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RESEARCH DIVISION INTERNATIONAL SECURITY | WP NR. 03, SEPTEMBER 2022

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

A Chronology

Anna Clara Arndt, Dr Liviu Horovitz

Contents

Introduction	3
Key statements & developments	4
Graphic representation	8
Autumn & Winter 2021 – 2022: First nuclear signals	9
February 2022: The high-time of nuclear threat-making	11
March 2022: Drawing red lines	17
April 2022: Fading momentum	36
May 2022: Backpedalling to the official doctrine	54
June 2022: Bringing Belarus into the nuclear fold?	68
July 2022: Nuclear narratives losing steam	81
August 2022: Everything was misunderstood?	88

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. 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.

It is difficult to identify a suitable starting point for this chronology since Russian-Western relations had already been strained for a long time when Moscow’s troops marched onto Kyiv. We decided that going back to autumn 2021 could offer readers a useful before-after comparison. Nonetheless, given both available resources and space constraints, prior to the invasion, 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 narratives. 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 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. Therefore, we identified, evaluated, and coded around ninety “nuclear interactions,” but also included hundreds of other potentially relevant interactions. 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 relevant statements and actions. We sought to tie them together into a narrative and (where reasonably easy to access) refer 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-473d4b2eeb4dc59d8e7dff9e8653ba>].

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, or includes steps through which actors (probably intentionally) forego an escalatory action.

1. **27 January: RU [warning]:** Medvedev: Russia has “the right” to use nuclear weapons in response to an existential threat, which makes it “possible to achieve various goals.”
2. **7 February: 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: RU [warning]:** Yearly nuclear exercise, normally held in autumn.
4. **21-22 February: RU [warning]:** Putin: Ukraine is seeking to acquire tactical nuclear weapons, which would pose a “strategic threat” to Russia.
5. **24 February: RU [escalatory]:** Putin: Whoever tries to hinder Russia will face consequences “never seen” in history.
6. **24 February: 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: W [de-escalatory]:** Biden: No US troops involved in the conflict, only to defend NATO.
8. **24 February: W [warning]:** Le Drian: NATO also has nuclear weapons.
9. **26 February: W [de-escalatory]:** Western states decide to only impose economic sanctions upon Russia and deliver military support for Ukraine.
10. **27 February: W [escalatory]:** Truss: Russia must be stopped in Ukraine.
11. **27 February: RU [escalatory]:** Putin: Russian deterrence forces will be placed on “high combat alert.”
12. **28 February: RU [warning]:** Shoigu: High combat alert = more personnel.
13. **28 February: W [de-escalatory]:** Psaki: Announces additional support for Ukraine, but the United States can defend itself.
14. **27 February: W [warning]:** Borrell: Financial aid to Ukraine, but also military jets (MiGs).
15. **28 February: W [escalatory]:** US warning to Russia against using tactical nuclear weapons.
16. **28 February: RU [warning]:** Zakharova: United States dreams of deploying nuclear weapons to Ukraine.
17. **1 March: RU [warning]:** Russian military exercises with nuclear submarines in the Barents Sea and with mobile ICBMs in Siberia.
18. **28 February & 1 March: 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: W [de-escalatory]:** Poland, Slovakia, Bulgaria, NATO will not send MiGs to Ukraine.
20. **2 March: W [de-escalatory]:** United States reschedules Minuteman III test.
21. **2 & 3 March: 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: W [de-escalatory]:** NATO foreign ministers reject the no fly zone requested by Ukraine.

