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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**Contemporary Perspectives On The Nuclear Dimension Of  
The Russia-Ukraine War**

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<i>Article Info</i>	<i>Abstract</i>
<p><b>Keywords:</b> <i>Russia-Ukraine War, Nuclear Deterrence, International Security Dynamics, NATO Strategic Response, Geopolitical Instability</i></p>	<p><i>The ongoing Russia-Ukraine war and persistent nuclear threats have significantly heightened the risks of a potential nuclear conflict. These threats are widely seen as attempts by Moscow to deter Western governments from providing substantial support to Ukraine and to prevent NATO from intervening directly in the conflict. Despite this, Russia's nuclear rhetoric has profound consequences; if Moscow successfully employs nuclear deterrence to shield its conventional warfare, it could lead to greater instability in Europe and disrupt the global security order. Russia's approach to the conflict, influenced by perceived threats and strategic imperatives, has prompted shifts in its nuclear posture and deterrence strategies. The analysis will focus on Russia's shifting nuclear doctrine, NATO's strategic responses to these developments, and the conflict's wider consequences for international security. Additionally, it will evaluate the complex challenges confronting both Russia and NATO in managing this precarious situation. By employing a thematic approach to qualitative research, reinforced with quantitative insights, this study examines the far-reaching impacts of Russia's nuclear deterrence strategies across multiple dimensions.</i></p>

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## Introduction

Russia and Ukraine's conflict has garnered significant academic and media interest since February 24, 2022, when Russia invaded. One of the primary justifications provided by Russia for the invasion is the eastward expansion of NATO. During the press conference, President Vladimir Putin stated, "You promised us in the 1990s that [NATO] would not move an inch to the East. You cheated us shamelessly"<sup>1</sup> Additionally, from the Russian perspective, Ukrainians are perceived as a significant challenge to the Russian world's status as a major power and to the "Russian world," an intellectual cornerstone that drives the modern Russian community and nation.<sup>2</sup> This argument reflects Russia's interpretation of NATO's expansion as a challenge to its strategic security and as a breach of prior understandings regarding the post-Cold War order. Additionally, the invocation of the "Russian world" ideology suggests how cultural and historical narratives are utilized to justify state actions and reinforce the broader geopolitical dimensions of the conflict. Russia initiated its invasion through numerous missile strikes targeting cities across Ukraine. Their ground forces moved quickly, capturing considerable areas of Ukraine within weeks and advancing the outermost regions of Kyiv. Since the last days of February, the war in Ukraine has ruled the year's news spotlight like no other story, claiming tens of thousands of lives, causing millions to flee their homes, and triggering a complex worldwide economic

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<sup>1</sup> Becky Sullivan, "How NATO's Expansion Helped Drive Putin To Invade Ukraine", February 24, 2022, *NPR*, <https://www.npr.org/2022/01/29/1076193616/ukraine-russia-nato-explainer>

<sup>2</sup> Alla Kyrudon and Serhyi Troyan, "The Russian-Ukrainian War (2014-2022): Basic Preconditions and Causes" *Balkan Social Science Review*, Vol. 20, No. 20 (2022): 157–79, <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=1092940>.

crisis. Since the summer of 2022, military engagements have predominantly occurred in Eastern and Southern Ukraine, while Russian forces have utilized cluster weapons, bombs, thermobaric munitions and cruise missiles to inflict significant damage on port towns along the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea. Key events such as Ukraine's counteroffensive, the explosion at the Kherson dam, and NATO's response have shaped the course of the conflict in significant ways. However, for an extended period, Russia had been issuing threats of employing nuclear weapons in the conflict.

The conflict is in its third year, and it remains a hotly debated issue in the global community, not only because it has widespread percussion but also because of the looming prospect to deploy atomic weapons. The conflict has refocused global attention on nuclear weapons and the alarming prospect of their use—an issue that had largely receded from public consciousness. Nuclear weapons have unexpectedly become a key concern in the European theater. In September 2022, following the Ukrainian advancements in the battlefield, Russia's nuclear signaling intensified, as reflected in statements from Russian government officials.<sup>3</sup> During the announcement of the seizing of four Ukrainian provinces — Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia—Putin declared: “We will defend our land with all the forces [emphasis added] and resources we have.” To emphasize his argument, he cited the "precedent" established by the United States' nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.<sup>4</sup> In the West, Russia's approach to

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<sup>3</sup> Lachlan MacKenzie, “Six Days in October: Russia’s Dirty Bomb Signaling and the Return of Nuclear Crises” *CSIS*, September 3, 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/six-days-october-russias-dirty-bomb-signaling-and-return-nuclear-crises>.

