-war/>].

⁸⁸⁹ Laura Pitel, Guy Chazan, and Ben Hall, “Why Olaf Scholz is reluctant to send battle tanks to Ukraine,” *Financial Times*, January 13, 2023 [<https://www.ft.com/content/9e0e5ed8-a924-469d-bea7-dc0de81f2c82>].

⁸⁹⁰ Jack Detsch, “Pentagon Balks at Sending Ukraine Long-Range Bombs,” *Foreign Policy*, January 12, 2023 [<https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/01/12/russia-ukraine-war-pentagon-balks-long-range-bombs/>].

⁸⁹¹ Jonathan Beale and Jasmine Andersson, “UK to send Challenger 2 tanks to Ukraine, Rishi Sunak confirms,” *BBC News*, January 15, 2023 [<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-64274755>].

⁸⁹² Erika Solomon and Christopher F. Schuetze, “Germany’s defense minister resigns after criticism over her handling of the war,” *New York Times*, January 16, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/16/world/europe/german-defense-minister-resigns-after-weeks-of-criticism.html>].

Finland told journalists that their countries would donate Leopards from their own stockpiles if Berlin issued licenses for the re-export – though official requests remained outstanding.⁸⁹⁴ On **October 18**, **Charles Michel**, the President of the European Council, said “the time [was] now” to send tanks to Ukraine. “They urgently need more equipment,” he stressed. Also, the European Parliament passed a resolution calling on Germany to form a European alliance to deliver Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine “without further delay.”⁸⁹⁵

In Washington, after months of discussions with Ukrainian officials, the Biden Administration was starting to concede that Kyiv may need weapons that can strike Crimea, even if such a move could escalate the conflict, **anonymous US officials** told reporters on **January 18**. The Pentagon had assessed that Ukraine’s position in any future negotiations would be stronger if its military could show Russia that its control of Crimea could be threatened. Administration officials also noted that fears that Russia would retaliate using tactical nuclear weapons had eased, though they cautioned that the risk remained. Ukrainian officials were worried that their country could not survive years of conflict while Russia continued to strike its cities and infrastructure, so it had become essential for Kyiv to put Russia’s control of Crimea at risk.⁸⁹⁶

Meanwhile, the tank thriller continued. On the same **January 18**, attending the World Economic Forum in Davos, **Scholz** told a number of US lawmakers that Berlin would only deliver Leopard tanks if Washington agreed to send the M1 Abrams. Conversely, **US officials** continued to insist that the M1 Abrams tanks, with their needs for specific fuel, frequent maintenance and spare parts, transport and training, were ill-suited to the battlegrounds in Ukraine. The officials also noted that the Administration worried that American tanks would be seen as a sign of escalation.⁸⁹⁷

On **January 19**, **Austin** visited Germany, where he publicly praised the government as a “staunch defender of our allies and values.” Standing next to Austin, Germany’s new defense minister, **Boris Pistorius**, gave no hint of whether Germany would ultimately allow the tanks to move ahead.⁸⁹⁸ Reportedly, no agreement could be found at a heated meeting between **Austin** and **Wolfgang Schmidt**, the head of the German Chancellery, on the same day. Subsequently, **Sullivan** phoned his German counterpart **Jens Plötner** to express US discontent with Berlin’s stance.⁸⁹⁹ On the following day, at a meeting of the

⁸⁹³ Katie Rogers and Ana Swanson, “Netherlands Considers Sending Patriot Missile System to Ukraine,” *New York Times*, January 17, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/17/us/politics/netherlands-patriot-system-ukraine.html>]. See also “Readout of President Joe Biden’s Call with Chancellor Olaf Scholz of Germany,” *White House*, January 17, 2023 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/01/17/readout-of-president-joe-bidens-call-with-chancellor-olaf-scholz-of-germany-3/>].

⁸⁹⁴ Lara Jakes and Erika Solomon, “Why Tanks Are Tripping Up the West,” *New York Times*, January 19, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/19/world/europe/tanks-ukraine-germany-us.html>].

⁸⁹⁵ “EU’s Michel backs tanks delivery to Ukraine,” *Reuters*, January 18, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-michel-idUKP6N32B02E>].

⁸⁹⁶ Helene Cooper, Eric Schmitt and Julian E. Barnes, “U.S. Warms to Helping Ukraine Target Crimea,” *New York Times*, January 18, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/18/us/politics/ukraine-crimea-military.html>].

⁸⁹⁷ Renzo Ruf and Hansjörg Friedrich Müller, “Erhält die Ukraine doch bald deutsche Leopard-Panzer? Die Entscheidung darüber ist wohl in Washington gefallen (Will Ukraine soon receive German Leopard tanks after all? The decision has probably been made in Washington),” *Aargauer Zeitung*, January 20, 2023 [<https://www.aargauerzeitung.ch/international/ukraine-krieg-erhaelt-die-ukraine-doch-bald-deutsche-leopard-panzer-die-entscheidung-darueber-ist-wohl-in-washington-gefallen-ld.2402720?reduced=true>], and Alexander Ward et al, “Scholz to lawmakers: U.S. must move first on tanks,” *Politico*, January 19, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/01/19/scholz-to-lawmakers-us-must-move-first-on-tanks-00078507>].

⁸⁹⁸ Lara Jakes and Erika Solomon “Why Tanks Are Tripping Up the West,” *New York Times*, January 19, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/19/world/europe/tanks-ukraine-germany-us.html>].

⁸⁹⁹ Stefan Kornelius, “Die USA sind wütend auf Scholz (The United States are angry at Scholz),” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, January 22, 2023 [<https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/kampfpanser-usa-bundestkanzler-scholz-1.5736789?reduced=true>].

Ukraine Defense Contact Group at Ramstein, still no decision could be reached on sending Leopard 2 main battle tanks to Ukraine, despite pleas from President **Volodymyr Zelenskyy** to do so. Yet, **German and US officials** sought to downplay the disagreements and several countries promised to send more military aid. For instance, the **US government** pledged to send a package worth around 2.5 billion US Dollars, including 90 Stryker combat vehicles.⁹⁰⁰

Pressure continued to build up on the German Chancellery. Republican Senator **Lindsey Graham**, who was in Kyiv on **January 20**, urged Germany to deliver the tanks.⁹⁰¹ Polish Foreign Minister **Zbigniew Rau** tweeted that arming Ukraine was not “some kind of decision-making exercise” and that Ukraine paid a price in blood because of the hesitation over Leopard deliveries.⁹⁰² On **January 21**, the **foreign ministers of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania** called on Germany to deliver Leopards to Ukraine.⁹⁰³ **Baerbock** said on **January 22** that she would not “stand in the way” of Poland sending Leopard tanks to Ukraine. In Washington, the new Republican chairman of the US House Foreign Affairs Committee, **Michael McCaul**, argued publicly that the Administration should send at least one M1 Abrams to Ukraine to persuade Germany to greenlight the Leopards. In Warsaw, **Morawiecki** told reporters on **January 23** that Poland would ask Germany for permission to send Leopards to Ukraine but suggested that his government would deliver them with or without Germany’s approval – thereby restating a claim he had already made on **January 18**. On the same **January 23**, **Sullivan** and **Plötner** spoke three times over the phone, and **Sullivan, Austin** and **Milley** met **Biden** at the White House to get final negotiating guidance.⁹⁰⁴ **Pistorius** meanwhile told journalists in Berlin that a decision would come “soon.”⁹⁰⁵ On **January 24**, **Poland** formally asked Germany for permission to transfer its Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine – Berlin retorted that a decision would indeed come “soon.”⁹⁰⁶

Throughout the entire tank episode, Russian officials sought to dissuade the West, and especially Germany, from delivering the tanks to Ukraine. On **January 19**, **Peskov** said in Moscow that it would be “extremely dangerous” for Germany to supply tanks. “It will mean bringing the conflict to a whole new level which, of course, will not bode well from the point of view of global and pan-European security,” he told reporters.⁹⁰⁷

⁹⁰⁰ Erika Solomon and Cassandra Vinograd, “A meeting of Ukraine’s allies ends with no consensus on sending Kyiv Western tanks,” *The New York Times*, January 20, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/20/world/russia-ukraine-news/a-meeting-of-ukraine-allies-ends-with-no-consensus-on-sending-german-tanks?smid=url-share>].

⁹⁰¹ Cassandra Vinograd, “Amid Mounting Frustration With Germany, Ukraine Holds Out Hope It Will Get Tanks,” *The New York Times*, January 21, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/21/world/europe/ukraine-germany-leopard-tanks.html>].

⁹⁰² Tweet by @RauZbigniew, Twitter, January 20, 2023 [https://twitter.com/RauZbigniew/status/1616478868407287811?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw].

⁹⁰³ “Baltische Außenminister drängen auf sofortige Leopard-Panzerlieferung aus Deutschland (Baltic foreign ministers urge immediate Leopard tank delivery from Germany),” *Spiegel*, January 21, 2023 [<https://www.spiegel.de/ausland/ukraine-krieg-baltische-aussenminister-draengen-auf-sofortige-leopard-panzerlieferung-aus-deutschland-a-26335832-3d46-49ab-a101-3d0a3f31aa5b>].

⁹⁰⁴ James Politi, Courtney Weaver, Laura Pitel and Guy Chazan, “Transatlantic ‘growing pains’: how Olaf Scholz made Joe Biden shift on tanks for Ukraine,” *Financial Times*, January 26, 2023 [<https://www.ft.com/content/ea1cd074-c912-4dd7-9977-72ac41da0a52>].

⁹⁰⁵ Ron DePasquale, “Poland says permission from Germany is ‘a secondary issue’ with Leopard tanks,” *New York Times*, January 23, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/23/world/russia-ukraine-news/poland-steps-in-as-pressure-grows-on-germany-to-supply-leopard-tanks?smid=url-share>].

⁹⁰⁶ Matthew Mpoke Bigg, “Poland asks Germany’s permission to send its Leopard tanks to Ukraine,” *New York Times*, January 24, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/24/world/europe/germany-ukraine-tanks.html>].

⁹⁰⁷ “‘A whole new level’ of war if NATO arms Ukraine, Russia warns,” *Al Jazeera*, January 19, 2023 [<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/1/19/a-whole-new-level-of-war-if-nato-arms-ukraine-russia-warns>].

168.	Warning
<p>On the same January 19, nuclear rhetoric returned to Moscow. Medvedev warned NATO that Russia's defeat in Ukraine could trigger a nuclear war. "The defeat of a nuclear power in a conventional war may trigger a nuclear war," Medvedev wrote on Telegram. "Nuclear powers have never lost major conflicts on which their fate depends," he concluded. Asked if Medvedev's remarks signified that Russia was escalating the crisis, Peskov said: "No, it absolutely does not mean that." Peskov said Medvedev's remarks were in full accordance with Russia's nuclear doctrine, as it allowed for a nuclear strike after "aggression against the Russian Federation with conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is threatened."⁹⁰⁸</p>	

On **January 22**, **Vyacheslav Volodin**, the chairman of Russia's lower house, the State Duma, threatened Europe and the United States with "global catastrophe" over their continued military support for Ukraine. Additional arms deliveries would lead to retaliation with "more powerful weapons," he stated. Nuclear powers had not used WMD in local conflicts in the past because their citizens and territorial integrity had not been threatened. Foreign politicians had to understand that "this could end in a global tragedy that will destroy their countries."⁹⁰⁹ The pressure Germany was facing showed "nervousness" among Ukraine's allies, **Peskov** said on **January 23**. But the Ukrainian people would ultimately have to "pay" for this "pseudo-support."⁹¹⁰ The next day, **Peskov** added that Leopard deliveries would "not bode well" for and leave "an indelible mark" on Russian-German relations, which were already "at a low point."⁹¹¹ In Washington, **Antonov** told reporters on **January 25** that the Biden Administration was "deliberately trying to inflict strategic defeat" on Russia. "If the United States decides to supply tanks, it will be impossible to justify such step using arguments about *defensive weapons*. This would be another blatant provocation against the Russian Federation. No one should have illusions about who is the real aggressor in the current conflict."⁹¹²

On **January 25**, the tank debate came to a first conclusion. **Germany** agreed to send Ukraine 14 Leopard 2 tanks from the Bundeswehr, mere hours before the **United States** pledged to send 31 M1 Abrams tanks.⁹¹³ Earlier in the day, **Biden** and **Scholz** had spoken over the phone to coordinate the announcement. The US President also called **Sunak**, **Macron**, and **Meloni**. This was "not an offensive threat to Russia," Biden emphasized during the announcement at the White House. "If Russian troops return to Russia, where they belong, this war would be over today."⁹¹⁴

⁹⁰⁸ Guy Faulconbridge and Felix Light, "Putin ally Medvedev warns NATO of nuclear war if Russia is defeated in Ukraine," *Reuters*, January 19, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-ally-medvedev-warns-nuclear-war-if-russia-defeated-ukraine-2023-01-19/>].

⁹⁰⁹ Carlo Martuscelli, "Top Russia official threatens West with 'global catastrophe' over weapons to Ukraine," *Politico*, January 23, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/top-russia-official-vyacheslav-volodin-threatens-west-with-global-catastrophe-over-weapons-to-ukraine-war/>].

⁹¹⁰ "Песков заявил, что все накачивающие Киев вооружениями страны несут за это ответственность (Peskov said that all countries pumping weapons into Kiev are responsible)," *Tass*, January 23, 2023 [<https://tass.ru/politika/16861059>].

⁹¹¹ Elena Teslova, "Kremlin says export of Leopard tanks to Ukraine will leave 'indelible mark' on Russian-German relations," *Anadolu*, January 24, 2023 [<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/kremlin-says-export-of-leopard-tanks-to-ukraine-will-leave-indelible-mark-on-russian-german-relations/2796030>].

⁹¹² "Ambassador Anatoly Antonov's answer to a media question," *Facebook Page of the Embassy of Russia in the USA*, January 25, 2023 [<https://www.facebook.com/RusEmbUSA/posts/pfbid0rjY8bKeejGMFRVqHvAmXEJtthUVRm7rvatqnYR5w4VBn-ZhQGxZCKwF7Z7Yd4Gzyl>].

⁹¹³ Erika Solomon and Christopher F. Schuetze, "Germany says it will send an initial shipment of 14 tanks to Ukraine," *The New York Times*, January 25, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/25/world/russia-ukraine-news/germany-leopard-tanks-ukraine?smid=url-share>].

⁹¹⁴ Peter Baker, "Biden announces 31 Abrams tanks for Ukraine, but says the move is not meant to escalate the war," *The New York Times*, January 25, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/25/world/russia-ukraine-news/biden-announces-31-abrams>].

The Russian reaction was swift. The Russian ambassador in Berlin, **Sergei Nechayev** said that Germany's "extremely dangerous decision" would take the conflict "to a new level of confrontation" and lead to "permanent escalation." Also, it destroyed "the remnants of mutual trust, [caused] irreparable damage to the already deplorable state of Russian-German relations, and [casted] doubt on the possibility of their normalisation in the foreseeable future."⁹¹⁵ In Moscow, **Peskov** noted that the tanks deliveries were a "losing scheme" that would burden Europe without strengthening the Ukrainian military.⁹¹⁶ As Western states made public when battle tanks might arrive in Ukraine, Moscow showed its discontent both on the battlefield and through harsher statements. The **US Administration** stated that it would not send Abrams from the Pentagon's stock, but would acquire them first – which would take months if not years.⁹¹⁷ On **January 26**, **UK defense minister Alex Chalk** said Britain would start training Ukrainian tank crews the following week, aiming to have the 14 Challenger 2 delivered by the end of March. In Berlin, **Pistorius** noted that Germany also planned to deliver a first company of Leopards by the end of March. In response to these developments, **Peskov** said that Moscow "categorically disagreed" that Western deliveries did "not mean involvement of these countries or the alliance in the hostilities ongoing in Ukraine." In contrast: "Moscow views everything that has been done by the alliance and the capitals I have mentioned as direct involvement in the conflict," he added. On the same day, Russia also launched 55 missiles at targets across Ukraine, 47 of which were shot down.⁹¹⁸

Analysts within the US government still believed Ukraine had few chances to recapture Crimea. On **January 26**, **senior Department of Defense officials** told House Armed Services Committee lawmakers in a classified briefing that the Pentagon did not believe Ukraine had the ability to force Russian troops out of Crimea. Among the briefers were **Laura Cooper**, the deputy assistant secretary of defense for Russia and **Douglas Sims**, director of operations on the Joint Staff. This assessment mirrored a statement by the Joint Chiefs chair **Milley** during the **January 20** meeting at Ramstein that, in 2023, it remained "very, very difficult to militarily eject Russian forces" from occupied Ukraine. "That doesn't mean it can't happen. Doesn't mean it won't happen, but it'd be very, very difficult."⁹¹⁹

Meanwhile further background on the Western debates surrounding military assistance for Ukraine trickled into media reports. A **senior European diplomat** provided context on the theory of escalation underlying these internal discussions: After Russia's invasion, the Western allies had agreed on an "unwritten policy," not to supply Ukraine with a fully comprehensive package of weapons out of fear that "we would trigger a big response from Russia," a "strong Russian reaction, including nuclear." The West should provide its support gradually, assessing the Russian response at every step. "You may call this a

tanks-for-ukraine-but-says-the-move-is-not-meant-to-escalate-the-war?smid=url-share], and Alexander Ward et al, "Inside Washington's about-face on sending tanks to Ukraine," *Politico*, January 25, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/01/25/inside-washingtons-about-face-on-sending-tanks-to-ukraine-00079560>].

⁹¹⁵ "Russia scorns Germany for sending Leopard battle tanks to Ukraine," *Al Jazeera*, January 25, 2023 [<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/1/25/russia-denounces-germany-over-dangerous-tanks-decision>].

⁹¹⁶ "Abrams tank deliveries to Kiev 'a losing scheme' for technological reasons, says Kremlin," *TASS*, January 25, 2023 [<https://tass.com/politics/1566775>].

⁹¹⁷ Lara Seligman, Paul McLeary, and Lee Hudson, "U.S. to send Ukraine more advanced Abrams tanks — but no secret armor," *Politico*, January 26, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/01/26/us-sends-ukraine-advanced-abrams-tanks-00079648>].

⁹¹⁸ Hanna Arhirova and Samya Kullab, "New barrage of Russian strikes in Ukraine kills at least 11," *AP News*, January 27, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-417545bf8718da9dad1b3a047abf32f6>].

⁹¹⁹ Alexander Ward et al, "Ukraine can't retake Crimea soon, Pentagon tells lawmakers in classified briefing," *Politico*, February, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/02/01/ukraine-crimea-russia-pentagon-00080799>].

process of getting [Putin] accustomed,” the diplomat said. The delivery of aircraft was therefore “only a matter of when,” the diplomat predicted.⁹²⁰

Sources within the German Chancellery, in turn, told journalists that Scholz’s reluctance to deliver weapons without US backing was grounded in a belief that this could spur escalation. Behind closed doors, the German leader was venting against those who were arguing for tank deliveries. After **Amy Gutman**, the US ambassador to Germany, had said in mid-September that Washington had “big expectations” from Berlin regarding weapons deliveries, Scholz had relied on scenario-analyses circulating within the Chancellery involving Russian sabotage against gas pipelines, cyber-attacks, or even nuclear use. Hence, Scholz now wanted to spread the risks by engaging the United States directly. He wanted the West to “cook the frog” (Putin) slowly and carefully in order to “avoid a global war.” In addition, electoral considerations also played a role, officials told journalists, with the German public divided and fearful. In various European capitals, Scholz’ approach was seen as both German unwillingness to assume responsibility and reluctance to accept a more independent European foreign policy.⁹²¹

One deliveries-debate concluded, the next one commenced. On **January 26**, **Western officials** told reporters that Washington had told Kyiv that supplying aircraft is a “no-go, for the moment.” An internal debate about supplying Ukraine with jet fighters had already been underway for a while, however, pushed by Ukrainian officials with support from Baltic states. Against this backdrop, Dutch foreign minister **Wopke Hoekstra** told the Dutch parliament on **January 20** that his Cabinet would look at supplying F-16 fighter jets, if Kyiv requested them. “We are open-minded, there are no taboos,” he had explained.⁹²² Yet, alongside announcing that Germany would send the Leopard-2 on **January 25**, **Scholz** ruled out providing fighter jets, citing the need to prevent further military escalation. “There will be no fighter jet deliveries to Ukraine,” he said. Deputy US national security advisor **Jon Finer**, in turn, said on **January 26** that the Administration would be discussing fighter jets “very carefully” with Kyiv and its allies.⁹²³ “We have not ruled in or out any specific systems,” he added. However, an **official at the Defense Department** told journalists the next day he did not think “we are opposed,” as a campaign inside the Pentagon to send fighter jets to Ukraine was gaining momentum.⁹²⁴ **Mykhailo Podolyak**, an adviser to Zelensky, said on **January 28** that Kyiv and its Western allies were engaged in “fast-track” talks on possible deliveries of military aircraft and long-range missiles.⁹²⁵ Yet, **Scholz** doubled down on his skeptical position talking to reporters on the same day. “The question of combat aircraft does not arise at all,”

⁹²⁰ Cristina Gallardo, “Ukraine got its tanks. Now it wants jet fighters too,” *Politico*, January 27, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/ukraine-volodymyr-zelenskyy-russia-war-after-tanks-the-west-mulls-discussion-on-fighter-jets/>].

⁹²¹ Markus Becker et al, “Olaf Scholz, die Panzerwende und die Angst vor der Eskalation (Olaf Scholz, the tank u-turn and the fear of escalation),” *Spiegel*, January 27, 2023 [<https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/olaf-scholz-liefert-leopard-2-panzer-an-die-ukraine-das-letzte-tabuu-a-5972cfe4-4164-4ede-9936-c9fb33b51037>], and Peter Dausend, Tina Hildebradt and Jörg Lau, “Mit dem Leo ins Risiko (Taking risks with the Leo),” *Zeit*, January 25, 2023 [<https://www.zeit.de/2023/05/leopard-panzer-lieferung-ukraine-bundesregierung>], and “Kanzler im Interview mit dem Tagesspiegel (Chancellor in an interview with the Tagesspiegel),” *Website of the Chancellery*, January 29, 2023 [<https://www.bundeskanzler.de/bk-de/aktuelles/kanzler-im-tagesspiegel-interview-2161058>], and Karen DeYoung, Dan Lamothe, and Loveday Morris, “Tanks for Ukraine: How we got there,” *The Washington Post*, January 28, 2023 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/01/28/inside-story-biden-ukraine-tanks/>].

⁹²² Cristina Gallardo, “Ukraine got its tanks. Now it wants jet fighters too,” *Politico*, January 27, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/ukraine-volodymyr-zelenskyy-russia-war-after-tanks-the-west-mulls-discussion-on-fighter-jets/>].

⁹²³ “Ukraine says pilots would need six months for F-16 combat training,” *Reuters*, January 27, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-says-pilots-would-need-six-months-f-16-combat-training-2023-01-27/>].

⁹²⁴ Lara Seligman et al, “At the Pentagon, push to send F-16s to Ukraine picks up steam,” *Politico*, January 28, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/01/28/pentagon-send-f-16s-ukraine-00080045>].

⁹²⁵ Susie Blann, “Ukraine: ‘Fast-track’ talks underway for missiles, planes,” *AP News*, January 28, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-zelenskyy-politics-government-donetsk-119eacfc993491b4b66a117ddf91696>].

he stressed. "I can only advise against entering into a constant competition to outbid each other when it comes to weapons systems."⁹²⁶

The fighter jet discussion did not abate, however. **Andriy Yermak**, a top aide to Zelenskyy, said on **January 30** that Poland would be willing to provide its F-16s to Ukraine in coordination with NATO.⁹²⁷ Asked by a reporter on the same day if Washington would transfer warplanes to Kyiv, **Biden** responded: "No." When asked about Biden's remark, a **US official** explained that there had been "no serious, high-level discussion about F-16s."⁹²⁸ Yet, "by definition, nothing is excluded," **Macron** told a press conference on the same day. Indeed, French officials noted that the possibility was on the table, but that a decision was unlikely in the immediate future.⁹²⁹ On **January 31**, British prime minister **Sunak** said he believed it was "not practical" to provide Ukraine with British fighter jets, but pledged to accelerate support to enable "decisive gains" against Russia.⁹³⁰ On the same day, **Biden** answered that he was "going to talk" to Zelenskyy when asked again about his administration potentially sending fighter jets to Ukraine.⁹³¹

Russia responded by cautioning against escalation risks. On **January 30**, **Peskov** warned that the West was "encouraging" Ukraine's demands and professed its "readiness to provide such weapons." It was a "dead-end situation" that would lead to "significant escalation," and to "NATO countries more and more becoming directly involved in the conflict," though it did not "have the potential to change the course of events and will not do so," Peskov said.⁹³²

Against this tense backdrop, US-Russian exchanges on the future of arms control continued. Asked if Moscow could envisage there being no nuclear arms control treaty after 2026, Russia's deputy foreign minister **Sergei Ryabkov** told reporters on **January 30**: "This is quite a possible scenario."⁹³³ One day later, the **US State Department** sent a report to Congress stating that Russia had violated New START by refusing to allow on-site inspections and rebuffing Washington's requests to meet to discuss its compliance concerns.⁹³⁴ In reaction, **Antonov** told journalists that it was Washington who was violating the treaty by "illegitimately" withdrawing more than 100 strategic weapons from treaty accounting. Given the "hybrid war" the West was waging against Russia, it was "unjustified, untimely and inappropriate" to

⁹²⁶ Jones Hayden, "Scholz doubles down on refusal of fighter jets for Ukraine," *Politico*, January 29, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-chancellor-olaf-scholz-doubles-down-on-refusal-of-fighter-jets-for-ukraine/>].

⁹²⁷ "President's Office: Poland ready to supply Ukraine with F-16 fighters in coordination with NATO," *Kyiv Independent*, January 30, 2023 [<https://news.yahoo.com/presidents-office-poland-ready-supply-123728364.html>].

⁹²⁸ Alexander Ward, "Biden seemingly rejects request to send U.S. F-16s to Ukraine," *Politico*, January 30, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/01/30/biden-f-16s-ukraine-00080276>].

⁹²⁹ Leila Abboud et al, "France open to sending fighter jets to Ukraine," *Financial Times*, January 31, 2023 [<https://www.ft.com/content/4678ec97-bdff-4dfa-9507-dd6f6cb3dcc4?sharetype=blocked>].

⁹³⁰ Sam Blewett, "UK says it is 'not practical' to give Ukraine British fighter jets," *The Independent*, January 31, 2023 [<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/ukraine-downing-street-cabinet-rishi-sunak-prime-minister-b2272778.html>].

⁹³¹ Kelly Garrity, "Biden says he will talk with Zelenskyy after rejecting Kyiv request for jets," *Politico*, January 31, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/01/31/biden-says-he-will-talk-with-zelenskyy-after-seemingly-rejecting-kyivs-request-for-f-16-fighter-jets-00080387>].

⁹³² "Kremlin: More Western arms for Ukraine will only lead to escalation," *Reuters*, January 31, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/kremlin-more-western-arms-ukraine-will-only-lead-escalation-2023-01-30/>].

⁹³³ Guy Faulconbridge, "Russia warns United States: the end of nuclear arms control may be nigh," *Reuters*, January 30, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-says-nuclear-arms-treaty-with-us-may-end-after-2026-2023-01-30/>].

⁹³⁴ Michael R. Gordon, "U.S. Says Russia Has Violated Nuclear-Arms Treaty by Blocking Inspections," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 31, 2023 [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-says-russia-has-violated-nuclear-arms-treaty-by-blocking-inspections-11675183584>].

invite the US inspectors to Russian strategic facilities. However, Moscow intended to continue to “abide” by New START’s “central limits, continue to share notifications and related data.”⁹³⁵

February 2023: Of Western fighterjets and Ukrainian incursions

169.	Warning
In response to Germany’s decision to send tanks to Ukraine, Putin warned on February 2 that Russia was not sending its tanks to the borders, but had “the means to respond, and it won’t end with the use of armor. Everyone must understand this.” It remained unclear whether the Russian leader was actually implying the potential use of nuclear weapons. ⁹³⁶	

In reaction to Putin’s statement, **Burns** noted in a speech on **February 2** that Washington had to take seriously Moscow’s “saber rattling,” but its purpose was to intimidate the United States, its European allies, and the Ukrainian government. Thus, he argued, the Administration had “to stay on an even keel in weighing those threats carefully but also not being intimidated by them.” Seeking to frame Burns’ comments, **US officials** told journalists that, while concerns remained valid over Russia using a nuclear weapon, the tensions that had existed in autumn 2022 had since abated. A more stable battlefield, China’s warnings, and improved communication between Moscow and Washington had contributed to a measure of stability. Putin had potentially concluded that nuclear threats were backfiring, a senior US official told reporters. Yet US officials also pointed out that Russia’s nuclear escalation threats were not over, and that the Kremlin could remind the West of its arsenal’s power by letting the West observe nuclear weapons movements. The US government had no evidence that Russia was moving nuclear weapons towards the battlefield, but admitted that with respect to some of Russia’s tactical arms, US reconnaissance might not pick up such movement.⁹³⁷

US support for Ukraine remained strong. On **February 2**, the **Biden Administration** announced a \$2.2 billion package of military aid to enable Ukraine to obtain long-range bombs. The Ground-Launched Small Diameter Bombs were able to strike targets within a range of over 90 miles, to be fired from HIM-ARS and M270 launchers.⁹³⁸ However, the new rockets were not to be drawn from American stockpiles, and would therefore take several months, if not over a year, to be delivered, US officials told the media.⁹³⁹

170.	Warning
Russian nuclear warnings returned to the forefront. On February 4 , asked whether Washington providing Ukraine with advanced weaponry and allowing Kyiv to strike Russian targets on Crimea	

⁹³⁵ “Посол РФ заявил, что Москва соблюдает ДЧВ на протяжении всех лет в отличие от Вашингтона (The Russian ambassador said that Moscow has complied with the START Treaty continuously over the years, unlike Washington),” TASS, February 1, 2023 [<https://tass.ru/politika/16932853>].

⁹³⁶ Julian E. Barnes and David E. Sanger, “Fears of Russian Nuclear Weapons Use Have Diminished, but Could Re-emerge,” *New York Times*, February 3, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/03/us/politics/russia-nuclear-weapons.html?searchResultPosition=1>].

⁹³⁷ Julian E. Barnes and David E. Sanger, “Fears of Russian Nuclear Weapons Use Have Diminished, but Could Re-emerge,” *New York Times*, February 3, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/03/us/politics/russia-nuclear-weapons.html?searchResultPosition=1>].

⁹³⁸ John Ismay, “Russia-Ukraine War. U.S. Package of \$2.2 Billion in Ukraine Aid Includes New Guided Weapon,” *New York Times*, February 3, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/02/03/world/russia-ukraine-news>].

⁹³⁹ Lara Seligman and Paul McLeary, “New U.S. aid package includes longer-range bombs for Ukraine,” *Politico*, February 3, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/02/03/ukraine-aid-includes-longer-range-bombs-00081112>].

would force Russia to negotiate with Ukraine, **Medvedev** said that “the result will be just the opposite. There will be no negotiations in this case, there will only be retaliation strikes. The whole of Ukraine, which remained under the rule of Kyiv, will burn.” In reaction to the question of how Russia would respond if Kyiv, with US permission, began to strike Crimea or strike deep into Russia, Medvedev replied that Russia’s response could be “anything” and that Putin “spoke about this quite clearly.” He added: “We do not set ourselves any restrictions and, depending on the nature of the threats, we are ready to use all types of weapons. In accordance with our doctrinal documents, including the Fundamentals of Nuclear Deterrence. I can assure you that the answer will be quick, tough and convincing.”⁹⁴⁰

Debates on supplying fighter jets continued. **Biden** had dismissed Kyiv’s plea for dozens of F-16s to provide air support for troops and for protection against Russian attack planes on **January 30** (see above). However, in private conversations senior US officials indicated **in the first week of February** that this “no” was probably temporary and that it did not preclude the Administration from deciding later to provide F-16s, or to work out an agreement to allow another country to send its own F-16s to Ukraine. According to **American and European officials**, such transfers could come from Denmark or the Netherlands. Two officials noted that the US approval of sales or transfers of F-16s from partner nations to third-party countries could help reassure NATO countries that were concerned about being singled out by Russia for sending the advanced fighter planes.⁹⁴¹

Also in **early February**, US officials and some congressional aides admitted to be working on possible jet deliveries behind the scenes. However, US and European officials stressed that they were focused on sending the weapons Kyiv needed for the immediate fight. Accordingly, a senior US DoD official stated that he did not think the US government was “opposed on the fourth-generation aircraft issue, I just think we have to make sure that we continue to prioritize.” Similarly, an Eastern European senior diplomat voiced on **February 1** that delivering fighter aircraft was “an issue of longer-term perspective”, further stressing the need to deliver what was committed in January “as soon as possible.” Western diplomats also cautioned that it was impossible to send Kyiv jets and train pilots in time for a looming Russian offensive.⁹⁴²

Still, **US officials** stressed that bigger and better weapons that were publicly promised but not delivered right away sent a message to Russia, since a Ukrainian military with more fighter jets and tanks in perhaps a year would be able to mount counteroffensives to take back territory seized by Moscow. In what seemed to be a reaction to Macron’s stance of sending fighter jets to Ukraine only if such equipment would not be used “to touch Russian soil,” a US official said that after a year of warning the Ukrainians not to fire Western weaponry into Russia, the Ukrainian military had earned their trust.⁹⁴³ In response to the overall Western reluctance of sending fighter jets, Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister **Andriy Melnyk** stressed on **February 1** that the war was “far from over,” stating that “Putin appears to have

⁹⁴⁰ Nadana Fridrikhson, “Dmitry Medvedev answered several of my questions in writing,” *Telegram @FridrihShow*, February 4, 2023 [<https://t.me/FridrihShow/7596>]; Kevin Liffey, “Russia’s Medvedev says more U.S. weapons supplies mean ‘all of Ukraine will burn,’” *Reuters*, February 4, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-medvedev-says-more-us-weapons-supplies-mean-all-ukraine-will-burn-2023-02-04/>]. Andrew Stanton, “Russia Floats Nuclear Deterrence if Ukraine Attacks Crimea,” *Newsweek*, February 4, 2023 [<https://www.newsweek.com/russia-floats-nuclear-deterrence-if-ukraine-attacks-crimea-1778989>].

⁹⁴¹ Helene Cooper and Eric Schmitt, “What ‘No’ on F-16 Fighter Jets Might Mean for Ukraine,” *New York Times*, February 1, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/01/us/politics/ukraine-f16-russia.html>].

⁹⁴² Lara Seligman, Clea Caulcut, Cristina Gallardo and Cory Bennett, “Cool your jets: Why the West is making Ukraine wait for fighter planes,” *Politico*, February 1, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/fighter-jets-west-eu-us-ukraine-wait-planes-f-16-russia-war/>].

⁹⁴³ Helene Cooper and Eric Schmitt, “What ‘No’ on F-16 Fighter Jets Might Mean for Ukraine,” *New York Times*, February 1, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/01/us/politics/ukraine-f16-russia.html>].

even more appetite than ever,” but that “without air support you can’t fight a modern war.” The same day, a military adviser to the Ukrainian government assessed that the discussion on jets was simply in its “early days,” expressing optimism that the Western position would change in the coming weeks.⁹⁴⁴

Some additional details emerged on Berlin’s position vis-à-vis Ukraine. In an interview on **February 5**, **Scholz** underlined that Putin had not threatened Germany nor himself personally in a telephone call of the two leaders. But their very different positions on the war in Ukraine had become clear. Scholz had made it very clear to Putin that Russia carried the sole responsibility for the war; adding that “we cannot simply accept this, because it fundamentally violates European peace.” Asked whether the delivery of Leopard-2 tanks would lead to an increased threat for Germany, Scholz answered that Putin’s words were “part of a series of abstruse historical comparisons that he uses to justify his attack on Ukraine,” further stating that Germany had “carefully weighed each arms shipment and closely coordinated it with our allies, first and foremost America. This joint approach prevents an escalation of the war.”⁹⁴⁵

Meanwhile, a week after **Scholz** had committed to sending Leopard-2 tanks to Ukraine for two tank battalions in coordination with other European nations, doubts were mounting in the chancellery and in the defense resort whether these plans were feasible, due to missing commitments by European partners. Government circles confirmed that the compilation of battalions proved to be a painstaking effort. At a video conference held by German defense minister **Boris Pistorius** in late January, no EU country wanted to make concrete commitments on participation in sending a package of modern Leopard-2 A6 models. Scholz, Pistorius and **Tjorven Bellmann**, political director at the German foreign office, had started to ask for support in individual phone calls to send both battalions to Ukraine by the end of March. However, officials in the chancellery voiced doubts that sending two battalions of 40 tanks each was realistic, and thus adapted their aims to 31 tanks per battalion.⁹⁴⁶

The intense lobbying from Berlin bore some fruits on **February 7**, when the Netherlands and Denmark committed to help finance the purchase of around 100 decommissioned Leopard 1 tanks. Both countries agreed to jointly finance the refurbishment of the tanks and provide training for Ukrainian crews alongside Germany. However, officials stated that neither the Netherlands nor Denmark would send any of their own tanks to Ukraine.⁹⁴⁷ Portuguese PM **Antonio Costa** told parliament on **February 9** that Portugal was carrying out maintenance on Leopard 2 tanks, and would deliver three of them in March.⁹⁴⁸

Of the countries that had signaled they might send tanks to Ukraine if Germany allowed it, Finland, Sweden, Belgium and Spain, commitments were still missing as of **February 9**. However, officials from some of these states stated they would work together with allies on training and financing. While a Belgian

⁹⁴⁴ Lara Seligman, Clea Caulcut, Cristina Gallardo and Cory Bennett, “Cool your jets: Why the West is making Ukraine wait for fighter planes,” *Politico*, February 1, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/fighter-jets-west-eu-us-ukraine-wait-planes-f-16-russia-war/>].

⁹⁴⁵ Angelika Hellemann, Alexandra Würzbach and Niels Starnick, “Klimakleber? Viele schütteln den Kopf über solche Aktionen. Ich auch’: Der Kanzler über Putin, Horrorszenarien und seinen Hochzeitstag,” *BILD*, February 5, 2023 [<https://www.bild.de/politik/inland/politik-inland/olaf-scholz-im-bams-interview-klimakleber-viele-schuetteln-den-kopf-ich-auch-82789486.bild.html>].

⁹⁴⁶ Matthias Gebauer, Marina Kormbaki and Gerald Traufetter, “Der Kanzler redet den Panzer-Parnern ins Gewissen,” *Spiegel*, February 3, 2023 [<https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/waffenhilfe-fuer-die-ukraine-kanzler-olaf-scholz-redet-den-panzer-partnern-ins-gewissen-a-9a1da89b-0b76-4c2d-a93a-d7116dca071f>].

⁹⁴⁷ Bojan Pancevski, “Tanks Aren’t Arriving in Ukraine Despite Promises From European Allies,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 9, 2023 [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/europeans-reluctance-to-give-ukraine-tanks-leaves-germany-out-in-the-cold-11675948197>].

⁹⁴⁸ Bojan Pancevski, “Tanks Aren’t Arriving in Ukraine Despite Promises From European Allies,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 9, 2023 [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/europeans-reluctance-to-give-ukraine-tanks-leaves-germany-out-in-the-cold-11675948197>].

government spokesman stated that the state had no tanks to give, a senior Finnish official confirmed that Finland would be part of the Leopard 2 cooperation in some way, further noting that Finland had a policy of not revealing the aid it sent to Ukraine. A senior NATO official specified that Finland had signaled it might not directly engage in tank deliveries before having officially joined the alliance; and even after joining it would only be able to spare a few tanks.⁹⁴⁹

Bilateral arms control issues between Washington and Moscow became heated. In its **February 8** statement on the further reduction and limitation of strategic offensive arms, the **Russian foreign ministry** rejected “the US representatives’ allegations about Russia’s non-compliance” and further read that the US “hostile actions ... put in question the applicability of several crucial provisions of New START.” It further stated that the US had “actually launched a total hybrid war against Russia, which includes the risk of a direct military confrontation between two nuclear powers.” Still, the statement concluded by reaffirming Russia’s “unwavering commitment to New START.”⁹⁵⁰

Where in public NATO allies emphasized unity, positions on the future of the conflict in Ukraine seemed to diverge. When **Macron** and **Scholz** met **Zelensky** for dinner in Paris on **February 8**, they told him that he needed to start considering peace talks with Moscow, media reported weeks later, arguing that significant gains were unlikely and the price of a prolonged conflict was steep for all.⁹⁵¹

Media reports surfaced on **February 10** that **US officials** were providing or confirming coordinates for the vast majority of strikes with advanced US-provided rocket systems. This information was confirmed by three senior Ukrainian and one senior US official. The coordinates were delivered by US military personnel from a European base outside of Ukraine. Ukrainian officials said that this process was intended to give Washington confidence about providing Kyiv with longer-range weapons. A senior US official stated that the key US role in providing targeting assistance served to ensure accuracy and conserve limited stores of ammunition for maximum effectiveness, adding that the US provided targeting information solely in an advisory role. In an official statement, senior Pentagon officials highlighted the limitations of US involvement, underlining that the Ukrainians were “responsible for finding targets, prioritizing them and then ultimately deciding which ones to engage. The US does not approve targets, nor are we involved in the selection or engagement of targets.”⁹⁵²

On the same **February 10**, it was reported that current and former **US officials** had indicated that the **Pentagon** was urging Congress to resume funding for 2024 of a pair of top-secret programs which would allow American Special Operations troops to employ Ukrainian operatives to monitor Russian military movements and counter disinformation. Critics, including on Capitol Hill, stated such activities may draw the US into a more direct role in the Ukraine war, while defense officials highlighted the useful gain in intelligence and replied that the secretive surrogate programs would not contribute directly to Ukraine’s combat capabilities as they would be restricted to performing nonviolent tasks.⁹⁵³

⁹⁴⁹ Bojan Pancevski, “Tanks Aren’t Arriving in Ukraine Despite Promises From European Allies,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 9, 2023 [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/europeans-reluctance-to-give-ukraine-tanks-leaves-germany-out-in-the-cold-11675948197>].