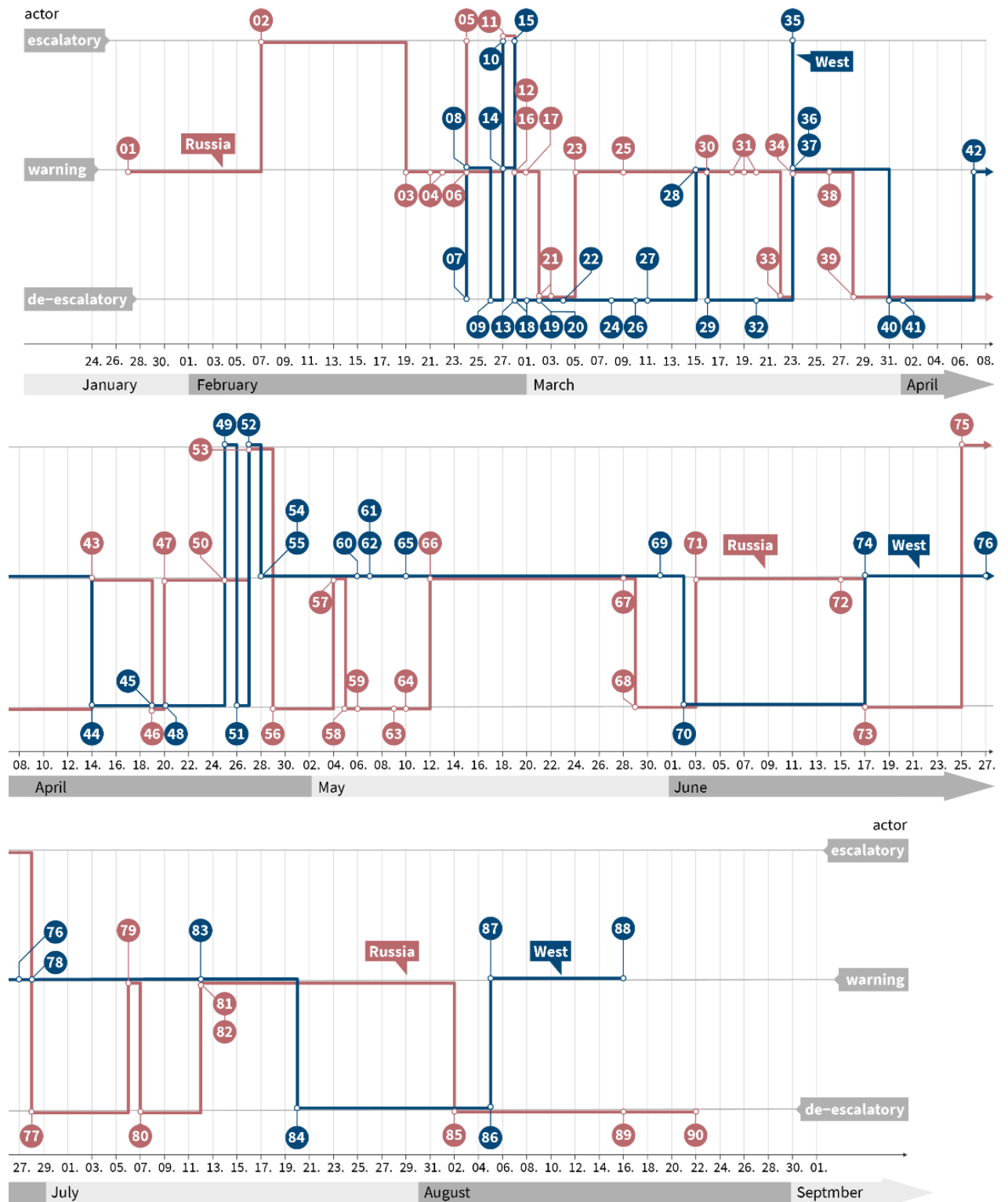
-
23. **5 March: RU [warning]:** Putin: A no fly zone would have “disastrous consequences.” And: The decision to put Russia’s deterrence forces on high alert had been necessary because UK Foreign Minister Truss had announced a NATO intervention in Ukraine.
-
24. **8 March: W [de-escalatory]:** Haines: No changes of the Russian nuclear posture, Putin wants to deter Western support for Ukraine.
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25. **9 March: RU [warning]:** Peskov: MiGs that take off from “any other airfields” on NATO territory would be “an extremely undesirable and potentially dangerous scenario.”
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26. **10 March: W [de-escalatory]:** Wolters: MiGs could be “mistaken as escalatory and could result in Russian escalation with NATO.”
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27. **11 March: 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: W [warning]:** Poland demands a NATO peacekeeping mission for Ukraine.
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29. **16 March: W [de-escalatory]:** NATO decides not to send peacekeeping troops to Ukraine but to expand economic and military assistance.
-
30. **16 March: RU [warning]:** Putin: The West wants to “finish off” Russia, but it will fail.
-
31. **18-20 March: RU [warning]:** Use of a conventional Kinzhal missile in Ukraine.
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32. **20 March: W [de-escalatory]:** Austin: Putin trying to “reestablish some momentum” and the United States can defend itself.
-
33. **22 March: RU [de-escalatory]:** Peskov: Nuclear weapons would only be used in “existential threat.” Ryabkov: Russia would “never escalate anything.”
-
34. **23 March: 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.”
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35. **23 March: 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.
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36. **23 March: W [warning]:** France conducts test of nuclear-armed missile and deploys three of its four nuclear submarines.
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37. **23 March: W [warning]:** Stoltenberg: „Any use of nuclear weapons will fundamentally change the nature of the conflict.”
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38. **26 March: RU [warning]:** Medvedev: Russia could use nuclear weapons if its existence is threatened, even by conventional weapons.
-
39. **28 March: 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.”
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40. **31 March: W [de-escalatory]:** Senior Pentagon official: “No indication” Russia is preparing to use tactical nuclear weapons.
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41. **1 April: W [de-escalatory]:** Pentagon cancels Minuteman III test.
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42. **7 April: W [warning]:** G7 and Borrell: Any threat or use of nuclear weapons would be “unacceptable and result in severe consequences.”
-
43. **14 April: RU [warning]:** Medvedev: If Sweden and Finland join NATO, “no non-nuclear status of the Baltics will be possible.”
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44. **14 April: W [de-escalatory]:** Burns: Putin’s threats must be taken seriously, but so far there are no alarming indications.
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45. **19 April: W [de-escalatory]:** Kirby: Washington is monitoring Russian rhetoric, but confident its strategic deterrent posture remains sufficient.
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46. **19 April: RU [de-escalatory]:** Lavrov: Russia initiated Putin-Biden and P5 statements that nuclear war cannot be won and must not be fought.
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47. **20 April: RU [warning]:** Russia tests nuclear-capable Sarmat intercontinental missile. Putin: Sarmat will “safeguard Russia’s security from external threats.”
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48. **20 April: W [de-escalatory]:** Kirby: Sarmat test was “routine” and Russia “properly notified” the United States.
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49. **25 April: 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: 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.”
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51. **26 April: W [de-escalatory]:** Johnson: No risk of Moscow using nuclear weapons.
-
52. **27 April: 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: 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: W [warning]:** Sullivan: “We won’t succumb to nuclear blackmail,” nor “tolerate nuclear saber rattling and nuclear brinkmanship.”
-
55. **28 April: W [warning]:** Biden: United States is prepared for “whatever” Russia might do, but would send only military assistance, not troops, to Ukraine.
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56. **29 April: RU [de-escalatory]:** Lavrov: Russian policymakers are “champions of making pledges by all nuclear countries never to start a nuclear war.”
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57. **4 May: RU [warning]:** Russia simulates electronic launches of nuclear-capable missiles in Kaliningrad – unclear whether training routine or political signaling.
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58. **5 May: RU [de-escalatory]:** Antonov: Russia would only use nuclear weapons defensively, in response to WMD use or when state existence is endangered.
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59. **6 May: RU [de-escalatory]:** Zaitsev: Nuclear contingencies spelled out in Russia’s nuclear doctrine do not apply to the conflict in Ukraine.
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60. **6 May: W [warning]:** Tomero: Nuclear use would have “devastating consequences” for Russia.
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61. **7 May: W [warning]:** Macron inauguration ceremony with a nuclear component.
-
62. **7 May: W [warning]:** Burns: No evidence that Russia is planning for nuclear use, but its saber-rattling cannot be taken “lightly.”
-
63. **9 May: RU [de-escalatory]:** The nuclear-capable component of the Victory Day parade is cancelled and Putin makes no nuclear references.
-
64. **10 May: RU [de-escalatory]:** Grushko: official nuclear doctrine drives policy.
-
65. **10 May: 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: 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: RU [warning]:** Russia tests a hypersonic Zircon cruise missile.
-