<sup>4</sup> Steven Pifer, “Russia, Nuclear Threats, and Nuclear Signaling” *Center for International Security Cooperation*, October 16, 2023, <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/news/russia-nuclear-threats-and-nuclear-signaling>.

the conflict with Ukraine was shaped through perceived threats and strategic considerations, prompting adjustments in its nuclear capabilities and deterrence strategies. Given Russia's substantial conventional military superiority over Ukraine, there is a tendency to prioritize conventional combat over nuclear escalation when pursuing strategic goals. However, it is also observed that Russia maintains a readiness to use nuclear weapons under certain circumstances. This nuclear signaling serves as a mechanism to control escalation, particularly to deter Western intervention in the conflict. This article discusses an overview of Russia's military operations, response from the West and NATO, and Russia's nuclear signaling, its development, weapon acquisition and the west perception about Russian nuclear signaling. The study employs a qualitative methodology, combining comparative, international-legal, and systemic approaches to analyze the nuclear dimensions of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. It examines official Russian statements, NATO declarations, and scholarly literature to capture perspectives from both sides. By employing structural-functional and synthesis methods, the research identifies patterns in nuclear signaling and strategic posturing.

### **Russia's Special Military Operation: An Overview**

At the onset of military action in Ukraine on Feb 24, 2022, President Vladimir Putin characterized the military conflict not as a full-fledged war but a "special military operation". He also claimed that the aim is to protect the people of the Donbas region and pursue the objectives of "demilitarizing Ukraine". Putin asserted Russia's no intentions of occupying Ukrainian territory or imposing its will by force. Russia's action provoked a response by the White House issuing a statement declaring, "Today, the United States, along with

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Allies and partners, is imposing severe and immediate economic costs on Russia in response to Putin's war of choice against Ukraine." Between February 22, 2022, and January 11, 2024, the United States placed sanctions against more than 16,000 individuals from Russia.<sup>5</sup> Concurrently, in response to the invasion of the two breakaway territories, President Biden issued Executive Order 14065, invoking the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) to curtail trade and financial transactions involving these regions significantly. The Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) within the Department of Commerce impose sanctions on export restrictions aimed at Russia's "defense, aerospace, and maritime sectors to cut off Russia's access to vital technological inputs, atrophying key sectors of its industrial base, and undercutting its strategic ambitions to exert influence on the world stage." Following the Russian invasion, the European Union swiftly implemented comprehensive sanctions targeting Russia across multiple sectors including technology, transportation, finance, and energy. These measures also encompassed rigorous bans on Russian media outlets. By June 2024, the EU had passed its 14th package of measures.<sup>6</sup>

Likewise, NATO has unequivocally condemned Russia's armed operations in Ukraine, labeling it as "the biggest security threat in a generation." NATO's concern stems from the belief that if Russia succeeds in its military campaign or accomplishes some of its goals, it could fundamentally disrupt the post-World War II global framework established under the UN charter and supported by international conventions and institutions. This could lead to a more unpredictable world with fewer universally accepted rules and guidelines. It is crucial for the Euro-Atlantic community to

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<sup>5</sup> "Sanctions imposed on Russia by target 202," *Statista*, May 28, 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1293531/western-sanctions-imposed-on-russia-by-target/>.

<sup>6</sup> "EU sanctions against Russia, Council of European Union, Accessed June 30, 2024. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions-againstrussia/timeline-sanctions-against-russia/>.

recognize the gravity of the situation and swiftly adjust their approach.<sup>7</sup> The response from the US and NATO highlights a unified position towards Russia's military activities in Ukraine, highlighting the severity of the threat and imposing significant economic sanctions on Russia. While, in Asia, the response has been notably varied. Russia's strongest partner, China's response to Ukraine's invasion by Russia, has been notably ambiguous. As a strategic partner of Russia, Beijing has consistently refrained by referencing terms like “war” or “invasion” in its official statements. Instead, Chinese authorities prefer to describe the situation using phrases like “Ukraine crisis,” “Russia-Ukraine conflict,” or “Russia’s special military operation against Ukraine.”<sup>8</sup>

India’s position on the Ukraine war is neutral, this is because Moscow has been seen as a reliable military partner for decades. Being a worldwide second biggest importer of Russian arms, India relies on Russia for approximately half of its military supplies. This partnership was further solidified when Russian President Vladimir Putin traveled to New Delhi in December 2021 and confirmed the sale of a \$5.4 billion missile defense system to India.<sup>9</sup> In parallel with India's strategic neutrality, Pakistan has adopted a position of cautious non-alignment in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Although Pakistan has consistently called for the respect of Ukraine's sovereignty and has provided humanitarian aid to Kyiv, it has conspicuously refrained from condemning Russia's actions. This