⁹⁵⁰ “Foreign Ministry statement regarding the Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START),” *Russian Foreign Ministry*, February 8, 2023 [https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1852877/?lang=en].

⁹⁵¹ Bojan Pancevski and Laurence Norman, “NATO’s Biggest European Members Float Defense Pact With Ukraine,” *Wallstreet Journal*, February 24, 2023 [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/natos-biggest-european-members-float-defense-pact-with-ukraine-38966950>].

⁹⁵² Isabelle Khurshudyan et al., “Ukraine’s strikes rely on precision targets from U.S.,” *Washington Post*, February 10, 2023 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/02/09/ukraine-himars-rocket-artillery-russia/>].

⁹⁵³ Wesley Morgan, “Pentagon looks to restart top-secret programs in Ukraine,” *Washington Post*, February 10, 2023 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/02/10/us-special-operations-ukraine-surrogate-program/>].

Also on **February 10**, Russia targeted Ukraine's infrastructure with drones, rockets and cruise missiles across the country. The attack involved 71 cruise missiles and seven Iranian-made drones, of which Ukraine shut down 61 and five, respectively, according to an official statement. Despite heavy fighting, there was no evidence of a major breakthrough. According to Ukrainian officials, two Russian missiles crossed into Romanian airspace, whereas Bucharest rejected the claim. Missiles hit inter alia several high-voltage infrastructure sites and damaged power transmission lines.⁹⁵⁴

US weapons deliveries were by no means without problems. On **February 13**, media reported that **US officials** uttered concerns about the stockpile as a further argument why the transfer of ATACMS (range of approximately 300 km) to Ukraine would not be happening anytime soon.⁹⁵⁵

The Alliance continued to argue a common line. In his speech on **February 13**, **Stoltenberg** stated that Putin was "not preparing for peace," but "launching new offensives," underlining that NATO "must continue to provide Ukraine with what it needs to win. And to achieve a just and sustainable peace." Stoltenberg further called for increased munitions production and improved intelligence and surveillance, and underlined that the Russian spring offensive had already begun, with Russia sending "thousands and thousands of more troops, accepting a very high rate of casualties." As a "second main focus" he noted that when the war ended, NATO "should ensure that Ukraine is able to deter and defend itself," by working with Ukraine on long-term reforms, interoperability and long-term transition to NATO standards.⁹⁵⁶

In meetings with allies on **February 14**, **Austin** highlighted the threat of Russia's significant remaining air force. "He was very clear that we have a short window of time to help the Ukrainians to prepare for an offensive and that they had some pretty specific needs," a senior US Administration official said. Later that day, Austin said that the US did not see imminent signs of a "massive aerial attack" in Ukraine, but that Washington and its allies were rushing as much air defense capability to Ukraine as they could. He added that "Russia has substantial aircraft ... and a lot of capability left." According to a **senior NATO diplomat**, "more than 80 per cent" of Russia's air force was probably "safe and available." Germany's defense minister **Boris Pistorius** on **February 14** confirmed that Rheinmetall would restart production of ammunition for Gepard anti-aircraft guns to support Kyiv. In this context, a US official voiced that fighter jets were not as capable against the Russian air force as an integrated air defense system.⁹⁵⁷ In the **second week of February**, US officials furthermore urged Ukrainian officials to prioritize the timing and execution of the spring counteroffensive, and deprioritize defending Bakhmut. A senior US official claimed that if Russia took Bakhmut this would "not result in any significant strategic shift in the battlefield."⁹⁵⁸

⁹⁵⁴ Marc Santora, "Russia-Ukraine War: Russia Fires Scores of Missiles While Ramping Up Winter Offensive," *New York Times*, February 10, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/02/10/world/russia-ukraine-news?smid=url-share#ukraine-says-russia-fired-missiles-and-drones-in-waves-to-evade-air-defense-systems>].

⁹⁵⁵ Paul McLeary, Lara Seligman and Alexander Ward, "U.S. tells Ukraine it won't send long-range missiles because it has few to spare," *Politico*, February 13, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/02/13/u-s-wont-send-long-range-missiles-ukraine-00082652>].

⁹⁵⁶ Jens Stoltenberg, "Pre-ministerial press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg ahead of the meetings of NATO Defence Ministers," *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, February 13, 2023 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_211689.htm].

⁹⁵⁷ Felicia Schwartz and Henry Foy, "Western intelligence shows Russians amassing aircraft on Ukraine border," *Financial Times*, February 14, 2023 [<https://www.ft.com/content/3fd6e91f-71e4-4c02-9360-be20a2a78763>].

⁹⁵⁸ Yasmeen Abutaleb and John Hudson, "US warns Ukraine it faces pivotal moment in war," *Washington Post*, February 14, 2023 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/02/13/us-ukraine-war-critical-moment/>].

The Biden Administration also seemed concerned with deepening Russian-Chinese ties. On the eve of the Munich security conference on **February 16**, spokesman for the Chinese foreign ministry **Wang Webin** said Beijing stood “ready to work with Russia to further advance our comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era.”⁹⁵⁹ On **February 18**, **Blinken** said Washington had indications that Beijing was “considering providing lethal support to Russia in its aggression against Ukraine.” He stated to have made clear that “that would have serious consequences in our own relationship.”⁹⁶⁰ The same day, **Harris** also warned China against supporting Russia in a speech to the Munich security conference, and US officials said they had shared intelligence with allies.⁹⁶¹

Nonetheless, Chinese officials did not seem deterred. On **February 19**, China’s UN ambassador **Zhang Jun** called on the US and Russia to “continue to negotiate with each other in finding a good solution.”⁹⁶² On **February 20**, **Wenbin** pointed out that it was the US not China that had been “incessantly supplying weapons to the battlefield.” He asked Washington to “stop shirking responsibility and disseminating fake news” and stressed that China would “continue firmly standing on the side of dialogue and the side of peace.”⁹⁶³ In reaction, **Borrell** warned **February 20** against China sending arms to Russia, saying it would be a “red line.”⁹⁶⁴ On the same day, Swedish foreign minister **Billström** stated that if such a decision was taken by China it would “definitely have consequences,” with Sweden standing “side by side with the United States on this message.” Lithuania’s **Landsbergis** also underlined that the EU would be on the same page as the US should China send arms to Russia. He also said that drawing from the lesson that the West reacted united to the Russian attack against Ukraine, “there would be enough arguments for China not to assist Russia in its genocidal war in Ukraine.”⁹⁶⁵ **US officials and some European officials** said that Chinese officials were trying to make it appear as if China was a neutral broker seeking a peace agreement when in reality it would be edging toward giving material aid to the Russian war effort. **Zelensky** reportedly said that China giving weapons to Russia would result in a “world war,” and that he hoped Chinese leaders would refrain from doing so after making a “practical assessment.”⁹⁶⁶ On **February 21**, Chinese foreign minister **Qin Gang** said that China was “deeply worried that the Ukraine conflict will continue to escalate or even spiral out of control,” and called on “certain countries to immediately stop fueling the fire,” adding that they must “stop hyping up today Ukraine, tomorrow Taiwan.” The same day, China released a paper on the Global Security Initiative (GSI), Xi’s flagship security proposal

⁹⁵⁹ Edward Wong, “U.S. Warnings to China on Arms Aid for Russia’s War Portend Global Rift,” February 19, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/19/world/europe/us-china-weapons-russia-ukraine.html>].

⁹⁶⁰ Chris Buckley, “China Says U.A. Is ‘Not Qualified’ to Issue Orders on Arms,” *New York Times*, February 20, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/20/world/asia/china-russia-us-arms.html>]; Edward Wong, “U.S. Warnings to China on Arms Aid for Russia’s War Portend Global Rift,” *New York Times*, February 19, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/19/world/europe/us-china-weapons-russia-ukraine.html>].

⁹⁶¹ Edward Wong, “U.S. Warnings to China on Arms Aid for Russia’s War Portend Global Rift,” *New York Times*, February 19, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/19/world/europe/us-china-weapons-russia-ukraine.html>].

⁹⁶² “Putin raises tension on Ukraine, suspends START nuclear pact,” *AP*, February 22, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-politics-de0af48be7ea480ccb0175f55a065363>].

⁹⁶³ Chris Buckley, “China Says U.A. Is ‘Not Qualified’ to Issue Orders on Arms,” *New York Times*, February 20, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/20/world/asia/china-russia-us-arms.html>].

⁹⁶⁴ Martin Pollard, Laurie Chen and Bernard Orr, “China says certain countries must stop ‘fueling the fire’ in Ukraine,” *Reuters*, February 21, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-says-it-is-deeply-worried-about-escalation-ukraine-conflict-2023-02-21/>].

⁹⁶⁵ Stuart Lau, “EU top diplomat says China will cross ‘red line’ if it sends arms to Russia,” *Politico*, February 20, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-diplomat-josep-borrel-china-russia-ukraine-war/>].

⁹⁶⁶ Edward Wong, “U.S. Warnings to China on Arms Aid for Russia’s War Portend Global Rift,” *New York Times*, February 19, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/19/world/europe/us-china-weapons-russia-ukraine.html>].

which aims to uphold the principle of “indivisible security.”⁹⁶⁷ Also on the same **March 21**, at a press conference with Kuleba in Brussels, **Borrell** told journalists that **Wang Yi** had told him in a private discussion at the MSC that China was “not providing arms to Russia” and “will not provide arms to Russia.”⁹⁶⁸

On **February 19**, **Russia’s defense ministry** stated that radioactive substances had allegedly been transported to Ukraine from a European country and that Kyiv was preparing a large-scale “provocation.” The statement further read that the aim of the provocation was “to accuse Russia’s army of allegedly carrying out indiscriminate strikes on hazardous radioactive facilities in Ukraine, leading to the leakage of radioactive substances and contamination of the area.” Ukraine and its allies dismissed these accusations as cynical attempts to spread disinformation and accused Moscow to be planning incidents itself, seeking to blame Ukraine.⁹⁶⁹

Probably around **February 20**, **Russia** unsuccessfully tested a SARMAT missile. Moscow had notified Washington in advance of the launch in accordance to its arms control obligations, and US officials noted such testing was “routine,” posed no risk to the United States, and was not seen by the Administration as an escalation. US officials believed that, had the test been successful, Putin would have highlighted the capability in his subsequent speech.⁹⁷⁰

171.	Warning
Nuclear rhetoric returned even at the Presidential level. In his state-of-the-nation address on February 21 , Putin repeated his narrative that the Ukraine war had been forced on Russia, particularly by NATO’s eastward expansion since the Cold War: “It’s they who have started the war. And we are using force to end it.” The “Kyiv regime” and “Western overlords” had “effectively occupied this country.” He alleged that the US government intended “to transform a local conflict into a phase of global confrontation,” and stressed that Russia would “react accordingly, because in this case we are talking about the existence of our country.” ⁹⁷¹	

During the same speech, **Putin** also announced the suspension of Russia’s participation in the New START treaty. According to Putin, some people in Washington were considering breaking a moratorium on nuclear testing. He stressed that “if the US conducts tests, then we will. No one should have dangerous illusions that global strategic parity can be destroyed,” further stating that “a week ago, I signed a decree on putting new ground-based strategic systems on combat duty.” Putin further said Ukraine had sought to strike a facility far inside Russia where it stationed nuclear bombers.⁹⁷² In reaction to Putin’s

⁹⁶⁷ Martin Pollard, Laurie Chen and Bernard Orr, “China says certain countries must stop ‘fueling the fire’ in Ukraine,” *Reuters*, February 21, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-says-it-is-deeply-worried-about-escalation-ukraine-conflict-2023-02-21/>].

⁹⁶⁸ “Ukraine: Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell at the joint press conference with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Kuleba and NATO Secretary-General Stoltenberg,” *EEAS*, February 21, 2023 [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ukraine-remarks-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-joint-press-conference_en].

⁹⁶⁹ “Russia accuses Kyiv of planning to stage nuclear incident,” *Reuters*, February 19, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-accuses-kyiv-planning-stage-nuclear-incident-2023-02-19/>].

⁹⁷⁰ Oren Lieberman and Natasha Bertrand, “US believes Russia had failed intercontinental ballistic missile test around when Biden was in Ukraine,” *CNN*, February 22, 2023 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/02/21/politics/russia-intercontinental-ballistic-missile-test/index.html>].

⁹⁷¹ “Putin raises tension on Ukraine, suspends START nuclear pact,” *AP*, February 22, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-politics-de0af48be7ea480ccb0175f55a065363>].

⁹⁷² Guy Faulconbridge, “Russia’s Putin issues new nuclear warnings to West over Ukraine,” *Reuters*, February 22, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/putin-update-russias-elite-ukraine-war-major-speech-2023-02-21/>]; “Putin raises tension on

speech, **Russia's foreign ministry** said later on **February 21** that Moscow intended to continue abiding by the restrictions outlined in New START on the number of warheads it could deploy.⁹⁷³ It also said Russia would continue to exchange information about test launches of ballistic missiles per earlier agreements with the United States.⁹⁷⁴

Russian rhetoric notwithstanding, the Biden Administration demonstrated strong support for Ukraine. On **February 20-21**, **Biden** made a surprise visit to Ukraine – an audacious move meant to demonstrate American resolve to help Ukraine defeat the Russian forces. Biden was the first President in generations to travel to an area that was not under the control of US forces. American military planes hovered in eastern Poland, but officials told journalists that they never entered Ukrainian airspace out of concern that it would be interpreted as the sort of direct US intervention the Administration had sought to avoid.⁹⁷⁵

The **US President** gave a speech on **February 21** in Poland to mark the one-year anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Biden said that "democracies of the world will stand guard over freedom today, tomorrow and forever" and that "Ukraine will never be a victory for Russia." However, he stressed that neither the United States nor European nations were seeking "to control or destroy Russia." The West was not "plotting to attack Russia, as Putin said today." Biden also noted that "millions of Russian citizens who only want to live in peace with their neighbors are not the enemy. This war was never a necessity; it's a tragedy. President Putin chose this war. Every day the war continues is his choice. He could end the war with a word." Biden moreover pledged continued support for Ukraine during the "hard and bitter days ahead, victories and tragedies," adding "let there be no doubt, the commitment of the United States and our NATO Alliance and Article 5 is rock solid."⁹⁷⁶

The **Biden Administration** condemned Putin's decision to suspend New START on the same day, castigating Putin but also stressing that the US would not abandon efforts to cooperate on nuclear precautions. **Blinken** called the suspension "deeply unfortunate and irresponsible," adding that Washington would "be watching carefully to see what Russia actually does." Blinken told reporters that "we'll of course make sure that, in any event, we are postured appropriately for the security of our country and our allies."⁹⁷⁷

Ukraine, suspends START nuclear pact," *AP*, February 22, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-politics-de0af48be7ea480ccb0175f55a065363>].

⁹⁷³ Guy Faulconbridge, "Russia's Putin issues new nuclear warnings to West over Ukraine," *Reuters*, February 22, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/putin-update-russias-elite-ukraine-war-major-speech-2023-02-21/>].

⁹⁷⁴ "Putin raises tension on Ukraine, suspends START nuclear pact," *AP*, February 22, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-politics-de0af48be7ea480ccb0175f55a065363>].

⁹⁷⁵ "Putin raises tension on Ukraine, suspends START nuclear pact," *AP*, February 22, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-politics-de0af48be7ea480ccb0175f55a065363>]; Matt Berg and Nahal Toosi, "U.S. rebukes Putin as 'irresponsible' on nukes," *Politico*, February 21, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/02/21/blinden-putin-nuclear-treaty-00083740>]; Nandita Bose and Guy Faulconbridge, "Biden says Ukraine 'stands strong', Russia gives nuclear warning," *Reuters*, February 22, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/biden-says-russia-will-never-defeat-ukraine-after-kremlin-suspends-nuclear-2023-02-21/>]. For Biden's trip to Ukraine, Peter Baker and Michael D. Shear, "Biden's Surreal and Secretive Journey Into a War Zone," *New York Times*, February 20, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/20/us/politics/biden-kyiv-ukraine.html?smid=url-share>].

⁹⁷⁶ "Remarks by President Biden Ahead of the One-Year Anniversary of Russia's Brutal and Unprovoked Invasion of Ukraine," *White House*, February 21, 2023 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/02/21/remarks-by-president-biden-ahead-of-the-one-year-anniversary-of-russias-brutal-and-unprovoked-invasion-of-ukraine/>].

⁹⁷⁷ Matt Berg and Nahal Toosi, "U.S. rebukes Putin as 'irresponsible' on nukes," *Politico*, February 21, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/02/21/blinden-putin-nuclear-treaty-00083740>].

172.	Warning
<p>Moscow responded with more nuclear rhetoric. Also on February 22, Medvedev stated that Washington had been supplying high “gigantic volumes of arms” to Ukraine “to defeat, contain and destroy Russia.” He added that “if the US wants to defeat Russia, then we are on the verge of a global conflict. If the US wants to defeat Russia, then we have the right to defend ourselves with any weapon, including nuclear weapons.” He also stated that Russia had suspended its participation in the New START treaty so the West could not defeat it on the battlefield, urging US elites “to think what they’ve done.” Medvedev furthermore alleged that “if Russia stops its special operation, without achieving victory, there will be no Russia, it will be torn apart. If the US stops supplying weapons to the Kyiv regime, the war will end.”⁹⁷⁸</p>	

In Washington, the Biden Administration offered some clarifications on China’s potential intentions. On **February 24, Blinken** told an interviewer that Washington had “picked up information” over the previous months that China was considering sending lethal aid and systematically avoiding sanctions on Russia. This had been the reason Blinken had met with Wang Yi in Munich, to tell him that such policy choices in Beijing would be a “serious problem in the relationship.”⁹⁷⁹ On **February 26, Burns** clarified that US officials believed that China was considering sending weapons to Russia, though they “don’t see that a final decision has been made yet, and we don’t see evidence of actual shipments of lethal equipment.”⁹⁸⁰

Beijing seemed bent to both appease Washington and retain its freedom of movement. The **Chinese Foreign Ministry** released a position paper on Ukraine on **February 24**, after **Wang** had visited Moscow and met **Putin** on **February 22**, after having attended the Munich Security Conference the previous weekend. The Chinese “peace plan” reiterated Beijing’s opposition to the use of nuclear weapons, but also called for the resumption of peace talks and an end to unilateral sanctions. It also criticized NATO expansion and “Cold War mentality.”⁹⁸¹

Some details emerged in Moscow with respect to the Kremlin’s stance towards New START. **Putin** said in an interview recorded on **February 22** and broadcasted on **February 26** that, when “all leading NATO countries had declared their main goal to inflict a strategic defeat” on Russia, Moscow had to “take into account their nuclear capabilities” – thus suggesting that arms control negotiations would have to involve Britain and France. Putin also appealed to nationalist sentiments in Russia by claiming that the West was bent on breaking the Russian Federation apart.⁹⁸²

Some internal Russian dynamics emerged from Western reporters’ inquiries. For an article published on **February 23, Putin confidants** argued that the Russian leader had become even more isolated since

⁹⁷⁸ Elena Teslova, “Medvedev says if US stops arms deliveries to Ukraine, war will end,” *Anadolu Agency*, February 22, 2023 [<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/medvedev-says-if-us-stops-arms-deliveries-to-ukraine-war-will-end/2827825>].

⁹⁷⁹ Jeffrey Goldberg and Morgan Ome, “Blinken: I Understand Why Zelensky Is Demanding That the U.S. ‘Do Even More and Do It Even Faster’,” *Atlantic*, February 26, 2023 [<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/02/antony-blinken-ukraine-jeffrey-goldberg-zelensky/673188/>].

⁹⁸⁰ “Transcript: CIA director William Burns on ‘Face the Nation,’” Feb. 26, 2023, *CBS News*, February 26, 2023 [<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/william-burns-cia-director-face-the-nation-transcript-02-26-2023/>].

⁹⁸¹ Nectar Gan and Simone McCarthy, “China calls for Russia-Ukraine ceasefire as claims to neutrality questioned,” *CNN*, February 24, 2023 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/02/23/china/china-position-political-settlement-ukraine-intl-hnk/>]. See also “China’s Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis,” *Website of the MFA of the PRC*, February 24, 2023 [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202302/t20230224_11030713.html].

⁹⁸² Andrew Katell, “Putin: will ‘take into account’ NATO’s nuclear capability,” *AP*, February 26, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/putin-nato-politics-russia-government-united-states-0bffeabd258654bed617653ee078ff35>].

the start of the war. “People who don’t trust anyone start trusting a very small number of people who lie to them,” one said. Given Putin’s prizing of loyalty and secrecy over competence, his underlings were telling him what he wanted to hear, a number of confidants assessed. “He’s of sound mind. He’s reasonable. He’s not crazy. But nobody can be an expert on everything. They need to be honest with him and they are not,” a longtime Putin confidant told reporters. Some of the more liberal officials had attempted to convince Putin to end the war by pointing to the economic damage of sanctions. But the Russian leader had insisted that he had “already factored in the discounts.” He admitted that he had underestimated how difficult it would be to achieve his aims. But he still refused to end the conflict. Many within the Russian elite assumed the fight had become existential for Putin. However, the Russian leader had gamed out the possibility of using a nuclear weapon in Ukraine and had come to the conclusion that it would not benefit him, two people close to the Kremlin told reporters. Overall, their assessment was that Putin hoped Russia could still outlast Western commitment to Ukraine. A former Kremlin official noted that the alternative was too difficult for Putin to contemplate – facing a disastrous defeat for Russia, he would have to abandon power, maybe even lose his life.⁹⁸³

US officials tried to reassure with respect to Russia’s nuclear intentions. On the same **February 23, Sullivan** told an expert audience that there was no concern that Putin would use strategic nuclear weapons on Ukraine or against NATO. But there were internal concerns within the Administration that Moscow might use tactical nuclear weapons on the Ukrainian battlefield, though there was no acute sign that it was going to happen soon. The US national security advisor also said that Washington would have to offer Kyiv “commitments” strong enough to deter Russia from invading again – but he noted that the end of fighting or real negotiations were not in sight.⁹⁸⁴

Once again, differences in views within the Alliance resurfaced. **France, Britain, and Germany** sought to establish stronger ties between NATO and Ukraine in order to encourage Kyiv to start negotiations with Moscow, journalists reported on **February 24**. A week prior, London had laid out a blueprint to give Ukraine much broader access to advanced military equipment, weapons and ammunition to defend itself once the war ended. Reportedly, all three capitals supported the initiative as a way to boost Ukrainian confidence and give Kyiv an incentive to start talks with Russia, but also to show Russia how committed the West was. However, the proposal would not include neither security guarantees, nor any stationing of NATO forces in Ukraine, and NATO membership would not be part of the package.⁹⁸⁵

Mere days before Scholz was scheduled to meet Biden in Washington, US-German relations appeared strained with respect to weapons deliveries to Ukraine. **Sullivan** told a TV journalist on **February 26** that the White House had not wanted to send Abrams, as these would not be “useful on the battlefield in this fight,” but Biden had relented to obtain German deliveries on Leopard tanks. Spokespersons of the German government denied a direct linkage and insisted the bilateral talks had been “constructive.”⁹⁸⁶ The Biden Administration also kept restating its support for Ukraine, but also its desire to keep the conflict limited and the need to dissuade Russian use of nuclear weapons. **Blinken** told an interviewer on **February 26** that US support for Ukraine was “fundamental” and “for as long as it takes,” but underlined

⁹⁸³ Max Seddon et al, “How Putin blundered into Ukraine — then doubled down,” *Financial Times*, February 23, 2023 [<https://www.ft.com/content/80002564-33e8-48fb-b734-44810afb7a49>].

⁹⁸⁴ Alexander Ward et al, “What Jake Sullivan privately said about the war,” *Politico*, February 24, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/02/24/what-jake-sullivan-privately-said-about-the-war-00084290>].

⁹⁸⁵ Bojan Pancevski and Laurence Norman, “NATO’s Biggest European Members Float Defense Pact With Ukraine,” *Wallstreet Journal*, February 24, 2023 [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/natos-biggest-european-members-float-defense-pact-with-ukraine-38966950>].

⁹⁸⁶ Alexander Ward, “Tanks for nothing,” *Politico*, February 27, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/02/27/tanks-for-nothing-00084521>].

that that Administration did not want to “broaden this war” and “do anything to create a wider conflagration.” Blinken also noted that, beyond US warnings, China and India engaging Putin directly about “their absolute opposition to any use of nuclear weapons” had “some effect.”⁹⁸⁷ On the next day, **February 27**, US Treasury Secretary **Janet Yellen** made a surprise visit to Kyiv and stated during a meeting with Zelensky that she brought with her “a clear message from President Biden and the American people: We will stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes.”⁹⁸⁸

On **February 28**, a Ukrainian drone crashed around 100 km southeast of Moscow in an apparent attempt to reach the capital, Russian authorities claimed.⁹⁸⁹

173.	Warning
On the same day, a US official underlined the high costs of Russian nuclear use. Colin Kahl told Congress on February 28 that the good news was that he did not think Russia was likely to use nuclear weapons. “Any use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine, on any scale would be considered a world changing event that would bring about severe consequences far in excess of anything the Russians have experienced to date,” he said. “A lot of the restraints we’ve been operating under would no longer [continue] in a world where Russia crossed that threshold.” ⁹⁹⁰	

March 2023: Russian nuclear rhetoric returns in full force

At the beginning of March, in Washington, the **Biden Administration** seemed bent to sanction China if it chose to deliver weapons to Russia. A report emerging on **March 1** noted that the US government was sounding out allies about the possibility of imposing such sanctions – but details had not yet been finalized.⁹⁹¹

In an attempt to urge Beijing to use its influence over Moscow, ahead of the G20 meeting, **Scholz** stated on **March 2** that it was “disappointing” that Beijing “was no longer willing to reaffirm what was still the consensus” during the meetings of G20 finance ministers in India the week before – “a clear condemnation of the Russian attack.” Still, he praised China’s “unequivocal” opposition to Russian nuclear threats, which according to Scholz “has helped de-escalate the situation,” also acknowledging that the recent 12-point peace plan of Beijing reaffirmed this “clear message” against the use of nuclear, biological or chemical weapons of mass destruction. He added that his message to Beijing was clear, “use your influence in

⁹⁸⁷ Jeffrey Goldberg and Morgan Ome, “Blinken: I Understand Why Zelensky Is Demanding That the U.S. ‘Do Even More and Do It Even Faster’,” *Atlantic*, February 26, 2023 [<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/02/antony-blinken-ukraine-jeffrey-goldberg-zelensky/673188/>].

⁹⁸⁸ Kelly Garrity, “Biden will back Ukraine for ‘as long as it takes,’ Yellen says in Kyiv,” *Politico*, February 27, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/02/27/treasury-sec-trip-ukraine-00084557>].

⁹⁸⁹ “Drone crashes in failed attack southeast of Moscow, regional governor says,” *Reuters*, February 28, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/moscow-says-ukraine-launched-failed-drone-attacks-russian-territory-overnight-2023-02-28/>].

⁹⁹⁰ Ben Makuch, “Putin Unlikely to Use Nukes in Ukraine, Pentagon Says,” *Vice*, February 28, 2023 [<https://www.vice.com/en/article/bvmwk4/pentagon-putin-nukes-ukraine>]. See also “Full Committee Hearing: Oversight of US Military Support to Ukraine,” *HASC Website*, February 28, 2023 [<https://armedservices.house.gov/hearings/full-committee-hearing-oversight-us-military-support-ukraine>].

⁹⁹¹ Trevor Hunnicutt and Michael Martina, “US seeks allies’ backing for possible China sanctions over Ukraine war,” *Reuters*, March 1, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/us-seeks-allies-backing-possible-china-sanctions-over-ukraine-war-sources-2023-03-01/>].

Moscow to press for the withdrawal of Russian troops.” He also reiterated towards Beijing: “Do not supply weapons to Russia.”⁹⁹²

Meanwhile, also on **March 2**, **Blinken** and **Lavrov** had a short 10-minute conversation during a G20 meeting in New Delhi. According to a US official, Blinken said that the United States would continue to support Ukraine in its defense against Russia for as long as it takes to end the war and that Russia should rejoin the New START treaty.⁹⁹³

Tensions in Ukraine continued unabated. On the same **March 2**, **Putin** accused Ukrainian saboteurs of crossing the border in the southern Bryansk region and staging “terrorist attacks” – officials in Kyiv stated these were false “provocations” that could be used by Moscow to escalate the conflict.⁹⁹⁴ However, on **March 6**, **Ukrainian special forces** said that they had indeed destroyed an unmanned observation tower in the Bryansk region.⁹⁹⁵

174.	Warning
One day later, Russian officials again warned that the conflict in Ukraine could escalate. Ryabkov told the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva on March 3 that US and NATO were following a “policy of fueling the conflict in Ukraine” and warned that “increasing involvement in the military confrontation is fraught with a direct military clash of nuclear powers with catastrophic consequences.” ⁹⁹⁶	

On the same **March 3**, **Scholz** made a low-key visit to Washington to meet Biden. Russia’s war in Ukraine was thought to be one of the topics for discussion, but few details emerged.⁹⁹⁷

Over the following days, after months of struggle, the battle over **Bakhmut** seemed to be reaching a climax. While the city held little strategic value, both sides seemed convinced that this was a contest to see which side could break the other.⁹⁹⁸

In Germany, the chancellor again discussed China’s involvement in Ukraine. Close to Berlin, at a two-day retreat of the German government, **Scholz** said on **March 5** that China had declared it would not send Russia weapons for its war against Ukraine, suggesting Germany had received bilateral assurances to this end. If China were to aid Russia, this “would have consequences,” Scholz said, but he was “relatively

⁹⁹² Hans von der Burchard, “Scholz urges China to talk to Ukraine, not deliver weapons to Russia,” *Politico*, March 02, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-olaf-scholz-urges-china-to-talk-to-ukraine-not-deliver-weapons-to-russia-war-zeiten-wende/>].

⁹⁹³ Kelly Hooper, “Blinken, Lavrov speak briefly at G-20 meeting,” *Politico*, March 2, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/03/02/blinken-lavrov-speak-briefly-at-g-20-meeting-00085159>].

⁹⁹⁴ Matthew Bodner and Henry Austin, “Putin claims ‘terrorist attack’ near Ukrainian border; Kyiv denies involvement,” *NBC News*, March 2, 2023 [<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/russia-claims-ukrainian-sabotage-bryansk-putin-terrorist-attack-rcna73034>].

⁹⁹⁵ Marc Santora, “Ukraine Claims a Drone Strike on a Military Target Inside Russia,” *New York Times*, March 6, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/06/world/europe/drone-attacks-bryansk-russia.html>].

⁹⁹⁶ James Keaten, “Russian envoy says nuclear powers may clash over Ukraine,” *AP*, March 2, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-us-nuclear-un-disarmament-0c7cff508a1c86814bb9b1feeea32b33>].

⁹⁹⁷ Erika Solomon, “Germany’s Scholz Visits Washington Amid Worries Over Ukraine ‘End Game’,” *New York Times*, March 3, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/03/world/europe/scholz-biden-ukraine-war.html>].

⁹⁹⁸ Carlotta Gall, “Ukrainian Soldiers, Nearly Encircled, Push Russians Back,” *New York Times*, March 6, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/06/world/europe/ukraine-bakhmut-battle.html>].

optimistic” that China would refrain from such steps. **Von der Leyen**, who also attended the retreat, said the EU had “no evidence” regarding lethal supplies from Beijing to Moscow.⁹⁹⁹

Questions pertaining to China seemed particularly important as much suggested the war was going to be long-lasting. The US intelligence community assessed that the war in Ukraine was not going to end soon. On **March 8**, **Haines** told Congress that Russia’s military was unlikely to make “major territorial gains” in 2023, which could present an opportunity for additional nuclear threats. Putin assessed that time worked in his favor and that “prolonging the war” might be “his best remaining pathway to eventually securing Russian strategic interests in Ukraine, even if it takes years.”¹⁰⁰⁰

During the night of **March 8-9**, **Russia** launched a massive rocket attack across Ukraine striking critical infrastructure and residential buildings in ten regions. Moscow said the strikes were in retaliation for the alleged Ukrainian incursion into the Bryansk region. Russia used around 80 missiles and 8 drones in its largest attack in weeks, out of which Ukraine intercepted 34 missiles and 4 drones, Ukrainian forces stated. Among the missiles were 6 Kinzhal cruise missiles. Almost half of Kyiv’s residents were left without heat, and the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant lost power.¹⁰⁰¹ On **March 9**, a Ukrainian military spokesperson noted that Ukraine had no weapons capable of shooting Kinzhals down. Their use significantly increased the proportion of Russia’s missiles reaching targets. Russia had also fired more ballistic missiles and fewer cruise missiles, which might have also increased the success rate of strikes.¹⁰⁰²

Meanwhile, the debate on sending fighter jets to Ukraine continued. On **March 9**, Slovak Defense Minister **Jaroslav Nad** said his Polish counterpart had told him that Warsaw would agree to a joint process to hand over MiG-29 jets to Ukraine, adding that the time had come also for Slovakia to take a decision on the matter. The same day, **Pawel Szrot**, head of the Polish president’s office, stated that Poland would deliver the fighter jets “in a broader international coalition.”¹⁰⁰³

Reactions to the Russian announcement to suspend its New START participation also continued. On **March 10**, the US State Department confirmed that the US was still sending New START notifications to Russia even though Moscow had stopped sending theirs to Washington on February 28. Accordingly, State Department spokesperson **Ned Price** said “Russia has not provided any New START notifications since it notified the United States that its purported suspension has taken effect. As the United States explores next steps, we remain in full compliance with the treaty.”¹⁰⁰⁴

⁹⁹⁹ Gabriel Rinaldi and Hans von der Burchard, “Germany’s Scholz says China ‘declared it will not deliver’ weapons to Russia,” *Politico*, March 5, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/china-ukraine-war-russia-weapon-deliveries-scholz-putin-zelenskyy-xi-jinping/>].

¹⁰⁰⁰ Amanda Macias, “U.S. intel chiefs warn Putin is expanding his nuclear weapons arsenal as the war in Ukraine drags on,” *CNBC*, March 8, 2023 [<https://www.cnn.com/2023/03/08/us-intel-chiefs-warn-putin-is-becoming-more-reliant-on-nuclear-weapons.html>]. See also Senate Hearing, March 8, 2023 [<https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/hearings/open-hearing-worldwide-threats-3>].

¹⁰⁰¹ Hanna Arhrova and Elena Becatoros, “Russian missile barrage slams into Ukrainian cities,” *AP*, March 9, 2023 [<https://ap-news.com/article/ukraine-russia-war-kyiv-odesa-kharkiv-40714ec02d628a95458594da6ba8a80e>].

¹⁰⁰² John Ismay, Matthew Mpoke Bigg and Andrew E. Kramer, “Questions surround Russia’s use of hypersonic missiles in its latest attack,” *New York Times*, March 9, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/09/world/europe/hypersonic-missiles-russia-ukraine.html>].

¹⁰⁰³ “Slovak defence minister says time to decide on sending MiG-29s to Ukraine,” *Reuters*, March 9, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/slovak-defence-minister-says-time-decide-sending-mig-29-jets-ukraine-2023-03-09/>].

¹⁰⁰⁴ Alexander Ward and Matt Berg, “What HFAC’s McCaul wants from State,” *Politico*, March 10, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/03/10/what-hfac-mccaul-wants-from-state-00086528>].

In mid-March, a collision between Russian fighter jets and a US drone caught international attention. On **March 14**, a Russian fighter jet collided with a US MQ-9 Reaper drone, marking the first time one of these aerial intercepts “resulted in a splashing of one of our drones,” according to NSC spokesperson **Kirby**. The drone was making a routine flight in international airspace, and Washington had not considered it necessary to advise Russia in advance of such flights, as they had been going on for more than a year, Kirby noted. Prior to the collision, two Su-27 warplanes had dumped jet fuel on the drone and flew in front of it in a “reckless, environmentally unsound and unprofessional manner,” **US European Command** stated, adding that these “aggressive actions by Russian aircrew are dangerous and could lead to miscalculation and unintended escalation.” One of the Russian aircrafts then struck the drone’s propeller, which led the Reaper to crash into the Black Sea, stated Air Force General **James Hecker**, commander of US Air Forces Europe, further stressing that “US and Allied aircraft will continue to operate in international airspace and we call on the Russians to conduct themselves professionally and safely.” Hecker added that the collision followed “a pattern of dangerous actions” involving US and allied aircraft and Russian planes. **Price** said the US ambassador in Moscow had voiced concerns to the Russian Foreign Ministry. The US State Department summoned Anatoly Antonov, the Russian ambassador in Washington. A **State Department spokesperson** stated that Antonov met with Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs **Karen Donfried** “to discuss Russia’s unsafe and unprofessional operations over the Black Sea, which resulted in the downing today of an unmanned US aircraft.”¹⁰⁰⁵

In turn, **Antonov** said the drone had been conducting “unacceptable” activity in Russia’s vicinity, claiming that the drone had been collecting data and passing it to Ukraine to enable it to conduct strikes on Russian territory.¹⁰⁰⁶ Following the meeting with Donfried on **March 14**, Antonov further described the US drone flight as a “provocation” and argued that there was no reason for US military aircraft and warships to be near Russia’s border. He insisted that the Russian warplanes did not hit the US drone or fire their weapons, adding that Moscow wanted “pragmatic” ties with Washington and stating “we don’t want any confrontation between the US and Russia.”¹⁰⁰⁷

Accordingly, the **Russian Defense Ministry** stated the US drone was flying over the Black Sea near Crimea and intruded in an area that was declared off limits by Russia as part of what it called its “special military operation” in Ukraine, causing the military to scramble fighters to intercept it. “As a result of a sharp maneuver, the MQ-9 drone went into unguided flight with a loss of altitude and crashed into the water,” the statement read. “The Russian fighters didn’t use their weapons, didn’t come into contact with the unmanned aerial vehicle, and they safely returned to their base.”¹⁰⁰⁸

Russian posturing continued at the highest levels. On the same **March 14**, **Putin** visited an aviation production plant and stated that Western states were seeking to “improve their geopolitical standing” in Ukraine, but Moscow was fighting for the “existence of Russian statehood.” He said: “For us, it’s not a geopolitical task,” but “it’s the task of survival of Russian statehood and the creation of conditions for the future development of our country” – he did, however, not mention any means by which he thought to

¹⁰⁰⁵ Nahal Toosi and Lawrence Ukenye, “Russian jet’s collision with U.S. drone sparks diplomatic flurry,” *Politico*, March 14, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/03/14/prussian-jet-collides-with-u-s-drone-00086994>].

¹⁰⁰⁶ Elena Becatoros and Darlene Superville, “US and Russia ratchet up rhetoric over downing of drone,” *AP*, March 15, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/ukraine-russia-war-drone-pentagon-9f4b3e8fdd719c0fa91a0683228b9e51>].

¹⁰⁰⁷ Karl Ritter, “US says Russian warplane hits American drone over Black Sea,” *AP*, March 15, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/ukraine-russia-war-kramatorsk-peace-plan-fde09a8ea4d9b692637ad8f76cd05f3a>].

¹⁰⁰⁸ Karl Ritter, “US says Russian warplane hits American drone over Black Sea,” *AP*, March 15, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/ukraine-russia-war-kramatorsk-peace-plan-fde09a8ea4d9b692637ad8f76cd05f3a>].

wage such struggle.¹⁰⁰⁹ During the same visit, **Putin** announced that the Russian Ministry of Industry and Trade had prepared a list of unspecified workers who could defer military service. Such steps could potentially signal his priority of high-quality weapons production over having skilled soldiers fight in Russia's military, some analysts noted.¹⁰¹⁰

Also on **March 14**, **Peskov** stated, after welcoming a Chinese peace proposal, that Kyiv's refusal to talk left Moscow with only military options. "We must achieve our goals," he stated, "given the current stance of the Kyiv regime, now it's only possible by military means."¹⁰¹¹ On the next day, **March 15**, **Peskov** noted that US-Russia relations were "at their lowest point, in a very lamentable state," with the collision being the latest manifestation of loosening ties. He added, however, that "at the same time, Russia has never refused constructive dialogue, and is not refusing it now."¹⁰¹²

Also on **March 15**, **Patrushev** said on Russian state TV Rossiya 1 that Russia would try to recover the wreckage of the American MQ-9 in the Black Sea to study it.¹⁰¹³

The Biden Administration showed itself unimpressed by Russian posturing. On the same day, **March 15**, **Austin** reiterated that the US would "continue to fly and to operate wherever international law allows it," adding that it was "incumbent upon Russia to operate its military aircraft in a safe and professional manner." He further called the incident "a pattern of aggressive and risky, and unsafe actions by Russian pilots in international airspace."¹⁰¹⁴ The same day, **Austin** also had a rare phone call with his Russian counterpart **Shoigu**. At a Pentagon briefing, Austin stated that as he had "said repeatedly," it was "important that great powers be models of transparency and communication, and the United States will continue to fly and to operate wherever international law allows." According to the Russian Ministry of Defense, Shoigu countered that the incident was caused by the US noncompliance with a flight restriction zone declared by Russia, with the ministry statement further calling US drone flights off the coast of Crimea "provocative in nature." Also on **March 15**, **Milley** spoke with **Gerasimov**, discussing "several security-related issues of concern," according to a Pentagon spokesperson. The two men had last spoken in October 2022.¹⁰¹⁵

Meanwhile, the discussion about providing Ukraine with fighter jets continued. On **March 14**, Polish PM **Mateusz Morawiecki** stated that Poland could give Ukraine MiG-29 fighter jets in the coming for to six

¹⁰⁰⁹ Ivan Nechepurenko, "Putin claims the West is trying to 'pull apart' Russia," *New York Times*, March 15, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/15/world/europe/putin-claims-the-west-is-trying-to-pull-apart-russia.html>].

¹⁰¹⁰ Marc Santora, Eric Schmitt, Valerie Hopkins and Ivan Nechepurenko, "Ukraine's Allies Promise Weapons for Spring Counteroffensive," *New York Times*, March 15, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/15/world/europe/ukraine-allies-weapons-russia.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare>].