68.	29 May: 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: W [warning]: Biden: “Any” nuclear use “in this conflict” would be “completely unacceptable” and “entail severe consequences.”
70.	2 June: 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: RU [warning]: Medvedev: Foreign-supplied weapons use against Russia could lead to strike on suppliers, which could lead to nuclear apocalypse.
72.	15 June: 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: RU [de-escalatory]: Putin: “We are not threatening anyone” but would use “resources” to “defend our sovereignty.”
74.	17 June: W [warning]: US tests Trident II missile.
75.	25 June: 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: W [warning]: G7 agrees that “any” nuclear use would be “unacceptable and met with severe consequences” – concern after Belarus announcement.
77.	28 June: RU [de-escalatory]: Peskov: Russia is not planning to deploy nuclear weapons to Belarus, just nuclear-capable delivery vehicles.
78.	28 June: W [warning]: US military unsuccessfully tests a hypersonic missile.
79.	6 July: 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: RU [de-escalatory]: Matvienko: Russia sees nuclear weapons only as a deterrent, “exceptional cases” are “clearly and strictly prescribed.”
81.	12 July: 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: RU [warning]: Rogozin: Russia is preparing tests of Sarmat missiles.
83.	12 July: W [warning]: United States conducts two successful hypersonic missile tests.
84.	20 July: 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: 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: RU [de-escalatory]: Russia’s nuclear policy is “aimed exclusively at protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country.”
87.	5 August: 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: W [warning]: US test launch of the Minuteman III ICBM.
89.	16 August: RU [de-escalating]: Shoigu: “From a military point of view, there is no need to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine.”
90.	22 August: 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.