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<sup>7</sup> “Russia's War Against Ukraine: Rethinking the Global Order And Lessons Learned For Nato,” Accessed June 25, 2024, <https://www.nato-pa.int/download-file?filename=/sites/default/files/2023-05/028%20PC%2023%20E%20%20RUSSIA%27S%20WAR%20AGAINST%20UKRAINE%20%20VALASEK%20REPORT.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Sheena Chestnut Greitens, “China’s Response to War in Ukraine,” *Asian Survey* 62 (5-6): 1–31, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2022.1807273>.

<sup>9</sup> Rikard Jozwiak, “Russia, India Extend Military Cooperation Deal During Putin-Modi Summit,” *RFE/RL*, 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/putin-india-weapons-s400-31595401.html>.

nuanced position was evident when Islamabad chose not to vote on resolutions during the United Nations General Assembly that denounced the invasion by Russia of Ukraine on three occasions.<sup>10</sup>

### **Military Assistance Provided to Ukraine**

After the Russian invasion, the United States, NATO, and the European Union have consistently supplied substantial aid to Ukraine. Each approved assistance package has elicited corresponding actions from Russia. For instance, in April 2024, upon the approval of a congressional package, the Russian defense minister stated, “We will increase the intensity of attacks on logistics centers and storage bases for Western weapons in Ukraine.”<sup>11</sup> The US has been Ukraine's significant security support provider and as of August 2024 has committed \$55.4 billion in military assistance in response to the Russian invasion. This aid includes M1A1 Abrams tanks, HIMARS artillery rockets, Patriot Missile Defense Systems, HAWK air defense systems and other crucial munitions from the US.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, NATO has provided political, military, and financial support to Ukraine. NATO's commitment to supporting Ukraine is articulated through the Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP), which has been continuously reinforced since its inception. At the 2022 Madrid Summit, NATO Allies strengthened the Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP) for Ukraine. By the 2023 Vilnius Summit, they expanded the CAP into a multi-year initiative focused on enhancing

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<sup>10</sup>Aamir Latif, “Pakistan Is In 'Gray Area' Over Russia-Ukraine War, Say Analysts,” 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/pakistan-is-in-gray-area-over-russia-ukraine-war-say-analysts/2950149>.

<sup>11</sup> Craig Trudell, “Russia Threatens to Increase Strikes on Ukraine Over US Aid.” *Bloomberg*, 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-04-23/russia-threatens-to-intensify-strikes-on-ukraine-over-us-aid>.

<sup>12</sup> “U.S. Security Cooperation with Ukraine - United States Department of State,” U.S. Department of State 2024, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-ukraine/>.

Ukraine's security and defense sectors and integrating it more closely with NATO.<sup>13</sup> As stated by the NATO secretary general, "NATO has mapped out existing capabilities across the alliance and there are systems that can be made available to Ukraine. I expect new announcements on air defense capabilities for Ukraine soon."

## **Ukraine NATO Membership**

Ukraine's pursuit of NATO membership has its roots in the 2008 Bucharest Summit, where NATO allies affirmed that Ukraine would eventually be admitted and established the MAP, or the Membership Action Plan as the next procedural step. The MAP encompasses comprehensive reforms across political, economic, defense, security, and legal sectors, essential for aspiring NATO members. From 2010 to 2014, Ukraine adopted a policy of non-alignment, which it later abandoned following the Russian offensive. The Ukrainian Parliament in June 2017 codified NATO membership as a strategic foreign and security policy goal, a commitment further solidified by a constitutional amendment in 2019. In 2020, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy endorsed a different approach to national security aimed at fostering a unique collaboration with NATO, along with the goal of achieving full inclusion. Ukraine reiterated its NATO membership aspirations in September 2022, following Russia's illegal annexation attempts.<sup>14</sup>

At the 2024 NATO summit in Washington, NATO declared; that "Ukraine's future is in NATO" and it is on an "irreversible

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<sup>13</sup>"NATO's Response to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine," 2024: [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_192648.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_192648.htm).

<sup>14</sup> Louisa Brooke, "NATO enlargement: Ukraine - House of Commons Library," *The House of Commons Library*, 2024: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9819/>.

path”. In response to this, Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov responded by saying, “So, we certainly will pay close attention to the rhetoric that will be coming out, the talks, and the decisions that will be put on paper”, former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev made similar sentiments declared that Ukraine's membership to NATO became an act of war over Moscow and only "prudence" on the alliance's behalf might hinder the world being shattered into pieces reflects that the Russians are not flexible in their stance against NATO. These statements depict that Russia stands firm in its stance. It repeatedly said that it does not have a problem with EU membership, but with NATO membership.