¹⁰¹¹ Karl Ritter, "US says Russian warplane hits American drone over Black Sea," *AP*, March 15, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/ukraine-russia-war-kramatorsk-peace-plan-fde09a8ea4d9b692637ad8f76cd05f3a>].

¹⁰¹² "Kremlin: relations with US in dire state amid drone incident," *Reuters*, March 15, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/kremlin-relations-with-us-dire-state-amid-drone-incident-2023-03-15/>].

¹⁰¹³ Alexander Ward and Matt Berg, "Senators want to force admin talk on Saudi ties," *Politico*, March 15, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/03/15/senators-want-to-force-admin-talk-on-saudi-ties-00087156>]; Rob Picheta, "A spat between the US and Russia over a downed drone is escalating. Here's what you need to know," *CNN*, March 16, 2023 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/03/15/europe/reaper-drone-russia-us-ukraine-explainer-intl/index.html>].

¹⁰¹⁴ Alexander Ward and Matt Berg, "Senators want to force admin talk on Saudi ties," *Politico*, March 15, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/03/15/senators-want-to-force-admin-talk-on-saudi-ties-00087156>].

¹⁰¹⁵ Helene Cooper and Eric Schmitt, "The Pentagon chief says he spoke to his Russian counterpart about the drone incident," *New York Times*, March 15, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/03/16/world/russia-ukraine-news?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare#pentagon-chief-russia-drone-incident>].

weeks.¹⁰¹⁶ On **March 15**, Polish government spokesman **Mueller** noted that some other countries also had pledged MiGs to Kyiv.¹⁰¹⁷

The US Administration sought to avoid the jets discussion, but promised on **March 15** to “fully and quickly” provide Ukraine with the weapons it needed for a spring counteroffensive against Russia. **Austin** stated that the allies “must provide Ukraine with the full capabilities for the fight ahead,” adding that he was “confident that we will continue to step up to meet Ukraine’s needs into the spring and well beyond.” Pentagon leaders said on the same day that the equipment and training being provided would enable Ukraine to win the war – where and when it chose to do so. “The increased Ukrainian capability will allow the Ukrainian leadership to develop and execute a variety of options in the future, to achieve their objectives and bring this war to a successful conclusion,” **Milley** said, further noting that: “We’re generating combat power, to a degree that we believe that it will provide them opportunities to change the dynamics on the battlefield, at some point going forward, whatever point that is.”¹⁰¹⁸

Also on **March 15**, Lithuanian vice FM **Meilunas** said that Ukraine had to be supplied with more weapons, stressing that “the best solution would be to find possibilities to increase production in NATO member states.”¹⁰¹⁹

The following day, on **March 16**, Polish President **Duda** said that Poland planned to give Ukraine about a dozen MiG-29 fighter jets, adding that Warsaw would hand over four of the Soviet-made warplanes “within the next few days.” However, it remained unclear how this would unfold. On the same day, Polish defense minister **Mariusz Blaszczak** said Poland wanted “to hand over MIGs in a broader coalition” with neighboring Slovakia and perhaps other countries. The German government appeared caught off guard, with **Pistorius** stating on the same day that so far everyone had “agreed that it’s not the time to send fighter jets,” adding that he had not yet received any confirmation from Poland that this had changed. The **White House** called Poland’s move a sovereign decision and lauded the Poles for continuing to “punch above their weight” in assisting Kyiv. However, US officials also stressed that Poland’s actions would not have any bearing on Biden. “There’s no change in our view with respect to fighter aircraft at this time,” **Kirby** said.¹⁰²⁰ One day later, on **March 17**, the **Slovak government** said it would send 13 MIG-29 warplanes to Ukraine – however, most of the jets had to be used for spare parts, as they were not in working order. “Promises must be kept,” acting PM **Eduard Heger** noted, but did not specify the timing of any deliveries. In response, the Russian embassy in Bratislava contended that such trans-

¹⁰¹⁶ “Poland may give Ukraine MiG-29 jets in next 4-6 weeks, says PM,” *Reuters*, March 14, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/poland-may-give-ukraine-mig-29-jets-next-4-6-weeks-says-pm-2023-03-14/>].

¹⁰¹⁷ “Poland to be 1st NATO member to give Ukraine fighter jets,” *AP*, March 16, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/ukraine-poland-russia-war-jets-migs-6d843ccbd50fef5f96091a5bff8f3e01>].

¹⁰¹⁸ Laura Seligman, “‘Ukraine doesn’t have any time to waste’: U.S. races to prepare Kyiv for spring offensive,” *Politico*, March 15, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/03/15/dod-ukraine-war-supplies-00087291>]; Marc Santora, Eric Schmitt, Valerie Hopkins and Ivan Nechepurenko, “Ukraine’s Allies Promise Weapons for Spring Counteroffensive,” *New York Times*, March 15, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/15/world/europe/ukraine-allies-weapons-russia.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referrerSource=articleShare>].

¹⁰¹⁹ Thomas Gibbons-Neff, Lara Jakes and Eric Schmitt, “Ukraine Burns Through Ammunition in Bakhmut, Putting Future Fights at Risk,” *New York Times*, March 16, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/16/world/europe/ukraine-ammunition-bakhmut.html>].

¹⁰²⁰ “Poland to be 1st NATO member to give Ukraine fighter jets,” *AP*, March 16, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/ukraine-poland-russia-war-jets-migs-6d843ccbd50fef5f96091a5bff8f3e01>]; Andrew Higgins and Lara Jakes, “Poland Says It Will Arm Ukraine With Warplanes, Raising Stakes,” *New York Times*, March 16, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/16/world/europe/ukraine-poland-planes.html>].

fers would be illegal, “explicitly” prohibited by Russian-Slovak agreements. In Moscow, **Peskov** commented that these deliveries would be “subject to destruction” and that Poland or Slovakia wanted “to dispose of their old unnecessary equipment this way.”¹⁰²¹

Meanwhile, concerning Russian arms supplies, media revealed on **March 16**, that between June and December 2022, **Beijing-connected Chinese companies** had sent Russian entities 1000 assault rifles and other equipment that could be used for military purposes, including drone parts and body armor. State-owned China North Industries Group Corporation Limited sent the CQ-A rifles to the Russian company Tekhkrin in June 2022. In late 2022, Russian entities received 12 shipments of drone parts by Chinese companies and over 12 tons of Chinese body armor, routed via Turkey, media reported. China was thus supplying Russia with previously unreported “dual-use” equipment. In reaction to these revelations, a **spokesperson of the Chinese embassy in Washington** stated that Beijing was “committed to promoting talks for peace” in Ukraine, adding that “China did not create the crisis. It is not party to the crisis, and has not provided weapons to either side of the conflict.” Also in reaction to the revelations, **Poland’s Ambassador to the EU Sadoś** said that “due to the potential very serious consequences, such information should be verified immediately.”¹⁰²²

In Washington, US military assessments mirrored earlier pronouncements. Speaking for a podcast recording in **mid-March**, **Milley** repeated his earlier assessment on Ukraine, saying that it would be “extremely difficult” for Kyiv to force out all Russian troops in 2023. It was “not impossible,” but “extremely difficult.” Hence, “in the world of probabilities,” he did not think it was “likely.” Neither side could “achieve their political objectives through military means, and that state of nature will exist for some period of time,” he said.¹⁰²³

During the second half of March, the focus was on Xi’s visit to Russia, the UK sending depleted uranium shells to Ukraine, and Putin’s announcement to station tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus. On **March 17**, the **International Criminal Court** issued an arrest warrant for Putin for his alleged role in illegally transferring Ukrainian civilians into Russian territories. In response, **Moscow** dismissed the warrant as meaningless, as Russia was not a party to the ICC. **Medvedev** alluded the ICC warrant could only be used as toilet paper. **Biden** noted that Putin had “clearly committed war crimes” and the ICC warrant made a “very strong point.”¹⁰²⁴

¹⁰²¹ Andrew Higgins, “Slovakia follows Poland in pledging warplanes for Ukraine, but most of its jets are in disrepair,” *New York Times*, March 17, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/17/world/europe/slovakia-ukraine-jets-mig29.html>] and “Slovakia’s transfer of Soviet-, Russian-made weapons to Kiev illegal — Russian embassy,” *TASS*, March 17, 2023 [<https://tass.com/defense/1590301>].

¹⁰²² Erin Banco and Sarah Anne Aarup, “‘Hunting rifles’ — really? China ships assault weapons and body armor to Russia,” *Politico*, March 16, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/03/16/chinese-rifles-body-armor-russia-ukraine-00087398>].

¹⁰²³ Daniel Lippman et al, “How the Iraq war changed top Biden officials,” *Politico*, March 20, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily>]. Also, “How the War in Ukraine Ends: A conversation with General Mark Milley,” *None of the Above*, March 21, 2023 [<https://soundcloud.com/noneoftheaboveegfpodcast/how-the-war-in-ukraine-ends-a>].

¹⁰²⁴ Nicolas Camut, “ICC issues arrest warrant for Putin over child deportations from Ukraine,” *Politico*, March 17, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/icc-arrest-warrant-vladimir-putin-war-crimes-ukraine/>]. Also, Mark Landler, “Arrest Warrant From Criminal Court Pierces Putin’s Aura of Impunity,” *New York Times*, March 17, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/17/world/europe/icc-putin-ukraine-war.html>].

Putin visited Sevastopol in Crimea on **March 18**.¹⁰²⁵ On **March 19**, he visited Mariupol, in what appeared to be a gesture of defiance.¹⁰²⁶

Xi met **Putin** at the Kremlin on **March 20**, the highest-profile leader to visit Russia since the invasion. The Russian leader pledged to study China's peace proposal for Ukraine "with respect," while **Xi** did not mention Ukraine at all in his public remarks. **Putin** said that China took a "fair and balanced position on the majority of international problems." **Xi** hailed the two nations as "good neighbors and reliable partners."¹⁰²⁷ In Washington, **Blinken** noted that **Xi's** visit suggested China felt "no responsibility to hold the Kremlin accountable for the atrocities committed in Ukraine" and "would rather provide diplomatic cover for Russia to continue to commit those very crimes." **Blinken** was skeptical of China's mediation efforts, noting that a cease-fire that did not remove Russia's forces from Ukraine "would effectively be supporting the ratification of Russian conquest." The fundamental element of any plan to end the fighting had to be "upholding the sovereignty and territory of Ukraine."¹⁰²⁸

Diverting some attention away from **Xi's** visit and offering a strong signal of Japanese solidarity with Ukraine, on **March 21**, Japanese PM **Kishida** visited Kyiv after having met with **Modi** in New Delhi.¹⁰²⁹ On **March 21**, media reported that **China** has shipped more than \$12 million in drones and drone parts to Russia since it invaded Ukraine, according to official Russian customs data from a third-party data provider. The shipments often came through small-time middlemen and exporters. The result was a steady supply of new drones to Russia that it can use in its war against Ukraine.¹⁰³⁰

175.	De-escalatory
On the second day of Xi's visit to Moscow, March 21 , Russia and China released a joint statement. With respect to nuclear policy, the statement could potentially be seen as de-escalatory, as Russia and China reaffirmed that "a nuclear war cannot be won and should not be fought." Observers believed the statement had been included at China's request. However, Moscow and Beijing called on all P5 nuclear-armed states to "reduce the risk of nuclear war and avoid any armed conflict between nuclear-weapon states." Also, the statement came short of restating Chinese opposition to the use of nuclear threats. ¹⁰³¹	

With respect to Ukraine, the statement brought Beijing close to Moscow's position. It started from the premise that both sides opposed "any countries or national blocs jeopardizing the reasonable security interests of other nations in the quest for military, political or other forms of superiorities." Thus, it noted that a resolution of the Ukraine "crisis" should "respect all countries' reasonable security concerns

¹⁰²⁵ Shashank Bengali and Victoria Kim "Putin Visits Occupied Crimea, a Day After War-Crimes Warrant," *New York Times*, March 18, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/18/world/europe/ukraine-grain-deal-un-russia.html>].

¹⁰²⁶ Matthew Mpoke Bigg, Ivan Nechepurenko and Andrés R. Martínez, "Defiant Putin Visits Mariupol, a City Razed by Russian Forces," *New York Times*, March 19, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/19/world/europe/putin-mariupol-crimea-ukraine.html>].

¹⁰²⁷ Anton Troianovski, "Xi refrains from mentioning Ukraine in Moscow, instead focusing on generalities," *New York Times*, March 23, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/03/20/world/russia-ukraine-xi-putin-news?smid=url-share#xi-refrains-from-mentioning-ukraine-in-moscow-instead-focusing-on-generalities>].

¹⁰²⁸ Michael Crowley, "Blinken Says Xi's Visit to Moscow Offers 'Diplomatic Cover' for Putin's War Crimes," *New York Times*, March 20, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/20/world/europe/blinking-xi-russia-war-crimes.html>].

¹⁰²⁹ Ben Dooley and Victoria Kim, "Japan's Prime Minister Becomes Latest G7 Leader to Visit Ukraine," *New York Times*, March 21, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/21/world/europe/japan-kishida-ukraine.html>].

¹⁰³⁰ Paul Mozur, Aaron Krolik and Keith Bradsher, "As War in Ukraine Grinds On, China Helps Refill Russian Drone Supplies," *New York Times*, March 21, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/21/business/russia-china-drones-ukraine-war.html>].

¹⁰³¹ The statement is available in Chinese here [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zyxw/202303/t20230322_11046188.shtml].

and prevent the formation of bloc confrontation.” They urged NATO to abide by its commitments as a regional and defensive organization, and called on NATO to respect the sovereignty, security, interests as well as diversity of civilizations, history and culture of other countries, and treat their peaceful development in an objective and fair manner. Against this background, Russia reiterated “efforts to resume peace talks as soon as possible, which [were] praised by the Chinese side,” said the statement. “Russia welcomes China’s willingness to play a constructive role in resolving the Ukraine crisis through political and diplomatic means.” However, the statement did not mention Chinese military support for Russia or any Russian intention to support a ceasefire or withdraw Russian troops.¹⁰³²

Overall, the meeting served to strengthen the bilateral relations between China and Russia, and both parties appeared to think it had been a success. After the state dinner on **March 21**, as the leaders bid farewell, Xi told Putin that “right now there are changes, the like of which we haven’t seen for 100 years. And we are the ones driving these changes together.”¹⁰³³

Months later, Western and Chinese officials leaked to the press that **Xi** had personally warned Putin against using nuclear weapons in Ukraine. During **spring and summer 2023**, Chinese officials privately took credit for convincing the leadership in Moscow to give up on veiled nuclear threats. Senior US officials agreed that Chinese officials were taking credit for “sending the message at every level” in Russia. According to a senior adviser the Chinese government, deterring Putin from using nuclear weapons in Ukraine had been central to Beijing’s attempt to repair relations to European governments in the aftermath of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Russian nuclear use would risk turning Europe against China, the adviser said, while sustained pressure from Beijing to prevent such an act might help improve relations with the continent.¹⁰³⁴

176.	Warning
In Moscow, responding to media reports that Britain would supply Ukraine with shells made with depleted uranium for the Challenger 2 battle tank, Shoigu noted on March 21 that “another step has been taken” and there were “fewer and fewer steps” before a potential “nuclear collision” between Russia and the West. In Beijing, Putin said that Russia would be forced to “respond accordingly,” given that the West “collectively” was “already beginning to use weapons with a nuclear component.” In London, a spokesperson of the UK defense ministry responded that Russia was “deliberately trying to disinform,” as depleted uranium had “nothing to do with nuclear weapons.” ¹⁰³⁵	

Chinese support for Russian policy seemed forthcoming in the aftermath of the bilateral meeting. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson **Wang** reiterated on **March 22** the key tenets of Beijing’s position. Xi’s visit to Russia was a “journey of friendship, cooperation and peace,” and accused the US of lacking impartiality and of “fanning the flames” of the conflict by providing weapons to Ukraine to Washington’s own benefit. Wang reiterated China’s claim that it remained neutral in the conflict, stated that it had “no

¹⁰³² Stuart Lau, “Xi, Putin back ‘peace talks’ for Ukraine war — but blame NATO and make no offer to withdraw,” *Politico*, March 21, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/xi-jinping-vladimir-putin-back-peace-talks-ukraine-war-blame-nato-no-offer-withdraw-china-russia/>]. Also “Xi, Putin sign joint statement on deepening comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for the new era,” *Xinhua*, March 22, 2023 [<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202303/22/WS641a0faaa31057c47ebb5bb7.html>].

¹⁰³³ Valerie Hopkins, *Twitter*, March 21, 2023 [<https://twitter.com/VALERIEinNYT/status/1638299396885315585>].

¹⁰³⁴ Max Seddon, James Kynge, John Paul Rathbone, and Felicia Schwartz, “Xi Jinping warned Vladimir Putin against nuclear attack in Ukraine,” *Financial Times*, July 5, 2023 [<https://www.ft.com/content/c5ce76df-9b1b-4dfc-a619-07da1d40cbd3>].

¹⁰³⁵ Dan Sabbagh and Ian Sample, “Putin says Russia ‘will respond’ if UK supplies depleted uranium shells to Ukraine,” *Guardian*, March 21, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/21/putin-says-russia-will-respond-if-uk-supplies-depleted-uranium-shells-to-ukraine>]. Also, “Russia’s Putin blasts UK move to send ammo with depleted uranium to Ukraine,” *Reuters*, March 21, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-blasts-uk-move-send-ammo-with-depleted-uranium-ukraine-2023-03-21/>].

selfish motives on the Ukraine issue,” and stressed that what China had done was promoting peace talks. He underlined that China would “continue to play a constructive role in promoting a political settlement of the Ukraine issue.” In other comments on Ukraine, Wang said Russia and China had agreed that the UN Charter had to be observed and international law respected, and that they opposed unilateral sanctions imposed by the US and others to economically punish Putin and his supporters. He further underlined that “the two sides pointed out that the solution to the Ukraine crisis must respect the legitimate security concerns of all countries and prevent the formation of bloc confrontation and fanning flames,” with “responsible dialogue” being “the best way to solve the issue steadily.”¹⁰³⁶

Just hours after Xi concluded the state visit, **Russia** launched a new wave of missile and drone attacks across Ukraine, shelling residential buildings in the south and killing seven people in a school dormitory in the Kyiv region.¹⁰³⁷

Also on **March 22**, Slovak defense minister **Jaro Nad** noted that Washington offered to sell Slovakia a dozen new Bell AH-1Z Viper helicopters at a discount after the country sent its retired MiG fighter jets to Ukraine. Slovakia had not yet approved the deal. The deal would be “hugely advantageous” to Slovakia, Nad said, as it included parts, training and some 500 AGM-114 Hellfire II missiles.¹⁰³⁸

177.	Warning
Concomitantly, nuclear warnings re-surfaced in Moscow. On the same March 22 , Ryabkov said that the risk of a nuclear conflict was “higher than anything we have had for the past few decades,” noted that Russia was committed to keeping the world “safe and free” from the threat of nuclear war, but warned that Moscow was in a “de-facto” open conflict with Washington over Ukraine. Speaking at an event entitled “A World Without START: What’s Next,” Ryabkov said there was “no question” of Moscow restoring the treaty for now, criticizing Washington’s “hostile course” in “practically all domains” towards Russia. Various Russian experts at the event agreed with Ryabkov that arms control was a “phenomenon associated with peace,” and that a return to New START involved not just negotiations over Ukraine, but “a change of the hostile approach of the United States towards Russia.” ¹⁰³⁹	

Responding to Russia’s accusations on the same day, **Cleverley** said depleted uranium shells were not nuclear munitions. Putin was uttering “threats” every time London or NATO were seeking to support Ukraine in its defense. “There is no nuclear escalation. The only country in the world that is talking about nuclear issues is Russia, the British foreign secretary said.”¹⁰⁴⁰ On the same day, the **Russian MFA** said in a statement that Moscow would not leave “unanswered” Britain’s decision to supply Ukraine

¹⁰³⁶ “China calls Xi’s Russia visit one of friendship, peace,” *AP*, March 22, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/china-russia-putin-xi-ukraine-war-fcfd22eb1f48b3de6f115c2943c77169>].

¹⁰³⁷ Jared Malsin, “Russia Launches Attacks Across Ukraine, Killing Seven in School Dormitory,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 22, 2023 [https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-fires-armed-drones-across-ukraine-killing-three-in-school-dormitory-aae731d6?mod=world_lead_story].

¹⁰³⁸ Jaro Nad’, “Jaro Nad’ - minister obrany SR”, Facebook, March 22, 2023 [<https://www.facebook.com/JaroNadPublic/posts/pfbid02eH9pApr2U5Gk4j2T1NqRRkYQNSGaiA36E17pALrkvDEUzgFC8gBkeavaZUL5g2iYI>].

¹⁰³⁹ Caleb Davis, “Russia says risk of nuclear conflict at highest level in decades,” *Reuters*, March 22, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-says-risk-nuclear-conflict-highest-level-decades-2023-03-22/>]. See also “Ничто не вечно под войной,” *Kommersant*, March 22, 2023 [<https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5888929>].

¹⁰⁴⁰ Dan Milmo, “UK says ‘no nuclear escalation’ in supplying depleted uranium shells to Ukraine,” *Guardian*, March 22, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/mar/22/russia-ukraine-war-live-imf-and-ukraine-agree-15bn-funding-deal-us-rejects-chinas-impartiality-claim?page=with:block-641ae8998f0889459a75fd60#block-641ae8998f0889459a75fd60>].

with such tank shells, and **Lavrov** noted that London's actions were taking the situation to a "new dangerous level."¹⁰⁴¹

Against this contentious background, Kyiv again signaled that it needed more military support. On **March 23**, **Zelensky**, speaking virtually to a EU heads of state gathering, pleaded for more support. He said Ukraine needed long-range missiles and modern fighter jets. In their joint statement, **EU leaders** urged "all countries not to provide material or other support for Russia's war of aggression," a message clearly directed at China. They also approved supplying Kyiv with one million rounds of ammunition for artillery over the next year.¹⁰⁴²

The first 4 of the 13 MIG-29s Slovakia had pledged to send to Ukraine had been delivered, and the remaining would arrive in the coming weeks, the **Slovak defense ministry** said on the same **March 23**.¹⁰⁴³

178.	Escalatory
Also on March 23 , in Moscow, Medvedev brought nuclear saber-rattling back to the forefront. The threat of a nuclear conflict "hasn't decreased, it has grown," he said. "Every day when they provide Ukraine with foreign weapons brings the nuclear apocalypse closer," Medvedev added. Russia's relations with the West were "already worse than they [had] ever been in history," he claimed. In addition, he moved from warning to escalation by blasting German justice minister Marco Bushmann , who had said that Putin would be arrested on the ICC's warrant if he visited Germany. "Let's imagine [...] the leader of a nuclear power visits the territory of Germany and is arrested," Medvedev said, adding that it would amount to a declaration of war against Russia. "In this case, our assets will fly to hit the Bundestag, the chancellor's office and so on." Also, he claimed that Russia's nuclear forces had provided a strong deterrent amid the fighting in Ukraine. "We would have been torn to pieces without them." Hence, it was "useless to have talks" with the West. Last but not least, he questioned Ukraine's very existence. "Honestly speaking, Ukraine is part of Russia. But due to geopolitical reasons and the course of history we had tolerated that we were living in separate quarters and had been forced to acknowledge those invented borders for a long time," he said. ¹⁰⁴⁴	

¹⁰⁴¹ "Russia warns of 'serious consequences' if UK supplies depleted uranium shells to Ukraine," *Guardian*, March 23, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/mar/22/russia-ukraine-war-live-imf-and-ukraine-agree-15bn-funding-deal-us-rejects-chinas-impartiality-claim?page=with:block-641b0e1f8f0823818506b22e>].

¹⁰⁴² Monika Pronczuk "E.U. leaders give final approval to sending a million artillery shells to Ukraine," *New York Times*, March 23, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/03/23/world/russia-ukraine-news/eu-leaders-gather-to-discuss-aid-to-ukraine-as-kyivs-military-demands-grow?smid=url-share>]. See also "European Council conclusions on Ukraine," Website of the European Council, March 23, 2023 [<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/03/23/european-council-conclusions-on-ukraine/>].

¹⁰⁴³ Anushka Patil "Slovakia makes its first delivery of pledged Soviet-era fighter jets to Ukraine," *New York Times*, March 24, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/03/23/world/russia-ukraine-news>]. Also, "Prvé štyri Stíhacie Lietadlá Mig-29 Sú Už Na Ukrajine," *Website of the Slovak Defense Ministry*, March 23, 2023 [<https://www.mosr.sk/52653-sk/prve-styri-stihacie-lietadla-mig-29-su-uz-na-ukrajine/>].

¹⁰⁴⁴ Vladimir Isachenkov, "Russia's security chief blasts West, dangles nuclear threats," *AP*, March 23, 2023 [<https://ap-news.com/article/medvedev-nuclear-putin-arrest-warrant-germany-ukraine-6dcde92e06f41a7c5cb7386f7939df33>].

Spain's prime minister **Pedro Sánchez** said also on **March 23** he would discuss a peace plan for Ukraine with Xi during an official visit to China the subsequent week – a “stable and lasting peace” that guaranteed Ukraine’s “territorial integrity” that was being “violated by Russia.” Two days later, on **March 25**, he added that he would push for a “fair and lasting” peace.¹⁰⁴⁵

Concerning European diplomatic and economic ties with China, on **March 24** in Brussels, **Borrell** said the “friendship” between China and Russia had limits, and that Europe should welcome any attempts by Beijing to distance itself from Moscow’s war in Ukraine. He said China had “not crossed any red lines for us” – it had forged close economic and diplomatic ties, but not a military alliance with Russia.¹⁰⁴⁶

179.	Warning
On March 24 , Medvedev repeated his nuclear warnings. He said Moscow was readying for a Ukrainian counteroffensive that “everyone knows” Kyiv was preparing for, adding that the Russian General Staff “calculates this and prepares its decisions.” If Ukraine attempted to retake Crimea, Moscow was ready to use “absolutely any weapons,” including those mentioned in Russia’s nuclear doctrine when the very existence of the state was threatened. An attempt to split away territory meant “an encroachment on the existence of the state,” Medvedev said. He hoped Russia’s “ <i>friends across the ocean</i> ” understood this. However, he also noted that he thought statements about the return of Crimea to Ukraine were mere propaganda. ¹⁰⁴⁷	

On **March 26**, **Putin** stated that Russia was “not creating any military alliance with China.” He confirmed that “yes, we have cooperation in the sphere of military-technical interaction,” stressing Russia was “not hiding this. Everything is transparent, there is nothing secret.” He added that “for decades many have desired turning China against the Soviet Union and Russia, and vice versa,” also accusing the US and NATO of seeking to build a new global “axis” that he said bore some resemblance to the World War Two alliance between Nazi Germany, fascist Italy and imperial Japan. Putin named Australia, New Zealand and South Korea as being in line to join a “global NATO” and referenced a defense agreement signed by Britain and Japan earlier in 2023.¹⁰⁴⁸

As Russia agreed to extend the Black Sea grain deal, **Erdogan** called Putin on **March 26** to thank him for his “positive attitude.” The two leaders discussed developments regarding the war in Ukraine, and Erdogan expressed the importance of ending the conflict through negotiations as soon as possible.¹⁰⁴⁹

¹⁰⁴⁵ José Bautista, “Spain’s prime minister plans to visit Beijing for talks on China’s contentious peace proposal,” *New York Times*, March 23, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/23/world/europe/spain-sanchez-china-xi-ukraine.html>], and Paul Mathiasen “Spain’s PM Sanchez to push for ‘territorial integrity’ for Ukraine in China visit,” *Reuters*, March 26, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/spains-pm-sanchez-push-territorial-integrity-ukraine-china-visit-2023-03-26/>].

¹⁰⁴⁶ “EU’s Borrell: Russia-China partnership has limits,” *Reuters*, March 24, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/eus-borrell-russia-china-partnership-has-limits-2023-03-24/>].

¹⁰⁴⁷ Pjotr Sauer, “Russian forces preparing for Ukrainian counteroffensive, says Medvedev,” *Guardian*, March 24, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/24/russian-forces-preparing-ukrainian-counteroffensive-dmitry-medvedev>]. See “Киев готовится к наступательным операциям, заявил Медведев,” *RIA Novosti*, March 24, 2023 [<https://ria.ru/20230324/nastuplenie-1860329473.html>] and “Медведев: попытка Украины отвоевать Крым даст основание РФ к применению любого оружия,” *TASS*, March 24, 2023 [<https://tass.ru/politika/17360995>].

¹⁰⁴⁸ Alexander Marrow, “Russia, China are not creating military alliance, Putin says,” *Reuters*, March 26, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/putin-russia-china-not-creating-military-alliance-agencies-2023-03-26/>]. “Ukraine war live. Russia and China ‘not creating a military alliance’ - Putin,” *Guardian*, March 26, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/mar/26/russia-ukraine-war-live-us-reacts-cautiously-to-russias-plan-to-station-tactical-nuclear-weapons-in-belarus?page=with:block-641fc7af8f0893440cca17aa&filterKeyEvents=false>].

¹⁰⁴⁹ “Putin and Erdogan held phone call, discussed grain deal,” *Reuters*, March 26, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/mar/26/russia-ukraine-war-live-us-reacts-cautiously-to-russias-plan-to-station-tactical-nuclear-weapons-in-belarus?page=with:block-641fc7af8f0893440cca17aa&filterKeyEvents=false>]; “Ukraine war live. US responds to Rus-

180.	Warning
<p>In what was the most mediatized Russian nuclear pronouncement of the month, on March 26, Putin suggested to a journalist that Russia would deploy nuclear weapons to Belarus by the summer. In response to a question focused on Britain's decision to send weapons containing depleted uranium to Ukraine, Putin condemned the British move and then said he was moving ahead with a plan, first revealed last year, to give Russia the ability to base nuclear weapons in Belarus. Ten Belarusian jets had already been retrofitted to carry Russian nuclear weapons. A storage facility for the warheads would be ready by July 1. The Russian leader insisted this decision was "nothing unusual" as Washington had been "doing this for decades." Putin also stated that Belarusian President Lukashenko had agreed to the deployment, and insisted that such a move would not violate nuclear nonproliferation agreements. Russia was replicating the US practice of nuclear sharing and would remain in control of weapons placed in Belarus.¹⁰⁵⁰</p>	

Western officials condemned Putin's remarks. On **March 26**, NATO spokesperson **Oana Lungescu** called Putin's rhetoric "dangerous and irresponsible," but noted that the Alliance had not registered any changes that would have prompted it to adjust its posture. Lungescu further called Russia's reference to NATO's nuclear sharing "totally misleading," since NATO allies would "act with full respect of their international commitments," while Russia had "consistently broken its arms control commitments."¹⁰⁵¹

The foreign ministry of Ukraine condemned the remarks, claimed that basing nuclear weapons would violated the NPT, and called for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council. It further called Putin's rhetoric "another provocative step" that undermined "the international security system as a whole," with the statement also calling for members of the international community to convey to the Russian regime "the categorical unacceptability of its next nuclear provocations and to take decisive measures to effectively deter and prevent any possibility of the aggressor state's use of nuclear weapons."¹⁰⁵² The secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, **Oleksiy Danilov**, stated Russia was holding Minsk as a "nuclear hostage," adding that the move was "a step towards the internal destabilization of the country."¹⁰⁵³ Ukrainian presidential aid **Podolyak** accused Putin of violating the nuclear-proliferation treaty and resorting to "scare" tactics.¹⁰⁵⁴

sia plan to station nuclear weapons in Belarus," *Guardian*, March 26, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/mar/26/russia-ukraine-war-live-us-reacts-cautiously-to-russias-plan-to-station-tactical-nuclear-weapons-in-belarus?page=with:block-641fc7af8f0893440cca17aa&filterKeyEvents=false>].

¹⁰⁵⁰ Anton Troianovski, Vivek Shankar and Andrew Higgins, "Putin Says He Could Put Tactical Nuclear Weapons in Belarus by Summer," *New York Times*, March 26, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/26/world/europe/russia-ukraine-putin-belarus.html>]. David Ljunggren, "Putin says Moscow to place nuclear weapons in Belarus, US reacts cautiously," *Reuters*, March 26, 2022 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-says-moscow-has-deal-with-belarus-station-nuclear-weapons-there-tass-2023-03-25/>]. Jones Hayden, "Putin says Russia to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus," *Politico*, March 25, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/putin-says-russia-to-deploy-tactical-nuclear-weapons-in-belarus-reports/>]; and "Putin announces deal with Belarus to station nuclear weapons there," *NBC News*, March 26, 2023 [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fdm7kN7nWLc>].

¹⁰⁵¹ Dan Peleschuk, "NATO criticises Putin's 'dangerous and irresponsible' nuclear rhetoric," *Reuters*, March 27, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-security-chief-says-basing-russian-nuclear-weapons-belarus-will-2023-03-26/>].

¹⁰⁵² "Ukraine war live. Kyiv calls Russia's tactical nuclear weapons plans 'another provocative step'," *Guardian*, March 26, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/mar/26/russia-ukraine-war-live-us-reacts-cautiously-to-russias-plan-to-station-tactical-nuclear-weapons-in-belarus?filterKeyEvents=false>].

¹⁰⁵³ Karl Ritter, "Ukraine demands emergency UN meeting over Putin nuclear plan," *AP*, March 26, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-belarus-tactical-nuclear-weapons-3aed32661ae3c218c59117d1ce593777>].

¹⁰⁵⁴ "Ukraine war live," *Guardian*, March 26, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/mar/26/russia-ukraine-war-live-us-reacts-cautiously-to-russias-plan-to-station-tactical-nuclear-weapons-in-belarus?filterKeyEvents=false>].

The same day, the **US defense department** stated that it had “not seen any reason” to adjust [US] strategic nuclear posture nor any indications Russia [was] preparing to use a nuclear weapon,” adding that Washington remained “committed to the collective defense of the NATO alliance.” Similarly, US NSC spokesman **Kirby** said the US government had “not seen any indication that [Putin had] made good on this pledge or moved any nuclear weapons around,” further clarifying that Washington had “seen no indication he has any intention to use nuclear weapons, period, inside Ukraine.” Washington was monitoring the situation daily, but there was nothing that suggested the US to change its strategic deterrent posture.¹⁰⁵⁵ The Chairman of the US House of Representatives **Michael McCaul** said he regarded Russia’s plan as disturbing and designed to intimidate the West: “I think this is saber-rattling on the part of Putin basically to try to frighten.”¹⁰⁵⁶ **Borrell** voiced that “Belarus hosting Russian nuclear weapons would mean an irresponsible escalation” and a “threat to European security,” adding that “Belarus can stop it” and that the EU stood “ready to respond with further sanctions.”¹⁰⁵⁷

On **March 27**, Belarus opposition leader **Tsikhonouskaya** said the move “grossly” contradicted “the will of the Belarusian people” and reflected the “further subjugation of Belarus under Russian control.”¹⁰⁵⁸ The same day, German foreign ministry spokesperson **Sasse** stated that Berlin saw Moscow’s announcement as “another attempt at nuclear intimidation and we consider this rhetoric to be irresponsible and expressly reject it.”¹⁰⁵⁹

Also on **March 27**, **Zakharova** released a statement meant to respond to the critiques of Putin’s Belarus interview, but the statement did not underpin the most extreme interpretation of the Russian leader’s claims. She called the Western reaction to the development of Russia’s cooperation with Belarus in the military nuclear sphere “inadequate,” and noted that it could not “but cause bewilderment.” She further pointed out that NATO allies had introduced the concept of “joint nuclear missions” themselves, and stated that Washington had “lowered the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons in recent years, shifting the focus to *limited scenarios* for their use.” Zakharova concluded by underlining that Russia had reserved “the right to take the necessary additional steps to ensure the security of Russia and its allies,” but stopped short of giving any indication that Russia indeed intended to deploy nuclear weapons to Belarus.¹⁰⁶⁰

Meanwhile, Western tank deliveries made their way to Ukraine. On **March 27**, media reported that the 18 Leopard 2 battle tanks promised by Germany had been handed over at the Ukrainian border, with

¹⁰⁵⁵ “Ukraine war live. US sees no indication that Russia moved nuclear weapons to Belarus,” *Guardian*, March 26, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/mar/26/russia-ukraine-war-live-us-reacts-cautiously-to-russias-plan-to-station-tactical-nuclear-weapons-in-belarus?filterKeyEvents=false>]; and “US Says No Indication Russia Has Moved Nuclear Weapons” *Defense Post*, March 26, 2023 [<https://www.thedefensepost.com/2023/03/26/russia-moving-nuclear-weapons/>].

¹⁰⁵⁶ Dan Peleschuk, “NATO criticises Putin’s ‘dangerous and irresponsible’ nuclear rhetoric,” *Reuters*, March 27, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-security-chief-says-basing-russian-nuclear-weapons-belarus-will-2023-03-26/>].

¹⁰⁵⁷ “Ukraine war live,” *Guardian*, March 26, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/mar/26/russia-ukraine-war-live-us-reacts-cautiously-to-russias-plan-to-station-tactical-nuclear-weapons-in-belarus?filterKeyEvents=false>].

¹⁰⁵⁸ “Ukraine war live,” *Guardian*, March 27, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/mar/27/russia-ukraine-war-live-nato-criticises-putin-for-dangerous-nuclear-rhetoric-donbas-town-of-avdiivka-post-apocalyptic>].

¹⁰⁵⁹ “Regierungspressekonferenz vom 27. März 2023,” *German Federal Government*, March 27, 2023 [<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/suche/regierungspressekonferenz-vom-27-maerz-2023-2173396>].

¹⁰⁶⁰ “Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova’s comment on a number of Western countries expressing concern over Russia-Belarus nuclear cooperation,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, March 27, 2023 [https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1859880/?lang=en].

about 40 Marder infantry fighting vehicles also having reached Ukraine.¹⁰⁶¹ On **March 28**, Ukrainian defense minister **Reznikov** said the first British Challenger 2 main battle tanks had arrived in Ukraine and would soon be in combat missions.¹⁰⁶²

The nuclear debate surrounding a possible nuclear deployment to Belarus continued. Also on **March 28**, **Belarus's foreign ministry** stated that it had been forced to house Russian nuclear weapons on its territory by the aggressive actions of NATO countries that were threatening Belarus' own security. Minsk also said the plans to station Russian tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus would not contravene international non-proliferation agreements as Belarus would not have control over the weapons. The ministry said it was forced to respond because "unilateral coercive measures in politics and the economy are accompanied by the buildup of military potential in the territory of neighboring countries – NATO members in close proximity to our borders. Considering these circumstances and the legitimate concerns and risks in the field of national security arising from them, Belarus is taking forced response actions to strengthen its own security and defense capability." It also noted that Belarus regarded the actions of the West as "direct and gross interference in the internal affairs of an independent state, aimed at changing the geopolitical course and changing the internal political system of Belarus."¹⁰⁶³

Russia continued to explain its position on New START. **Lavrov** told an interviewer on **March 28** that there were no contacts with Washington regarding strategic arms control. For Moscow to resume contacts with Washington, the US government had to "amend" its ways and return to "civilized principles of maintaining relations between states."¹⁰⁶⁴

181.	Warning
The nuclear rhetoric continued in Moscow. In remarks published on March 28 , Patrushev , the secretary of Russia's Security Council, warned the US and its allies against harboring hopes for Russia's defeat in Ukraine. He alleged that some American politicians believed the US could launch a preventative missile strike on Russia to which Moscow would be unable to respond, a purported belief that he described as "short-sighted stupidity, which is very dangerous." Patrushev then alluded to Russia's nuclear potential: "Russia is patient and isn't trying to scare anyone with its military superiority, but it has unique modern weapons capable of destroying any adversary, including the United States, in case of a threat to its existence," he said. ¹⁰⁶⁵	

New START data provision discussions continued. Reacting to Russia's announced suspension of New START, the **White House** on **March 28** stated that it would cease exchanging the biannual data update on its nuclear forces following Moscow's refusal to do so. This was a "proportionate and reversible"

¹⁰⁶¹ Matthias Gebauer, "Deutsche Leopard-Panzer in der Ukraine angekommen," *Spiegel*, March 27, 2023 [<https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/deutsche-leopard-panzer-in-der-ukraine-angekommen-a-a275a157-d33a-4df0-a43e-bd57a0a7b6f9>].

¹⁰⁶² "Ukraine defence minister thanks UK for sending 'fantastic' tanks," *Reuters*, March 28, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-defence-minister-thanks-uk-sending-fantastic-tanks-2023-03-28/>].

¹⁰⁶³ Andrew Osborn, "Belarus says it will host Russian nuclear weapons to counter NATO," *Reuters*, March 28, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/belarus-says-it-decided-host-russian-nuclear-weapons-after-nato-pressure-2023-03-28/>]; "Ukraine war live: Belarus foreign ministry: country forced to host nuclear missiles due to Nato actions", *Guardian*, March 28, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/mar/28/russia-ukraine-war-live-news-updates-multiple-russian-drones-shot-down-over-kyiv-blasts-attack?page=with:block-642297b58f0893440cca2bd5#block-642297b58f0893440cca2bd5>].

¹⁰⁶⁴ "Sergey Lavrov's interview," *Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, March 28, 2023 [https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1860091/].