Graphic representation

Nuclear escalation dynamics between Russia and the West January to September



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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 Adviser, 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

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.⁶

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 Vladimir Isachenkov, "Putin warns West: Moscow has 'red line' about Ukraine, NATO," *AP News*, November 30, 2021 [<https://apnews.com/article/europe-russia-ukraine-vladimir-putin-moscow-cd558699728e9ae935eaaaf940efeb18>], and "Russia Calling! Investment Forum," *Website of the President of Russia*, November 30, 2021 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/67241>].

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 infrastructure” was drawing closer to Russia’s borders and the “nightmare scenario of military confrontation” was returning.⁷ 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.⁸

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.⁹ 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.”¹⁰

On **January 21**, **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.”¹¹ 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.”¹²

⁷ “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/>].

⁸ 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/>].

⁹ “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/>].

¹⁰ 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>].

¹¹ 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/>].

¹² 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>].

1.	Warning
<p>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.¹³</p>	

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

2.	Escalatory
<p>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.¹⁴</p>	

3.	Warning
<p>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.¹⁵</p>	

4.	Warning
<p>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.¹⁶ On February 22, he sought to clarify his earlier statement, stating that tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine would be a "strategic threat" to Russia.¹⁷</p>	

¹³ "Medvedev sees no need to review Russia's nuclear doctrine," *TASS*, January 27, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1393713>].

¹⁴ "News conference following Russian-French talks," *Website of the President of Russia*, February 8, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67735>].

¹⁵ "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/>].

¹⁶ "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>].

¹⁷ "Vladimir Putin answered media questions," *Website of the President of Russia*, February 22, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67838>].

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.¹⁸ Against this background, German Chancellor **Olaf Scholz** suspended the certification process for the controversial Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline.¹⁹ 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 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 2021.²⁰

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 "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."²¹

5.	Escalatory
<p>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</p>	

¹⁸ 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>].

¹⁹ 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>].

²⁰ 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/>].

²¹ "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>].

a veiled threat to employ nuclear weapons against those who interfered in Russia’s attempt to eliminate an existential threat.²²

6.	Warning
<p>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.”²³ 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.²⁴</p>	

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.”²⁵</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.”²⁶</p>	

²² “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>].

²³ “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>]

²⁴ 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>].

²⁵ “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/>].

²⁶ “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/>].