### **Ukraine's Aspiration for EU Membership**

In the aftermath of the 2013–14 Revolution of Dignity, that toppled a profoundly bribed, Russian-backed dictatorship, Ukraine stated its intention to align with the Euro-Atlantic community of market-oriented democracies. In 2019, Ukraine formally amended its constitution to solidify its strategic goals of EU and NATO membership. The European Union's enlargement policy from 2013 to 2022 was not just inefficient, but also lacking in a proactive expansion drive. Russia's conflict in Ukraine altered the balance of expenses and incentives, providing the EU with a strategic drive to resume enlargement. Following the Russian invasion, Ukraine applied for immediate accession to the EU and was subsequently given EU candidate status by June 2022. The European Council's anticipated commencement of accession negotiations with Ukraine on December 16, 2023, represents a pivotal yet contentious development in the EU's enlargement strategy. While Western policymakers regard Ukraine's EU membership as both a necessary and inevitable progression, the endeavor is fraught with substantial political, financial, and institutional challenges. The accession process, likely to trigger a new wave of EU enlargement, risks exacerbating tensions within the Union, particularly by testing the

commitment of current member states and potentially undermining EU cohesion. The integration of Ukraine necessitates the EU to enhance its decision-making processes and resource allocation, underscoring the urgent need for institutional reforms to effectively manage this enlargement.<sup>15</sup>

When asked about Ukraine's accession into the EU, Putin stated, "Russia is not concerned that Ukraine could get the status of a European Union candidate because the EU is not a military organization." From Russia's statements, it appears that the Kremlin is not significantly concerned about Ukraine's potential accession to the European Union, viewing it as an unlikely and insubstantial prospect. The dismissive tone, referring to the EU membership as a "carrot being dangled in front of a cart,"<sup>16</sup> indicates that Russia perceives these promises as largely symbolic and not a serious geopolitical shift.

### **Russian Nuclear Deterrence and Strategic Interest**

Nuclear deterrence, encompassing nuclear forces, both strategic and non-strategic, continues a fundamental aspect of the broader strategic-deterrence concept. Strategic nuclear weapons are consistently regarded as the basis of Russia's present and future deterrence policy. Russia's nuclear arsenal deters assault by pledging to cause intolerable havoc on any potential adversary in a retaliation attack. In the Russia Ukraine war, this comprises the threat of a vast deployment of strategic nuclear arms that are capable of causing "deterrent damage" regarding the military-economic possibility of economic advisors. Russian nuclear deterrence is

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<sup>15</sup> "Want Ukraine in the EU? You'll Have To Reform The EU, Too," Brookings Institution. Accessed August 17, 2024, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/want-ukraine-in-the-eu-youll-have-to-reform-the-eu-too/>.

<sup>16</sup> "Russia Says Ukraine's EU Membership 'Hardly Real' Possibility," 2023. *The Moscow Times*: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/11/09/russia-says-ukraines-eu-membership-hardly-real-possibility-a83053>.

based on a strategic planning document that outlines the core concept of nuclear deterrence, identifies military risks, threats to be countered, and establishes the parameters under which Russia will consider using nuclear weapons. The policy emphasizes that deterring aggression against Russia and its allies is a top national priority, achieved through the comprehensive military capabilities of the Russian Federation, including its nuclear arsenal, as a deterrent against potential adversaries.<sup>17</sup> The threat of nuclear retaliation serves as a deterrent against intervention in the conflict or escalation beyond a certain point. Moscow appears to be attempting to confine the conflict to Ukraine while deterring NATO intervention through implicit nuclear threats. Emphasizing the defensive nature of its nuclear capabilities, Russia views nuclear weapons solely as a preventative measure. It reserves their use as an intense and unavoidable measure in response to existential threats.

Thomas Schelling argued in his seminal work *Arms and Influence* that the strategic use of force and coercion, particularly through diplomatic signaling, serves as a mechanism to alter an adversary's behavior by introducing significant risks.<sup>18</sup> According to deterrence theory, the adversary is likely to reconsider aggressive actions when faced with credible threats of severe retaliation. This framework can be applied to the current Russia-Ukraine conflict, where President Putin's nuclear threats appear to have temporarily achieved their intended effect. Early in the conflict, global concern escalated, prompting NATO to mobilize military resources in anticipation of a potential Russian escalation. Russia's explicit warning that any direct Western intervention in Ukraine would

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<sup>17</sup> “Basic Principles of State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence - the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation,” [Www.mid.ru](http://www.mid.ru). 2017, [https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/international\\_safety/1434131/#sel=21:7:2](https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/international_safety/1434131/#sel=21:7:2).