¹⁰⁶⁵ Vladimir Isachenkov, "Russia stops sharing missile test info with US, opens drills," *Politico*, March 28, 2023 [https://ap-news.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-nuclear-weapons-drills-ea08b851e6e49b99b9fd2366f890ccdf?utm_source=homepage&utm_medium=TopNews&utm_campaign=position_04].

countermeasure in order to induce Russia to return to compliance, NSC's **Kirby** said.¹⁰⁶⁶ The decision had been conveyed to Russia on **March 27** by the Pentagon's Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy John **Plumb**. "Russia responded that they will not be providing that information," he told the House Armed Services' Strategic Forces subcommittee. "And so as a diplomatic countermeasure, the United States will not be providing that information back." The Pentagon would also look into other possible countermeasures, he added, "and what we're trying to do is balance both responding to Russia's irresponsible behavior but continuing to demonstrate what we believe [what] a responsible nuclear power's action should be."¹⁰⁶⁷ The following day, on **March 29**, Russia's deputy foreign minister **Ryabkov** stated that Russia had stopped informing the United States about its nuclear activities, including missile test launches. "There will be no notifications at all. All notifications, all kinds of notifications, all activities under the treaty will be suspended and will not be conducted regardless of what position the US may take," he said. US State Department deputy spokesman Patel said the Biden administration was aware of Ryabkov's comments but it had not "received any notice indicating a change," adding that Washington had "across-the-board concerns about Russia's reckless behavior as it relates to the New START treaty."¹⁰⁶⁸

The next day, on **March 30**, **Ryabkov** reversed his statement, saying that while Moscow had suspended "every kind of information exchange, as well as other elements of verification activity deriving from the New START Treaty within the treaty's framework," notifications of ballistic missile launches would continue, in line with a 1988 US-Soviet agreement. "The Russian Federation will still voluntarily honor the principal qualitative limits on strategic weapons set by the treaty, and will continue to fulfill the Ballistic Missile Launch Notification Agreement of 1988," Ryabkov said.¹⁰⁶⁹

Against this background of New START discussions, on **March 29**, **Russia's MOD** stated that it began exercises with its Yars intercontinental ballistic missile system and several thousand troops in Siberia. "In total, more than 3,000 military personnel and about 300 pieces of equipment are involved in the exercises," the ministry noted, adding that the movements would involve measures to conceal the deployment from foreign satellites and other intelligence assets. Putin has aimed to make the Yars missile system, which replaced the Topol system, part of Russia's "invincible weapons" and the mainstay of the ground-based component of its nuclear arsenal. The Yars missile systems reportedly have an operational range of 11 to 12,000 km, are able to carry multiple independently targetable nuclear warheads and can be mounted on a truck carriers or deployed in silos.¹⁰⁷⁰

¹⁰⁶⁶ Steve Holland and Arshad Mohammed, "US to stop exchanging nuclear data with Russia after Moscow's treaty suspension," *Reuters*, March 28, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-will-not-give-moscow-nuclear-data-after-russian-treaty-suspension-white-house-2023-03-28/>].

¹⁰⁶⁷ Alexander Ward, Matt Berg and Lawrence Ukenye, "We should've notified you earlier," *Politico*, March 28, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/03/28/we-shouldve-notified-you-earlier-00089151>].

¹⁰⁶⁸ "Ukraine war live: Russia has stopped informing the US about its nuclear activities," *Guardian*, March 29, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/mar/29/russia-ukraine-war-live-zelenskiy-fears-war-could-be-hampered-by-washington-divisions-moscow-starts-drills-with-new-icbm?page=with:block-64242d578f08531ffe52eaf4#block-64242d578f08531ffe52eaf4>]; Vladimir Isachenkov, "Russia stops sharing missile test info with US, opens drills," *AP*, March 29, 2023 [https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-nuclear-weapons-drills-ea08b851e6e49b99b9fd2366f890ccdf?utm_source=homepage&utm_medium=TopNews&utm_campaign=position_04].

¹⁰⁶⁹ Francesca Ebel, "Russia says notifications of ballistic missile launches will continue," *Washington Post*, March 30, 2023 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/03/30/russia-nuclear-start-treaty-notifications/>], and Vladimir Isachenkov, "Russia to keep missile test notices under Cold War-era deal," *AP*, March 30, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-us-nuclear-start-treaty-test-warnings-5e7efae0ab2d52ece5d5e1e8609152b0>].

¹⁰⁷⁰ "Russia starts exercises with Yars intercontinental ballistic missiles," *Reuters*, March 29, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-starts-exercises-with-yars-intercontinental-ballistic-missiles-2023-03-29/>]; also, Vladimir Isachenkov, "Russia stops sharing missile test info with US, opens drills," *AP*, March 29, 2023 [https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-nuclear-weapons-drills-ea08b851e6e49b99b9fd2366f890ccdf?utm_source=homepage&utm_medium=TopNews&utm_campaign=position_04].

182.	Warning
<p>Nuclear innuendos continued in Moscow. With reference to Putin announcing to station tactical nuclear missiles in Belarus, Ryabkov also stated on March 29 that Putin's move followed the failure by Kyiv's allies to heed previous "serious signals" from Moscow. He hoped NATO leaders could assess "how serious" the situation was. He lamented that the "serious signals" Russia had sent had only been "scratching the surface" and not "left any external imprint" on NATO's positions. Russia had to "reckon with the changing reality." Putin's statement reflected "an entire range of measures that have been and will be taken." By ignoring Moscow's signals, Western elites were "demonstrating their fundamentally, deeply irresponsible attitude toward their own countries, their own peoples, and toward international security," Ryabkov emphasized.¹⁰⁷¹</p>	

Western support for Ukraine remained steady. On the same **March 29**, the **German Bundestag's** budget committee agreed to send an additional €12bn worth of military support to Ukraine, €8bn of which to be spent directly on purchasing weapons and equipment for Ukraine, and €4bn to replenish German military stocks. **Pistorius** called the aid package "a very, very important step to show how serious we are about our long-term commitment to Ukraine in their fight against Putin."¹⁰⁷² That same **March 29**, the Spanish defense minister **Robles** announced that Spain would send six leopard 2A4 tanks to Ukraine.¹⁰⁷³

On the question of providing Ukraine with F-16 fighter jets, Pentagon policy chief **Kahl** reiterated to senators on **March 29** that Western combat aircraft was "currently Ukraine's seventh priority capability area." He moreover cautioned that Western fighters would require considerable money to maintain, and could total over \$1 billion over three years depending on how many aircraft are provided and in what condition.¹⁰⁷⁴

Meanwhile, IAEA's **Grossi** said on **March 29** when visiting the Zaporizhzhia NPP that with increased Russian and Ukrainian military forces in southern Ukraine, fighting may soon escalate. He stated it was "obvious that military activity is increasing in the whole region, so every possible measure and precaution should be taken so that the plant is not attacked and can be protected."¹⁰⁷⁵

¹⁰⁷¹ "Russia hoping that NATO understands gravity of move to deploy nukes in Belarus - diplomat," *TASS*, March 29, 2023 [https://tass.com/politics/1596131?utm_source=google.de&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=google.de&utm_referrer=google.de].

¹⁰⁷² "Germany to send additional 12 billion euros in military support to Ukraine," *Reuters*, March 29, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germany-send-additional-12-billion-euros-military-support-ukraine-2023-03-29/>]; Christopher F. Schuetze, "Germany, stressing its long-term commitment, promises additional military aid to Ukraine," *New York Times*, March 29, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/03/29/world/russia-ukraine-news?smid=url-share#germany-stressing-its-long-term-commitment-promises-additional-military-aid-to-ukraine>].

¹⁰⁷³ "Spain to send six tanks to Ukraine after Easter," *Reuters*, March 29, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/spain-send-six-tanks-ukraine-after-easter-2023-03-29/>].

¹⁰⁷⁴ "National Security Daily: No Western Warplanes for Ukraine," *Politico*, March 29, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/03/29/the-worlds-mounting-nuclear-problems-00089366>].

¹⁰⁷⁵ Matthew Mpoke Bigg, "Russia and Ukraine are ramping up forces in the region of a nuclear complex, the U.N.'s watchdog warns," *New York Times*, March 29, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/03/29/world/russia-ukraine-news/russia-and-ukraine-are-ramping-up-forces-in-the-region-of-a-nuclear-complex-the-uns-watchdog-warns?smid=url-share>].

On **March 30**, **Kirby** stated that Russia was seeking to acquire more munitions from North Korea to bolster its war on Ukraine. “We remain concerned that North Korea will provide further support and Russia’s military operations against Ukraine and we have new information that Russia is actively seeking to acquire additional munitions from North Korea,” he said.¹⁰⁷⁶

On **March 31**, **Lavrov** stated that Russia faced “existential threats” to its security and development from “unfriendly states” as he presented an updated foreign policy doctrine. The 42-page document set out changes to Russia’s view of the world – in particular its increasingly confrontational relationship with the West – that had already been repeatedly articulated by Putin. Lavrov said the start of its “special military operation” in Ukraine had ushered in “revolutionary changes” in world affairs that needed to be reflected in how Russia could take “symmetric and asymmetric measures in response to unfriendly actions.” The document named the United States as the main threat to international stability and the driver of an “anti-Russian line.” But it also said Moscow sought “peaceful coexistence” and a “balance of interests” with Washington. It underlined Russia’s desire to maintain “strategic stability.”¹⁰⁷⁷

In Beijing on **March 31**, the **Xi-Sanchez meeting** revealed the gap between China and the West. The Spanish PM encouraged Xi to talk to the Ukrainian leadership and learn first-hand about Kyiv’s peace formula. According to the Chinese readout Xi called for an end to a “Cold War mentality” and to the pressure of “extreme” sanctions. China’s stance might potentially have been influenced by von der Leyen’s long-awaited EU positioning on China from a day earlier, March 30, where she had said that China was becoming “more repressive at home and more assertive abroad,” and noted that how China continued to interact with Putin’s war would be a “determining factor” for EU-China relations going forward.¹⁰⁷⁸

183.	Warning
Nuclear rhetoric was also ramped up in Minsk. “Putin and I will decide and introduce here, if necessary, strategic weapons, and they must understand this, the scoundrels abroad, who today are trying to blow us up from inside and outside,” Lukashenko said on March 31 . “We will protect our sovereignty and independence by any means necessary, including through the nuclear arsenal.” While Putin had emphasized that Russia would retain control over any tactical nuclear weapons stationed in Belarus, the Belarusian leader noted: “Don’t say we will just be looking after them, and these are not our weapons,” he said. “These are our weapons and they will contribute to ensuring sovereignty and independence,” Lukashenko noted, as the West was “preparing to invade Belarus, to destroy our country.” ¹⁰⁷⁹	

Despite the bluster in Minsk, diplomats from Belarus took a more constrained approach in New York. A **UN Security Council meeting** was convened on **March 31** at the initiative of the United States and

¹⁰⁷⁶ Alexander Ward, “Russia seeking munitions from North Korea, Kirby says,” *Politico*, March 31, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/03/30/russia-seeking-munitions-from-north-korea-00089672>].

¹⁰⁷⁷ “Russia seeks to balance US, meet ‘existential threats’ in new foreign policy doctrine,” *Reuters*, March 31, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-seeks-balance-us-meet-existential-threats-new-foreign-policy-doctrine-2023-03-31/>]. See “The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation,” *Website of the Russian MFA*, March 31, 2023 [https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1860586/].

¹⁰⁷⁸ Eduardo Baptista, “In Beijing, Spanish PM urges Xi to speak with Ukraine’s Zelenskiy,” *Reuters*, March 31, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/spanish-pm-says-he-encouraged-chinas-xi-speak-with-zelenskiy-2023-03-31/>]. Also, Philip Blenkinsop, “EU must cut risks in ties with ‘hardening’ China - EU chief,” *Reuters*, March 30, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/eu-needs-de-risk-ties-with-changing-china-eu-executive-chief-2023-03-30/>].

¹⁰⁷⁹ Yuras Karmanau “Russia might put strategic nukes in Belarus, leader says,” *AP*, March 31, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-nuclear-weapons-belarus-ukraine-ad058c18a3ff259bcbb64cf61ea6251d>] and “Lukashenko: Russia could put intercontinental missiles in Belarus if necessary,” *Reuters*, March 31, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/belarus-lukashenko-says-russian-nuclear-arms-needed-deter-threats-west-2023-03-31/>].

Ukraine. Belarus had been forced by “national security risks” to train pilots and modernize aircraft to deliver nuclear weapons, Belarusian diplomats stated. The same risks had spurred the “possible – I emphasize the possible – deployment of tactical nuclear warheads on the territory of Belarus.” Russia’s envoy noted that his country would not transfer control over the weapons to Belarus. Almost all UNSC members were critical of Russia’s announcement – even China. “We call for the abolition of the nuclear-sharing arrangements and advocate no deployment of nuclear weapons abroad by all nuclear weapons states, and the withdrawal of nuclear weapons deployed abroad,” said China’s envoy.¹⁰⁸⁰

April 2023: A quiet spring on the nuclear rhetoric front

Western criticism arose as Russia assumed the leadership of the UN Security Council at the beginning of April. Russian permanent representative to the UN **Nebenzya** stated on **March 31** that he planned to oversee several debates, including one on arms control, adding that he would discuss a “new world order” that was coming to “replace the unipolar one.” In reaction to the opinion that Russia should not be given the right to chair the SC because of events in Ukraine, he stressed that “without Russia, not only would the work of the Security Council lose its meaning, but also the work of the UN as a whole.” The same **March 31**, the **Kremlin** stated that it planned to exercise all its rights on the council. Also on **March 31**, Russia’s deputy permanent representative **Polyanskiy** denied that his mission was becoming a pariah at the UN. “Absolutely not. We feel that the west is embattled in the UN right now because more countries understand our position,” Polyanskiy said, adding that he thought “it’s rather the west is isolated, but not us in the General Assembly.” As for Putin’s ICC arrest warrant, Polyanskiy dismissed it as “totally irrelevant to any of our activities.”¹⁰⁸¹ In response, on **April 1**, **Zelensky** called Russia’s UNSC role an “absurd and destructive” development and said that it proved “the complete bankruptcy of international institutions.”¹⁰⁸² The same day, **Kuleba** called it “a slap in the face to the international community.” He urged other members of the UNSC to prevent Moscow from abusing its presidency.¹⁰⁸³ The following day, **April 2**, **Borrell** stated that the EU would stand against any abuse during Russia’s leadership, stressing that Russia violated “the very essence of the UN legal framework.”¹⁰⁸⁴

Around the same time, Finland’s accession to NATO generated a number of warnings and counter-warnings. On **April 3**, reacting to Stoltenberg’s announcement that Finland would become the 31st member of NATO, **Grushko** warned that Russia would strengthen its “military potential in the west and in the north-west,” stressing that if the “forces and resources of other NATO members” were deployed in Finland, Moscow would “take additional steps to reliably ensure Russia’s military security.”¹⁰⁸⁵ Following

¹⁰⁸⁰ Edith M. Lederer, “Russia clashes with US over tactical nukes for Belarus,” *AP*, March 31, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-belarus-united-nations-nuclear-0139f0f7f830e275b509cbfa4737915a>] and Elena Chernenko, “О ядерном несдержанно,” *Kommersant*, March 31, 2023 [<https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5912291>].

¹⁰⁸¹ George Wright, “Russia assumes UN Security Council presidency despite Ukrainian anger,” *BBC*, April 1, 2023, [<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-65146557>]; Grigory Sapozhnikov, “Nebenzya: Without Russia the UN would lose its meaning,” *TASS*, March 31, 2023 [<https://tass.com/politics/1596965>]; Julian Borger, “‘Absurdity to a new level’ as Russia takes charge of UN security council,” *Guardian*, 31 March, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/31/absurdity-to-a-new-level-as-russia-takes-charge-of-un-security-council>].

¹⁰⁸² “«Абсурдна новина»: Зеленський відреагував на головування Росії в Радбезі ООН,” *Radio Svoboda*, April 1, 2023 [<https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-zelensky-radbez-oon-rosiya-viyna/32345212.html>].

¹⁰⁸³ “Kuleba: Russian UN Security Council presidency ‘a slap in the face to the international community,’” *Kyiv Independent*, April 1, 2023 [<https://kyivindependent.com/kuleba-russian-un-security-council-a-slap-in-the-face-to-the-international-community/>].

¹⁰⁸⁴ “Zelenskiy Calls Russia’s UN Security Council Presidency ‘Absurd,’” *Radio Free Europe*, April 2, 2023 [<https://www.rferl.org/a/zelenskiy-russia-un-security-council-ukraine/32345772.html>].

¹⁰⁸⁵ “Russia says it will beef up military in northwest as Finland joins NATO - RIA,” *Reuters*, April 3, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-says-it-will-beef-up-military-northwest-finland-joins-nato-ria-2023-04-03/>].

Finland's official NATO accession on **April 4**, **Stoltenberg** stated that the Alliance was "removing the room for miscalculation in Moscow about NATO's readiness to protect Finland," which made Finland "safer and stronger, and all of us safer."¹⁰⁸⁶

In reaction, **Peskov** said that NATO's expansion to Finland was an "encroachment on our security and on Russia's national interests," adding that Moscow would watch closely for any NATO military deployments there. He also said Finland's NATO accession would "force" Russia to "take countermeasures to ensure our security." Also in Moscow, the **Russian foreign ministry** underlined that Russia would be "forced to take military-technical and other retaliatory measures to counter the threats to our national security arising from Finland's accession to NATO," adding that the development marked "a fundamental change in the situation in northern Europe, which had previously been one of the most stable regions in the world." **Shoigu** noted the accession of Finland created "the risks of a significant expansion of conflict." But he said it would not affect the outcome of what Russia calls its "special military operation" in Ukraine.¹⁰⁸⁷

Meanwhile, arms deliveries to Ukraine remained front and center. Poland delivered the first batch of Soviet-era MiG-29 fighter jets to Ukraine, the Polish government stated on **April 3**.¹⁰⁸⁸

On **April 5**, Duda said at a joint news appearance with Zelenskiy during the latter's state visit to Warsaw that Poland would send 14 MiG-29 fighter jets in total to Ukraine.¹⁰⁸⁹ As the Alliance was highly unlikely to admit Ukraine anytime soon, Warsaw would push NATO leaders to provide "additional security guarantees" for Ukraine when they met for their annual summit in summer 2023, Duda also noted. He did not specify what these would be, saying only that they would serve as a "prelude" to full membership. Also, Poland and Ukraine signed an agreement for joint production of 125-millimeter tank shells and other arms, and separate deals for the sale of Polish self-propelled mortars, combat vehicles and anti-aircraft systems.¹⁰⁹⁰ Spanish defense minister **Robles** stated that same **April 5** that Madrid would send six Leopard 2A4 tanks to Ukraine in the second half of April, thereby pushing back the initial shipment date.¹⁰⁹¹

¹⁰⁸⁶ Steven Erlanger, "Finland Joins NATO in a Power Shift and Rebuke to Putin," *New York Times*, April 4, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/04/world/europe/finland-nato-russia-ukraine.html>].

¹⁰⁸⁷ Andrew Osborn and Jake Cordell, "Russia says Finland's NATO accession is dangerous historic mistake," *Reuters*, April 4, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-finlands-nato-accession-carries-risk-escalation-2023-04-04/>]; Jon Henley, "Finland becomes 31st member of Nato in Brussels ceremony," *Guardian*, April 4, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/04/finland-nato-member-brussels-ceremony>]; Matt Berg, Alexander Ward and Lawrence Ukenye, "National Security Daily: The inbox," *New York Times*, April 4, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/04/04/pompeo-not-helping-ukraine-costs-more-00090309>].

¹⁰⁸⁸ "Ukraine war live: Poland delivers first MiG-29 jets to Ukraine, says official," *Guardian*, April 3, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/apr/03/russia-ukraine-war-live-moscow-to-station-nuclear-weapons-near-belarus-western-border-envoy-says?page=with:block-642aaf2e8f08cfbe54d09467#block-642aaf2e8f08cfbe54d09467>]; "Marcin Przydacz: Wołodmyr Zełenski w środę przyjedzie do Polski," *Radio RMF*, April 3, 2023 [https://www.rmfm24.pl/tylko-w-rmf24/poranna-rozmowa/news-marcin-przydacz-wołodmyr-zelenski-w-srode-przyjedzie-do-pol,nId,6693491#crp_state=1].

¹⁰⁸⁹ Leonie Chao-Fong, "Zelenskiy welcomed with military honours on visit to Poland," *Guardian*, April 5, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/05/zelenskiy-welcomed-military-honours-visit-poland-ukraine>].

¹⁰⁹⁰ Andrew Higgins "Zelensky Gets Hero's Welcome in Poland, Cementing Ukraine's Ties," *New York Times*, April 5, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/05/world/europe/russia-ukraine-zelensky-poland.html>].

¹⁰⁹¹ "Ukraine war live: Spain delays sending Leopard tanks to Ukraine," *Guardian*, April 5, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/apr/05/russia-ukraine-war-live-zelenskiy-heads-to-poland-as-macron-and-von-der-leyen-arrive-in-china?page=with:block-642d37b58f081b317503559a#block-642d37b58f081b317503559a>].

Ahead of Macron's state visit to China, speculations were ripe as to what Paris could achieve. Three Biden Administration officials told reporters on April 2 they had little expectation that Macron would achieve a breakthrough, as Xi was unlikely to act on Macron's requests or curtail any of China's assertive moves in the Pacific.¹⁰⁹² The **Elysee Palace** stated on **April 5** that Macron and Biden had agreed in a telephone call to engage China to hasten the end of the war in Ukraine.¹⁰⁹³ China's ambassador to the EU **Fu Cong** noted that China was not on Russia's side in the war and that some people "deliberately misinterpret this because there's the so-called 'no limit' friendship or relationship." He added that "no limit" was "nothing but rhetoric." Fu said that China had not provided military assistance to Russia, nor recognized its efforts to annex Ukrainian territories, including Crimea and the Donbas. Beijing had not condemned the invasion, he said, because it understood Russia's claims about a defensive war against NATO encroachment, and because China believed the "root causes" were "more complicated" than Western leaders said. China would not provide arms for Russia to use in Ukraine in the future, the ambassador said.¹⁰⁹⁴

Having arrived in Beijing, **Macron** warned on **April 5** that anyone helping the "aggressor" Russia in the Ukraine conflict would become an "accomplice in breach of international law." It was not in China's interest to provide weapons to Russia in its war against Ukraine, he added. He did not agree with everything in China's 12-point peace plan for the war in Ukraine, but he did say Beijing could play a more constructive role in the "path to peace." His aim in Beijing was to "relaunch a strategic and global partnership with China" and so engage the country in a "shared responsibility for peace and international stability," Macron said.¹⁰⁹⁵ In Kyiv, **Kuleba** underlined that any peace plan proposed by China that allowed for Russian rule over any Ukrainian territory, including Crimea, was a non-starter.¹⁰⁹⁶

In Brussels, taking stock of Russian-Chinese relations, **Stoltenberg** stated on **April 5** that Putin's announcement that Russia would station tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus demonstrated that the Russia-China joint statement amounted to just "empty promises," further noting that Russia was becoming more and more dependent on China, partly due to international sanctions imposed on Moscow over its war in Ukraine.¹⁰⁹⁷ Responding to Stoltenberg's statement, **Peskov** stated on **April 6** that it was NATO that was "expanding towards Russia, not Russia taking its military infrastructure towards the borders of NATO," adding that Russia would keep an eye on any NATO military deployments to Finland and respond accordingly. "This movement adds to our concerns and worries for our safety ... and we are taking

¹⁰⁹² "Emmanuel Macron wants to charm China – after failing with Putin," *Politico*, April 2, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/war-ukraine-xi-jinping-emmanuel-macron-vladimir-putin-beijing-china-visit-european-union/>].

¹⁰⁹³ "Macron, Biden want to engage China to end war in Ukraine, Elysee says," *Reuters*, April 5, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/macron-biden-want-engage-china-end-war-ukraine-elysee-says-2023-04-05/>].

¹⁰⁹⁴ "China's Ambassador to the EU Tries to Distance Beijing From Moscow," *New York Times*, April 5, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/05/world/europe/eu-china-ambassador-russia-fu-cong.html>].

¹⁰⁹⁵ "Ukraine war live: Anyone supporting Russia in Ukraine conflict is an 'accomplice,' warns Macron," *Guardian*, April 5, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/apr/05/russia-ukraine-war-live-zelenskiy-heads-to-poland-as-macron-and-von-der-leyen-arrive-in-china?page=with:block-642d5d728f08547fbc6654d9#block-642d5d728f08547fbc6654d9>]; Alexander Ward, "National Security Daily: The inbox," *Politico*, April 5, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/04/05/what-taiwans-tsai-privately-told-3-senators-00090644>]; and Roger Cohen, "Macron in China, Says He'll Urge Xi to Work for Peace in Ukraine," *New York Times*, April 5, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/05/world/europe/macron-xi-china-ukraine.html>].

¹⁰⁹⁶ Alexander Ward, "National Security Daily: The inbox," *Politico*, April 5, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/04/05/what-taiwans-tsai-privately-told-3-senators-00090644>].

¹⁰⁹⁷ "Russia's Belarus nuclear threat shows 'empty promises' of China statement: Stoltenberg," *Reuters*, April 5, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-belarus-nuclear-threat-shows-empty-promises-china-statement-stoltenberg-2023-04-05/>].

measures to ensure our security. And so it will be every time NATO approaches our borders, in order to rebalance the security architecture on the continent,” he said.¹⁰⁹⁸

Continuing this rhetoric of pointing fingers to the West, on **April 5**, **Putin** told US ambassador Lynne Tracy that the United States was responsible for the dramatic deterioration of relations between Washington and Moscow. “Relations between Russia and the United States, which global security and stability directly depend on, are going through a deep crisis, unfortunately,” Putin told the new envoy during her credentials presentation, adding “supporting the color revolutions, supporting the coup d’état in Kyiv in 2014, in the end led to today’s Ukrainian crisis.” No response of Tracy was reported.¹⁰⁹⁹

At the same time, in what appeared to be the clearest statement of Ukraine’s interest in negotiations since peace talks had been halted in April 2022, on **April 5**, **Andrii Sybiha**, deputy head of the president’s office of Ukraine, stated that if the Ukrainian counteroffensive would succeed, Ukraine would be “ready to open [a] diplomatic page to discuss” and have peace talks over Crimea.¹¹⁰⁰

On **April 6**, media continued to report on Macron’s and Von der Leyen’s state visit to Beijing. After meetings in Beijing, **Macron** stated that he had urged Xi to bring Russia “back to reason and everyone back to the negotiating table” on the war in Ukraine, while Xi said he wanted to avoid escalation and supported Europe’s strategic autonomy. Macron also said he and Xi had agreed that nuclear weapons should be excluded from the conflict in Ukraine. A few hours later, **Peskov** said in Moscow he saw no prospect for China to mediate in the Ukraine conflict and that Russia had “no other way” than to continue with its offensive, adding that “so far” there were “no prospects for a political settlement.”¹¹⁰¹ A few days later, on **April 10**, **Peskov** stated it was hard to imagine France playing a role in brokering peace in Ukraine, as Paris was “both indirectly and directly involved in this conflict on the side of Ukraine.”¹¹⁰²

Also meeting Xi on **April 6** in Beijing, **Von der Leyen** warned Beijing that any arms shipments to Russia would “significantly harm” relations with the EU. She called on Beijing to use its “influence in a friendship that is built [over] decades” to “really exert” responsibility and be “very clear in the messaging” with Moscow. After the same meeting, **Xi** stated that China and the EU should establish correct mutual understanding and avoid misunderstanding and misjudgment.¹¹⁰³

Meanwhile, discussions on weapons deliveries to Ukraine continued as the **Pentagon** stated on **April 4** that the US would send Ukraine about \$500 million in ammunition and equipment and spend more than

¹⁰⁹⁸ “Ukraine war live: Russia ‘taking measures’ in response to Nato expansion, says Kremlin,” *Guardian*, April 6, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/apr/06/russia-ukraine-war-live-powerful-blasts-in-occupied-melitopol-von-der-leyen-and-macron-in-china?page=with:block-642eb86d8f08156fb81ea299#block-642eb86d8f08156fb81ea299>].

¹⁰⁹⁹ Alexander Ward, “National Security Daily: Broad sides,” *Politico*, April 5, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/04/05/what-taiwans-tsai-privately-told-3-senators-00090644>]; “Vladimir Putin received the credentials of seventeen foreign ambassadors,” *Website of the President of Russia*, April 5, 2023 [<http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70868/videos>].

¹¹⁰⁰ Christopher Miller and Felicia Schwartz “Ukraine ‘ready’ to talk to Russia on Crimea if counteroffensive succeeds,” *Financial Times*, 5 April, 2023 [<https://www.ft.com/content/d68b4007-4ddf-4320-b29a-f2eee2662d6e>].

¹¹⁰¹ Amy Hawkins and Angelique Chrisafis, “Macron urges Xi to bring Russia ‘back to reason’ over Ukraine,” *Guardian*, April 5, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/06/macron-urges-xi-china-russia-ukraine-war>].

¹¹⁰² “Ukraine war live,” *Guardian*, April 10, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/apr/10/russia-ukraine-war-live-pentagon-assesses-impact-of-apparent-intelligence-leak-zelenskiy-condemns-palm-sunday-shelling?page=with:block-6433eee48f08156fb81ec4fa#block-6433eee48f08156fb81ec4fa>].

¹¹⁰³ Stuart Lau, “Von der Leyen warns Xi not to arm Russia with Chinese weapons,” *Politico*, April 6, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/ursula-von-der-leyen-warn-xi-jinping-not-arm-russia-chinese-weapons-china/>].

\$2 billion to buy an array of munitions, radar and new weapons to help Kyiv counter drones in the coming months. The aid was to be taken from military stockpiles, so it would arrive quickly, and included ammunition for HIMARS, air defense interceptors, and artillery rounds, **Blinken** stated.¹¹⁰⁴ On **April 6**, as Ukraine's defense minister Reznikov arrived in Greece, the Greek defense minister **Nikolaos Panagiotopoulos** said Athens would "provide every support to Ukraine at this very important, crucial stage of the war," promising more artillery, small arms ammunition shipments, access to Greek hospitals for military personnel and additional Soviet-era BMP infantry fighting vehicles.¹¹⁰⁵

At the same time, debates continued on whether and when to grant Ukraine NATO membership. On **April 6**, **four officials** involved in the NATO foreign ministers meeting stated that the United States, Germany and Hungary were rebuffing the efforts by some European countries to provide Ukraine a path to NATO membership. Poland and the Baltic states had sought to grant Kyiv a "road map" to join the alliance. "We've got several weeks of hard negotiations ahead to try and close those gaps and craft some kind of political outcome," a Western official stated. "But yes, there are some significant differences on that at the moment." Still, two individuals who had attended these meetings said a growing number supported offering Ukraine "a political path" to membership in Vilnius that would "thicken" the bonds between NATO and Kyiv. Washington, however, was pushing back against that proposal, they said. Practical support such as ammunition deliveries should be the main priority for Vilnius, US officials stated, with discussions over a potential postwar political relationship only distracting from that goal.¹¹⁰⁶ The next day, on **April 7**, **Lavrov** stated that Moscow wanted any Ukraine peace talks to focus on creating a "new world order," adding that Russia rejected a "unipolar world order led by *one hegemon*."¹¹⁰⁷

A leak of classified US intelligence reports offered insights into Ukraine-related questions in the **second week of April**. Comprising around a 100 pages of intelligence and operational briefs from Pentagon's Joint Chiefs, the documents suggested US understanding of Russian planning remained extensive, but also that Washington had leveraged human and signals intelligence to penetrate Ukrainian and Allied decision-making circles. They left no doubt about how deeply enmeshed the United States was in the day-to-day conduct of the war, providing the precise intelligence and logistics that helped explain Ukraine's success against Russia. In terms of predictions, the documents revealed that the US analysts assessed that Ukraine's forces were in more dire straits than Kyiv had publicly acknowledged – without an influx of munitions, Ukraine's air defense system may soon collapse, the US IC had concluded. Last but not least, initial reporting on the documents also offered another explanation for why Washington was reluctant to provide Kyiv with long-range options. One document revealed that Zelensky had argued for "striking Russian deployment locations in Russia's Rostov Oblast" using unmanned aerial vehicles. Another report assessed that China could use Ukrainian strikes on targets deep inside Russia "as an opportunity to cast NATO as the aggressor, and may increase its aid to Russia if it deems the attacks were significant."¹¹⁰⁸

¹¹⁰⁴ Lolita C. Baldor and Matthew Lee, "US is providing Ukraine with \$2.6 billion in military aid," *AP*, April 4, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/ukraine-russia-war-security-aid-billions-e02b957dc15fcb1004bf54a2232c1f5e>].

¹¹⁰⁵ Srdjan Nedeljkovic and Derek Gatopoulos, "Greece to send more arms to Ukraine, but sets limits," *AP*, April 6, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/b8255c6473e7f01cced6202af2c073da>].

¹¹⁰⁶ Henry Foy and Felicia Schwartz, "US opposes offering Ukraine a road map to Nato membership," *Financial Times*, April 6, 2023 [<https://www.ft.com/content/c37ed22d-e0e4-4b03-972e-c56af8a36d2e>].

¹¹⁰⁷ "Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov links peace in Ukraine to a 'new world order'," *Euronews*, April 8, 2023, [<https://www.euronews.com/2023/04/07/russian-foreign-minister-lavrov-links-peace-in-ukraine-to-a-new-world-order>].

¹¹⁰⁸ Julian E. Barnes et al, "Leaked Documents Reveal Depth of U.S. Spy Efforts and Russia's Military Struggles," *New York Times*, April 8, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/08/us/politics/leaked-documents-russia-ukraine-war.html?searchResultPosition=13>]; David Sanger, "How the Latest Leaked Documents Are Different From Past Breaches," *New York Times*, April 9, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/09/us/politics/leaked-pentagon-documents-ukraine.html?searchResultPosition=11>]; and Natasha Bertrand and Kylie Atwood, "Leaked Pentagon documents provide rare window into depth of US intelligence on allies and

Meanwhile on **April 11**, in a criticized move that further underlined unconstrained Russian-Hungarian relations, Hungary's foreign minister **Péter Szijjártó** arrived in Moscow to sign a new energy deal, making him one of the only officials from an EU country to have met with Russian officials in Moscow since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Szijjártó stated that the Russian state energy giant Gazprom would maintain an option to supply additional gas to Hungary in 2023 on top of the shipments agreed under a long-term deal. He insisted that access to Russian energy supplies was crucial for Hungary's security, regardless of the political considerations brought on by the war.¹¹⁰⁹ Yet mere days earlier, among the leaked Pentagon documents, a "top secret" CIA update from **March 2** revealed that **Orbán** had branded the United States as "one of his party's top three adversaries" during a political strategy session on **February 22**. However, the leaked documents also indicated Hungary may have been secretly letting allies use its airspace to move arms toward the battlefield, despite pledges to bar such transfers.¹¹¹⁰

Weapons deliveries to Ukraine continued to be a topic of debate. On **April 10**, Denmark's acting defense minister **Troels Lund Poulsen** confirmed Denmark's intention to provide refurbished 100 Leopard 1 battle tanks to Ukraine. The following day, **April 11**, **Poulsen** said that a Danish decision on whether to supply western fighter jets to Ukraine was likely to take place "before the summer."¹¹¹¹ Also on **April 10** in Canada, **Trudeau** pledged fresh military support for Ukraine after meeting with his Ukrainian counterpart Denys Shmyhal. Canada would send 21,000 assault rifles, 38 machine guns and 2.4m rounds of ammunition to Ukraine and impose sanctions on 14 Russian individuals and 34 entities, including security targets linked to the private mercenary Wagner group, Trudeau said.¹¹¹² In addition, a leaked US document revealed that **Serbia** had declined to provide training to Ukrainian forces, but had committed to sending lethal aid or had supplied it already. The document also said Serbia had the political will and military ability to provide weapons to Ukraine in the future, media reported on **April 11**.¹¹¹³ However, on **April 13**, Serbian president **Aleksandar Vučić** insisted that Serbia had never sold weapons or ammunition to Ukraine or Russia, adding he was "quite certain" that Serbian ammunition would appear "on one side or the other in the battlefield" in Ukraine, after having been exported to Turkey, Spain or the Czech Republic.¹¹¹⁴

foes," *CNN*, April 10, 2023 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/04/09/politics/pentagon-leaked-documents-us-spying-allies-foes/index.html>].

¹¹⁰⁹ Justin Spike, "Hungary forces new energy deals with Russia amid Ukraine war," *AP*, April 11, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/hungary-makes-new-energy-agreement-russia-c069d83bc748cb820c3958bbecf13f17>].

¹¹¹⁰ "Here is what the leaked US war files tell us about Europe," *Politico*, April 14, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/what-the-leaked-us-war-files-tell-us-about-europe/>].

¹¹¹¹ "Ukraine war live: Decision on western fighter jets for Ukraine likely 'before summer', says Denmark," *Guardian*, April 11, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/apr/11/russia-ukraine-war-live-ukrainian-pm-arrives-in-canada-gershkovich-wrongfully-detained-says-us?page=with:block-643555e8f0885230b2d8935#block-643555e8f0885230b2d8935>].

¹¹¹² "Ukraine war live: Canada's prime minister, Justin Trudeau, has pledged fresh military support for Ukraine after meeting with his Ukrainian counterpart, Denys Shmyhal," *Guardian*, April 11, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/apr/11/russia-ukraine-war-live-ukrainian-pm-arrives-in-canada-gershkovich-wrongfully-detained-says-us?page=with:block-64359c3b8f0891526bb40718#block-64359c3b8f0891526bb40718>].

¹¹¹³ "Leaked documents show Serbia agreed to supply arms to Kyiv," *Guardian*, April 12, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/apr/12/russia-ukraine-war-live-russia-risks-becoming-economic-colony-of-china-as-isolation-deepens-says-cia-director?page=with:block-643642038f08791e579d327a#block-643642038f08791e579d327a>].

¹¹¹⁴ "Ukraine war live: Serbian president denies it sold military aid to Ukraine," *Guardian*, April 13, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/apr/13/russia-ukraine-war-live-pentagon-leaker-reportedly-worked-on-military-base-world-bank-to-fund-ukraine-energy-repairs?page=with:block-643839428f08791e579d455d#block-643839428f08791e579d455d>].

At the same time, leaked US documents spurred debate about Chinese support for Russia's war efforts. On **April 13**, journalists reported that, according to a leaked US document, an intercept of Russian intelligence had revealed that **China's Central Military Commission** had approved the "provision of lethal aid" to Russia in its war in Ukraine earlier in 2023 and had planned to disguise military equipment as civilian items. In response to these revelations, a senior US administration official stated that the Administration had no evidence that China had indeed "transferred weapons or provided lethal assistance to Russia," but Washington was monitoring the situation "closely." This US stance notwithstanding, another leak shared some light on potential rationales in Washington. A separate US intelligence assessment from the same period also included in the Pentagon leaks had assessed that Beijing would view a "significant" Ukrainian attack within Russia using US or NATO weapons as "indicative that Washington was directly responsible for escalating the conflict and possibly as further justification for China to provide Russia with lethal aid."¹¹¹⁵ In response, China's foreign minister **Qin Gang** on **April 14** said that China would adopt "a prudent and responsible attitude" regarding the export of weapons, adding that China would "not provide weapons to relevant parties of the conflict, and manage and control the exports of dual-use items in accordance with laws and regulations." He reiterated China's willingness to help facilitate negotiations to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict and said all parties should remain "objective and calm." In turn, the same day, White House National Security Council spokeswoman **Watson** cautioned the White House would "continue to monitor closely."¹¹¹⁶

With media continuing to focus on the leaked US documents, a **US Defense Intelligence Agency** assessment was revealed on **March 14** according to which the war between Ukraine and Russia was expected to continue into 2024. The analysis concluded that, even if Ukraine recaptured "significant" amounts of territory and inflicted "unsustainable losses on Russian forces" – an outcome US intelligence analysts found unlikely, Ukraine's gains would not lead to peace talks. "Negotiations to end the conflict are unlikely during 2023 in all considered scenarios," the document said. It further anticipated that the year would end with the two sides achieving only "marginal" territorial gains as a result of "insufficient troops and supplies for effective operations." In the event that Russia dealt a significant blow against Ukraine and captured more territory, Moscow was likely to "posture forces to achieve further objectives, such as regime change" in Ukraine, the assessment read. In the scenario in which Ukraine gained a decisive advantage, however, US intelligence believed that Kyiv was likely to "conduct riskier offensive operations for additional gains." In response to such a Ukrainian approach, Russia could be expected to "increase nonconventional attacks on Ukraine," though, importantly, "nuclear use" remained "unlikely," the document noted.¹¹¹⁷

Also on **March 14**, media reported that Russia had put its Pacific naval fleet on high alert as part of a surprise inspection aimed at building its defensive capabilities. **Shoigu** said: "The main objective of this inspection is to increase the ability of the armed forces to repel the aggression of a probable enemy from the direction of ocean and sea."¹¹¹⁸

¹¹¹⁵ Karen DeYoung and Missy Ryan, "Russia says China agreed to secretly provide it with 'lethal aid,' files reveal," *Washington Post*, April 14, 2023 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/04/13/russia-china-weapons-leaked-documents-discord/>].

¹¹¹⁶ "China vows not to sell arms to any party in Ukraine war," *AP*, April 14, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/china-taiwan-weapons-germany-ukraine-2a51d2c64c12fca75683d20fbafba475>].

¹¹¹⁷ John Hudson, "No Russia-Ukraine peace talks expected this year, U.S. leak shows," *Washington Post*, April 14, 2023 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/04/12/leaked-documents-ukraine-war/>].

¹¹¹⁸ "Russia conducts surprise inspection of Pacific Fleet," *Reuters*, April 14, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-puts-pacific-fleet-high-alert-surprise-inspection-2023-04-14/>].

Ukraine's westward grain and food exports became a sore point in relations with a number of Eastern European countries in **mid-April**. Governments in Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Slovakia had already called on the EU in March to take steps to curb the influx of Ukrainian produce that had been pushing down prices and said Europe should consider reinstating the tariffs that had been lifted after Russia's invasion. On **April 15**, after having reached an agreement with Kyiv to halt Ukrainian grain deliveries to Poland, **Warsaw** imposed a unilateral ban of dozens of other types of food, to the dismay of the EU and other European governments. In reaction, the government in **Budapest** said that absent "meaningful EU measures," it would follow suit at the end of June.¹¹¹⁹ In reaction, a **European Commission spokesperson** stated on **April 16** that unilateral action on trade by European Union member states was "not acceptable."¹¹²⁰ Still, **Bratislava** and **Sofia** followed suit in introducing a temporary ban on Ukraine grain imports on **April 17 and 19**, respectively.¹¹²¹ On **April 17**, the **Kremlin** stated that prospects for a renewal of the Black Sea grain initiative were "not so bright."¹¹²² The following **April 18**, Polish Agriculture Minister **Robert Telus** said Poland had reached an agreement on restarting transit of Ukrainian grains through its territory as of April 21.¹¹²³ On **April 19**, the European Commission said it was preparing €100m in compensation for EU farmers affected by the recent influx of Ukrainian grain as well as restrictions on selling wheat and maize in affected countries.¹¹²⁴

Also on **April 15**, Ukrainian finance minister **Serhiy Marchenko** stated that a new international economic support package of \$115 billion would give Ukraine more confidence that it could prevail in battling Russia's invasion, amid growing recognition that the war could continue for longer than expected. He detailed that G7 ministers had assured him during International Monetary Fund and World Bank meetings in Washington that they would support Ukraine for as long as needed.¹¹²⁵

In other international reactions to the war in Ukraine, on **April 14**, Brazilian president **Lula da Silva** met in Beijing with China's leader Xi Jinping, after which the two leaders declared that negotiation was "the only viable way out of the crisis in Ukraine," – in a statement which avoided the words "invasion" or "war."¹¹²⁶ Following the visit, on **April 16**, **da Silva** called for establishing a group of countries that were not involved in the Russia-Ukraine war in order to broker peace, citing China's Xi and the president of the United Arab Emirates, bin Zayed al-Nahyan, both of whom he had met during the second week of

¹¹¹⁹ Matthew Mpoke Bigg, Vivek Shankar and Enjoli Liston, "E.U. Cries Foul as Poland and Hungary Ban Ukraine Grain Imports," *New York Times*, April 16, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/16/world/europe/hungary-poland-grain-imports-ukraine.html>].

¹¹²⁰ "EU warns against unilateral steps after Poland, Hungary ban Ukrainian grain," *Reuters*, April 16, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/polish-ban-ukrainian-grain-food-imports-apply-transit-says-minister-2023-04-16/>].

¹¹²¹ "Bulgaria introduces temporary ban on Ukraine grain imports - report," *Reuters*, April 19, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-grains-bulgaria-idAFL8N36M2G7>]; "Slovakia joins Poland and Hungary in halting Ukraine grain imports," *Guardian*, April 17, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/17/slovakia-joins-poland-hungary-halting-ukraine-grain-imports>].

¹¹²² "Kremlin says prospects for Black Sea grain deal 'not bright'," *Reuters*, April 17, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-russia-grain-idAFR4N36901K>].

¹¹²³ "Ukraine says Black Sea grain deal under threat," *Reuters*, April 18, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-poland-talks-corridor-idINS8N34H01E>].

¹¹²⁴ Philip Blenkinsop, "EU plans farmer support, import curbs on Ukraine grain," *Reuters*, April 19, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-plans-farmer-support-import-curbs-ukraine-grain-2023-04-19/>].

¹¹²⁵ "Ukraine minister: G7 support crucial for longer war with Russia," *Reuters*, April 15, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraines-marchenko-says-g7-support-crucial-longer-war-with-russia-2023-04-15/>].

¹¹²⁶ Keith Bradsher, "Brazil's Lula Meets Xi in China as They Seek Path to Peace in Ukraine," *New York Times*, April 14, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/14/world/asia/brazil-china-russia-ukraine.html>].

April. But Kyiv remained critical of Brasilia's efforts. On **April 18**, Lula condemned the violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity by Russia, but again called for mediation to end the war.¹¹²⁷

In what seemed like a follow-up to Xi's visit to Moscow in March, on **April 16**, China's defense minister **Li Shangfu** concluded his three-day visit to Moscow, where he was welcomed by Putin and Shoigu. Following the meeting, Putin stated that military cooperation played "an important role in the Russia-China relations." The two countries were "working actively through the military departments, regularly exchanging information that is useful to us, cooperating in the field of military-technical cooperation, conducting joint exercises, moreover, in different theaters: in the Far East region, and in Europe, and at sea, and on land and in the air," **Putin** said. **Li** stated that the countries' relations "outperform the military-political unions of the Cold War era. They rest on the principles of nonalignment, and are very stable," while also underlining that he had chosen Russia for his first state visit to "show the world the high standard and uniqueness of China-Russia relations."¹¹²⁸

On **April 17**, Russian opposition activist **Kara-Murza** was sentenced to jail for 25 years for his opposition to the Russia's war in Ukraine. Numerous Western countries protested. Russia replied these calls were attempts to interfere in its internal affairs.¹¹²⁹

Concerning further weapons supplies to Ukraine, the **Slovak defense ministry** stated on **April 17** that Slovakia had handed over all 13 MiG-29 fighter jets it had pledged.¹¹³⁰ In addition, Ukraine received two types of air defense systems ahead of the Rammstein military group meeting on April 20. The Patriot air defense system delivery, one from the United States, the other jointly gifted by Germany and the Netherlands, was confirmed by Ukrainian defense minister Reznikov on **April 19**. The second of four promised German Iris-T system were also delivered, according to German government officials. The same **April 19**, the White House announced a new US military aid package for Ukraine of about \$325m in additional military aid, which would include more ammunition and artillery rounds.¹¹³¹ On **April 20**, the **Danish and Dutch defense ministers** announced in a joint statement that they planned to provide Ukraine with at least another 14 refurbished Leopard 2 battle tanks by early 2024.¹¹³²

¹¹²⁷ Anthony Boodle, "Brazil's Lula condemns invasion of Ukraine, touts peace initiative," *Reuters*, April 19, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/ukraine-invites-brazils-lula-visit-criticizes-his-peace-efforts-2023-04-18/>].

¹¹²⁸ "Putin meets with China's defense minister in Moscow," *AP*, April 16, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-china-defense-minister-putin-52cc43b06f30b437251845396a07679f>]; "Russian-Chinese military-political ties outperform Cold War-era unions – Chinese minister," *TASS*, April 16, 2023 [<https://tass.com/world/1605087>]; Stuart Lau, "China Watcher: Warning to Berlin — Defense chief meets Putin — Lula's love feast," *Politico*, April 18, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/china-watcher/warning-to-berlin-defense-chief-meets-putin-lulas-love-feast/>].

¹¹²⁹ "Moscow jails activist for 25 years for opposing Ukraine war," *Guardian*, April 17, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/17/moscow-jails-vladimir-kara-murza-for-25-years-for-opposing-ukraine-war>]; "Russia summons Western diplomats over 'meddling' in dissident's case," *Reuters*, April 18, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-warns-western-diplomats-expulsion-risk-after-meddling-dissidents-case-2023-04-18/>].

¹¹³⁰ "Slovakia hands over all 13 promised MiG fighter jets to Ukraine," *Reuters*, April 17, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/slovakia-hands-over-all-13-promised-mig-fighter-jets-ukraine-2023-04-17/>].

¹¹³¹ "Biden Administration Announces Additional Security Assistance for Ukraine," *US Department of Defense*, April 19, 2023 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3367924/biden-administration-announces-additional-security-assistance-for-ukraine/>]; Matt Berg, "A dream: Patriot systems arrive in Ukraine," *Politico*, April 19, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/04/19/patriot-missiles-arrive-in-ukraine-00092768>]; "National Security Daily," *Politico*, April 19, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/04/19/no-sweden-in-nato-until-after-election-senators-say-00092774>]; "New US \$325 million weapons package could signal Ukraine counteroffensive," *Euronews* with *AP*, April 20, 2023 [<https://www.euronews.com/2023/04/20/new-us-325-million-weapons-package-could-signal-ukraine-counteroffensive>]; and "Ukraine war live: Summary," *Guardian*, April 19, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/apr/19/russia-ukraine-war-live-drone-strikes-hit-infrastructure-facility-in-odesa-region-causing-fire>].

¹¹³² "Danes, Dutch to donate Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine," *AP*, April 20, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/denmark-netherlands-ukraine-tanks-9f6a383f99c09eb25e47fd711b775651>].

184.	De-escalatory
<p>In an interview, US undersecretary of defense for policy Colin Kahl pushed back against criticisms that the Biden administration had slow-rolled aid to Ukraine. “We are all in,” he said on April 17, adding that “Russia has already lost, by every measure.” Regarding weapons deliveries to Ukraine, the Administration had expressed its “concern about US-provided equipment and material being used to strike targets inside of Russia,” but “by and large” it had “not held things back because of a concern for escalation.” Kahl also stated that in exchanges with the US administration, Russian officials had “constantly made the point that Russia’s nuclear doctrine has not changed, that they would only use nuclear weapons in an event of an existential threat to the Russian state,” and the Administration did not think the war in Ukraine posed such a threat. But, Kahl stressed that “while we will do anything we can to support Ukraine, the United States does not have any interest in directly entering the conflict, and seeing the conflict escalate to World War Three either.”¹¹³³</p>	

185.	Warning
<p>On April 18, G7 foreign ministers discussed moving closer to an outright ban on most exports to Russia in an attempt to increase economic pressure on Putin. “We remain committed to intensifying sanctions against Russia, coordinating and fully enforcing them,” the communiqué stated, and would support Ukraine “for as long as it takes.” It condemned “in the strongest possible terms Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine,” calling on Russia to “withdraw all forces and equipment from Ukraine immediately and unconditionally.” In the nuclear realm, it once again noted that “Russia’s irresponsible nuclear rhetoric and its threat to deploy nuclear weapons in Belarus” were “unacceptable,” adding that any use of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons in Ukraine “would be met with severe consequences.”¹¹³⁴</p>	

With more details about Russia-China relations arising from leaked US documents, on **April 20**, media reported that a leaked US intelligence report showed that China had refused a request from the Wagner mercenary group for weapons. Wagner’s request in early 2023 suggested “it had some confidence Beijing would be open to arming Moscow, going beyond other non-lethal forms of support for the military campaign provided by Chinese companies.”¹¹³⁵

Meanwhile, **Stoltenberg** paid a surprise visit to Kyiv on **April 20** and reaffirmed on this occasion that Ukraine’s place was in NATO. On the following **April 21**, speaking ahead of the meeting of the Ukraine defense contact group at Ramstein airbase, he declared that “Ukraine’s rightful place is in NATO, as Allies have agreed.” This statement was later criticized by some allies, who noted that there was no such broad agreement on Ukraine joining NATO, including Hungary’s Orbán. Stoltenberg further pledged more military support for Ukraine, and said he and Zelenskyy had discussed a NATO support program for Ukraine, which would help Ukraine “transition from Soviet-era equipment and doctrines to NATO

¹¹³³ “Colin Kahl on America’s Defense Strategy,” *FP*, April 17, 2023, min 10:50 - 12:40 and 15:35 - 17:25 [https://foreignpolicy.com/live/colin-kahl-on-americas-defense-strategy/?live_refresh;https://vimeo.com/818359939?embedded=true&source=vimeo_logo&owner=24338262].¹¹³³

¹¹³⁴ “G7 Japan 2023 - Foreign Ministers’ Communiqué (18 April 2023),” *Ministère de l’Europe et des affaires étrangères: France Diplomacy*, April 18, 2023 [https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/global-challenges/news/article/g7-japan-2023-foreign-ministers-communique-april-18-2023#sommaire_3]; and Alberto Nardelli, Alex Wickham and Bryce Baschuk, “US, Ukraine Allies Consider Near-Total Ban on Exports to Russia,” *Bloomberg*, April 20, 2023 [<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-04-20/us-ukraine-allies-consider-export-ban-for-russia-over-putin-s-war-in-ukraine?srnd=premium-uk&lead-Source=uverify%20wall>].

¹¹³⁵ Mehul Srivastava, Max Seddon and Felicia Schwartz, “China snubbed Wagner arms request, says US intelligence leak,” *Financial Times*, April 21, 2023 [<https://www.ft.com/content/755b7302-6f69-4790-a143-d75dd2ad8aef>].

standards and ensure full interoperability with the alliance.” He added that once the war in Ukraine ended, Ukraine had to have “the deterrence to prevent new attacks.”¹¹³⁶

In response, on **April 21**, **Peskov** repeated that preventing Ukraine from joining NATO remained one of the goals of Russia’s invasion, arguing that NATO continued its policy of “absorbing and drawing Ukraine into the alliance” and Kyiv’s membership would pose “a serious, significant threat to our country, to our country’s security,” as Russia was dealing with “an aggressive bloc” that viewed it as an “opponent.”¹¹³⁷

Also at the meeting at Ramstein airbase, on **April 21**, **Austin** said the support of the Ukraine defense contact group “for the forces of freedom in Ukraine holds strong and true,” and that the 11th meeting of the group would focus on three key areas: “air defense, ammunition and enablers.”¹¹³⁸ Austin furthermore announced that thirty-one Abrams tanks that Ukrainians will use for training would arrive in Germany by mid-to-late May. Yet Washington continued to refuse to supply Ukraine with F-16 fighter jets. After the Ramstein meeting, **Milley** said that Ukraine’s air-defense system had worked effectively for more than a year and kept Russian warplanes “cautious” for fear of being shot down. Sustaining Ukraine’s air defenses, he said, was “the most critical thing right now.” Milley said the US would continue to work with its allies to that end, adding that “we need to do everything we can to ensure that Ukraine has adequate air defense — ground-based air-defense capability.”¹¹³⁹

In the context of the Ukraine defense contact group, more pledges for further military assistance were made. On **April 21**, **Pistorius** stated that Germany, Poland and Ukraine had signed an agreement for a hub to repair Leopard tanks used in Ukraine to fight Russian forces, a hub that could begin operations at the end of May 2023.¹¹⁴⁰ The same **April 21**, the Canadian defense minister **Anita Anand** announced C\$39m in new military assistance for Ukraine, including sniper rifles, radio sets and a donation to a NATO fund to help Kyiv in its war against Russia.¹¹⁴¹ On **April 24**, **Borrell** expressed confidence that the bloc would complete a plan within days to buy ammunition for Ukraine after Kyiv had expressed frustration at wrangling among EU member states. “I am sure everybody will understand that we are in

¹¹³⁶ Lili Bayer, “Your place is in NATO, alliance chief tells Ukraine on first wartime visit,” *Politico*, April 20, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/nato-jens-stoltenberg-visit-kyiv-ukraine-war-russia/amp/>]; “Doorstep by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at Ramstein Air Base prior to the Ukraine Defense Contact Group meeting,” *NATO*, April 21, 2023 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_214043.htm]; “National Security Daily,” *Politico*, April 21, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/04/21/what-a-year-mayorkas-week-has-been-00093246>]; Lorne Cook and Samya Kullab, “NATO chief: Ukraine’s ‘rightful place’ is in the alliance,” *AP*, April 21, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-stoltenberg-dd2432f52abc743a5f3592cec210a69e>].

¹¹³⁷ Elena Teslova, “Kremlin says NATO encroaching on Russia’s security,” *Andalou Agency*, April 21, 2023 [<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/kremlin-says-nato-encroaching-on-russias-security/2878291>]; Lorne Cook and Samya Kullab, “NATO chief: Ukraine’s ‘rightful place’ is in the alliance,” *AP*, April 21, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-stoltenberg-dd2432f52abc743a5f3592cec210a69e>].

¹¹³⁸ Ljoyd J. Austin, “Opening Remarks by Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III at the 11th Ukraine Defense Contact Group (As Delivered),” *US Department of Defense*, April 21, 2023 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/3369867/opening-remarks-by-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-at-the-11th-ukraine/>].

¹¹³⁹ Helene Cooper, “Pentagon Speeds Up Tank Timeline for Ukraine but Resists Calls for Jets,” *New York Times*, April 21, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/21/world/europe/us-ukraine-tanks-jets.html>]; Lara Seligman, “Ukrainian troops to begin training on US-made tanks in next few weeks,” *Politico*, April 21, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/ukraine-troops-training-us-tanks-next-weeks/>].

¹¹⁴⁰ “Ukraine aktuell: Reparatur-Hub für Leopard-2-Panzer in Polen,” *Deutsche Welle*, April 21, 2023 [<https://www.dw.com/de/ukraine-aktuell-reparatur-hub-für-leopard-2-panzer-in-polen/a-65391554>].

¹¹⁴¹ “Canada to send rifles, radios in new C\$39 million Ukraine aid package,” *Reuters*, April 21, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/canada-send-rifles-radios-new-c39-million-ukraine-aid-package-2023-04-21/>].

a situation of extreme urgency,” Borrell stated as he arrived for a meeting of EU foreign ministers in Luxembourg.¹¹⁴²

In an attempt to push forward talks on Ukraine’s EU and NATO accession, on **April 24**, Estonian prime minister **Kaja Kallas** visited president Zelenskiy in Kyiv and said that Ukraine should be admitted to the EU and NATO. She stated that she supported Ukraine getting more ammunition, arms and training, which was why she proposed the EU to provide 1m shells to Ukraine.¹¹⁴³ The following day, on **April 25**, **Kallas** voiced hope that EU membership talks with Kyiv could begin in 2023, adding that it would be a “hard process” and that the requirements would “need to be fulfilled 100%.”¹¹⁴⁴

Also on **April 24**, in less optimistic news, media reported that **Biden administration officials** were quietly preparing for the possibility that if Ukraine’s spring counteroffensive fell short of expectations, critics at home and allies abroad would argue that the United States had come up short, too. If Kyiv’s forces did not retake a large part of territory seized by Russia, hawks might say the US should have provided more weapons while doves might claim the time for peace talks was yesterday, officials feared. Still, inside the Administration, officials stressed that they would be doing everything possible to make the spring offensive succeed.¹¹⁴⁵

186.	Warning
On April 24 , Lavrov told the UN Security Council that the world may have reached a more dangerous situation than ever during the Cold War. “As was the case in the Cold War, we have reached the dangerous, possibly even more dangerous, threshold.” ¹¹⁴⁶	

187.	Warning
The next day, April 25 , Medvedev said that the world was “sick and quite probably on the verge of a new world war,” adding that such a new world war was not inevitable but the risks of a nuclear confrontation were growing and more serious than concerns about climate change. ¹¹⁴⁷	

188.	Warning
Also on April 25 , the Russian foreign ministry’s head of nuclear non-proliferation Vladimir Yermakov stated that if the US continued “to follow its current course towards a standoff with Russia, while constantly raising the stakes on the verge of a direct military conflict, then the fate of the New START Treaty may become sealed.” He added that “in the worst-case scenario,” if Washington drove the situation “to a military clash between the strongest nuclear powers,” then it was “not the fate of the New	

¹¹⁴² “Foreign Affairs Council: Press remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell upon arrival,” *European Union External Action*, April 24, 2023 [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/foreign-affairs-council-press-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-upon-arrival-8_en].

¹¹⁴³ “Joint Declaration of the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the Prime Minister of Estonia Kaja Kallas,” *Republic of Estonia Government*, April 24, 2023 [<https://www.valitsus.ee/en/news/joint-declaration-president-ukraine-volodymyr-zelenskyy-and-prime-minister-estonia-kaja-kallas>].

¹¹⁴⁴ “Ukraine EU entry negotiations should start this year, urges Estonian PM,” *Euronews*, April 25, 2023 [<https://www.euronews.com/2023/04/25/ukraine-eu-entry-negotiations-should-start-this-year-urges-estonian-pm>].

¹¹⁴⁵ Jonathan Lemire and Alexander Ward, “Biden’s team fears the aftermath of a failed Ukrainian counteroffensive,” *Politico*, April 24, 2023 [https://www.politico.com/news/2023/04/24/biden-ukraine-russia-counteroffensive-defense-00093384?bezug-grd=NWL&utm_source=sondermailing].

¹¹⁴⁶ “Ukraine war live: Summary,” *Guardian*, April 24, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/apr/24/russia-ukraine-war-live-drone-attack-on-crimea-repelled-russia-says-moscow-threatens-to-scrap-grain-deal>].

¹¹⁴⁷ “Putin ally: We are probably on verge of a new world war,” *Reuters*, April 25, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-ally-we-are-probably-verge-new-world-war-2023-04-25/>].

START but the fate of the entire world” that would be a “concern.” These observations would “again confirm” that “the most pressing threat today” was “connected not with the dynamic of stimuli for the first massive strike, which is supposed to be curbed by agreements like the New START, but with a danger of nuclear escalation as a result of a direct military confrontation between nuclear powers,” adding that “to our deepest regrets, these risks keep growing.” He added that Washington was escalating the risks through its conduct with Moscow, demanding that to reverse the negative trend “the US must immediately take concrete steps on de-escalation and to abolish the hostile course towards undermining Russia’s security in practice.”¹¹⁴⁸

On **April 26**, in a telephone conversation with president Zelenskiy, **Xi** reportedly stated that there was “no winner in a nuclear war” and negotiation was the only viable way out of the conflict. All parties should “remain calm and restrained in dealing with the nuclear issue and truly look at the future and destiny of themselves and all mankind and work together to manage the crisis,” Xi added, emphasizing that “we should seize the opportunity to accumulate favorable conditions for a political settlement of the crisis,” that he hoped all parties would “jointly seek long-term peace and stability in Europe through dialogue,” and that he would send the special representative of the Chinese government for Eurasian affairs to visit Kyiv and other countries for “in-depth communication” on the political settlement of “the Ukraine crisis.”¹¹⁴⁹

189.	De-escalatory
Following the warnings by senior Russian officials that Western military support for Ukraine was increasing the risks of a nuclear conflict and the phone-call between Zelenskiy and Xi, on April 27 Moscow seemed bent to half-heartedly walk back Russian claims. Zakharova said that Russia would “do everything to prevent the development of events according to the worst scenario, but not at the cost of infringing on our vital interests,” adding that she would “not recommend that anybody doubt our determination and put it to the test in practice.” She also underlined that the United States would “continue to deliberately infringe on our fundamental interests, deliberately generate risks and raise the stakes in the confrontation with Russia.” ¹¹⁵⁰ On the same day, Peskov stated that the Kremlin was “ready to welcome anything that could hasten the end of the conflict in Ukraine and Russia achieving all the goals it has set itself,” which seemed to all but Russian ears a contradiction in and of itself. ¹¹⁵¹	

Zakharova and Peskov’s statements notwithstanding, **Russia** fired more than twenty cruise missiles at Kyiv and other parts of Ukraine, including Dnipro and Uman, in the early hours of **April 28**. A few hours later, **Shoigu** told the press that NATO’s real aim in Ukraine was to “strategically defeat” Russia, as “almost all” members of the alliance had send military aid to Ukraine. The government in Kyiv noted its

¹¹⁴⁸ “Risks of direct military clash between Russia, US keep growing — Foreign Ministry,” TASS, April 25, 2023 [<https://tass.com/russia/1609013>].

¹¹⁴⁹ “China says it will send peace envoy to Ukraine,” AP, April 26, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/china-ukraine-russia-ac231aec87246cca207c8bb48fd49f34>]; “习近平同乌克兰总统泽连斯基通电话,” CRI online, April 26, 2023 [<https://news.cri.cn/2023-04-26/95029a60-8f18-ffc9-c51d-f5ba9889d1ee.html>].

¹¹⁵⁰ “Russia says does not plan nuclear escalation, but others should not test its patience,” Reuters, April 27, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-says-does-not-plan-nuclear-escalation-others-should-not-test-its-patience-2023-04-27/>].

¹¹⁵¹ Andrew Osborn, “Kremlin welcomes Xi-Zelenskiy call on Ukraine, but says Russia’s aims remain the same,” Reuters, April 27, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/kremlin-welcomes-xi-zelenskiy-call-ukraine-says-its-aims-remain-same-2023-04-27/>].

forces had downed 21 of 23 Russian missiles and two attack drones overnight. **Zelenskiy** condemned the attack and vowed a response to “Russian terror.”¹¹⁵²

Also on **April 28**, **Peskov** played down the idea that Russia was planning to test nuclear weapons. **Tracy** had told Russian media that Russia was the only country talking about potentially resuming nuclear testing. The US ambassador to Moscow was responding to Putin’s February 2023 statement that “if the United States conducts tests, then we will. No one should have dangerous illusions that global strategic parity can be destroyed,” Putin said.¹¹⁵³

That same **April 28**, media reported that the **US National Nuclear Security Administration** (NNSA) was setting up an advanced network of radiation sensors in Ukraine to detect nuclear blasts and verify an attacker’s identity.¹¹⁵⁴

Against this background, support for Ukraine remained steady at the end of April. During a visit to the United States, South Korea’s president **Yoon Suk-yeol** said on **April 29** that it was necessary to ensure Russia’s invasion of Ukraine was unsuccessful and that Seoul was considering options to provide lethal aid to Kyiv.¹¹⁵⁵

May 2023: Western debates on arming Ukraine – but few nuclear statements

Support for Ukraine remained strong, and Russia continued to resent it. On **May 1**, Republican US House Speaker **Kevin McCarthy** stressed his support for military aid to Ukraine, blistering Russia’s “killing of the children,” and distancing himself from others within the GOP who opposed major additional US aid to Ukraine.¹¹⁵⁶ On **May 2**, in a meeting with Russia’s top military officials, **Shoigu** said Russian forces were engaged in combat operations “along the entire line of contact” in Ukraine and were fighting not only Ukraine but also “unprecedented military assistance from the West.” On the same day, **Peskov** stated German-supplied weapons were already being used in the Donbas region. **Scholz** had said on **May 1** that Berlin had stressed towards Ukraine, like other NATO members, that the weapons it was supplying should not be used against Russian territory.¹¹⁵⁷

After a pair of explosions above the Kremlin early on **May 3**, **Russia** accused Ukraine of trying to assassinate Putin in a terrorist attack with a drone attack that had been disabled by Russian defenses. Kyiv denied any involvement and asserted that Russia had manufactured the incident to distract attention

¹¹⁵² Joe Middleton, Jon Henley and Helen Sullivan, “Russia-Ukraine war live,” *Guardian*, April 28, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/apr/28/russia-ukraine-war-live-air-raid-sirens-sound-in-kyiv-and-across-ukraine?filterKeyEvents=false>].

¹¹⁵³ “Kremlin plays down idea that Russia is preparing a nuclear weapons test,” *Reuters*, April 28, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/kremlin-plays-down-idea-that-russia-is-preparing-nuclear-weapons-test-2023-04-28/>].

¹¹⁵⁴ William J. Broad, “U.S. Wires Ukraine With Radiation Sensors to Detect Nuclear Blasts,” *New York Times*, April 28, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/28/science/ukraine-nuclear-radiation-sensors.html>].

¹¹⁵⁵ David Brunnstrom and Eric Beech, “On lethal aid to Ukraine, South Korean leader says Seoul considering its options,” *Reuters*, April 29, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/lethal-aid-ukraine-south-korean-leader-says-seoul-considering-its-options-2023-04-28/>].

¹¹⁵⁶ “Ukraine war live: Evening summary,” *Guardian*, May 1, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/may/01/russia-ukraine-war-live-air-raid-sirens-in-kyiv-and-across-ukraine-as-officials-warn-of-missile-threat>].

¹¹⁵⁷ “Kremlin says German involvement in Ukraine conflict is growing due to arms supplies,” *Reuters*, May 2, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/kremlin-says-german-involvement-ukraine-conflict-is-growing-due-arms-supplies-2023-05-02/>].

from Ukraine's expected imminent counteroffensive and possibly to justify an escalation of its own attacks. Moscow stressed that "the Russian side reserves to take retaliatory measures where and when it sees fit."¹¹⁵⁸ In reaction, on **May 4**, **Zelenskiy** denied responsibility for the attack, stating "we don't attack Putin, or Moscow, we fight on our territory and defend our towns and cities." The same day, **Podolyak** also denied Ukraine's involvement in the attack, saying it was the result of "local resistance forces." In reactions from Russia, **Medvedev** said that Zelenskiy should be "eliminated" in retaliation. In a similar vein, the chair of the State Duma **Vyacheslav Volodin** stated the "Kyiv regime" should be labelled as terrorists and destroyed, adding "we will demand the use of weapons that can stop and destroy the Kyiv terrorist regime," though it remained unclear whether he meant nuclear weapons or merely sufficient conventional deliveries.¹¹⁵⁹

However, some Russian officials were more explicit. On the same **May 4**, **Rogozin** said "an imminent deadly air fight" was anticipated but that Russia could avoid a significant number of casualties by using tactical nuclear weapons against Kyiv preemptively. "According to our [nuclear] doctrine we have the right to use tactical nuclear weapons because that's what they exist for," he said, calling them a "great equalizer for the moments when there is a clear discrepancy in the enemy's favor."¹¹⁶⁰ In contrast, **Prigozhin** cautioned that "as a radically-minded person" he could say that "the use of nuclear weapons in response to a drone is, of course, out of question." He added that instead Russia should improve its military capabilities to allow it to retaliate, while making disproportionate threats to the West made them "look like clowns."¹¹⁶¹

In reaction to the drone incident, also on **4 May**, **Blinken** stated that the US could not confirm Russian reports that Ukraine had targeted Putin with a drone strike. White House press secretary **Karine Jean-Pierre** stated the US was "certainly not encouraging or enabling Ukraine to strike beyond its borders." Senior administration officials were working to confirm whether the suspected strike was ordered by Kyiv, conducted by a rogue pro-Ukraine group, or a false flag operation by Russia, two **US officials** stated.¹¹⁶²

Later on **4 May**, **Peskov** claimed the US was behind the drone incident, stating Russia knew "decisions about such actions, on such terrorist attacks, are not made in Kyiv, but in Washington" and that Kyiv was "doing what it is told to do." He added that it was "very important" that "in Washington they understand that we know this, and understand how dangerous such direct participation in the conflict" was, adding that retaliatory steps would be "carefully considered and balanced" by the Russian leadership. In an apparent attempt to project an image of normality, Peskov also said the same day that Putin would not

¹¹⁵⁸ "Сообщение пресс-службы Президента," *President of Russia*, May 3, 2023 [<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/71091>].

¹¹⁵⁹ "What happened above the Kremlin at night? What will happen next?," *Pravda.ru*, May 3, 2023 [https://english.pravda.ru/news/russia/156506-kremlin_attacks/].

¹¹⁶⁰ Pjotr Sauer and Dan Sabbagh, "Kremlin drone incident: Zelenskiy denies Russian claim Ukraine attempted to kill Putin," *Guardian*, May 4, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/03/russia-accuses-ukraine-of-trying-to-kill-vladimir-putin-with-kremlin-drone-strike>]; "Putin Allies Split Over Using Tactical Nuclear Weapons in Ukraine," *Moscow Times*, May 4, 2023 [<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/05/04/putin-allies-split-on-using-tactical-nuclear-weapons-in-ukraine-a81038>].

¹¹⁶¹ "Пресс-служба Пригожина", *Telegram*, May 4, 2023 [https://t.me/concordgroup_official/894].

¹¹⁶² Alexander Ward, Matt Berg and Ari Hawkins "The Kremlin drone attack, explained as best we can," *Politico*, May 3, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/05/03/the-kremlin-drone-attack-explained-as-best-we-can-00095047>]; Pjotr Sauer and Dan Sabbagh, "Kremlin drone incident: Zelenskiy denies Russian claim Ukraine attempted to kill Putin," *Guardian*, May 4, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/03/russia-accuses-ukraine-of-trying-to-kill-vladimir-putin-with-kremlin-drone-strike>]; "Putin Allies Split Over Using Tactical Nuclear Weapons in Ukraine," *Moscow Times*, May 4, 2023 [<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/05/04/putin-allies-split-on-using-tactical-nuclear-weapons-in-ukraine-a81038>].

give a special presidential address in connection with the attack and that a normal working situation was in place. In response, **Kirby** said “the US did not have any involvement with this incident,” and Peskov was “just lying there, pure and simple.” Kirby further reiterated that Washington did not support or condone attacks by Ukraine outside its borders, stating “we’ve been clear with them publicly and we’ve been clear with them privately that we do not encourage nor do we enable them to strike outside Ukraine.” Similarly, US Defense Department spokesperson **Garron Garn** said the allegations were “completely false” as “the US was in no way involved.”¹¹⁶³

Concerning possible nuclear weapons use, also on **May 4**, Director of US National Intelligence **Avril Haines** stated that Russia was “very unlikely, in our current assessment” to use its nuclear arsenal. She did not elaborate further on the US intelligence community assessment.¹¹⁶⁴

Meanwhile, on **May 3**, during Zelenskiy’s visit to Finland, a group of Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland issued a joint statement in which they backed Ukraine to become a member of NATO and the EU. The statement added that the Nordic countries would “continue their political, financial, humanitarian and military support for as long as it takes.”¹¹⁶⁵

Concerning military support for Ukraine, the same **May 3**, a **senior US DoD official** told media that a Patriot air defense system from the US Army, along with a group of 65 Ukrainian air defenders trained by the US military had arrived in Ukraine the previous week.¹¹⁶⁶ In Brussels, the European Commission signed off on an act in support of ammunition production, **Breton** stated. The act allocated more than \$550 million from the EU budget to boost weapons manufacturing, matched with another \$550 million in co-financing from member countries, with the aim to produce 1 million rounds of ammunition within one year.¹¹⁶⁷

Meanwhile, discussions on supplying Ukraine with F-16 jets continued. Helsinki Commission Chair **Joe Wilson** and ranking member **Steve Cohen** visited Kyiv in the first week of May and stated that they plan to urge the Biden administration to facilitate the donation of materiel Kyiv has sought for months: F-16 jets and long-range munitions, such as the U.S.-made Army Tactical Missile System.¹¹⁶⁸

¹¹⁶³ Matt Berg, “Kremlin ‘lying’ about U.S. involvement in Moscow drone strikes, officials say,” [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/05/04/moscow-drone-strikes-kremlin-kirby-00095266>]; Pjotr Sauer and Julian Borger, “White House dismisses ‘ludicrous’ Russian claims US planned Kremlin drone strikes,” [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/04/russia-accuses-us-of-being-behind-drone-attack-on-kremlin-putin>]; “Ukraine war live: Summary,” *Guardian*, May 4, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/may/04/russia-ukraine-war-live-air-raid-sirens-in-kyiv-and-eastern-regions-zelenskiy-denies-responsibility-for-kremlin-drone-attack>].

¹¹⁶⁴ “Russia ‘very unlikely’ to use nuclear weapons, US intel chief,” *Reuters*, May 4, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-very-unlikely-use-nuclear-weapons-us-intel-chief-2023-05-04/>].

¹¹⁶⁵ “Joint statement of the Nordic-Ukrainian Summit in Helsinki,” *Government Offices of Sweden*, May 3, 2023 [<https://www.government.se/statements/2023/05/joint-statement-of-the-nordic-ukrainian-summit-in-helsinki/>].

¹¹⁶⁶ Alexander Ward, Matt Berg and Ari Hawkins “The Kremlin drone attack, explained as best we can,” *Politico*, May 3, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/05/03/the-kremlin-drone-attack-explained-as-best-we-can-00095047>].

¹¹⁶⁷ Alexander Ward, Matt Berg and Ari Hawkins “The Kremlin drone attack, explained as best we can,” *Politico*, May 3, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/05/03/the-kremlin-drone-attack-explained-as-best-we-can-00095047>].

¹¹⁶⁸ “National Security Daily: On the Hill,” *Politico*, May 9, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/05/09/no-atacms-to-ukraine-following-u-k-move-00095936>].

US senator Tammy **Duckworth** stated on **May 5** that if F-16s were what Ukraine needed and were appropriate, she would support that, but “frankly, what they need more of than anything right now” was artillery and ammunition, which was “something that we’re working hard on producing.”¹¹⁶⁹

Instead, on **May 9**, media reported that London was set to send missiles with a range of 300km to Ukraine.¹¹⁷⁰ On **May 11**, **Wallace** confirmed reports that the UK had donated multiple long-range Storm Shadow cruise missiles to Ukraine, stating that these weapons systems would give Ukraine “the best chance to defend themselves against Russia’s continued brutality, especially the deliberate targeting of Ukrainian infrastructure, which is against international law.” According to Western officials, Britain had received assurances from the Ukrainian government that these missiles would be used only within Ukrainian sovereign territory and not against Russian territory.¹¹⁷¹

In reaction to London’s step, the Biden Administration stated on **May 9** that it had no plans to follow Britain’s lead in sending long-range missiles to Ukraine, with one US official stating that the US “policy on ATACMS had not changed.”¹¹⁷² However, on **May 9**, the **US Department of Defense** still confirmed a “new security assistance package,” which included more artillery, ammunition, air defense missiles and drones to bolster Ukraine’s air defenses and artillery ammunition needs. Washington sought to spend money to help network the new US Patriot air defense systems with existing Ukrainian Soviet-era air defenses, as well as the French, German and Italian systems at work in Ukraine, the DOD announced. This package totaled up to \$1.2bn and is being provided under the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI).¹¹⁷³ Moreover, the same day, **MEPs** voted in Brussels to speed up consideration of a law to boost ammunition production in Europe to €500m to supply Ukraine. The decision should see the new legislation, termed the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (Asap), in place by the end of the year, MEPs and European Commission officials said.¹¹⁷⁴

Concerning attacks on Russian territory, on **May 6**, Russian nationalist writer Zakhar Prilepin was wounded in a car bombing, an attack which the **Russian foreign ministry** blamed on Ukraine and the West, stating that “responsibility for this and other terrorist acts lies not only with Ukrainian authorities, but also their western patrons, the United States in the first instance.” **Zakharova** stated on Telegram that the attack was the “direct responsibility of the US and Britain,” and alleged that Washington and NATO had “fed another international terrorist cell – the Kyiv regime.”¹¹⁷⁵

¹¹⁶⁹ “National Security Daily: The complex,” *Politico*, May 5, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/05/05/duckworth-dod-needs-to-think-ahead-in-the-indo-pacific-00095542>].

¹¹⁷⁰ Karen DeYoung, “Britain prepares to send long-range missiles to Ukraine,” *Washington Post*, May 9, 2023 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/05/08/britain-ukraine-long-range-missile/>].

¹¹⁷¹ “Britain has delivered long-range ‘Storm Shadow’ cruise missiles to Ukraine ahead of expected counteroffensive, sources say,” *CNN*, May 11, 2023 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/05/11/politics/uk-storm-shadow-cruise-missiles-ukraine/index.html>].

¹¹⁷² “National Security Daily: No ATACMS to Ukraine following U.K. move,” *Politico*, May 9, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/05/09/no-atacms-to-ukraine-following-u-k-move-00095936>].

¹¹⁷³ “Biden Administration Announces Additional Security Assistance for Ukraine,” *US Department of Defense* May 9, 2023 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3388890/biden-administration-announces-additional-security-assistance-for-ukraine/>]; “National Security Daily: The complex,” *Politico*, May 9, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/05/09/no-atacms-to-ukraine-following-u-k-move-00095936>].

¹¹⁷⁴ “More ammunition production to support Ukraine: MEPs to fast-track proposal,” *European Parliament*, May 9, 2023 [<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20230509IPR86104/more-ammunition-production-to-support-ukraine-meps-to-fast-track-proposal>]; “Ukraine war live: Summary,” *Guardian*, May 9, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/may/09/russia-ukraine-war-live-15-missiles-shot-down-over-kyiv-as-victory-day-begins-in-russia>].

¹¹⁷⁵ “Pro-Kremlin writer Zakhar Prilepin injured in car explosion, says Russia,” *Guardian*, May 6, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/06/pro-kremlin-writer-zakhar-prilepin-injured-in-car-explosion-says-russia>].

Regarding air and missile defense efforts in Ukraine, the Ukrainian air force stated on **May 6** that a US-made Patriot air-defense missile successfully intercepted a Russian hypersonic Kinzhal missile for the first time over Kyiv on **May 4**. This was confirmed by three senior US officials.¹¹⁷⁶ Ahead of Russian 'Victory Day' celebrations, Russia attacked Kyiv with nearly three dozen drones overnight, Ukraine's military stated on **May 8**, which amounted to one of the largest direct attacks of the Ukrainian capital as part of a broader aerial assault that also targeted Kharkiv, Kherson, Mykolaiv and Odesa with 16 missiles. Ukraine's military said that it shot down all 35 drones, including 30 over Kyiv.¹¹⁷⁷

On **May 9**, Putin said in a speech during celebrations marking Russia's World War II victory on the Red Square that Western nations were waging a "real war" on Moscow and treated Ukraine as a "bargaining chip." He added that Western elites would "talk about their exceptionalism, dividing people and provoking bloody conflicts, sowing hatred, Russophobia and aggressive nationalism, destroying traditional family values." The celebrations were scaled back, featuring a single Soviet-era tank, no aircraft and lasted less than an hour.¹¹⁷⁸ The same **May 9**, in reaction to Russia's Victory Day parades, **Scholz** stated that the EU had to avoid being intimidated by Moscow's showcasing of military power but continue to support Ukraine for as long as it took.¹¹⁷⁹

Meanwhile, on **May 9**, concerning the Black Sea Grain initiative, **Blinken** and UK foreign secretary **James Cleverly** urged Russia not to use global hunger as a tool of war in the conflict in Ukraine. Blinken called on Russia to extend and expand the grain initiative, calling Russia blocking ships from sailing to Ukrainian ports to pick up grain a "cynical action," adding that "the world shouldn't need to remind Moscow every few weeks to stop using people's hunger as a weapon in their war against Ukraine." Similarly, Cleverly stated it was "completely wrong" that Russia used "the hunger of some of the poorest people in the world to pursue leverage in this conflict."¹¹⁸⁰

In discussions on the possibility of ending the war, also on **May 9**, **Guterres** said there was currently no prospect of peace between Russia and Ukraine because "both sides are convinced that they can win," adding he was pessimistic about the EU and the UN's ability to broker an end to the conflict sparked by Russia's 2022 invasion.¹¹⁸¹ The same **May 9**, speaking alongside her Chinese counterpart, Qin Gang, at a press conference in Berlin, **Baerbock** stated China could play a decisive role in ending the war in Ukraine, adding that as a permanent member of the UN security council, China had the power to be influential in the conflict and bring it to an end.¹¹⁸²

¹¹⁷⁶ "Ukraine Claims It Shot Down Russia's Most Sophisticated Missile for First Time," *New York Times*, May 6, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/06/world/europe/ukraine-russia-war-patriot.html>].

¹¹⁷⁷ "Russia launched a large wave of attack drones over Kyiv, Ukrainian officials say," *New York Times*, May 8, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/08/world/europe/russia-drone-attack-kyiv.html>].

¹¹⁷⁸ "Downbeat Putin slams West at low-key Victory Day parade in Russia," *Politico*, May 9, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-downbeat-vladimir-putin-slams-at-low-key-victory-day-parade-celebrations-moscow-kremlin-ukraine-war/>].