<sup>18</sup> “Arms and Influence — Thomas Schelling on Nuclear Taboos, Salami Tactics, and Mutual Alarm Dynamics” *Athenarium*. March 2022, <https://athenarium.com/arms-and-influence-thomas-schelling/>

provoke a nuclear response seems to have effectively dissuaded NATO from engaging more assertively, illustrating the enduring influence of deterrence in contemporary geopolitical conflicts. Since 2000, official Russian military doctrine has included reliance on nuclear deterrence of conventional and nuclear threats.<sup>19</sup> Russia's recent decision to revise its nuclear doctrine underscores a strategic response to evolving global and regional security dynamics. In June 2024, President Vladimir Putin signaled these changes, citing the need to adapt the nation's nuclear posture to contemporary threats and challenges. This move reflects a broader effort to recalibrate deterrence strategies considering shifting geopolitical pressures and emerging security imperatives.<sup>20</sup> On November 19, 2024, President Vladimir Putin introduced revisions to Russia's nuclear doctrine. The updated doctrine stipulates that Russia "reserves the right" to employ nuclear weapons, not just in retaliation not only to a nuclear strike but also in response to a conventional weapons attack that poses a "critical threat" to its "sovereignty and territorial integrity" or that of its ally, Belarus.<sup>21</sup> It occurred after the administration of US President Joe Biden let Ukraine to deploy US-made weapons to strike Russian territory in response to ongoing Russian attacks on Ukraine. Russia had previously cautioned that if the US, Britain, or France permitted Ukraine to fire their projectiles deep within Russia, it could view these NATO countries as particularly connected with the conflict, changing the nature of the war.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> "Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation." Thailand.mid.ru. 2020. [https://thailand.mid.ru/en/o\\_rossii/vneshnyaya\\_politika/voennaya\\_doktrina\\_rf/](https://thailand.mid.ru/en/o_rossii/vneshnyaya_politika/voennaya_doktrina_rf/).

<sup>20</sup> "Russia Updating Its Nuclear Doctrine Amid 'Current Realities'" *Sky News*, 2019, <https://news.sky.com/story/russia-updating-its-nuclear-doctrine-amidcurrent-realities-13158091>.

<sup>21</sup> "Russia Revises Nuclear Use Doctrine," | Arms Control Association: Armscontrol.org. 2024. <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2024-12/news/russia-revises-nuclear-use-doctrine>.

<sup>22</sup> Juliana Kim, and Joanna Kakissis, "In a First, Biden Allows Ukraine to Strike Russia with U.S. Long-Range Weapons" *NPR*. November 17, 2024,

Nevertheless, Russia's recent nuclear rhetoric and strategic maneuvers have escalated the dangers of nuclear arms use to levels not seen in decades, reigniting discussions on the need for renewed risk reduction initiatives. However, Russia appears to be challenging or reevaluating the institutions and standards created to handle nuclear hazards, particularly considering the growing complexities surrounding nuclear security. Since the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russia has taken steps to distance itself from key arms control agreements. Notably, Russia halted its engagement in the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) and has reserved from the process of ratifying the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). During this period, President Vladimir Putin announced that Russia effectively tested the nuclear-powered cruise missile Burevestnik and declared the Sarmat super-heavy missile ready for production. Additionally, on June 9, 2023, Russia formally notified its intention to withdraw about the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE), which imposes limits on armed forces in designated regions in Europe, with the withdrawal set to take effect on November 7.<sup>23</sup> These actions by Russia can be interpreted as elements of a broader strategy aimed at exerting pressure on NATO. By signaling a potential for nuclear escalation, Russia may be attempting to coerce NATO into reducing its support for Ukraine.

### **Russian Nuclear Signaling and NATO's Response**

The threat of nuclear war has become increasingly pronounced since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. At the start of the war, President Putin announced that Russian nuclear forces were on “special

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<https://www.npr.org/2024/11/17/nx-s1-5194432/biden-long-range-missilesrussia-ukraine-war>.