¹¹⁷⁹ "Europe must not be intimidated by Moscow's power plays - Scholz," *Reuters*, May 9, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/europe-must-not-be-intimidated-by-moscows-power-plays-scholz-2023-05-09/>].

¹¹⁸⁰ "US and UK tell Russia to stop using hunger as leverage in Ukraine conflict," *Guardian*, May 9, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/may/09/russia-ukraine-war-live-15-missiles-shot-down-over-kyiv-as-victory-day-begins-in-russia>].

¹¹⁸¹ David Latona, "UN chief says peace talks in Ukraine conflict not possible right now," *Swissinfo*, May 9, 2023 [<https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/un-chief-says-peace-talks-in-ukraine-conflict-not-possible-right-now/48497008>].

¹¹⁸² "Germany's Baerbock says China can help end Ukraine war," *Deutsche Welle*, May 9, 2023 [<https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-baerbock-says-china-can-help-end-ukraine-war/a-65566298>].

Further dimming the prospects of arms control, according to a decree signed by **Putin** on **May 10**, Russia may formally “denounce” the treaty on conventional armed forces in Europe that it pulled out of in 2015. The decree formally appointed Ryabkov to represent Putin during parliamentary proceedings on denouncing the treaty.¹¹⁸³

Also speaking on **May 10** at a meeting of NATO’s military committee, **Stoltenberg** said the alliance needed to “redouble our efforts” in order to provide security to the 1 billion people in NATO countries, citing what he claimed was a range of rising threats.¹¹⁸⁴

Elsewhere, media reported that Trump had known of Putin’s intent to invade Ukraine. On **May 10**, Trump said that he and Putin “used to talk about” Moscow’s intention to launch another invasion in Ukraine, adding that Putin “would’ve never gone in if I was president. We used to talk about it, too.” **Alexander Vidman**, an NSC director for Ukraine in the Trump Administration, confirmed on **May 11** that conversations about Russia’s aggression had been “on the agenda consistently” during bilateral meetings, adding that “it was in every set of talking points” he drafted for Trump, “all the background documents” he prepared. Vidman added that warning Russia against escalating the war “was a regular topic.” The same day, a **former Trump Administration official** said Trump in at least one call told Putin that Russia couldn’t wade deeper into Ukraine because he had approved the transfer of anti-tank missiles to Kyiv. “It was in the context of *you can’t do what you did with Obama*,” the official said, referring to the annexation of Crimea and the “little green men” in the Donbas.¹¹⁸⁵

Regarding discussions on peace talks between Russia and Ukraine, on **May 12**, **Putin** told South African President **Cyril Ramaphosa** over the phone that Moscow had never refused the “diplomatic track” to resolving the conflict in Ukraine, adding that he supported the proposal to involve African leaders in talks regarding a peace process for Ukraine.¹¹⁸⁶ On **May 16**, **Ramaphosa** reiterated that six African leaders would plan to travel to Russia and Ukraine “as soon as is possible” to help find a resolution to the war, adding that Putin and Zelenskiy had “agreed to receive the mission and the African heads of state, in both Moscow and Kyiv.”¹¹⁸⁷ In reaction, on **May 18**, **Peskov** said Moscow would be ready to listen to “any proposals” that would help resolve the conflict.¹¹⁸⁸

Concerning Chinese efforts to help resolve the Ukraine war, also on **May 12**, media reported that **Borrell** had sent a paper to EU foreign ministers stating that a Russian defeat in Ukraine would not derail China’s rise, while relations between Beijing and the EU would be “critically affected” if Xi did not push

¹¹⁸³ “Russia moves to ‘denounce’ European armed forces treaty - decree,” *Reuters*, May 10, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-moves-denounce-european-armed-forces-treaty-decree-2023-05-10/>].

¹¹⁸⁴ “Opening remarks NATO Military Committee in Chiefs of Defence session,” *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, May 10, 2023 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_214383.htm?selectedLocale=en].

¹¹⁸⁵ “National Security Daily: Trump ‘used to talk about’ Ukraine invasion with Putin,” *Politico*, May 11, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/05/11/trump-used-to-talk-about-ukraine-invasion-with-putin-00096394>]; Aaron Rupar, “‘He made a tremendous mistake’ - Trump on Putin,” *Twitter*, May 11, 2023 [<https://twitter.com/atrupar/status/1656464045145223171?s=20>].

¹¹⁸⁶ “Putin, S.Africa’s Ramaphosa discussed Ukraine in phone call-Kremlin,” *Reuters*, May 12, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/putin-safricas-ramaphosa-discussed-ukraine-phone-call-kremlin-2023-05-12/>]; “Telephone conversation with President of South Africa Cyril Ramaphosa,” *Kremlin*, May 12, 2023 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/71120>].

¹¹⁸⁷ “President Cyril Ramaphosa: Media briefing on Official Visit by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong of the Republic of Singapore,” *South African Government*, 16 May 2023 [<https://www.gov.za/speeches/president-cyril-ramaphosa-media-briefing-official-visit-prime-minister-lee-hsien-loong>].

¹¹⁸⁸ “Kremlin says African Ukraine peace delegation will visit Moscow,” *Reuters*, May 18, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-kremlin-africa-idAFR4N377023>]; “Ukraine war live: Evening Summary,” *Guardian*, May 18, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/may/18/russia-ukraine-war-live-updates-kyiv-missile-strikes-attack>].

Putin to withdraw his forces from Ukraine.¹¹⁸⁹ Meanwhile, on the same **May 12**, **China's foreign ministry** announced that its special representative for Eurasian affairs, Li Hui, would visit Ukraine, Poland, France, Germany and Russia in what it called "an effort to promote peace talks."¹¹⁹⁰

Meanwhile, discussions flared up again about attacks on Russian territory. On **May 13**, media reported that leaked US intercepts would show that **Zelensky** had plotted attacks inside Russia. Namely, Ukraine's leader proposed occupying Russian villages to gain leverage over Moscow, bombing a pipeline that transfers Russian oil to Hungary, and privately pining for long-range missiles to hit targets inside Russia's borders, according to classified US intelligence documents detailing his internal communications with top aides and military leaders.¹¹⁹¹

Elsewhere, Western states pledged more military support to Ukraine. On **May 13**, media reported that the **German government** would provide further military equipment worth €2.7bn to Ukraine in what would be the biggest Berlin had provided since Russia's invasion. The package would include 20 Marder infantry fighting vehicles, 30 Leopard 1 tanks, 15 Gepard anti-aircraft tanks, 200 reconnaissance drones, four additional Iris-T anti-aircraft systems including ammunition, additional artillery ammunition and more than 200 armored combat and logistics vehicles.¹¹⁹²

On **May 14**, on his first state visit to Berlin since the beginning of the war, **Zelenskiy** thanked Germany for its support and what he called the largest military aid package since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion as he met with Steinmeier and Scholz in Berlin. Scholz pledged to support Ukraine as long as needed to repel Russia's invasion, and outlined weapons deliveries including new IRIS-T air defense systems and Leopard 2 tanks.¹¹⁹³

The same **May 14**, **Macron** stated that Russia had "already lost geopolitically" its war in Ukraine and was transforming into a vassal state of China, adding that Russia had "de facto started a form of vasallization with China" and had "lost its access to the Baltic, which was critical, because it prompted the decision by Sweden and Finland to join NATO."¹¹⁹⁴ Macron also promised Zelenskiy, who was visiting Paris, to "train and equip" several Ukrainian battalions and provide them with "tens of armored vehicles and light tanks."¹¹⁹⁵

¹¹⁸⁹ "EU tells ministers they must 'recalibrate' China policy over support for Russia," *Guardian*, May 12, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/12/eu-tells-ministers-they-must-recalibrate-china-policy-over-support-for-russia>].

¹¹⁹⁰ Nicolas Camut, "China's special envoy to visit Ukraine, Russia," *Politico*, May 12, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/china-xi-jinping-li-hui-volodymyr-zelenskyy-vladimir-putin-special-envoy-to-visit-ukraine-russia/>].

¹¹⁹¹ "Zelensky, in private, plots bold attacks inside Russia, leak shows," *Washington Post*, May 13, 2023 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/05/13/zelensky-ukraine-war-leaked-documents/>].

¹¹⁹² Matthias Gebauer und Marina Kormbaki, "Bundesregierung schnürt neues Waffenpaket für die Ukraine," *Spiegel*, May 13, 2023 [https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/ukraine-bundesregierung-schnuert-neues-waffenpaket-hilfe-fuer-die-fruehjahrsoffensive-a-220880d8-c19a-4785-a97b-8c2e94e68366?sara_ref=re-so-app-sh].

¹¹⁹³ Loveday Morris and Kate Brady, "Ukraine's Zelensky visits Germany, turning a page on fragile ties," *Washington Post*, May 14, 2023; [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/05/14/zelensky-ukraine-germany-visit-aid/>]; "Ukraine war live: Summary," *Guardian*, May 14, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/may/14/russia-ukraine-war-live-zelenskiy-arrives-in-berlin-after-germany-announces-further-27bn-of-military-aid>].

¹¹⁹⁴ "Russia denounces Macron over China comments," *Reuters*, May 15, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-denounces-macron-over-china-comments-2023-05-15/>].

¹¹⁹⁵ "France to give Ukraine more tanks, Macron and Zelenskyy announce," *Politico*, May 14, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/volodymyr-zelenskyy-emmanuel-macron-ukraine-war-france/>].

After meeting Zelenskyy in Britain, **Sunak** said on **May 15** that Britain would provide Ukraine with hundreds of air defense missiles and further unmanned aerial systems, including new long-range attack drones with a range of more than 200km, over the coming months. He added that Ukraine needed “the sustained support of the international community to defend against the barrage of unrelenting and indiscriminate attacks that have been their daily reality for over a year.”¹¹⁹⁶

Concerning Russian weapons supplies, also on **May 15**, **Kirby** stated that the US was seeing more indications that Russia and Iran were expanding an unprecedented defense partnership that would help Moscow prolong its war in Ukraine as well as pose a threat to Iran’s neighbors. Iran reportedly provided Russia with one-way attack drones, including more than 400 since August, Kirby said.¹¹⁹⁷

On **May 16**, **Ukraine’s military** said it has neutralized the Kremlin’s most potent hypersonic weapon, shooting down six out of six Kinzhal missiles launched at Kyiv during a sweeping and “exceptionally intense” night-time attack. Ukraine’s commander-in-chief, **Valerii Zaluzhnyi**, moreover claimed Kyiv’s defenders shot down 18 out of 18 Russian rockets and drones. In response, **Russia’s defense ministry** stated that it had destroyed a US-built Patriot surface-to-air missile defense system overnight with a hypersonic Kinzhal missile attack on Ukraine.¹¹⁹⁸ Two US officials said later on May 16 that a Patriot system had probably suffered damage but that it did not appear to have been destroyed.¹¹⁹⁹ The following day, Ukrainian air force spokesperson Yuriy Ihnat ruled out the possibility of a Russian Kinzhal missile having destroyed a Patriot system.¹²⁰⁰

Meanwhile, discussions on conditions for peace talks and the possibility of the Ukraine war turning into a frozen conflict took off. On **May 17**, **Kuleba** reiterated towards China’s special representative for Eurasian affairs Li Hui at talks in Kyiv that his government would not accept any proposals to end the war with Russia that involved it losing territory or freezing the conflict.¹²⁰¹ After China’s special envoy had met with Zelenskyy, his chief of staff Andriy Yermak, and with Kuleba, **Wang** stated on **May 18** that there was “no remedy to resolve the crisis,” adding that “all parties should create favorable conditions and accumulate mutual trust for the political settlement.” Over two days, Hui and Kuleba had discussed “ways to stop Russian aggression,” the **Ukrainian Foreign Ministry** stated.¹²⁰² In contrast, on **May 17**, **Lavrov** alleged the war in Ukraine may end due to the US abandoning its allies, as Washington had done

¹¹⁹⁶ “UK pledges attack drones, more missiles as Ukraine’s Zelenskyy meets prime minister on European tour,” *AP*, May 15, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/ukraine-zelenskyy-uk-sunak-military-aid-fc6809548de37304fb311fc66ee7d0d0>].

¹¹⁹⁷ “US sees more indication of Russia, Iran defense cooperation,” *Reuters*, May 16, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/us-sees-more-indications-russia-iran-defense-cooperation-white-house-2023-05-15/>].

¹¹⁹⁸ “Russia’s most potent hypersonic weapon neutralised, says Ukraine,” *Guardian*, May 16, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/16/ukraine-russia-targets-kyiv-with-massive-overnight-airstrike>]; “Ukraine war live: A summary of today’s developments,” *Guardian*, May 16, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/may/16/russia-ukraine-war-live-updates-kyiv-russian-air-strikes-latest-news>].

¹¹⁹⁹ “Patriot missile defense system in Ukraine likely damaged, US officials say,” *Reuters*, May 17, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/patriot-missile-defense-system-ukraine-likely-damaged-us-sources-2023-05-16/>].

¹²⁰⁰ “Ukraine denies Russia destroyed Patriot missile defence system,” *Reuters*, May 17, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/ukraine-denies-russia-destroyed-patriot-missile-defence-system-2023-05-17/>].

¹²⁰¹ “Ukraine tells Chinese envoy it won’t accept ceding land to Russia,” *Reuters*, May 17, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-tells-china-envoy-it-would-not-accept-proposals-ceding-territory-russia-2023-05-17/>].

¹²⁰² “China says Ukraine envoy met with Zelenskyy during talks in Kyiv,” *AP*, May 18, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/china-ukraine-zelenskyy-envoy-a9be43651b773735a99e1edef64bd6af>].

before in Afghanistan.¹²⁰³ Instead, on **May 18**, according to US officials, various US agencies and the White House were discussing the possibility that the Russia-Ukraine war might turn into a frozen conflict that could last many years. Three current and a former Biden administration official confirmed that an extended freeze in fighting was one possibility for which the US government was preparing.¹²⁰⁴

Regarding the Ukrainian bid for F-16s jets, **Sunak** and **Rutte** agreed on **May 16** to build an “international coalition” to help Ukraine procure such weapons. A UK spokesperson said the two governments “would work to build an international coalition to provide Ukraine with combat air capabilities, supporting with everything from training to procuring F-16 jets.”¹²⁰⁵ **Senior US officials** stated on **May 18** that the Biden administration was still reluctant to send Ukraine its own F-16s, in part because the plane’s multimillion-dollar price tag would absorb too much of an already-dwindling war funding.¹²⁰⁶ And Norway’s defense minister **Bjørn Arild Gram** said his government donating F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine was not on the agenda at the moment.¹²⁰⁷

However, Biden told G7 leaders on **May 19** that Washington would back a joint international effort to train Ukrainian pilots to fly F-16 and other modern fighter jets. According to a senior administration official, the plan would include training “on fourth-generation fighter aircraft, including F-16s.” The official added that the training would take place “over the coming months” and that the participating countries would decide “when to actually provide jets, how many ... and who” would provide them.¹²⁰⁸ In reaction, **Denmark’s ministry of defense** stated the same **May 19** that it would train Ukrainian F-16 pilots.¹²⁰⁹ In response, Russia’s Deputy FM **Alexander Grushko** stated the following **May 20** that Western countries would be running “enormous risks” if they supplied Ukraine with F-16 fighter jets.¹²¹⁰

¹²⁰³ “Lavrov says crisis in Ukraine could end with US turning its back on its allies,” *TASS*, May 17, 2023 [<https://tass.com/politics/1618633>]; “Ukraine war live: Evening Summary” *Guardian*, May 17, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/may/17/russia-ukraine-war-live-last-ship-to-leave-ukraine-under-current-grain-deal-jets-pledge-a-good-start-says-zelenskiy>].

¹²⁰⁴ Nahal Toosi, “Ukraine could join ranks of ‘frozen’ conflicts, U.S. officials say,” *Politico*, May 18, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/05/18/ukraine-russia-south-korea-00097563>].

¹²⁰⁵ “UK and Netherlands agree ‘international coalition’ to help Ukraine procure F-16 jets,” *Guardian*, May 16, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/16/uk-and-netherlands-agree-international-coalition-to-help-ukraine-with-f-16-jets>].

¹²⁰⁶ “The Latest Flash Point Among Ukraine’s Allies Is Whether to Send F-16s,” *New York Times*, May 18, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/17/world/europe/ukraine-f-16-biden-netherlands-britain.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referring=Source=articleShare>].

¹²⁰⁷ “Ukraine war live: Evening Summary,” *Guardian*, May 18, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/may/18/russia-ukraine-war-live-updates-kyiv-missile-strikes-attack>].

¹²⁰⁸ “US to back fighter jet training for Ukrainian pilots,” *Guardian*, May 19, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/19/us-indicates-will-not-block-european-countries-export-f-16-jets-ukraine>].

¹²⁰⁹ “Ukraine’s F-16 training could begin in July, Danish defense minister signals,” *Politico*, May 23, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-war-ukraine-pilots-to-starting-training-on-f-16s-by-july-danish-defense-minister-hints/>]; “Ukraine war live: Closing Summary,” *Guardian*, May 19, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/may/19/russia-ukraine-war-live-zelenskiy-to-attend-g7-in-person-reports-say-as-leaders-prepare-new-sanctions>].

¹²¹⁰ “Russia says supplying F-16 jets to Ukraine would carry ‘colossal’ risks for West, TASS reports,” *Reuters*, May 20, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-says-supplying-f-16-jets-ukraine-would-carry-colossal-risks-west-tass-2023-05-20/>]; “Russia to take into account West’s plans to send F-16 aircraft to Kiev — senior diplomat,” *TASS*, May 20, 2023 [<https://tass.com/politics/1620545>].

At the same time, on **May 18**, **Wallace** stated that the long-range Storm Shadow missiles Britain had provided had already been used in Ukraine.¹²¹¹ And on **May 19**, the **United States** and **Australia** imposed a new set of sanctions on Russia. Washington halted the exports of a number of consumer goods out of concern that they might be repurposed to support Russia's war in Ukraine. Meanwhile, Australian PM **Anthony Albanese** and foreign minister **Penny Wong** announced sanctions that would target numerous entities.¹²¹² In a similar vein, on **May 20**, **Sunak** announced a UK ban on imports of Russian diamonds and Russian-origin copper, nickel and aluminum.¹²¹³

190.	Warning
Meeting in Hiroshima, the G7 nations condemned Russia's "brutal" war on its neighbor Ukraine "in the strongest possible terms," calling it a "serious violation of international law," in its final communique of their summit, released on May 20 . As part of the statement, the G7 called for "just and lasting peace" and recommitted to providing Ukraine with military, financial and humanitarian support. ¹²¹⁴ Their May 19 communique on nuclear policy had made clear that "Russia's irresponsible nuclear rhetoric" and "stated intent to deploy nuclear weapons in Belarus" were "dangerous and unacceptable." The G7 reiterated that "threats by Russia of nuclear weapon use, let alone any use of nuclear weapons by Russia, in the context of its aggression against Ukraine [were] inadmissible." ¹²¹⁵ In reaction, on May 21 , Russia's foreign ministry dismissed the G7 summit as a "politicized" event which it said had pumped out anti-Russian and anti-Chinese statements. ¹²¹⁶	

Meanwhile, as a response to the ICC issuing an arrest warrant for Putin, on **May 20**, the **Russian government** placed the ICC prosecutor, Karim Khan, and ICC judge Rosario Albatore Aitala on a wanted list.¹²¹⁷ The Russian national investigative committee stated that both were charged with "preparing to attack a representative of a foreign country enjoying international protection in order to complicate international relations."¹²¹⁸

¹²¹¹ "Ukraine war live: Evening Summary," *Guardian*, May 18, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/may/18/russia-ukraine-war-live-updates-kyiv-missile-strikes-attack>].

¹²¹² "Ukraine war live: Closing Summary," *Guardian*, May 19, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/may/19/russia-ukraine-war-live-zelenskiy-to-attend-g7-in-person-reports-say-as-leaders-prepare-new-sanctions>]; "Australia imposes sanctions on 21 Russian entities, including Rosneft," *Euromaidan Press*, May 19, 2023 [<https://euromaidanpress.com/2023/05/19/australia-imposes-sanctions-on-21-russian-entities-including-rosneft/?swcfpc=1>].

¹²¹³ "Factbox: British imports of Russian copper, aluminium, nickel and diamonds," *Reuters*, May 19, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/british-imports-russian-copper-aluminium-nickel-diamonds-2023-05-19/>].

¹²¹⁴ "G7 Hiroshima Leaders' Communiqué," The White House, May 20, 2023 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/20/g7-hiroshima-leaders-communique/>]; "Ukraine war live: Closing summary," *Guardian*, May 20, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/may/20/russia-ukraine-war-live-moscow-renews-air-attacks-on-kyiv-biden-to-meet-zelenskiy-at-g7-summit>].

¹²¹⁵ "G7 Leaders' Hiroshima Vision on Nuclear Disarmament," *White House Website*, March 19, 2023 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/19/g7-leaders-hiroshima-vision-on-nuclear-disarmament/>].

¹²¹⁶ "Russia accuses G7 of undermining global stability," *Guardian*, May 21, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/may/21/russia-ukraine-war-live-zelenskiy-to-meet-biden-at-g7-kyiv-says-fighting-in-bakhmut-continues?page=with:block-646a17ef8f08293047a588a2#block-646a17ef8f08293047a588a2>].

¹²¹⁷ Andrew Roth, "Russia issues arrest order for British ICC prosecutor after Putin warrant," *Guardian*, May 19, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/law/2023/may/19/russia-arrest-order-international-criminal-court-prosecutor-karim-khan>]; "Russia puts war crimes prosecutor on 'wanted list'," *Politico*, May 19, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-vladimir-putin-karim-khan-british-icc-prosecutor-karim-khan-on-a-wanted-list/>].

¹²¹⁸ "Russia indicts ICC prosecutor, judge who issued war crimes warrant for Putin," *AP*, May 21, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-indictment-icc-prosecutor-judge-putin-260100f9ba533e15ebee3084dba74ff4>].

Regarding military aid to Ukraine, on **May 21**, the White House announced a new package of up to \$375m, including ammunition, artillery, armored vehicles and training. In addition, on **May 22**, **defense ministers from twelve northern European countries** met in Poland to discuss stepping up the deterrence and security on NATO's eastern flank and strengthening Ukraine's defenses. The talks were described as "very good" by the Polish defense minister and focused on coordinating ways of providing security to countries in the group.¹²¹⁹

In Washington, **Biden** defended his reluctance about sending F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine despite constant calls from Kyiv, but he added that his Administration's recent authorization of training on the jets was intended to deter further Russian aggression down the line.¹²²⁰

191.	Warning
In what appeared to be a warning in reaction to Biden's announcement to support training of Ukrainian pilots on F-16 fighter jets, as well as the US' "unconditional approval of strikes on the Crimea using American and other Western weapons," Antonov stated on May 22 that "such steps" would "once again clearly demonstrate" that the US had "never been interested in peace," but only in "a strategic defeat for Russia." He added that he "would like to warn representatives of the administration against thoughtless judgments on Crimea, especially in terms of <i>blessing</i> the Kyiv regime for air attacks on the peninsula. Let me remind you that strikes on this territory are considered by us as an attack on any other region of the Russian Federation. It is important that the United States is fully aware of the Russian response." ¹²²¹	

Despite these strong statements of disapproval from Moscow, as of **May 22**, Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark had signaled their willingness to train Ukrainian pilots to fly F-16 jets, although they did not comment on sending jets. A Norwegian military spokesperson stated that Oslo was still evaluating its options concerning training and supplying Ukraine with F-16s.¹²²² The training mission had "started in several countries," **Borrell** said on **May 23**. The same day, Denmark's acting Defense Minister **Troels Lund Poulsen** said that Ukrainian pilots could start training on F-16 jets in July, adding that it would then "probably ... take up to six months before we have the facilities in place so that we can fly F-16 fighter jets from Ukraine."¹²²³ Also on **May 23**, **Pistorius** stated that Germany was also looking into options to support a coalition of countries that planned to train Ukrainian pilots in flying F-16s, adding that any potential German contribution could be minor only, as Germany did not own any of the US-built jets.¹²²⁴ The following **May 24**, Dutch defense minister **Kajsa Ollongren** stated in a letter to parliament

¹²¹⁹ "Ukraine war live: Closing summary," *Guardian*, May 22, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/may/22/russia-ukraine-war-live-bakhmut-remains-epicentre-of-combat-ukraine-says-brazils-lula-upset-not-to-meet-zelenskiy-at-g7>].

¹²²⁰ "National Security Daily: It's not just getting F-16s, it's keeping them in the air," *Politico*, May 22, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/05/22/its-not-just-getting-f-16s-its-keeping-them-in-the-air-00098143>].

¹²²¹ "Ambassador Anatoly Antonov's answer to a media question," *Embassy of the Russian Federation in the USA*, May 22, 2023 [https://washington.mid.ru/en/press-centre/news/ambassador_anatoly_antonov_s_answer_to_a_media_question_f_sup/]; "Ukraine war live: Closing summary," *Guardian*, May 22, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/may/22/russia-ukraine-war-live-bakhmut-remains-epicentre-of-combat-ukraine-says-brazils-lula-upset-not-to-meet-zelenskiy-at-g7>].

¹²²² "National Security Daily: It's not just getting F-16s, it's keeping them in the air," *Politico*, May 22, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/05/22/its-not-just-getting-f-16s-its-keeping-them-in-the-air-00098143>].

¹²²³ Nicolas Camut "Ukraine's F-16 training could begin in July, Danish defense minister signals," *Politico*, May 23, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-war-ukraine-pilots-to-starting-training-on-f-16s-by-july-danish-defense-minister-hints/>].

¹²²⁴ "Ukraine F-16 training has begun in Poland, Borrell announces," *Euractiv*, May 23, 2023 [<https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/ukraine-f-16-training-has-begun-in-poland-borrell-announces/>]; "Ukraine war live: Summary," *Guardian*, May 23, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/may/23/russia-ukraine-war-live-updates-latest-news-belgo-rod-kremlin-russian-pm-china>].

that the Netherlands wanted to offer Ukrainian pilots F-16 training as soon as possible. The training would be coordinated with Belgium, Denmark and the UK, and other countries could join, Ollongren added.¹²²⁵ On **May 26**, Swedish Defense Minister **Pal Jonson** said that Stockholm was open to training Ukrainians on Gripen fighter jets, although “at this stage” Sweden would not deliver such jets to Ukraine.¹²²⁶

Meanwhile, also on **May 23**, Russian Prime Minister **Mikhail Mishustin** arrived in China to meet with Xi Jinping and discuss a series of deals on infrastructure and trade.¹²²⁷ The following day, Mishustin said that relations between Russia and China were at an “unprecedented high level.”¹²²⁸ At the same time, the possible use of Western equipment against Russian territory sparked discussions. On **May 22/23**, a two-day incursion into Russia’s Belgorod region took place. Already on May 22, **Podolyak** stated Ukraine had “no direct relationship” with the events, instead he casted the attack as a home-grown, internal Russian strife carried out by underground partisans comprising Russian citizens.¹²²⁹ The same day, Ukrainian military intelligence spokesperson **Andriy Yusov** stated that the Russian Volunteer Corps (RVC) and the Freedom of Russia Legion had launched the operation. Both groups claimed responsibility the same day.¹²³⁰ In reaction, on **May 23**, **Russia’s military** said it had routed militants who attacked its western Belgorod region with armored vehicles, killing more than 70 “Ukrainian nationalists” and pushing the remainder back into Ukraine.¹²³¹ RVC and Freedom of Russia Legion, however, stated that only two of their soldiers died while 12 were wounded.¹²³²

192.	Warning
In reaction to these attacks inside Russia, the Kremlin accused “pro-Ukrainian fighters” on May 24 to have conducted the raid and stated that the use of US-made military hardware was testament to the West’s growing involvement in the Ukraine conflict. Shoigu promised the same day that Moscow would respond to any more cross-border raids by Ukrainian militants swiftly and “extremely harshly.” Peskov stated that it was “no secret” that “the direct and indirect involvement of Western countries in this conflict” was “growing by the day,” adding that Russia was “drawing the appropriate	

¹²²⁵ “Netherlands wants to give Ukrainian pilots F-16 training as soon as possible,” *Reuters*, May 24, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/netherlands-wants-give-ukrainian-pilots-f-16-training-soon-possible-2023-05-24/>].

¹²²⁶ Catherine Nicholls, “Sweden will consider training Ukrainian pilots on Gripen fighter jets if asked, says defense minister,” *CNN*, May 26, 2023 [https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/russia-ukraine-war-news-05-26-23/h_d50ff45b244c1d5b013b8b82ef7d8348].

¹²²⁷ “Ukraine war live: Summary,” *Guardian*, May 23, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/may/23/russia-ukraine-war-live-updates-latest-news-belgorod-kremlin-russian-pm-china>].

¹²²⁸ “Russia, China seal economic pacts amid Western criticism,” *Reuters*, May 24, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-china-set-ink-bilateral-pacts-despite-western-criticism-2023-05-24/>].

¹²²⁹ “В Офіці президента відреагували на звинувачення РФ щодо подій у Белгородській області,” *Radio free Europe*, May 22, 2023 [<https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/newspodiyi-bylhorod-ukrayina-reaktsiya/32422673.html>].

¹²³⁰ “У ГУР відреагували на ситуацію в Белгородській області Росії,” *Radio Free Europe*, May 22, 2023 [<https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-hur-bylhorodska-oblast-rf/32422590.html>].

¹²³¹ “Ukraine war: Belgorod incursion may stretch Russia’s defences,” *Reuters*, May 24, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/cross-border-incursions-ukraine-may-stretch-russian-defences-2023-05-24/>]; “Anti-Putin Russians say they launched a cross-border attack from Ukraine. Here’s what we know,” *CNN*, May 24, 2023 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/05/23/europe/belgorod-attacks-russia-ukraine-explainer-intl/index.html>].

¹²³² “Російські добровольці розповіли про результати «операції» в Белгородській області РФ,” *Radio Free Europe*, May 24, 2023 [<https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-rosiiski-dobrovoltsi-bielhorodska-oblast/32426204.html>].

conclusions.”¹²³³ In response, **Kirby** stated the same **May 24** that Washington was looking into these reports, adding that the United States had been clear with Kyiv that it would not support any such use of US-made equipment.¹²³⁴ The same **May 24**, the head of Russia’s foreign intelligence service **Sergei Naryshkin** accused Washington and London of thwarting efforts to reach a settlement over the conflict in Ukraine and of turning a blind eye to what he said was increasing “terrorism and violence” visited on Russia’s civilians by Ukraine. Naryshkin expressed satisfaction that most countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America had not imposed sanctions on Russia over its actions in Ukraine, despite what he called colossal pressure to do so from Washington.¹²³⁵

Regarding discussions on granting NATO membership to Ukraine, also on **May 24**, **Stoltenberg** stated that Ukraine would not be able to join NATO as long as the war was ongoing, adding that the issue was “what happens when the war ends.”¹²³⁶

193.	Escalatory
Meanwhile, the Russian plan to deploy nuclear weapons to Belarus progressed. On May 25 , Shoigu and Lukashenko signed a corresponding agreement to store Moscow’s nuclear weapons in Belarus, with Lukashenko stating that the relocation of some tactical nuclear weapons from Russia to Belarus had begun. Control of the weapons was planned to remain with the Kremlin, and it was unclear how many nuclear weapons would be stored in Belarus. Russian and Belarusian officials said that the move was a direct result of Russia’s perception of increased Western aggression. “In the context of an extremely sharp escalation of threats on the western borders of Russia and Belarus, a decision was made to take countermeasures in the military-nuclear sphere,” Shoigu said. Belarusian Defense Minister Viktor Khrenin called the deal “an effective response to the aggressive policy of countries unfriendly to us,” and also announced plans to “build up the combat potential of the regional grouping of Russia and Belarusian troops,” including the transfer to Minsk of the Iskander-M missile system, capable of carrying a nuclear charge, and the S-400 anti-aircraft missile system. ¹²³⁷	

194.	Warning
In reaction to Russia’s stated intention to deploy nuclear weapons to Belarus, also on May 25 , Miller said the US government strongly condemned this arrangement, which he called “the latest example of irresponsible behavior,” repeating Washington’s warning that a use of chemical, biological or nuclear	

¹²³³ “Russia: US equipment used in border raid shows growing Western role in Ukraine,” *Reuters*, May 24, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-us-equipment-used-border-raid-shows-growing-western-role-ukraine-2023-05-24/>].

¹²³⁴ “US investigates claims American gear used in raids on Russia,” *Politico*, May 24, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/us-investigate-claims-american-gear-military-vehicle-used-raids-russia-ukraine/>].

¹²³⁵ “Russian spy chief tells ‘meddling West’ to go to the devil, forecasts its demise,” *Reuters*, May 24, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russian-spy-chief-tells-meddling-west-go-devil-forecasts-its-demise-2023-05-24/>].

¹²³⁶ “Ukraine joining NATO in midst of war ‘not on agenda’ -Stoltenberg,” *Reuters*, May 24, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-joining-nato-midst-war-not-agenda-stoltenberg-2023-05-24/>].

¹²³⁷ Yuras Karmanau “Russia signs deal to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus,” *AP*, May 25, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/belarus-russia-nuclear-weapons-shoigu-285ff887e8b1c28d20ff68e1d775441e>]; “Belarus’ president says transfer of tactical nuclear weapons from Russia has already started,” *Guardian*, May 25, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/may/25/russia-ukraine-war-live-updates-russian-rebels-belgorod-attack-raid-anti-putin-militia-latest-news?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-646f7fea8f08e69f06831877#block-646f7fea8f08e69f06831877>].

weapons in the conflict would be met with “severe consequences,” without specifying those consequences. He added that the US government had, however, not seen any reason to adjust its nuclear posture or any indications that Russia was preparing to use a nuclear weapon.¹²³⁸

The same **May 25**, Russia’s foreign ministry stated that it had summoned the ambassadors of Germany, Sweden, and Denmark to protest the “complete lack of results” in an investigation to identify who had blown up the Nord Stream gas pipelines the previous year. The Russian government accused all three countries of trying to conceal who was behind the blasts, adding that it was unhappy about what it called the opaque nature of the investigation and its refusal to engage with Russia.¹²³⁹

195.	Warning
Nuclear warnings once again returned to the forefront. Signaling skepticism of an approaching end to the Ukraine war, on May 26 , Medvedev said the conflict in Ukraine would last “for a very long time,” and “probably” for “decades.” Negotiations with Ukraine were inevitable but impossible as long as Zelenskiy was in power. He said Russia could not trust any truce with the current rulers of Kyiv as the conflict would simply erupt again and so the very nature of the current government of Ukraine would have to be destroyed. Medvedev also warned that the West was seriously underestimating the risk of a nuclear war over Ukraine, cautioning that Russia would launch a pre-emptive strike if Ukraine got nuclear weapons. Allowing Ukraine nuclear weapons would mean “a missile with a nuclear charge coming to them.” He added that “the Anglo-Saxons” would “not fully realize this and believe that it will not come to this. It will under certain conditions.” ¹²⁴⁰	

The same **May 26**, echoing Russia’s reluctance to commit to peace talks, **Lavrov** told Hui that there were “serious obstacles” to resuming peace talks, blaming Ukraine and western countries.¹²⁴¹ Nonetheless, **Putin**, in a phone call with Lula da Silva, stated that Russia was open to dialogue over Ukraine.¹²⁴²

Against this background, western support for Ukraine continued. On **May 26**, Canadian trade minister **Mary Ng** said Canada would welcome Ukraine’s application to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).¹²⁴³ Moreover, the previous day, Canada’s minister of

¹²³⁸ “US condemns Russia moving nuclear weapons to Belarus, will not adjust nuclear posture,” *Reuters*, May 25, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/us-condemns-russia-moving-nuclear-weapons-belarus-will-not-adjust-nuclear-2023-05-25/>].

¹²³⁹ “Russia summons Germany, Denmark, Sweden envoys over Nord Stream investigation,” *Guardian*, May 25, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/may/25/russia-ukraine-war-live-updates-russian-rebels-belgorod-attack-raid-anti-putin-militia-latest-news?filterKeyEvents=false&page=with:block-646f46188f0879b44af7d512#block-646f46188f0879b44af7d512>].

¹²⁴⁰ “Медведев допустил, что конфликт на Украине затянется на десятилетия,” *Ria Novosti*, May 26, 2023 [<https://ria.ru/20230526/desyatiletiya-1874241221.html>]; Guy Faulconbridge, “Russia’s Medvedev: Ukraine conflict may last for decades, no talks with Zelenskiy,” *Reuters*, May 26, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-medvedev-warns-west-is-underestimating-risks-nuclear-escalation-over-2023-05-26/>]; “War in Ukraine could last ‘decades,’ ex-Russian leader says,” *Politico*, May 26, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/war-ukraine-could-last-decades-russia-dmitry-medvedev/>].

¹²⁴¹ “Russia’s Lavrov tells China envoy ‘serious obstacles’ to Ukraine peace,” *AFP*, May 26, 2023 [<https://twitter.com/AFP/status/1662106175335280642>]; “Russia’s Lavrov Tells China Envoy ‘Serious Obstacles’ to Ukraine Peace,” *Moscow Times*, May 26, 2023 [<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/05/26/russias-lavrov-tells-china-envoy-serious-obstacles-to-ukraine-peace-a81305>].

¹²⁴² “Brazil’s Lula says spoke to Putin on war, declined economic forum invitation,” *Reuters*, May 26, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/brazils-lula-said-spoke-putin-war-declined-invitation-economic-forum-2023-05-26/>].

¹²⁴³ “Canada backs Ukraine’s application to join trans-Pacific trade pact,” *Reuters*, May 27, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/canada-backs-ukraines-application-join-trans-pacific-trade-pact-2023-05-26/>].

defense **Anita Anand** said Canada would donate 43 AIM-9 missiles to Ukraine to help the country “secure its skies in the face of ongoing Russian attacks.”¹²⁴⁴

Elsewhere, the same **May 26**, Japan’s chief cabinet secretary **Hirokazu Matsuno** stated that Japan would place additional sanctions on Russia after the Group of Seven (G7) summit the country hosted the previous week had agreed to step up measures to punish Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine.¹²⁴⁵ In response, the following **May 27**, Russia accused Japan of “cynical, unscrupulous speculation” over Tokyo’s comments around the nuclear threat Moscow poses and promised to respond to Japan’s latest round of sanctions.¹²⁴⁶

Also on **May 27**, Russia’s embassy in the US dismissed US criticism vis-à-vis nuclear deployment to Belarus, saying Washington had for decades deployed just such nuclear weapons in Europe.¹²⁴⁷

On **May 28**, the EU’s spokesperson for foreign affairs and security policy, **Nabila Massrali**, said Russia would be “held accountable” for attacks on civilian areas.¹²⁴⁸

Meanwhile, on **May 29**, **Lukashenko** said that if any other country wanted to join a Russia-Belarus union there could be “nuclear weapons for everyone,” adding “we need to strategically understand that we have a unique chance to unite.” Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev dismissed Lukashenko’s invitation to join the union as a “joke,” adding that Kazakhstan was already a member of the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union, so no further integration was necessary. He also stated that Kazakhstan would not need nuclear weapons as it had joined the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.¹²⁴⁹

196.	Warning
Meanwhile, Russian warnings against Western weapons supplies to Ukraine were renewed. The same May 27 , the Russian ambassador to the UK, Andrei Kelin stated that Russia had warned that Western supplies to Ukraine risked escalating the war to levels not seen so far, saying that it was “a big idealistic mistake” to think that Ukraine would prevail since Russia had “enormous resources” and it was yet to “act very seriously.” He added that this depended on the escalation of the war that was taking place and “sooner or later, of course, this escalation may get a new dimension which we do not	

¹²⁴⁴ “Defence Minister Anita Anand announces military aid for Ukraine at the twelfth meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group,” *Government of Canada*, May 25, 2023 [<https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2023/05/defence-minister-anita-anand-announces-military-aid-for-ukraine-at-the-twelfth-meeting-of-the-ukraine-defense-contact-group.html>].

¹²⁴⁵ “Japan ramps up Russia sanctions with G7,” *Reuters*, May 26, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/japan-slap-additional-sanctions-russia-after-g7-summit-bulletin-2023-05-26/>].

¹²⁴⁶ “Russia accuses Japan of ‘cynical speculation’ after Tokyo’s nuclear rebuke,” *Reuters*, May 27, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-accuses-japan-cynical-speculation-after-tokyos-nuclear-rebuke-2023-05-27/>].

¹²⁴⁷ “Don’t lecture us on nuclear deployments, Russia tells US,” *Reuters*, May 27, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-tells-united-states-dont-lecture-moscow-nuclear-deployments-2023-05-27/>].

¹²⁴⁸ Nabila Massrali, “Russia’s barbaric attacks continue, killing & terrorising civilians,” *Twitter*, May 28, 2023 [<https://twitter.com/NabilaEUspox/status/1662808007544131585>].

¹²⁴⁹ “‘Nuclear weapons for everyone’ who joins Belarus and Russia, Putin ally promises,” *NBC News*, May 29, 2023 [<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/nuclear-weapons-ukraine-belarus-lukashenko-russia-putin-rcna86640>]; “Belarus’s Lukashenko says there can be ‘nuclear weapons for everyone,’” *Reuters*, May 29, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/belarus-lukashenko-says-there-can-be-nuclear-weapons-everyone-2023-05-29/>].

need and we do not want. We can make peace tomorrow if the Ukrainian side will be prepared to negotiate” but there were no preconditions for that.¹²⁵⁰

On **May 29**, **Podolyak** detailed a possible peace plan, suggesting that any peace settlement acceptable to Ukraine would have to include not only a restoration of the country’s sovereign borders, but a demilitarized zone extending between 100km and 120km into Russia. Podolyak tweeted: “The key topic of the postwar settlement should be the establishment of safeguards to prevent a recurrence of aggression in the future. To ensure real security for residents of Kharkiv, Chernihiv, Sumy, Zaporizhzhia, Luhansk and Donetsk regions and protect them from shelling, it will be necessary to introduce a demilitarization zone of 100km-120km on the territory of Belgorod, Bryansk, Kursk, and Rostov republics. Probably with a mandatory international control contingent at the first stage.”¹²⁵¹ Also contributing to the debate of how to end the war in Ukraine, in a speech in Moldova on **May 31**, **Macron** stated the West may at some stage have to negotiate with the existing Russian leadership even as it pursued international justice against the same individuals. He also reiterated that Ukraine needed security assurances.¹²⁵²

At the end of May, the US and Denmark announced additional weapons supplies for Ukraine. On **May 29**, Danish prime minister **Mette Frederiksen** said that her government planned to increase spending on military aid to Ukraine by \$2.6bn in 2023 and 2024.¹²⁵³ On **May 31**, **the US administration** announced a \$300 million package for Ukraine featuring munitions for the Patriot missile defense system, artillery rounds and more than 30 million rounds of small arms ammo.¹²⁵⁴

At the same time, on **May 30**, Moscow was targeted with a large-scale drone attack for the first time in its 15-month-old war in Ukraine. In reaction, **Putin** said that Ukraine had chosen the path of attempting “to intimidate Russia, Russian citizens [with] attacks on residential buildings” and added that the drone attacks were “clearly a sign of terrorist activity.”¹²⁵⁵ Figures from Russia, including the head of Chechnya, **Ramzan Kadyrov**, said Putin should declare martial law nationwide to “sweep away that terrorist gang.” **Podolyak**, stated that Ukraine was “pleased to watch and predict an increase in the number of attacks,” but had “nothing directly to do with this.”¹²⁵⁶ In a sarcastic tweet, he added that “even artificial

¹²⁵⁰ “Ukraine war: Russian Ambassador Andrei Kelin issues warning of escalation in Ukraine,” *BBC*, May 27, 2023 [<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-65720980>]; “Ukraine war live: Russia hasn’t started to act ‘seriously’ yet in Ukraine, Russian ambassador says,” *Guardian*, May 28, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/may/28/russia-ukraine-war-live-russia-unleashes-major-drone-attack-as-kyiv-prepares-to-celebrate-birthday>].

¹²⁵¹ @Podolyak_M, “The key topic of the post-war settlement,” *Twitter*, May 29, 2023 [https://twitter.com/Podolyak_M/status/166317856655557893]; “Ukraine war live: Closing summary,” *Guardian*, May 29, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/may/29/russia-ukraine-war-live-zelenskiy-thanks-air-defence-forces-as-explosions-rock-kyiv-for-second-night-in-a-row>].

¹²⁵² “West may have to negotiate with Putin as well as pursue war crimes trial, Macron says,” *Guardian*, May 31, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/31/macron-to-call-for-european-strategic-awakening-after-ukraine-invasion>].

¹²⁵³ “Ukraine war live: Closing summary,” *Guardian*, May 29, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/may/29/russia-ukraine-war-live-zelenskiy-thanks-air-defence-forces-as-explosions-rock-kyiv-for-second-night-in-a-row>].

¹²⁵⁴ “Biden Administration Announces Additional Security Assistance for Ukraine,” *US Department of Defense*, May 31, 2023 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3411804/biden-administration-announces-additional-security-assistance-for-ukraine/>]; “National Security Daily: New Ukraine Package,” *Politico*, May 31, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/05/31/the-china-hawks-briefing-desantis-00099407>].

¹²⁵⁵ “Putin says Ukraine drone strikes on Moscow aim to scare and provoke Russia,” *Reuters*, May 30, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/drones-hit-several-buildings-moscow-mayor-2023-05-30/>].

¹²⁵⁶ “Andrew Roth and Pjotr Sauer, “Large-scale drone attack hits Moscow for first time in Ukraine war,” *Guardian*, May 30, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/30/moscow-drone-attack-mayor-reports-minor-damage-to-buildings>].

intelligence is already smarter and more far-sighted than the Russian military and political leadership.”¹²⁵⁷ Also on **May 30**, the **White House** said that it was still gathering information about what happened in Moscow, repeating its earlier statements that it did “not support attacks inside Russia.”¹²⁵⁸ The following **May 31**, **Peskov** stated that Russia would not plan to declare martial law after the large-scale drone strike.¹²⁵⁹

In a similarly de-escalating statement, **Kirby** said on the same **May 31** that Washington was planning to continue to give Ukraine what it needed to defend itself and its territory, “but we don’t support attacks on Russia”. He added that “we don’t want to encourage or enable attacks inside Russia, because we don’t want to see the war escalate beyond the violence has already visited upon the Ukrainian people.”¹²⁶⁰

June 2023: Some Russian nuclear rhetoric returns with Ukraine’s offensive

In June, discussions on Ukraine’s NATO membership and security guarantees for the country continued. On **May 31**, **Macron** had reiterated that NATO needed to provide “strong and tangible” security guarantees or “an architecture of security” for Ukraine ahead of the alliance’s Vilnius summit in July if it wanted a sustainable peace and wanted to be credible toward Ukraine, adding that Kyiv needed a clear “path” to become a NATO member. The following **June 1** at a NATO foreign ministers meeting, French foreign minister **Catherine Colonna** said that NATO needed to think about what kind of security guarantees it could offer Ukraine.¹²⁶¹ The same day, Lithuania’s foreign minister **Gabrieliūš Landsbergis** also noted that the time had come for NATO members to find a concrete answer to the question of how Ukraine could become a member, while **Stoltenberg** stated that the focus of NATO foreign ministers had been to “bring Ukraine closer to NATO, where it belongs” and that the alliance had to “have in place frameworks to provide guarantees for Ukrainian security after the end of the war.”¹²⁶² In contrast, on the same **June 1**, **Scholz** only said that “there must also be guarantees for a peace order after the war” and that Germany would “make a contribution to this.” Meanwhile, **Kallas** stated that the “only security guarantee” that “works” was NATO membership.¹²⁶³ On June 2, **Wallace** said that the path was open to Ukraine, although political realities may slow the process as it was not possible to add members in the middle of a

¹²⁵⁷ “Moscow drone attack exposes Russia’s vulnerabilities, fuels criticism of military,” *AP*, May 30, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-drone-attack-moscow-defenses-4cd363fc7288998f0af26a8d8a8fe87c>].

¹²⁵⁸ “White House says it does not support attacks inside Russia,” *Reuters*, May 30, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/white-house-says-it-does-not-support-attacks-inside-russia-2023-05-30/>]; “Press Briefing by Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre and Office of Management and Budget Director Shalanda Young,” *White House*, May 30, 2023 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2023/05/30/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-karine-jean-pierre-and-office-of-management-and-budget-director-shalanda-young/>].

¹²⁵⁹ “Ukraine war live: Summary,” *Guardian*, May 31, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/may/31/russia-ukraine-war-live-russian-oil-refinery-in-krasnodar-on-fire-belgorod-shelled-says-governor>].

¹²⁶⁰ “US has been clear with the Ukrainians it doesn’t support attacks on Russian soil, White House official says,” *CNN*, May 31, 2023 [https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/russia-ukraine-war-news-05-31-23/h_f4da9a6b7130723bc3e08d6ba4169bf1].

¹²⁶¹ “National Security Daily: Who’s afraid of Vladimir Putin,” *Politico*, June 1, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/06/01/whos-afraid-of-vladimir-putin-00099623>]; “Ukraine war live: Summary,” *Guardian*, June 1, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/jun/01/russia-ukraine-war-live-three-killed-in-kyiv-as-russia-launches-fresh-overnight-strikes>].

¹²⁶² “Ukraine war live: Summary,” *Guardian*, June 1, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/jun/01/russia-ukraine-war-live-three-killed-in-kyiv-as-russia-launches-fresh-overnight-strikes>].

¹²⁶³ “National Security Daily: I want a guarantee,” *Politico*, June 2, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/06/02/saudi-sportswashing-getting-messi-00099867>].

war. In reaction to these discussions, also on **June 2**, **Zelenskiy** said he understood Ukraine would not join NATO while the war with Russia was ongoing.¹²⁶⁴

Reacting to these statements, **Peskov** stated on the same **June 2** that Ukraine's membership in NATO was "one of the main irritants and would be a potential problem for many, many years," an issue he said many EU countries were "well aware of" though the US ultimately called the tunes at the military alliance. He added that Kyiv's NATO ambitions indicated "the unpreparedness, the unwillingness and the incapacity of the Kyiv regime to resolve existing problems at the negotiating table." Peskov underlined that Russia would "ensure its interests and its security," which excluded the "expansion of NATO and its direct approach to our borders."¹²⁶⁵

Concerning the question of whether the US government had been holding back military equipment out of fear of Russia's potential reaction, a **senior US administration official** stated on **June 1** that this fear had "always been overstated compared to others, like what would actually help [Ukraine] in the fight." A **US Department of Defense official** added that Kyiv's troops proved repeatedly that they would not use US-provided equipment to strike deep into Russian territory, making it less risky to deliver Ukraine advanced weapons and technology.¹²⁶⁶

Meanwhile, discussions on arms control questions continued. On **June 1**, the **US State Department** stated that Washington would stop providing Moscow some notifications required under New START, including updates on its missiles and launcher locations, to retaliate for Moscow's "ongoing violations" of the accord.¹²⁶⁷

In a much-awaited speech, **Sullivan** stated on **June 2** that the Biden administration was willing to conduct "unconditional" talks with Russia and China. Sullivan further noted that the Administration was not planning to deploy additional nuclear weapons to match Russia and China's growing arsenals, but that it would rely on conventional options to retain military dominance and on enhanced relations with allies and partners around the world.¹²⁶⁸

In reaction, on **June 3**, **Ryabkov** warned Washington that it should stop brandishing ultimatums over the collapse of arms control agreements, saying that Moscow would only return to a nuclear arms reduction treaty if Washington abandoned its hostile stance. Ryabkov stated that the pillars of arms control were collapsing and were in "semi-lethal" condition due to what he cast as the hostile policies of the US. "Talking to the Russian Federation in the language of ultimatums just does not work," he stated. Moscow would come back to full compliance with the New Start treaty if Washington abandoned its "hostile

¹²⁶⁴ "Ukraine war live: Summary," *Guardian*, June 2, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/jun/02/russia-ukraine-war-live-kyiv-shoots-down-more-than-30-missiles-and-drones-in-early-morning-strikes>].

¹²⁶⁵ "Kremlin says Ukrainian NATO membership would cause problems for many years," *Reuters*, June 2, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/kremlin-says-europe-knows-risks-ukraine-joining-nato-us-calls-tunes-2023-06-02/>].

¹²⁶⁶ "National Security Daily: Who's afraid of Vladimir Putin," *Politico*, June 1, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/06/01/whos-afraid-of-vladimir-putin-00099623>].

¹²⁶⁷ "U.S. Countermeasures in Response to Russia's Violations of the New START Treaty," *US Department of State*, June 1, 2023 [<https://www.state.gov/u-s-countermeasures-in-response-to-russias-violations-of-the-new-start-treaty/>]; Jonathan Landay and Arshad Mohammed, "US to stop giving Russia some New START nuclear arms data," *Reuters*, June 2, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/us-stop-giving-russia-some-new-start-nuclear-arms-data-2023-06-02/>].

¹²⁶⁸ "Remarks by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan for the Arms Control Association (ACA) Annual Forum," *White Houset*, June 2, 2023 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/06/02/remarks-by-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan-for-the-arms-control-association-aca-annual-forum/>].

stance” towards Moscow, he added.¹²⁶⁹ On **June 5**, **Peskov** stated that it was “an important and positive statement,” but that he expected it to be supported with steps through diplomatic channels. He added that Russia remained “open to dialogue, and we believe it was of paramount importance,” but needed to “understand how this offer is formulated.”¹²⁷⁰

Meanwhile, debates continued on how and under which conditions peace in Ukraine could be reached. The same **June 2**, **Blinken** said Washington was working with Kyiv and other allies to build consensus around the core elements of a “just and lasting peace” to end the war with Russia. Washington would also encourage initiatives by other countries to bring about an end to the conflict, as long as they upheld the UN charter and Ukraine’s sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence.¹²⁷¹ Blinken underlined that a “cease-fire that simply freezes current lines in place” would enable Putin “to consolidate control over the territory he has seized, and rest, rearm, and re-attack.” This was “not a just and lasting peace” but would instead “reward the aggressor.” He added that the US would support negotiations if and when Russia was “ready to work for true peace,” but rejected any calls for a “land for peace” deal, whereby Kyiv agreed to give up some of its sovereign territory to end the war.¹²⁷²

China continued to boost its role in the conflict. **Li** stated the same **June 2** that Beijing was considering “sending another delegation to relevant countries to engage in dialogue on resolving the Ukraine crisis.” He rejected a media report saying China promoted a ceasefire that would leave its ally Russia occupying parts of Ukraine and said Beijing would “do anything” to ease tensions. However, he acknowledged a “big gap between both sides’ positions” and “getting all sides to negotiate now would still face a lot of difficulties.” He stated that the “the risk of escalation of the Russia-Ukraine” was “still high,” adding that all sides must take concrete measures to “cool down the situation” and ensure safety of nuclear facilities.¹²⁷³ He also underlined that the Chinese leadership believed “that weapon supply to the battlefield should cease if the war is to stop, lives are to be saved and peace is to be realized, otherwise the risk of spiraling tensions will only increase.”¹²⁷⁴

In reaction to China’s efforts, the same **June 2** a **French official** said that during his delegation’s visit in May, Li had not presented any peace plan but the meeting was rather “doing a roundtable of each of our positions,” adding that Paris did not expect China to be a mediator, but that it could “use its influence on Russia” and could “help make it understand.”¹²⁷⁵

Other nations also attempted to mediate in the conflict. On **June 3**, Indonesia’s defense minister **Prabowo Subianto** called for a ceasefire and the establishment of a demilitarized zone by withdrawing 15 kilometers from each party’s forward position – to be monitored by a UN peacekeeping force. However, the proposed plan was dismissed the same day by Ukrainian foreign ministry spokesperson **Oleg**

¹²⁶⁹ Guy Faulconbridge, “Russia warns United States: don’t brandish ultimatums on arms control,” *Reuters*, June 3, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-come-back-start-if-us-abandons-its-hostile-stance-foreign-ministry-2023-06-03/>].

¹²⁷⁰ “Kremlin welcomes U.S. readiness for dialogue with Russia on new nuclear arms control system - Peskov,” *Interfax*, June 5, 2023 [<https://interfax.com/newsroom/top-stories/91166/>].

¹²⁷¹ “Ukraine war live: Summary,” *Guardian*, June 2, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/jun/02/russia-ukraine-war-live-kyiv-shoots-down-more-than-30-missiles-and-drones-in-early-morning-strikes>].

¹²⁷² Missy Ryan, “U.S. rebuffs cease-fire calls in its strategy for Ukraine resilience,” *Washington Post*, June 2, 2023 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/06/02/ukraine-russia-blinken-address-finland/>].

¹²⁷³ “China weighs next Ukraine peace mission after first yields little progress,” *Reuters*, June 2, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/neither-ukraine-nor-russia-have-shut-door-talks-china-envoy-2023-06-02/>].

¹²⁷⁴ Missy Ryan, “U.S. rebuffs cease-fire calls in its strategy for Ukraine resilience,” *Washington Post*, June 2, 2023 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/06/02/ukraine-russia-blinken-address-finland/>].

¹²⁷⁵ “China weighs next Ukraine peace mission after first yields little progress,” *Reuters*, June 2, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/neither-ukraine-nor-russia-have-shut-door-talks-china-envoy-2023-06-02/>].

Nikolenko, who reiterated Kyiv's position that Russia should withdraw its troops from Ukraine and that "no disputed territories" but only occupied territories existed.¹²⁷⁶

The US government's efforts to strengthen Ukrainian defenses also continued. The Pentagon said on **June 2** that training for Ukrainian forces on advanced US Abrams tanks had started, but that those weapons would not be ready in time for Kyiv's counteroffensive.¹²⁷⁷ On the same day, allies attending a summit in Moldova on **1 June** signaled that F-16 fighter jets could be made available to Ukraine within six months. Several countries, including the UK, Denmark, Poland, the Netherlands and Belgium, said they wanted to help procure F-16s for Ukraine. **Zelenskiy** said he had received "powerful support."¹²⁷⁸ On **4 June**, the **Peskov** stated that any supply of missiles to Kyiv by France and Germany with a range of 500 km or more would lead to "another round of spiraling tension" in the Ukraine conflict. Peskov also reiterated that Russia would continue its operations in Ukraine until the "job is done," stating that there was "no alternative."¹²⁷⁹

Concerning the attribution of several drone attacks on Russian territory in May, **US officials** told media on **June 5** that they assessed that Ukraine had developed sabotage cells inside Russia made up of a mix of pro-Ukrainian sympathizers and operatives well-trained in this kind of warfare. Ukraine was believed to have provided these operatives with Ukrainian-made drones, and, according to two US officials, there was no evidence that any of the drone strikes had been conducted using US-provided weapons.¹²⁸⁰

Meanwhile, on **June 5**, the **US delegation** to the US-Ukraine Cyber Dialogue reaffirmed its unwavering commitment to support Ukraine's cyber defense in the face of Russia's invasion. As part of this support, Washington was working to deliver an additional \$37 million in cyber assistance to Ukraine, the State Department stated.¹²⁸¹

Media then focused on developments in the Russia-occupied south of Ukraine, where the Nova Kakhovka dam was destroyed on **6 June**, with 80 villages located in the immediate flooding zone. The dam supplied water to the Crimean peninsula and Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant. While western reactions signaled that it remained unclear who was responsible, they condemned the destruction of the dam and suspected it was Russia. Accordingly, media reported on the same **June 6** that the US government had intelligence leaning towards the Kremlin being responsible, according to two US officials and one Western official, while Russian officials stated Ukraine was responsible.¹²⁸² **Kirby** stated the same **June 6**, that the US could "not say conclusively" who was responsible but was doing its best to assess,

¹²⁷⁶ "Indonesia proposes demilitarised zone, UN referendum for Ukraine peace plan," *Reuters*, June 3, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/indonesia-proposes-demilitarised-zone-un-referendum-ukraine-peace-plan-2023-06-03/>].

¹²⁷⁷ "Ukraine war live: Summary," *Guardian*, June 2, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/jun/02/russia-ukraine-war-live-kyiv-shoots-down-more-than-30-missiles-and-drones-in-early-morning-strikes>].

¹²⁷⁸ "Ukraine war live: Summary," *Guardian*, June 2, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/jun/02/russia-ukraine-war-live-kyiv-shoots-down-more-than-30-missiles-and-drones-in-early-morning-strikes>].

¹²⁷⁹ "Kremlin: Western long-range missiles to Ukraine will fuel 'spiralling tension'," *Reuters*, June 4, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/kremlin-western-long-range-missiles-ukraine-will-fuel-spiralling-tension-2023-06-04/>].

¹²⁸⁰ Tim Kelly, Nobuhiro Kubo, Yukiko Toyoda and Kaori Kaneko, "Exclusive: Ukraine has cultivated sabotage agents inside Russia and is giving them drones to stage attacks, sources say," *CNN*, June 5, 2023 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/06/05/politics/ukraine-sabotage-agents-russia-drone-attacks/index.html>].

¹²⁸¹ "Proceedings of the 2023 U.S.-Ukraine Cyber Dialogue," *US Department of State*, June 5, 2023 [<https://www.state.gov/proceedings-of-the-2023-u-s-ukraine-cyber-dialogue/>].

¹²⁸² Yuliya Talmazan, Daniel Arkin, Sarah Kaufman and Daryna Mayer, "Ukraine accuses Russia of blowing up a major dam; Kremlin blames Kyiv," *NBC News*, June 6, 2023 [<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/kakhovka-dam-ukraine-russia-destroyed-rcna87852>].

adding that “destruction of civilian infrastructure is not allowed by the laws of war.”¹²⁸³ Also on **June 6**, **Stoltenberg** stated that this was “an outrageous act,” which demonstrated “once again the brutality of Russia’s war against Ukraine.”¹²⁸⁴ **Sunak** said that if the bursting of the Kakhovka dam was proven to be intentional, it would represent a “new low” in Russian aggression, adding that the UK’s military and intelligence agencies were looking into the blast and it was too soon to pre-empt the cause and make a definitive judgment.¹²⁸⁵

The incident sparked escalatory rhetoric. The same day, **Zelenskiy** condemned the attack on the dam as “an environmental bomb of mass destruction,” calling it a “terrorist” act. “Such deliberate destruction by the Russian occupiers and other structures of the hydroelectric power station is an environmental bomb of mass destruction,” he said.¹²⁸⁶ Ukraine’s foreign ministry called for an urgent meeting of UN security council to discuss what it called a Russian “terrorist act against Ukrainian critical infrastructure.”¹²⁸⁷

Danilov claimed that Russia’s 205th Motorized Rifle Brigade was directly responsible.¹²⁸⁸ Also on **June 6**, **Yermak** said he did not understand how there could be any doubts that Russian forces blew up the hydroelectric station and its dam at 2.50am, since both constructions were “located in the temporary Russian-occupied territories.” He added that “neither shelling nor any other external influence” would have been capable of destroying the structures as “the explosion came from within.”¹²⁸⁹

Peskov, in contrast, stated on **June 6** that Moscow could “state unequivocally” that the explosion was due to “deliberate sabotage by the Ukrainian side,” demanding that Kyiv to “bear full responsibility for all the consequences.” He strongly rejected the Ukrainian allegations that Russia had destroyed the dam, adding that “here we are definitely talking about deliberate sabotage from the Ukrainian side,” which could potentially have very serious consequences for several tens of thousands of residents of the region.¹²⁹⁰ On **June 7**, **Putin** accused Kyiv of destroying the Kakhovka dam at the suggestion of the West, in what he called a “barbaric” war crime that escalated the conflict with Moscow.¹²⁹¹ The same **June 7**,

¹²⁸³ “Press Briefing by Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre and NSC Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby,” *White House*, June 6, 2023 [<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2023/06/06/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-karine-jean-pierre-and-nsc-coordinator-for-strategic-communications-john-kirby-14/>].

¹²⁸⁴ “Joint press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg with the Prime Minister of Slovakia, Ľudovít Ódor,” *NATO Newsroom*, June 6, 2023 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_215430.htm].

¹²⁸⁵ “Rishi Sunak blasts Russia’s ‘new low’ as MI6 investigates Ukraine dam explosion,” *Politico*, June 7, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/rishi-sunak-blasts-russias-new-low-ukraine-dam-explosion/>].

¹²⁸⁶ Yuliya Talmazan, Daniel Arkin, Sarah Kaufman and Daryna Mayer, “Ukraine accuses Russia of blowing up a major dam; Kremlin blames Kyiv,” *NBC News*, June 6, 2023 [<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/kakhovka-dam-ukraine-russia-destroyed-rcna87852>].

¹²⁸⁷ “Ukraine seeks UN Security Council meeting, new sanctions over dam blast,” *Reuters*, June 6, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-seeks-un-security-council-meeting-dam-blast-new-sanctions-2023-06-06/>].

¹²⁸⁸ The Kyiv Independent, “Official: Kakhovka dam was blown up by Russia’s 205th Motorized Rifle Brigade,” *Twitter*, June 6, 2023 [<https://twitter.com/kyivindependent/status/1666053750597857282?s=46&t=UxeNgDKIqnhQqORr2FbSbQ>].

¹²⁸⁹ “Ukraine war live: Summary,” *Guardian*, June 6, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/jun/06/russia-ukraine-war-live-dam-near-kherson-blown-up-by-russian-forces-ukrainian-military-says>].

¹²⁹⁰ “Kremlin says Ukraine sabotaged dam to cut Crimea’s water, distract from own failure,” *Reuters*, June 6, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/kremlin-says-ukraine-sabotaged-dam-cut-crimeas-water-distract-own-failure-2023-06-06/>].

¹²⁹¹ “Ukraine war live: Closing summary,” *Guardian*, June 7, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/jun/07/russia-ukraine-war-live-updates-nova-kakhovka-dam-collapse-kherson-oblast-floods-evacuations-flood-flooding-latest-news>].

the Russian permanent mission to the UN stated the responsibility for the “unfolding tragedy” in Kherson due to the destruction of the Kakhovka dam rested with “the Kiev regime and its Western masters who pump up Ukraine with weapons.”¹²⁹²

Against the destruction of the dam, media reported on **June 6, 2023** on new evidence related to the destruction of the Nord Stream pipeline on September 26, 2022. Apparently, the **CIA** had received intelligence from a close US ally from Europe in June 2022 – three months before the Nord Stream pipelines were destroyed – that the **Ukrainian military** was planning a covert attack on the undersea network using a small team of divers who reported directly to the commander in chief of the Ukrainian armed forces, Valery *Zaluzhny* – who had been put in charge so that Zelensky would not know about the operation, the intelligence report said. The intelligence summary reported on by the media stated that the Ukrainian military operation had been “put on hold” for reasons that remained unclear. The Ukrainians had planned to attack the pipeline on the heels of the major allied naval exercise BALTOPS that ran June 5-17, 2022, according to the report. The source’s information could not immediately be corroborated, but the *CIA* had shared the report with Germany and other European countries in June, with highly specific details including numbers of operatives and methods of attack, according to multiple officials familiar with the matter.¹²⁹³ On **June 13, 2023** media reported that the *CIA* had even warned Ukraine not to destroy the Nord Stream pipeline months before the attack.¹²⁹⁴ In reaction, **Zelenskyy** denied again on **June 7** that Ukraine had any involvement in destroying the pipelines. He insisted that he did “not know anything, 100 percent,” adding that if the Ukrainian military was “supposed to have done this, show us proof.”¹²⁹⁵ On **June 13**, media reported that the *CIA* had even warned Ukraine not to destroy Nord Stream months before the attack.¹²⁹⁶

Paris planned to send aid to Ukraine “to meet immediate needs” after the destruction of the Kakhovka dam, **Macron** said on **June 7**, calling the destruction an “atrocious act which is endangering populations.”¹²⁹⁷ On **June 9**, **Kishida** also told Zelenskyy that Japan would offer emergency humanitarian aid worth a few million dollars.¹²⁹⁸ The same **June 9**, the Norwegian Seismic Array **Norsar** published seismic data suggesting that the Kakhovka dam had been blown up with a blast at the site. Signals from a regional station in Romania pointed to an explosion at 2.54am on June 6. Norsar did not draw conclusions on who was responsible.¹²⁹⁹ The same day, **Ukraine’s domestic security agency** said it had intercepted a telephone call proving Russian forces blew up the Kakhovka station and dam in Kherson region. It posted a 90-second audio clip of the alleged conversation on its Telegram channel in which one

¹²⁹² Russia at the United Nations, “#Nebenzia at #UNSC on Kakhovka HPP,” *Twitter @RussiaUN*, 7 June 2023 [<https://twitter.com/RussiaUN/status/1666227069318049793>].

¹²⁹³ Shane Harris and Souad Mekhennet “U.S. had intelligence of detailed Ukrainian plan to attack Nord Stream pipeline,” *Washington Post*, June 6, 2023 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/06/06/nord-stream-pipeline-explosion-ukraine-russia/>].

¹²⁹⁴ Nicolas Camut, “CIA warned Ukraine not to blow up Nord Stream, reports say,” *Politico*, June 13, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/cia-warned-ukraine-not-to-blow-up-nord-stream-reports-pipeline/>].

¹²⁹⁵ Paul Ronzheimer, Gabriel Gavin and Victor Jack, “Zelenskyy denies Ukraine involvement in Nord Stream pipeline blasts,” *Politico*, June 7, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/zelenskyy-denies-ukraine-involvement-in-nord-stream-pipeline-blasts/>].

¹²⁹⁶ Nicolas Camut, “CIA warned Ukraine not to blow up Nord Stream, reports say,” *Politico*, June 13, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/cia-warned-ukraine-not-to-blow-up-nord-stream-reports-pipeline/>].

¹²⁹⁷ “France to send aid to Ukraine for dam disaster, says Macron,” *France 24*, June 7, 2023 [<https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20230607-🇫🇷-live-evacuations-continue-following-attack-on-major-russian-held-dam-in-ukraine>].

¹²⁹⁸ “Japan to offer emergency aid to Ukraine, to host reconstruction meeting,” *Reuters*, June 9, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/japan-offer-emergency-aid-ukraine-host-reconstruction-meeting-2023-06-09/>].

¹²⁹⁹ Julian Borger and Piotr Sauer, “Seismic data adds to evidence Ukraine’s Kakhovka dam was blown up,” *Guardian*, June 9, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jun/09/seismic-data-adds-evidence-ukraine-kakhovka-dam-blown-up>].

person said “Our saboteur group is there. They wanted to cause fear with this dam. It did not go according to the plan. More than they planned.”¹³⁰⁰ Further engaging in discussions on who had caused the Kakhovka dam explosion, Ukraine’s deputy defense minister **Hanna Maliar** stated on **June 11** that Russian forces had blown up the Khakhovka dam to prevent Ukrainian troops from launching an offensive and advancing in the southern Kherson region. She said the action had been intended to help Russia deploy reserves to the Zaporizhzhia and Bakhmut areas.¹³⁰¹ On **June 12**, **Zelenskiy** stated that an investigation by the international criminal court had started over the breach of the Kakhovka dam.¹³⁰²

197.	Warning
Meanwhile, the discussion of sending fighter jets to Ukraine received a nuclear dimension. On June 6 , Lavrov noted in a speech at a military base in Dushanbe in Tajikistan that the US-made F-16s could “accommodate” nuclear weapons and warned that supplying Ukraine with F-16s would escalate the conflict further. “If they do not understand this, then they are worthless as military strategists and planners,” the Russian foreign minister said about Western decision-makers. ¹³⁰³	

198.	De-escalatory
In reaction, Kirby declined to discuss the nuclear capabilities of the F-16 jets, but noted that President Biden had been consistent that he did not want to see the war escalate, certainly not into the nuclear realm. Instead, the purpose of providing advanced fighter aircraft was “to help Ukraine defend itself, defend its airspace and its territorial integrity,” Kirby said. ¹³⁰⁴	

On **June 7**, media reported that in closed-door sessions at the Shangri-La Dialogue the **Ukrainian delegation** had brought up the idea of obtaining F-18s alongside the F-16 fighter. Dozens of old but serviceable F-18s might be available for export by the end of the decade, as Australia, Canada, Switzerland and Finland transition to F-35s, the argument went.¹³⁰⁵

Concerning security guarantees to Ukraine, former NATO secretary general Anders **Rasmussen** said on **June 7** that a group of NATO countries may be willing to put troops on the ground in Ukraine if member

¹³⁰⁰ “Ukraine security service says it intercepted call proving Russia destroyed Kakhovka dam,” *Reuters* June 9, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-dam-intercept-idAFL8N381190>].

¹³⁰¹ “Ukraine says Russia blew up dam to prevent offensive in south,” *Reuters*, June 11, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-says-russia-blew-up-kakhovka-dam-prevent-offensive-south-2023-06-11/>].

¹³⁰² “Ukraine’s Zelenskiy: Work has started on international investigation of dam breach,” *Reuters*, June 11, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraines-zelenskiy-work-has-started-international-investigation-dam-breach-2023-06-11/>].

¹³⁰³ “Russia says U.S.-built F-16s could ‘accommodate’ nuclear weapons if sent to Ukraine,” *Reuters*, June 6, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-says-us-built-f-16s-could-accommodate-nuclear-weapons-if-sent-ukraine-2023-06-06/>].

¹³⁰⁴ “Russia says U.S.-built F-16s could ‘accommodate’ nuclear weapons if sent to Ukraine,” *Reuters*, June 6, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-says-us-built-f-16s-could-accommodate-nuclear-weapons-if-sent-ukraine-2023-06-06/>].

¹³⁰⁵ “National Security Daily: F-18 talk heats up,” *Politico*, June 7, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/06/07/dam-collapse-not-expected-to-hinder-counteroffensive-00100717>].

states did not manage to provide tangible security guarantees to Kyiv at the alliance's summit in Vilnius.¹³⁰⁶

On **June 8**, of nine **US congresspeople** renewed pressure on the White House to send Ukraine long-range munitions, urging Biden to greenlight the Army Tactical Missile System. The letter also called on the president to approve other advanced weaponry, including F-16 fighter jets and additional air defense capabilities such as another Patriot missile defense system.¹³⁰⁷ The following **June 9**, a bipartisan sextet introduced a House bill that called on the Biden administration to send Army Tactical Missile Systems to Ukraine.¹³⁰⁸

Meanwhile, the discussion of providing security guarantees to Ukraine picked up again. According to **five European diplomats**, the Western alliance was still divided. One proposal was the so-called Kyiv Security Compact, a concept Zelenskyy's office had developed with Rasmussen. That plan would see a core group of allies make binding commitments to fortify Ukraine's defenses for years to come with both military and non-military aid. Separately, a group of former senior Western defense officials and academics have put forward an idea focused on long-term cooperation and helping Ukraine rapidly expand its own defense industry. In reaction to these discussions, on **June 7**, **Stoltenberg** stated that NATO security guarantees were Article 5, and thus full membership, but that he was aware about ongoing "discussions and consultations between Ukraine and some allies on bilateral arrangements." On **June 8**, Ukraine's deputy prime minister **Olha Stefanishyna** urged that Ukraine needed "clear security guarantees following the example of Finland and Sweden," that applied "for the transition period before Ukraine's actual accession to NATO."¹³⁰⁹ On **June 9**, US Ambassador to NATO **Julianne Smith** stated that Ukraine was unlikely to get a formal offer to join NATO while being "engaged in full-scale war," but that NATO allies wanted to signal to Zelensky in at the alliance's Vilnius summit that "we care deeply about having a longer-term relationship with Ukraine and looking for ways to acknowledge, you know, all they've accomplished and that our support isn't going to fade away or that we're not going to get distracted."¹³¹⁰

199.	Warning
Concerning the stationing of tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus, Putin told Lukashenko on June 9 that Russia would start deploying them after the facilities were ready on 7-8 July, adding that everything was "going according to plan." ¹³¹¹	

Also on **June 9**, the **North Atlantic Council** stated that Russia's decision to withdraw from the Treaty on Conventional armed forces in Europe (CFE) was "the latest in a series of actions that systematically un-

¹³⁰⁶ "Ukraine war live: Closing summary," *Guardian*, June 7, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/jun/07/russia-ukraine-war-live-updates-nova-kakhovka-dam-collapse-kherson-oblast-floods-evacuations-flood-flooding-latest-news>].

¹³⁰⁷ Lara Seligman and Joe Gould, "Pressure builds on Biden to send long-range weapons to Ukraine," *Politico*, June 8, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/06/08/congress-biden-administration-long-range-weapons-ukraine-00100938>].

¹³⁰⁸ "National Security Daily: Send ATAMCS," *Politico*, June 9, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/06/09/bidens-saudi-fist-bump-gambit-not-a-roaring-success-00101218>].

¹³⁰⁹ Lili Bayer, "The West isn't ready to give Ukraine the security pledges it wants," *Politico*, June 8, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/the-west-isnt-ready-to-give-ukraine-the-security-pledges-it-wants-russia-war/>].

¹³¹⁰ "National Security Daily: Didn't get the invite," *Politico*, June 9, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/06/09/bidens-saudi-fist-bump-gambit-not-a-roaring-success-00101218>].

¹³¹¹ "Putin says tactical nuclear weapons to be deployed in Belarus in July," *Reuters*, June 9, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-deploy-tactical-nuclear-weapons-belarus-july-putin-says-2023-06-09/>]; Anton Gerashchenko, "'The necessary facilities' for placing Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus," *Twitter @Gerashchenko_en*, June 9, 2023 [https://twitter.com/Gerashchenko_en/status/1667148214493929473?s=20].

dermines Euro-Atlantic security,” adding that Russia’s decision further demonstrated “Moscow’s continued disregard for arms control.” The NAC also urged Russia to “implement its commitments and obligations, and to use the remaining time before its withdrawal to reconsider its decision.”¹³¹²

The same **June 9**, Hungarian Deputy Prime Minister **Zsolt Semjen** stated that Hungary had received a group of Ukrainian prisoners of war from Russia, a release that the Ukrainian foreign ministry welcomed while emphasizing “the need to coordinate cooperation on such sensitive issues.” The Russian Orthodox Church’s Moscow Patriarchate confirmed the same day that “at the request of the Hungarian side, a group of Ukrainian prisoners of war of Transcarpathian origin who participated in the hostilities was transferred to Hungary.”¹³¹³

Regarding further support for Ukraine, the **US administration** announced a new \$2.1 billion assistance package for Kyiv on **June 9**. The aid included more munitions for the Patriot air-defense system, HAWK air-defense systems and missiles and Puma unmanned aerial systems.¹³¹⁴ The following **June 10**, **Trudeau** stated Canada would be part of a multinational effort to train Ukrainian fighter pilots, announcing additional military and humanitarian aid for Kyiv. Trudeau added that Russia was responsible and would be held accountable for the destruction of the Kakhovka dam.¹³¹⁵ In a similar vein, also on **June 10**, the UK foreign secretary **James Cleverly** announced that the UK would provide an extra £16m of humanitarian aid to Ukraine after the destruction of the Kakhovka dam.¹³¹⁶ In addition, on **June 14**, media reported that the **Biden administration** was expected to send depleted-uranium rounds to Ukraine after internal debates about how to arm the Abrams tanks that will be delivered.¹³¹⁷ The news came the same day **Blinken** unveiled a \$325 million package for Ukraine, one that included more munitions for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, anti-tank weapons, armored vehicles, artillery rounds and other equipment.¹³¹⁸

Underlining slim prospects for peace talks, **Peskov** stated on **June 11** that there was “practically no precondition for an agreement at the moment,” and that there was “no foundation, even flimsy, for any kind of dialogue.” He claimed Kiev was lacking openness to negotiations due to its alleged unwillingness and unpreparedness, but also not being allowed by its Western sponsors.¹³¹⁹

¹³¹² “North Atlantic Council Statement on Russia’s withdrawal from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe,” *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, June 9, 2023 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_215586.htm].

¹³¹³ “Hungary receives Ukrainian POWs from Russia, Ukraine says not informed,” *Reuters*, June 9, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/hungary-receives-ukrainian-pows-russia-ukraine-says-not-informed-2023-06-09/>].

¹³¹⁴ Anthony Capaccio, “Pentagon Readies New \$2 Billion Ukraine Air Defense Package,” *Bloomberg*, June 9, 2023 [<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-06-08/more-patriot-hawk-missiles-to-be-put-on-contract-for-ukraine-s-long-term-needs#xj4y7vzkg>].

¹³¹⁵ Murray Brewster, “Trudeau commits \$500M more in military aid during surprise visit to Kyiv,” *CBC*, June 10, 2023 [<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trudeau-ukraine-visit-counteroffensive-russia-1.6871411>].

¹³¹⁶ “Ukraine war live,” *Guardian*, June 10, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/jun/10/russia-ukraine-war-livehumanitarian-crisis-hugely-worse-after-kakhovka-dam-collapse-says-un-aid-chief?page>].

¹³¹⁷ Michael R. Gordon and Gordon Lubold, “U.S. Set to Approve Depleted-Uranium Tank Rounds for Ukraine,” *The Wall Street Journal*, June 13, 2023 [https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-set-to-approve-depleted-uranium-tank-rounds-for-ukraine-f6d98dcf?mod=world_lead_pos1].

¹³¹⁸ Eli Stokols and Ari Hawkins, “Biden reaffirms support of NATO alliance, announces more military aid to Ukraine,” *Politico*, June 13, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/06/13/blinden-previews-robust-package-for-ukraine-with-nato-secretary-general-00101734>].

¹³¹⁹ “Russia Seeing No Foundation for Peace Talks With Ukraine,” *Sputnik International*, June 11, 2023 [<https://sputnikglobe.com/20230611/russia-seeing-no-foundation-for-peace-talks-with-ukraine-1111058959.html>].

On **June 12**, a very large NATO military exercise took place over Germany, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic. About 10,000 soldiers from 25 countries were involved, making use of 250 military jets to prepare for an attack on one of NATO's members. Although the exercise was planned long before Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, it was nevertheless seen as a signal towards the Kremlin.¹³²⁰

Meanwhile, announcements of military support to Ukraine continued. On **June 12**, Netherlands's defense minister **Kajsa Ollongren** specified that the Netherlands would aim to begin training Ukrainian pilots on F-16 jets in summer 2023, adding that the aim was to have the training program fully operational within six months, with Denmark being a possible location to host the program. She further stated that a final decision had not yet been taken on a request from Kyiv to supply dozens of F-16s. The US-backed training program would include Belgium and Luxembourg, while France and Britain had also offered assistance, she stated. Two sources said the training would begin with two groups of 12 Ukrainian pilots, already experienced flying Soviet-era MiGs.¹³²¹ On **June 16**, **Stoltenberg** in a statement "strongly" welcomed the Danish and Dutch leadership in the initiative, "for demonstrating their will to really step up support for Ukraine," adding that the fact that Allies were now "starting training" meant that NATO would then "have the possibility, on short notice, also to make decisions of delivering planes," which would, however, depend on the time it took to train the pilots and the assessment of the needs.¹³²² Also on **June 16**, **Ollongren** stated that the Netherlands had a number of decommissioned F-16 fighter jets that could be made available for training Ukrainian pilots. However, the partners were still deciding whether those jets would be needed, she said.¹³²³

On **June 13**, **Colonna** stated that France had prevented an attack on its foreign ministry website that was likely carried out by Russian or Russian-speaking individuals, adding that authorities had prevented an identity-hack attempt on that site, and that Paris believed there was a broader campaign of spreading disinformation in France from Russian parties. France's foreign ministry said it could not directly attribute the attacks to Russian authorities, but Colonna said Russian embassies and Russian cultural institutes were involved in the campaign by spreading disinformation.¹³²⁴

Continuing the debate on Western security guarantees for Ukraine, according to multiple **American and European officials** speaking on **June 14**, the United States, Britain, France and Germany were working together to provide those assurances to Kyiv. They would formalize their military and economic support for Ukraine for an indefinite period of time, and thus continue it even after the fighting has stopped. The US was "in talks" with Ukraine and its allies and partners "on how we can reassure Ukraine about their

¹³²⁰ "Ukraine war live: Evening summary," *Guardian*, June 10, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/jun/12/russia-ukraine-war-live-counteroffensive-seeing-first-localised-results-says-kyiv-icc-probe-of-kakhovka-dam-disaster-has-begun>].