<sup>23</sup> Ted Richard, “An Assessment of Russia's Withdrawal from the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty - Lieber Institute West Point” *Lieber Institute*, 2024, <https://lieber.westpoint.edu/assessment-russias-withdrawalcomprehensive-test-ban-treaty/>.

combat readiness,” stating “No matter who tries to stand in our way or all the more so create threats for our country and our people, they must know that Russia will respond immediately, and the consequences will be such as you have never seen in your entire history.” This statement indicates Russia's aim to demonstrate its commitment to achieving its objectives and to discourage outside intervention. In addition to this, Moscow had also issued around 20 nuclear signals during the initial ten weeks of the military operation. For reference, he directed his military to place Russia’s nuclear deterrence forces on high alert, marking the latest indication from the Russian leader of his willingness to employ the highest level of brinkmanship in his pursuit of objectives in Ukraine.<sup>24</sup> Many of the weapons deployed by Russia possess nuclear capabilities, such as the Iskander short-range missile that struck Ukraine in August 2022, and the KH 22 missile that targeted a shopping mall in Kremenchuk in June 2022. By May 31, 2024, Russia had launched a series of aerial assaults on Ukraine utilizing cruise missiles, drones, and ballistic missiles.

Moreover, recent developments in the Ukraine conflict may have also indicated a resurgence of Russian nuclear threats, featuring exercises involving tactical nuclear weapons. These actions are seen as a reaction to heightened Western support for Ukraine, exemplified by French President Emmanuel Macron's statement reaffirming France's potential deployment of ground troops to bolster European security countering Russian aggression. In its reaction, Russia stated these claims as a “completely new round of escalation of tension”. It declared on May 6 2024, that it will carry out exercises that replicate the deployment of tactical nuclear arms, or—as Moscow refers to them—“non-strategic”

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<sup>24</sup> “Putin Puts Nuclear Forces On High Alert, Escalating Tensions” *AP News*, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-kyiv-business-europe-moscow-2e4e1cf784f22b6afbe5a2f936725550>.

nuclear weapons.<sup>25</sup> Following this, on July 31, 2024, Russia carried out its third round of tactical nuclear weapon drills in which the exercises included maneuvers involving air force units, which were armed with nuclear weapons and conducted patrol flights as part of the training. The first two rounds of these maneuvers were conducted in May and June, with the June drills being held in coordination with the armed forces of Belarus, Russia's key regional ally.<sup>26</sup> This action appears to be part of Russia's broader strategy to deter Western support for Ukraine. While it remains uncertain whether these weapons will ultimately be deployed, the threat they pose is tangible and significant. On the other hand, NATO is modifying its nuclear arsenal in reaction towards security concerns emerging from China and Russia. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg urged the alliance to publicly display its nuclear stockpile to convey a clear message. He said, "Transparency helps to communicate the direct message that we, of course, are a nuclear alliance ... NATO's aim is, of course, a world without nuclear weapons, but as long as nuclear weapons exist, we will remain a nuclear alliance, because a world where Russia, China and North Korea have nuclear weapons, and NATO does not, is a more dangerous world."<sup>27</sup> Dmitry Peskov, the spokesperson for Russian President Vladimir Putin, criticized this move as escalating tensions, noting a perceived contradiction with the recent Ukraine Peace

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<sup>25</sup> Giles D. Arceneaux, "Why The West Should Take Russia's Nuclear Threats More Seriously" *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 2024, <https://thebulletin.org/2024/06/why-the-west-should-take-russias-nuclear-threats-more-seriously/>.

<sup>26</sup> "Russian Military Begins, 'Third Phase' of Nuclear Weapons Drills" *The Moscow Times*, July 31, 2024. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/07/31/russian-military-begins-third-phase-of-nuclear-weapons-drills-a85880>.

<sup>27</sup> Seb Starcevic, "NATO Should Flex Its Nuclear Muscles, Stoltenberg Says" *POLITICO.eu*, 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/nato-should-flex-nuclear-muscle-jens-stoltenberg-says/>.

Conference declaration that denounced any danger or employing nuclear weapons concerning Ukraine.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, during NATO's 75th anniversary summit held in Washington, NATO declared the planned deployment of strategic missiles, featuring Tomahawk guided missiles as well as developmental hypersonic weapons in Germany by 2026. The Tomahawk is a 5.6-meter (18.4-foot) long missile with a multitude of about 2,400 kilometers (1,500 miles) reaching a speed of 885 km/h (550 mph). This decision follows the dissolution of the 1987 Intermediate Nuclear Range Forces Treaty in 2019.<sup>29</sup> This outlines NATO's commitment to European defense and solidarity with its allies, while also demonstrating its resolve to address perceived threats posed by Russia. In response, Kremlin spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, stated, "This poses a dire threat to our national security. All of this will necessitate thoughtful, coordinated, and effective responses from us to counter-deter NATO."<sup>30</sup> The Russian Defense Ministry released footage depicting a Su-34 fighter jet deploying a FAB-3000 bomb on a target in Ukraine. This action is framed by Moscow as a response to what it perceives as an escalating confrontation with NATO. Russia has cited increased troop deployments, the buildup of weapon stockpiles, and the expansion of military infrastructure in Eastern Europe as evidence of NATO's direct involvement in the conflict.<sup>31</sup> These moves suggest the

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<sup>28</sup> "NATO Escalates Nuclear Tensions With Russia - ICAN" International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, 2024, [https://www.icanw.org/nato\\_escalates\\_nuclear\\_tensions\\_with\\_russia](https://www.icanw.org/nato_escalates_nuclear_tensions_with_russia).

<sup>29</sup> Michaela Küfner, "NATO Summit: US To Deploy Long-Range Weapons In Germany – DW – 07/11/2024" DW, <https://www.dw.com/en/nato-summit-us-to-deploy-long-range-weapons-in-germany/live-69617846>.

<sup>30</sup> Andrew Osborn, "Russia To Counter 'Threatening' US Deployment Of Long-Range Missiles In Germany" *Reuters*, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-says-it-will-work-military-response-us-long-range-missiles-germany-2024-07-11/>.

<sup>31</sup> John Hardie, "What We Know About Russia's New 3-Ton Glide Bomb" *FDD* 2024, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/07/19/what-we-know-about-russias-new-3-ton-glide-bomb/>.

rhetoric around a direct fighting involving Moscow and NATO is increasing.

Since the conflict began, the West and NATO have implemented various measures against Ukraine, a total of five NATO summits have taken place, each addressing different aspects of the evolving security landscape, identified emerging threats, and reaffirmed its core values and objectives. These summits resulted in significant budgetary, conceptual, and policy decisions. In the 32nd summit in 2022, NATO has adopted a new force model, marking the most significant reworking of its strategy for collective defense and deterrence since the Cold War.<sup>32</sup> This model aims to substantially enhance the alliance's readiness across all domains—land, sea, air, and cyber—resulting in a seven-fold increase in NATO's high-readiness forces, thereby strengthening its ability to respond swiftly and cohesively to a wide range of threats. Moreover, motivated by the benefits of NATO's collective defense agreement, Finland and Sweden sought to join the alliance, ending decades of neutrality. NATO extended invitations at the June 2022 Madrid Summit, leading to Finland's membership in April 2023. Following the ratifications by Turkey and Hungary, Sweden officially became NATO's 32nd member on March 7, 2024.<sup>33</sup> In response to Sweden's accession to NATO, Russia has signaled its intention to take countermeasures. Its accession has significant implications for Russian interests, particularly due to Sweden's vast railway network, which will be crucial for the rapid movement of troops along with equipment around the area in the event during any battle.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> “News: 2022 NATO Summit,” 28-Jun.-2022, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_196144.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_196144.htm).

<sup>33</sup> Louisa Brooke, “NATO enlargement: Sweden and Finland - House of Commons Library” *The House of Commons Library*, 2024, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9574/>.

<sup>34</sup> Rupal Mishra, “Implications of Sweden's NATO Membership for Russia and the Baltic Region - Australian Institute of International Affairs” *Australian*

## Challenges

Russia and Ukraine each face significant challenges that are influencing their strategic positions and the broader conflict. For Russia, if Ukraine were to join NATO, it would present a significant challenge due to the strategic implications of having a NATO member state directly on its border. For the Kremlin, NATO is mainly viewed as a means for the US to further its geopolitical agenda, undermining Russia's security. The expansion of NATO to include Ukraine would place the alliance's military infrastructure and forces much closer to Russian territory.<sup>35</sup> The possibility of NATO troops being stationed in Ukraine or engaging in military operations could provoke a strong and potentially aggressive response from Russia. Therefore, Ukraine's accession to NATO would not only challenge Russia's strategic posture, but also significantly raise the stakes in an already volatile geopolitical landscape.

Another significant logistical challenge confronting Russia in its ongoing military engagement in Ukraine is its increasing dependency on external suppliers for munitions because of the economic sanctions. As of May 2024, the US department of treasury has imposed a new round of sanctions on Russia's military-industrial sector, including its chemical and biological weapons programs, and entities in other countries that supply crucial materials for its defense and weapons production.<sup>36</sup> The Kremlin has increasingly relied on

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*Institute of International Affairs*, 2024, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/implications-of-swedens-nato-membership-for-russia-and-the-baltic-region/>.