¹³²¹ Anthony Deutsch, "Exclusive: Coalition aims to begin Ukrainian F-16 pilot training by summer, Dutch minister says," *Reuters*, June 12, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/coalition-aims-begin-ukrainian-f-16-pilot-training-by-summer-dutch-minister-2023-06-12/>].

¹³²² "Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the meeting of NATO Ministers of Defence in Brussels," *NATO*, June 16, 2023 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_215694.htm].

¹³²³ "National Security Daily: The complex," *Politico*, June 16, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/06/15/more-oil-on-the-fire-serbia-kosovo-heats-up-again-00102114>].

¹³²⁴ "France says it uncovered mass Russian-linked misinformation campaign," *Reuters*, June 13, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/french-foreign-minister-prevented-attack-website-likely-carried-out-by-russian-2023-06-13/>]; Laura Kayali and Clea Caulcutt, "France exposes mega Russian disinformation campaign," *Politico*, June 13, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/france-accuses-russia-of-wide-ranging-disinformation-campaign/>].

long-term security to deter any future aggression for after this war ends,” a **National Security Council spokesperson** confirmed.¹³²⁵

In a message that could be read as re-assuring towards the Russian population in reaction to Ukraine’s counter-offensive, **Putin** stated on **June 13** that while Russia needed to fight enemy agents and improve its defenses against attacks deep inside its own territory, it would not make any sense to follow Ukraine’s example and “introduce some kind of special regime or martial law in the country,” he said, adding there was “no such need today.”¹³²⁶

200.	Warning
Lukashenko said on June 13 that Belarus had started receiving missiles and nuclear warheads from Russia, adding that these nuclear weapons were “three times more powerful than those [dropped on] Hiroshima and Nagasaki.” He warned that “there would be no hesitation” to use the Russia-provided nuclear weapons “in the event of an aggression against us,” adding that a response would be “immediate.” He further said that Belarus needed the weapons “to make sure not a single foreign soldier sets their foot on the Belarusian land again.” ¹³²⁷	

201.	Warning
On June 16 , Putin confirmed at the St Petersburg International Economic Forum that the first nuclear warheads had been delivered to Belarus, “but just the first ones, this is the first batch.” He said that the use of nuclear weapons was “undoubtedly theoretically possible for Russia,” and that it was “possible” if there was “a threat to our territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty, to the existence of the Russian state.” He added that Russia had “more of these weapons than NATO countries do, they know that” and that there was a “serious danger” that the NATO military alliance could be pulled further into the Ukraine war. He further underlined that stationing these weapons in Belarus was “an element of deterrence, a signal to those who think about inflicting a strategic defeat on Russia.” Still, he stressed that while nuclear weapons had been “made to ensure our security in the broadest sense of the word and the existence of the Russian state,” Moscow currently had “no such need” to use them. ¹³²⁸	

In contrast, **Peskov** signaled that Russia was not opposed to further arms control talks but that prospects remained meagre. He stated on **June 18** that overall, the situation in arms control and strategic security was “rather bad than good;” it required “immediate” bilateral Russian-American negotiations, as well as negotiations “in a wider format.” However, he added that “so far” relations with Washington

¹³²⁵ Alexander Ward, Matt Berg and Ari Hawkins, “The ‘European Quad’ weighs security guarantees for Ukraine,” *Politico*, June 14, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/06/14/the-european-quad-weighs-security-guarantees-for-ukraine-00101897>]; “Western allies plan to provide long-term security assurances to Ukraine,” *Financial Times*, June 14, 2023 [<https://www.ft.com/content/8f0528ba-45a4-42c0-b099-07a34e2ee9ff>].

¹³²⁶ “Putin sees no need to declare martial law on Russia’s entire territory,” *TASS*, June 13, 2023 [<https://tass.com/politics/1631713>].

¹³²⁷ “Lukashenko: No hesitation to use nuclear weapons in response to aggression on Belarus,” *BELTA*, June 13, 2023 [<https://eng.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-no-hesitation-to-use-nuclear-weapons-in-response-to-aggression-on-belarus-159580-2023/>]; “Belarus starts taking delivery of Russian nuclear weapons,” *Reuters*, June 14, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/belarus-has-started-taking-delivery-russian-tactical-nuclear-weapons-president-2023-06-14/>].

¹³²⁸ “Putin warns NATO over being drawn into Ukraine war, says Russia has more nuclear weapons,” *CNN*, June 17, 2023 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/06/17/europe/nato-danger-ukraine-war-putin-intl-hnk/index.html>]; “Putin says Russia put nuclear bombs in Belarus as warning to West,” *Reuters*, June 17, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-says-russia-positions-nuclear-bombs-belarus-warning-west-2023-06-16/>].

had been “so bad” and “at such a low point that any substantial dialogue [was] out of the question for now.”¹³²⁹

In addition, an official announcement of the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Denmark partnering to send “high priority defense equipment to Ukraine” including “hundreds of short and medium range air defense missiles and associated systems” came in a **joint statement released by the British government on June 15**. The statement further read that the delivery of equipment had already begun and should be completed “within several weeks.”¹³³⁰

Meanwhile, diplomatic tensions between the West and Russia remained high. On **June 15**, the **Australian government** stated it would cancel Russia’s lease to build a new embassy in Canberra due to security concerns. In reaction, the Kremlin called the Australian decision a hostile move which reflected what it said was the authorities’ anti-Russian sentiment.¹³³¹ The same **June 15**, the Russian foreign ministry summoned the Australian ambassador in Moscow **Graeme Meehan**. Peskov stated this was “Russophobic hysteria.”¹³³² On **June 21**, the Russian foreign ministry stated that Russia had barred an additional 48 Australians from entering the country in what it said was retaliation for Australia’s long-running sanctions regime against it. On **June 23**, the Russian embassy in Australia stated that it had “appealed to the Supreme Court because of Canberra’s termination of the contract for the lease of a new piece of land.”¹³³³

Keen to foster support for peace talks, a **delegation of African leaders** began a peace mission in Kyiv on **June 16**. After meeting the delegation, Zelenskiy reiterated his position that peace talks with Russia would be possible only after Moscow withdrew its troops from the “entire” territory of Ukraine.¹³³⁴ In Moscow on **June 17**, **Putin** welcomed the African leaders’ “balanced approach” and stated that he was “open to a constructive dialogue” with those who would consider the “legitimate interests of the parties,” but was also reported to have dismissed most proposal as unrealistic.¹³³⁵ **Peskov** told journalists on **June 20** that Putin’s discussions with the African delegations had been “very productive,” but that Kyiv’s position meant that one could “hardly talk about stable grounds” for peace negotiations.¹³³⁶

¹³²⁹ “Situation in arms control bad, no potential for negotiations — Kremlin Spokesman,” TASS, 18 June, 2023 [<https://tass.com/politics/1634531>].

¹³³⁰ “Joint statement by Denmark, the Netherlands, the UK, and the USA,” UK Ministry of Defence, June 15, 2023 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-by-denmark-the-netherlands-the-uk-and-the-usa>].

¹³³¹ Renju Jose, “Australia cancels lease for new Russian embassy citing national security,” Reuters, June 15, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australia-cancels-lease-new-russian-embassy-citing-national-security-2023-06-15/>].

¹³³² “Australia diligently continues to move in main stream of Russophobic hysteria — Kremlin,” TASS, June 15, 2023 [<https://tass.com/politics/1632779>].

¹³³³ “Russia bans another 48 Australians from entering its territory,” Interfax, June 21, 2023 [<https://interfax.com/newsroom/top-stories/91716/>]; “Australia says no threat from squatting Russian diplomat,” Reuters, June 23, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australia-pm-says-no-threat-russian-diplomat-squatting-site-proposed-embassy-2023-06-23/>]; “Russian Embassy in Australia Says Turned to Supreme Court Over Termination of Lease,” Sputnik, 23 June, 2023 [<https://sputnikglobe.com/20230623/russian-embassy-in-australia-says-turned-to-supreme-court-over-termination-of-lease-1111414055.html>].

¹³³⁴ “Ukraine tells African leaders no peace talks with Russia,” Reuters, June 16, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/south-african-president-arrives-ukraine-peace-mission-2023-06-16/>].

¹³³⁵ “Russia-Ukraine war live,” Guardian, June 17, 2023 [https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/jun/17/russia-ukraine-war-live-counteroffensive-records-tactical-successes-as-troops-advance-south?CMP=share_btn_tw&page].

¹³³⁶ “Kremlin says it sees scant grounds for Ukraine peace talks after African mission,” Reuters, June 20, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-russia-africa-kremlin-idAFS8N3850EO>].

Also on **June 16**, regarding Ukraine's NATO membership prospects, **Biden** talked to Stoltenberg about a proposal the latter had circulated among NATO members suggesting to waive the requirement for Ukraine to meet certain standards under a Membership Action Plan. According to a **senior US official**, Biden was "open" to this plan, if allies supported it. Biden further stated that he saw "no point" in holding the Vilnius summit without offering a clear "signal" that Ukraine would eventually become a NATO member.¹³³⁷ **Officials** within European NATO governments told reporters the next day, **June 17**, that Stoltenberg's plan was likely to succeed. Germany's **Pistorius** agreed. "I would be open for this," he said.¹³³⁸ Nonetheless, the US position was less clear than it seemed on first sight. Also on **June 17**, **Biden** noted that Kyiv had to "meet the same standards" for joining NATO. The alliance system needed to be secure. Ukraine had to be "non-corrupt" and "meet all the standards." He was not "going to make it easy." Could Ukraine fulfill these conditions? "I think it will. I think it can. But it is not automatic." In the same interview, Biden also reiterated that it was "totally irresponsible" for Russia to deploy nuclear weapons to Belarus.¹³³⁹

A number of other developments captured media attention. In Moscow, **Peskov** said on **June 17** that the grain deal had "no chance" to be extended – but it was "hardly possible to predict any final decision."¹³⁴⁰ However, Russia wanted to keep in force its agreement with the UN to facilitate its exports of grain and fertilizer, deputy foreign minister **Alexander Grushko** told journalists on **June 19**.¹³⁴¹

In Paris, **Thierry Breton**, the EU commissioner for the internal market, told journalists on **June 18** that the EU was "going to step up" its "efforts to deliver arms and ammunition – this is a war of high intensity in which they play a crucial role," Breton said. "We are preparing for the war to last several more months, or even longer," he added.¹³⁴²

Meanwhile, hostilities continued. In London, **British officials** briefing the press on **June 18** noted that both sides were taking high casualties as Ukraine was fighting to dislodge Russian forces from occupied areas.¹³⁴³ On **June 19**, **Ukrainian forces** appeared to attack Russia's Belgorod region, particularly the Valuisk municipal district, according to Russian sources.¹³⁴⁴ On the same **June 19**, **Ukrainian defense officials** claimed their forces had shot down four Kalibr cruise missiles and a number of Shahed drones.¹³⁴⁵ During the night of **June 20**, **Russia** launched attacks across Ukraine – Kyiv's spokespeople

¹³³⁷ Francesca Chambers, "NATO chief: Ukraine can expect security guarantees, not membership invitation, at summit," *USA today*, June 16, 2023 [<https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2023/06/14/nato-stoltenberg-ukraine-membership-vilnius-summit/70317400007/>]; Alexander Ward and Paul Mcleary "Biden 'open' to plan that eases Ukraine's path to NATO membership," *Politico*, June 16, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/06/15/biden-ukraine-nato-membership-00102331>].

¹³³⁸ Alexander Ward and Lili Bayer, "European officials support plan that could ease Ukraine's move into NATO," *Politico*, June 16, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/06/16/europe-ukraine-joining-nato-00102416>].

¹³³⁹ Alex Gangitano "Biden: 'I'm not going to make it easier' for Ukraine to join NATO," *The Hill*, June 17, 2023 [<https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/4055273-biden-wont-make-it-easier-for-ukraine-to-join-nato/>].

¹³⁴⁰ "Kremlin: there appears to be 'no chance' of extending Black Sea grain deal," *Reuters*, June 17, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-grain-kremlin-idAFR4N37R01T>].

¹³⁴¹ "If grain deal ends, UN pledge on Russian exports will go on, Russian official says," *Reuters*, June 19, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/if-grain-deal-ends-un-pledge-russian-exports-will-go-russian-official-2023-06-19/>].

¹³⁴² Elizabeth Pineau and Mimosa Spencer "EU to accelerate arms shipments to Ukraine," *Reuters*, June 18, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/europe-accelerate-arms-shipments-ukraine-eu-industry-chief-2023-06-18/>].

¹³⁴³ "Both sides suffer heavy casualties as Ukraine strikes back against Russia, UK assessment says," *AP*, June 19, 2023 [<https://ap-news.com/article/ukraine-russia-war-counteroffensive-casualties-5ea704de519ba8fb08740f7252d800c9j>].

¹³⁴⁴ "Several injured from strikes on Russia border regions, say local governors," *Deutsche Welle*, June 19, 2023 [<https://www.dw.com/en/ukraine-updates-russia-blocking-kherson-flood-aid-un-says/a-65955487>].

¹³⁴⁵ "Russia-Ukraine war," *Guardian*, June 19, 2023 [https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/jun/19/russia-ukraine-war-live-updates-latest-news-moscow-blocking-aid-to-flood-hit-areas-after-kakhovka-dam-destroyed?CMP=share_btn_tw&pagej].

said about two-dozen Iranian drones had been destroyed.¹³⁴⁶ Overall, it seemed difficult for the **Ukrainians** to pierce Russia's well-prepared lines of defense, analysts concluded.¹³⁴⁷

Debates on whether Ukraine would be invited to join NATO at Vilnius also continued. **Stoltenberg** told the press in Berlin on **June 19** that no formal invitation for Ukraine to join NATO would be extended at Vilnius. Instead, leaders would talk about how to move Ukraine closer to NATO. Yet he also warned against accepting a frozen conflict. "We all want this war to end, but a just peace cannot mean freezing the conflict and accepting a deal dictated by Russia," he said. At the same press conference, **Scholtz** said that Germany was prepared for the possibility that the war in Ukraine could last longer.¹³⁴⁸

Some other statements attracted media attention. In Beijing, **Blinken** said on **June 19** that China had renewed its promises not to send arms to Russia.¹³⁴⁹ In California, **Biden** reiterated on the same **June 19** in a side comment that the threat of Putin using nuclear weapons was "real."¹³⁵⁰ One day later, on **June 20**, after meeting Chinese Premier Li Qiang in Berlin, **Scholz** said he "appealed again" to China to "exert its influence even more strongly on Russia in this war." It was important that China continued "not to deliver weapons to the aggressor, Russia," the German chancellor said.¹³⁵¹

202.	Warning
Russian threats returned on June 20 . In Moscow, Shoigu told military officials that Ukraine was planning to strike Crimea with Western weapons. An attack on the "territory of the Russian Federation, including Crimea" with Himars and Storm Shadow missiles would constitute an attack "outside the zone of the special military operation" and would mean "the full involvement of the United States and Great Britain in the conflict." Russia would respond with "immediate strikes on decision-making centres on the territory of Ukraine," he said. ¹³⁵²	

Concerning Ukraine's NATO membership bids, on **June 20**, Ukraine's ambassador to NATO, **Natalia Galibarenko**, said her government wanted at the Vilnius summit "some kind of invitation – or at least commitment [...] to look at the timeframe and modalities of our [NATO] membership." But she understood that for many within the Alliance this was a "red line" because they believed "that it creates a burden for them." Hence, if Ukraine did not get an invitation, this would be a "bad message," but not the

¹³⁴⁶ "Moscow launches Ukraine-wide overnight attacks," *Guardian*, June 20, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/jun/20/russia-ukraine-war-live-attacks-reported-across-ukraine-putin-nuclear-weapons-threat-is-real-says-biden?page=with:block-6490f8188f08abfd8db401b1&filterKeyEvents=false>].

¹³⁴⁷ Marcus Walker, "'Mines Everywhere': Ukraine's Offensive Is Proving a Hard Slog," *Wallstreet Journal*, June 16, 2023 [https://www.wsj.com/articles/mines-everywhere-ukraines-offensive-is-proving-a-hard-slog-270a1e4a?mod=world_lead_pos3]. Also, Marc Santora, "Counteroffensive Is Grueling and Costly, but Promising, Ukraine and U.S. Say," *New York Times*, June 15, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/15/world/europe/ukraine-counteroffensive.html>].

¹³⁴⁸ "NATO summit will not formally invite Ukraine to join alliance," *Reuters*, June 19, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/nato-summit-will-not-formally-invite-ukraine-join-alliance-stoltenberg-2023-06-19/>].

¹³⁴⁹ Humeyra Pamuk "Blinken urges China's vigilance on its firms providing tech to Russia," *Reuters*, June 26, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/blinken-urges-chinas-vigilance-its-firms-providing-tech-russia-2023-06-19/>].

¹³⁵⁰ Arguably, this statement could be coded as a US "warning." However, we assessed that the indirect nature of President Biden's comment placed it under the threshold that has been applied in this working-paper. See Trevor Hunnicutt and Nandita Bose, "Biden says threat of Putin using tactical nuclear weapons is 'real'," *Reuters*, June 20, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/biden-says-threat-putin-using-tactical-nuclear-weapons-is-real-2023-06-20/>].

¹³⁵¹ Geir Moulson, "Germany prods China on Ukraine war as leaders pledge to work together on climate," *AP*, June 20, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/germany-china-meeting-li-scholz-trade-ada3891512ea074d9a642567421e1fd9>].

¹³⁵² "Russia warns Ukraine against striking Crimea with U.S., British missiles," *Reuters*, June 20, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-warns-ukraine-against-striking-crimea-with-us-british-missiles-2023-06-20/>].

“end of the world.”¹³⁵³ The following **June 21**, **Cleverly** stated that the UK would be “very supportive” of a fast-tracked accession to NATO for Ukraine, adding that he thought “all NATO allies” would “recognize” that the offer to both Sweden and Finland did not require a MAP, and Ukrainians had demonstrated their commitment to reform the military for the requirements of NATO membership.¹³⁵⁴ Also, **Wallace** said on **June 29** that NATO should “absolutely look at skipping” the MAP, but allies had to “all move together” and there were 31 members in NATO.¹³⁵⁵

Regarding further financial support for Ukraine, also on **June 20**, **von der Leyen** unveiled an aid package for 2023-27 worth €50bn, stating that the aim was to “provide predictable finance to Ukraine on its EU path, together with global partners and the private sector.” Of the aid pledge, 17 billion were meant as grants and the rest as low-interest loans.¹³⁵⁶

With view to sanctions, on **June 21**, **EU governments** agreed to an 11th package of sanctions against Russia, aimed at stopping other countries and companies from circumventing existing measures. It forbade transit via Russia of an expanded list of goods and technologies which might aid Russia’s military or security sector. The biggest novelty, diplomats said, was enabling restrictions on the sale of sensitive dual-use goods and technology to third countries that might sell it on to Russia.¹³⁵⁷

The same **June 21**, adding to nuclear warnings, **Putin** announced that new Sarmat nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missiles would soon enter service. He stressed that “the most important task” was “the development of the nuclear triad,” which was “a key guarantee of Russia’s military security and global stability,” also stating that already about half of the units and formations of the Strategic Missile Forces were equipped with the latest Yars systems, and the troops were being re-equipped with modern missile systems with the Avangard hypersonic warhead.¹³⁵⁸

Regarding the training of Ukrainian pilots on F-16s, the same **June 21**, a **US Defense Department official** stated that a coalition of Western countries thought Romania could be a good place to train Ukrainian pilots to fly F-16 fighter jets. The group was working to negotiate a contract to conduct the aircraft training at a site in Romania, **Pentagon officials** said.¹³⁵⁹

¹³⁵³ Lili Bayer, “Ukraine wants commitment on NATO membership bid,” *Politico*, June 20, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/ukraine-seeks-political-decision-but-realistic-on-nato-membership-war-russia/>].

¹³⁵⁴ Cristina Gallardo, “UK ‘very supportive’ of fast-track NATO plan for Ukraine,” *Politico*, June 21, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/uk-james-cleverly-very-supportive-of-fast-track-nato-plan-for-ukraine-war-russia/>].

¹³⁵⁵ Alistair Smout, Kylie MacLellan, and William James, “Britain says NATO should consider removing MAP hurdle to Ukraine’s membership,” *Reuters*, June 29, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/britain-says-nato-should-consider-removing-map-hurdle-ukraines-membership-2023-06-29/>].

¹³⁵⁶ Gabriela Baczynska, “EU offers Ukraine 50 billion euros through 2027,” *Reuters*, June 20, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-unveil-50bln-euro-aid-package-ukraine-sources-2023-06-20/>].

¹³⁵⁷ “Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine: EU adopts 11th package of economic and individual sanctions,” *Council of the EU*, June 23, 2023 [<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/06/23/russia-s-war-of-aggression-against-ukraine-eu-adopts-11th-package-of-economic-and-individual-sanctions/>]; Jan Strupczewski, “EU approves 11th sanctions package against Russia over Ukraine,” *Reuters*, June 21, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-approves-11th-sanctions-package-against-russia-over-ukraine-2023-06-21/>].

¹³⁵⁸ “Putin says Russia’s new Sarmat nuclear missiles soon ready for deployment,” *Reuters*, June 21, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/putin-says-russias-new-sarmat-nuclear-missiles-soon-ready-deployment-2023-06-21/>].

¹³⁵⁹ Lara Seligman and Lili Bayer, “West eyes Romania as possible F-16 training site for Ukrainian pilots,” *Politico*, June 21, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/06/21/west-eyes-romania-as-possible-f-16-training-site-for-ukrainians-00102916>].

Also on **June 23**, European enlargement commissioner **Olivér Várhelyi** stated that Ukraine had made good progress on its EU accession journey, but would still need to “deliver” on undertakings before official accession talks could begin. While Kyiv had made good progress on reforms in judicial governance and media anti-corruption, it now needed to “build a credible track record of prosecutions and convictions and to ensure a steady fight against corruption,” he said.¹³⁶⁰ In the same vein, **Rasmussen** stated on **June 28** that the EU should not “lower the bar” on membership in terms of corruption and democracy, saying to do so would risk “importing instability.” He added that Denmark supported EU membership for Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and the western Balkans, but that “geopolitical circumstances” did not justify skating over governance reforms.¹³⁶¹

Adding to Russian critique of Western arms and ammunition being used to strike Crimea and targets inside Russia, on **June 22**, the Russia-appointed Kherson governor **Vladimir Saldo** accused Kyiv of using British-supplied long-range missiles to strike a bridge connecting Kherson province with the Crimean peninsula. Ukrainian authorities did not confirm the use of Shadow missiles in the attack on the bridge.¹³⁶²

At the same time, concerning military developments on the ground, the **Ukrainian air force** said on **June 23** that its air defenses had shot down 13 Russian cruise missiles heading towards a military airfield in the western Khmelnytskyi region.¹³⁶³

Meanwhile, suggesting intra-elite tensions in Russia were rising, **Prigozhin** questioned the official justifications for invading Ukraine on **June 23**, criticizing the country’s military top brass for “deceiving” Russian society.¹³⁶⁴ One day later, on **June 24**, **Prigozhin** attempted an insurrection. The **Wagner group** took over the city of Rostov, including the headquarters of the southern military district, and started a march on Moscow. In an emergency broadcast, **Putin** issued a nationwide call for unity in the face of a mutinous strike that he compared to the revolution of 1917. “Any internal mutiny is a deadly threat to our state, to us as a nation,” he said.¹³⁶⁵ The same day, **Prigozhin** ordered his fighters to withdraw from Rostov and halt their march on Moscow. Under a deal brokered by **Lukashenko**, Prigozhin agreed to leave Russia in exchange for safe passage to exile in Belarus. On **June 26**, **Putin** demanded that Wagner Group forces either join Russia’s conventional military, return to their families, or go to Belarus alongside Prigozhin.¹³⁶⁶ **Russian authorities** closed the mutiny probe into the Wagner Group.¹³⁶⁷ On **June 27**,

¹³⁶⁰ “Ukraine war live: Ukraine and Moldova making good progress towards EU membership, European commissioner says,” *Guardian*, June 22, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/jun/22/russia-ukraine-war-live-slow-pace-of-counter-offensive-setting-conditions-for-future-main-effort-usthinktank-says?page>].

¹³⁶¹ Ben Hall, “EU should not ‘lower the bar’ to take in Ukraine, says Denmark,” *Financial Times*, June 29, 2023 [<https://www.ft.com/content/3374e390-29ea-4cf0-9a03-c168d1b5614a>].

¹³⁶² Lorenzo Tondo, “Russia accuses Ukraine of using UK-supplied missiles to strike bridge to Crimea,” *Guardian*, June 22, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jun/22/russia-accuses-ukraine-uk-missiles-strike-bridge-to-crimea>].

¹³⁶³ AFP News Agency, “#UPDATE Ukraine said on Friday it had downed an entire barrage of 13 cruise missiles,” *Twitter @AFP*, June 23, 2023 [<https://twitter.com/AFP/status/1672170126471462912>].

¹³⁶⁴ Isabel van Brugen, “Prigozhin Says Putin’s Reason for Invading Ukraine Was a Lie,” *Newsweek*, June 23, 2023 [<https://www.newsweek.com/prigozhin-wagner-group-putin-ukraine-war-shoigu-nato-lie-1808700>]; Пресс-служба Пригожина “#1829 Публикуем первую часть большого интервью Евгения Пригожина,” *Telegram*, June 23, 2023 [https://t.me/concordgroup_official/1279].

¹³⁶⁵ “Ukraine war live: Summary,” *Guardian*, June 24, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/jun/23/russia-ukraine-war-live-russia-investigates-mutiny-as-wagner-chief-says-evil-military-leaders-must-be-stopped>].

¹³⁶⁶ “National Security Daily: Putin’s message to Wagner,” *Politico*, June 26, 2023 [<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2023/06/26/keep-calm-and-tell-ukraine-to-carry-on-00103624>].

¹³⁶⁷ Andrew Roth, Piotr Sauer and agencies, “Wagner boss to leave Russia as reports say US spy agencies picked up signs of planned uprising days ago,” *Guardian*, June 25, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jun/25/wagner-boss-to-leave>].

Lukashenko stated that Prigozhin had arrived in Belarus, adding that agreed with his minister of defense that he could use a Wagner unit “as part of the army.”¹³⁶⁸ The same day, **Putin** told members of Russia’s security services that they “in fact stopped a civil war” by acting “clearly and coherently” during Prigozhin’s armed mutiny. “The people and the army were not on the side of the mutineers,” he added.¹³⁶⁹

203.	De-escalatory
In reaction to these developments, Western officials worried about the faith of Russia’s nuclear arsenal. American officials sent diplomatic messages to Russia making clear that they were not involved in the events and considered them an internal Russian matter. They urged Moscow not to use nuclear weapons or escalate. US and European officials agreed behind closed doors that they should remain “silent” and “neutral” about the mutiny. “Any time you have a major country like Russia that has signs of instability, that’s something of concern,” Blinken said on June 25 . “When it comes to their nuclear weapons, we have seen no change in their posture, and we have made no change in our own posture. But it’s something, of course, we’re looking at very, very carefully.” ¹³⁷⁰ On June 26 , Biden stated that the US was “not involved” and “had nothing to do with it,” adding that he had agreed with key allies that they “had to make sure” to give Putin “no excuse to blame this on the West and blame this on NATO.” ¹³⁷¹ Burns called Naryshkin to assure the Kremlin that Washington had no role in it. ¹³⁷² However, the same day, Lavrov said Moscow would still look into the potential involvement of Western spies in the rebellion. ¹³⁷³	

Reports emerged that, given the instability caused by the insurrection, **some Western nations**, including G7 members, had discussed the need for Ukraine not to take advantage of the current situation by, for instance, launching attacks against Russian territory. At the **meeting of EU foreign ministers on June 26**, some stated that it was not in Europe’s interest to destabilize Russia. These discussions revealed a lack of consensus with respect to potential outcomes of the Ukraine crisis – it was not clear who was willing to accept how much instability in Russia and the associated risks for Ukraine to regain which territories. At the same meeting, **Kuleba** said now was the time to pump more artillery systems

[russia-as-reports-say-us-spy-agencies-picked-up-signs-of-planned-uprising-days-ago](#)]; “Belarus leader says he talked Prigozhin back from brink,” *Reuters*, June 27, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/belarus-leader-says-he-talked-prigozhin-back-brink-2023-06-27/>]; Zoya Sheftalovich, “Russia drops charges over Wagner mutiny, reports say,” *Politico*, June 27, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-drop-charge-wagner-group-mutiny-yevgeny-prigozhin-vladimir-putin/>].

¹³⁶⁸ “Lukashenko confirms Prigozhin’s arrival in Belarus,” BELTA, June 27, 2023 [<https://eng.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-confirms-prigozhins-arrival-in-belarus-159876-2023/>].

¹³⁶⁹ Andrew Osborn, “Vladimir Putin thanks Russian army for stopping ‘civil war’,” *Reuters*, June 27, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/vladimir-putin-thanks-russian-army-stopping-civil-war-2023-06-27/>].

¹³⁷⁰ Alexander Ward, Lili Bayer, Suzanne Lynch and Cristina Gallardo, “West after Wagner rebellion: Talk softly and help Ukraine carry a bigger stick,” *Politico*, June 26, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/ukraine-counteroffensive-russia-wagner-rebellion/>]; Michael R. Gordon and Alan Cullison, “Wagner Mutiny Revives U.S. Fears Over Control of Russia’s Nuclear Weapons,” *Wallstreet Journal*, June 25, 2023 [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/wagner-mutiny-revives-u-s-fears-over-control-of-russias-nuclear-weapons-29319369>].

¹³⁷¹ Jeff Mason, Steve Holland and Simon Lewis, “Biden: US, allies not involved in uprising against Putin,” *Reuters*, June 26, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/biden-us-allies-not-involved-uprising-against-putin-2023-06-26/>].

¹³⁷² Julian E. Barnes, “The director of the C.I.A. called the Kremlin to make clear the U.S. had no tie to Wagner’s rebellion,” *New York Times*, June 30, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/30/world/europe/cia-william-burns-russia-wagner-rebellion.html?searchResultPosition=1>].

¹³⁷³ “Russia checking if Western agencies were involved in mutiny: foreign minister,” *Reuters*, June 26, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-checking-if-western-agencies-were-involved-mutiny-foreign-minister-2023-06-26/>].

and missiles into Kyiv's arsenal, place more sanctions on Russia, and speed up the training of Ukrainian pilots on advanced fighter jets.¹³⁷⁴

Some western heads of state and government, as well as defense and foreign ministers still further commented on the mutiny. **Macron** stated on **June 25** that the revolt led by Wagner against the country's leadership would show the "divisions" that existed "within the Russian camp, and the fragility of both its military and its auxiliary forces."¹³⁷⁵ The same day, **Nauseda** cautioned that NATO would need to strengthen its eastern flank if Belarus became the new host of Wagner.¹³⁷⁶ **Reznikov** stated he had had a phone call with **Austin** and both had agreed that the Russian authorities were weak and that withdrawing Russian troops from Ukraine was "the best choice for the Kremlin" as "Russia would be better served to address its own issues."¹³⁷⁷ On **June 26**, **Borrell** said that Russia had thus far posed a threat because it had been strong and had had force, while now it was also "becoming a risk because it may have entered an era of political instability and internal fragility."¹³⁷⁸ **Kirby** stated the same day that the US government was "not taking sides in this internal matter,"¹³⁷⁹ while **Cleverly** said that Prigozhin's rebellion was "an unprecedented challenge to president Putin's authority" and that "cracks" were emerging "in Russian support for the war."¹³⁸⁰ On **June 27**, **Duda** stated that the relocation Wagner to Belarus were "all very negative signals for us which we want to raise strongly with our allies."¹³⁸¹ At a meeting of NATO allies on **June 28**, **Duda** reiterated that the Wagner group's presence in Belarus could "be a potential danger" for his country and for Lithuania, which share borders with Belarus.¹³⁸²

204.	De-escalatory
Meanwhile, on June 25 , Lavrov , referring to Biden's statement that the threat of Russia using tactical nuclear weapons was "real," commented that he would not attach too much importance "to verbal escapades that have no foundation." ¹³⁸³	

¹³⁷⁴ Henry Foy, Sam Fleming, and Felicia Schwartz "West explores nuclear risks from unstable Putin regime," *Financial Times*, June 26, 2023 [<https://www.ft.com/content/35b0291b-5d02-4869-851b-a1de4080c5f6>].

¹³⁷⁵ Aurélien Viers, Florent Provansal and François Tonneau, "Macron : 'La rébellion de Wagner montre les divisions au sein du camp russe'," *Provence*, June 25, 2023 [<https://www.laprovence.com/article/politique/9427644555835815/info-la-provence-macron-la-rebellion-de-wagner-montre-les-divisions-au-sein-du-camp-russe>].

¹³⁷⁶ "Vilnius Urges Beefed-Up NATO If Prigozhin In Belarus," *Radio Free Europe*, June 25, 2023 [<https://www.rferl.org/a/vilnius-urges-beefed-up-nato-if-prigozhin-in-belarus/32475182.html>].

¹³⁷⁷ Oleksii Reznikov, "Had a phone conversation with my friend and colleague @SecDef Lloyd Austin III," *Twitter @oleksiireznikov*, June 25, 2023 [<https://twitter.com/oleksiireznikov/status/1673024465410588673>].

¹³⁷⁸ "Foreign Affairs Council: Press remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell at the press conference," *European External Action Service*, June 26, 2023 [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/foreign-affairs-council-press-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-press-conference-1_en].

¹³⁷⁹ Jeff Mason, Steve Holland and Simon Lewis, "Biden: US, allies not involved in uprising against Putin," *Reuters*, June 26, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/biden-us-allies-not-involved-uprising-against-putin-2023-06-26/>].

¹³⁸⁰ "UK's Cleverly: Prigozhin's rebellion is an unprecedented challenge to Russia's Putin," *Reuters*, June 26, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/uks-cleverly-prigozhins-rebellion-is-an-unprecedented-challenge-russias-putin-2023-06-26/>].

¹³⁸¹ "Ukraine war live: Closing summary," *Guardian*, June 27, 2023 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/jun/27/russia-ukraine-war-live-putin-confirms-russian-pilots-killed-during-wagner-mutiny-zelenskiy-visits-front>].

¹³⁸² Cora Engelbrecht and Steven Erlanger, "NATO Stresses Risk of Wagner Group's Potential Relocation to Belarus," *New York Times*, June 28, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/28/world/europe/wagner-belarus-nato-estonia-poland.html>].

¹³⁸³ "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's answers to questions from Moscow. Kremlin. Putin programme, June 25, 2023," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, June 25, 2023 [https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1892818/].

In other news, acting Danish defense minister **Troels Lund Poulsen** on **June 26** announced the start of training for Ukrainian pilots on F-16 jets. He added that Denmark would also consider whether it “should make a concrete donation to Ukraine of the Danish F-16 fighters, and how many there should be.”¹³⁸⁴

Also on **June 26**, Bulgaria’s Economy Minister **Bogdan Bogdanov** suggested Russia may have been responsible for an explosion in the early hours of June 25 at an arms factory in the town of Karnobat in eastern Bulgaria.¹³⁸⁵

Concerning further military support for Ukraine, on **June 27**, the **Pentagon** announced that the United States would provide Kyiv with a new military package worth up to \$500m, including ground vehicles like Bradley fighting vehicles and Stryker armored personnel carriers, and munitions for high mobility artillery rocket systems.¹³⁸⁶ On **June 28**, **Nauséda** confirmed that his country was to supply Ukraine with two Namsam launchers.¹³⁸⁷ The same day, **Pistorius** stated that Germany “should supply more arms deliveries” abroad, and had to “change the corresponding restrictions,” adding that establishing lasting weapons supplies to Ukraine was “crucial.”¹³⁸⁸ The same **June 28**, **Blinken** stated that NATO allies would unveil “a very robust package for Ukraine, political and practical” during the Vilnius summit.¹³⁸⁹

At the same time, the Russian government appeared to take retribution steps against Wagner supporters. Russian army general **Sergei Surovikin** was detained as part of a crack-down, apparently accused that he had known about Prigozhin’s plans, media reported on **June 29**.¹³⁹⁰ In Washington, the **Biden Administration** was “considering” sending Army Tactical Missile Systems to Ukraine, journalists noted on the same day. The White House, long reluctant on this question, seemed to have softened its position, US and European officials told journalists.¹³⁹¹

Also on **June 29**, **Ukraine** conducted nuclear disaster response drills in the vicinity of the Russian-occupied powerplant at Zaporizhzhia, claiming that Russia was potentially planning to destroy the powerplant. In New York, **Nebenzia** wrote to Guterres to say that Russia had “no intention” to “blow up” the

¹³⁸⁴ “Denmark to start the training of Ukrainian pilots on F-16s,” *AP*, June 26, 2023 [<https://apnews.com/article/denmark-ukraine-f16-training-f35-2affe4143ce2debeef486285ac1f8904>].

¹³⁸⁵ Nicolas Camut, “Bulgaria’s economy minister hints Russians attacked ammo factory,” *Politico*, June 26, 2023 [<https://www.politico.eu/article/bulgaria-economy-minister-bogdan-bogdanov-nikolay-denkov-hints-at-russian-attack-on-ammunition-factory/>].

¹³⁸⁶ Joseph Clark, “Pentagon Announces \$500M in Security Assistance for Ukraine,” *US Department of Defense*, June 27, 2023 [<https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3441398/pentagon-announces-500m-in-security-assistance-for-ukraine/>].

¹³⁸⁷ Andrius Sytas, “Lithuania buys NASAMS air defence for Ukraine,” *Reuters*, June 28, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/lithuania-buys-nasams-air-defence-ukraine-2023-06-28/>].

¹³⁸⁸ Erika Solomon, “German Defense Minister Vows Stronger Geopolitical Role Ahead of U.S. Visit,” *New York Times*, June 28, 2023 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/28/world/europe/german-defense-minister-pistorius-stronger-geopolitical-role.html>].

¹³⁸⁹ Council on Foreign Relations, “A Conversation with Secretary of State Antony Blinken,” *Youtube*, June 28, 2023 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OuaF_Gw5l5w].

¹³⁹⁰ Max Seddon, Henry Foy and Polina Ivanova “Russia detains ‘General Armageddon’ in crackdown on pro-Wagner elites,” *Financial Times*, June 29, 2023 [<https://www.ft.com/content/e937199c-a5c1-45d9-85bc-85cf75a3528d>].

¹³⁹¹ Vivian Salama, “U.S. Considers ATACMS Long-Range Missiles to Bolster Ukraine’s Fight,” *Wallstreet Journal*, June 29, 2023 [<https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-close-to-approving-long-range-atacms-missiles-to-bolster-ukraines-fight-cc4e389c>].

facility.¹³⁹² However, **Ukraine's military intelligence** claimed on **June 29** that Russia was gradually reducing the number of personnel at Zaporizhzhia, and among the first to leave were employees of Rosatom.¹³⁹³

In Brussels, on the same **June 29**, after EU leaders concluded to “stand ready” to help Ukraine defend itself in the long term, **Borrell** noted that military support for Ukraine had to be “for the long haul,” as Ukraine needed EU “commitment to continue ensuring their security during the war and after the war.”¹³⁹⁴ However, Hungarian prime minister **Viktor Orbán** said on **June 30** that he rejected the EU plans to grant more money to Ukraine.¹³⁹⁵

Also on **June 29**, US ambassador to NATO **Julianne Smith** said that most officials were confident the Alliance could agree at Vilnius on something “above and beyond restating Bucharest.” Allowing Ukraine to skip a MAP was “one option” that they were “looking at.”¹³⁹⁶

Ukraine's counteroffensive received the spotlight on the last day of June. In Kyiv, **Valery Zaluzhny**, the commander of Ukraine's armed forces, said to reporters that “without being fully supplied, these plans” of the counteroffensive were “not feasible at all,” adding that they were still “being carried out” and, hence, the advance was slow. He complained about the lack of fighter jets, saying that Russia was technologically more advanced. When asked whether he feared a Russia nuclear escalation or an explosion at Zaporizhzhia, he said: “It doesn't stop me at all. We are doing our job. All these signals come from outside for some reason: ‘Be afraid of a nuclear strike.’ Well, should we give up?”¹³⁹⁷ In Washington, **Milley** told journalists that the counteroffensive was “advancing steadily,” but it was going to be “very difficult,” “very bloody,” and “very long.”¹³⁹⁸

¹³⁹² Serhiy Chaliy, “Ukraine conducts disaster response drills near Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant,” *Reuters*, June 29, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-conducts-disaster-response-drills-near-zaporizhzhia-nuclear-plant-2023-06-29/>].

¹³⁹³ “Russia reducing personnel at Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant - Ukrainian intelligence,” *Reuters*, June 30, 2023 [<https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/russia-reducing-personnel-at-zaporizhzhia-nuclear-plant---ukrainian-intelligence/48631148>].

¹³⁹⁴ Andrew Gray and Julia Payne, “EU leaders back security commitments for Ukraine,” *Reuters*, June 30, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-leaders-debate-russia-mutiny-pledge-support-ukraine-2023-06-29/>].

¹³⁹⁵ “Hungary opposes EU plan to grant more money to Ukraine, Orban says,” *Reuters*, June 30, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/hungary-opposes-eu-plan-grant-more-money-ukraine-pm-orban-2023-06-30/>].

¹³⁹⁶ “NATO to ‘stand behind’ Ukraine at summit; Stoltenberg mandate extended,” *AFP*, June 29, 2023 [https://www.space-war.com/reports/NATO_to_show_it_stands_behind_Ukraine_at_summit_US_999.html].

¹³⁹⁷ Isabelle Khurshudyan, “Ukraine's top general, Valery Zaluzhny, wants shells, planes and patience,” *Washington Post*, June 30, 2023 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/06/30/valery-zaluzhny-ukraine-general-interview/>].

¹³⁹⁸ Olena Harmash, “Ukraine, US agree: counteroffensive creeps ahead, measured in blood,” *Reuters*, June 30, 2023 [<https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-counteroffensive-idCAKBN2YG1TUJ>].

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