<sup>35</sup> “Pushing for Ukraine's NATO Membership Threatens to Derail an End to the War” America First Policy Institute, 2023, <https://americafirstpolicy.com/issues/issue-brief-pushing-for-ukraines-nato-membership-threatens-to-derail-an-end-to-the-war>.

<sup>36</sup> “The U.S. Continues to Degrade Russia's Military-Industrial Base and Target Third-Country Support with Nearly 300 New Sanctions” U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2024, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy2318>.

North Korea, Iran, and Belarus to sustain its military operations. According to the US Department of State, North Korea has emerged as a critical supplier of artillery shells, reportedly providing approximately 3 million 152-millimeter rounds and the DPRK since September 2023, has sent over 10,000 containers of armaments or munitions-related items to Russia.<sup>37</sup> The continued duration of the conflict is likely to further entrench this reliance, with Russian military logistics increasingly intertwined with the production capacities and geopolitical alignments of these external partners. In Western nations, there is considerable uncertainty regarding future support for Ukraine. The US presidential election in November 2024 has further intensified concerns, especially given President Joe Biden's departure from the presidential race. Ukrainian officials and Western allies are apprehensive about the continuity of military aid and political backing from Washington. In February 2024, while speaking at a rally in South Carolina, the President-elect Donald Trump while in office, he cautioned NATO countries that he "would encourage" Russia "to do whatever the hell they want" to nations which are "delinquent" as the leading candidate for the Republican nomination intensified his criticism of foreign aid and long-established international partnerships. President-elect Donald Trump's comments on NATO, suggesting a reduced commitment to protect allies who do not meet defense budget targets, exacerbate these concerns.<sup>38</sup> His statement indicates that with his arrival, his potential policy shifts could significantly impact US support for

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<sup>37</sup> "Responding to Two Years of Russia's Full-Scale War On Ukraine and Navalny's Death - United States Department of State" State Department, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/imposing-measures-in-response-to-navalnys-death-and-two-years-of-russias-full-scale-war-against-ukraine/>.

<sup>38</sup> Amy Mackinnon and Jack Detsch, "Trump's NATO Bashing Confirms Europe's Worst Fears" *Foreign Policy*, 2024, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/02/12/trump-nato-comments-europe-2024/>.

NATO and Ukraine, thereby influencing the dynamics of the conflict and the broader stability of European security.

## **Implications**

Wars and conflicts cause significant harm not only to the states directly engaged but also to countries that are indirectly influenced by the ensuing tensions. The Russia-Ukraine crisis has resulted in a substantial loss of life, the forced relocation of hundreds of thousands, and extensive political and economic disruptions on a global scale. The repercussions are evident across multiple dimensions, including national economies, security dynamics, interstate relations, global financial systems, and humanitarian efforts. Moreover, the conflict's dynamics have heightened the dangers of nuclear deployment and the expansion of nuclear weapons. Given this precedent, no country wants to face a similar situation. This has led governments with potential nuclear threats—like Taiwan with China or South Korea with North Korea—to think about developing their own nuclear weapons to deter their adversaries from using strategies similar to Russia. In any scenario where Russia either deploys nuclear weapons or engages in conventional military attacks, it could compel other regional powers to reconsider their stance on acquiring nuclear arsenals. This reassessment would stem from the perception that possessing nuclear weapons serves as the most effective means of deterring potential aggressors and ensuring national security. As a result, countries that previously may not have pursued nuclear capabilities could be driven to develop or enhance their own nuclear arsenals, perceiving them as the ultimate safeguard against threats. This shift in perspective among revisionist powers—those seeking to challenge the current international order—could significantly heighten the risk of nuclear proliferation, as more states might seek to acquire nuclear weapons in response to the increasing perceived vulnerabilities.

## **Conclusion**

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine represents Europe's first significant military engagement since World War II. Since the beginning of the conflict in 2022, the crisis has emerged as a focal point on the international stage. Despite the efforts of multiple peace initiatives, which includes China's 12-point proposal, the Saudi peace summit, and the most recent Ukraine peace summit in Switzerland, a lasting resolution to the conflict remains out of reach. The fact that Ukraine and Russia have not yet engaged in direct negotiations highlights the significant obstacles to achieving a meaningful ceasefire. The persistent threat of nuclear escalation further complicates the situation, adding a grave dimension to the already volatile conflict. As geopolitical dynamics continue to shift, all parties must prioritize direct dialogue and mutual understanding. The choices made shortly will significantly influence the trajectory of European security, however, this could also profoundly impact global stability. Addressing the crisis with a genuine commitment to de-escalation and constructive negotiations is essential to avoiding an all-out war and ensuring a stable and secure future for generations to come.