8.	Warning
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.” ²⁷	

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.”²⁸

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; ²⁹ 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.” ³⁰	

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. ³¹	

²⁷ “‘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/>].

²⁸ “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/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2022_155.pdf].

²⁹ 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/>].

³⁰ “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/department-of-defense-statement-on-additional-military-assistance-for-ukraine/>].

³¹ “In Full: Trevor Phillips On Sunday,” *Sky news*, February 27, 2022 [<https://news.sky.com/video/in-full-trevor-phillips-on-sunday-12553126>].

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.³² The draft of the new Constitution had already been presented on **December 27, 2021**.³³ 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.³⁴

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. ³⁵ It was not initially clear what specific steps would accompany this decision. ³⁶	

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." ³⁷ Experts consequently classified the decision as largely symbolic. ³⁸	

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

³² "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-2022-02-27/>].

³³ "Amended Belarusian Constitution would drop country's goal to be nuclear-free, neutral," *TASS*, December 27, 2021 [<https://tass.com/world/1381539>].

³⁴ Vladimir Isachenkov, "Belarus president offers to host Russian nuclear weapons," *AP News*, November 30, 2021 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-germany-migration-europe-ab1efae5e65bf01af3be2f6139ef6f4b>].

³⁵ "Meeting with Sergei Shoigu and Valery Gerasimov," *Website of the President of Russia*, February 27, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/67876>].

³⁶ "'Abschreckungskräfte' in Alarmbereitschaft ('Deterrence forces' on alert)," *Tagesschau*, February 27, 2022 [<https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/europa/putin-atomstreitkraefte-101.html>].

³⁷ "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/>].

³⁸ 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-XJN5DK2IBJAMJLB5ZUVKQ5HLL.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-nuke.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>].

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.”³⁹

13.	De-escalatory / warning
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. ⁴⁰	

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.⁴¹

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.⁴²

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	

³⁹ “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/>].

⁴⁰ “‘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>].

⁴¹ “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>].

⁴² “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>].

kinds of planes.”⁴³ Borell was referring to fighter jets of the Soviet MiG or Sukhoi type, which for example Bulgaria, Croatia, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia reportedly owned.⁴⁴ Media later suggested that several Western governments had hoped a potential delivery of fighter jets would not be made public.⁴⁵ In addition, Borrell said Poland had agreed to act as a “logistical hub” for the delivery of such “material assistance.”⁴⁶

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. ⁴⁷	

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. ⁴⁸	

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.”⁴⁹

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. ⁵⁰	

⁴³ “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].

⁴⁴ 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>].

⁴⁵ 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>].

⁴⁶ “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].

⁴⁷ 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>].

⁴⁸ “It would be US ‘golden dream’ to have nuclear weapons in Ukraine — diplomat,” *TASS*, February 28, 2022 [<https://tass.com/world/1412847>].

⁴⁹ 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>].

⁵⁰ 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>].

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

18.	De-escalatory
<p>In a press conference on February 28, US President Joe Biden denied the question of whether Americans should be afraid of nuclear war.⁵¹ 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.”⁵²</p>	

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.⁵³ 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.⁵⁴

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.⁵⁵

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.”⁵⁶

⁵¹ “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/>].

⁵² “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/>].

⁵³ “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>].

⁵⁴ “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)].

⁵⁵ “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>].

⁵⁶ 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.”⁵⁷

19.	De-escalatory
<p>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.”⁵⁸ According to media reports, Slovakia and Bulgaria also rejected the delivery of MiG fighter jets to Ukraine.⁵⁹</p>	

20.	De-escalatory
<p>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.”⁶⁰</p>	

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
<p>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</p>	

⁵⁷ “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>]

⁵⁸ “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].

⁵⁹ 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>].

⁶⁰ “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/>].

said. “When it comes to the use of nuclear weapons, we have already stated our position several times. Perhaps you are confusing us with the United States, but the Russian Federation has never spoken about this.”⁶¹

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.”⁶²

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.⁶³

22.	De-escalatory
<p>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.⁶⁴ 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 negotia-</p>	

⁶¹ “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/>].

⁶² “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/].

⁶³ “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>].

⁶⁴ “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].

tions 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.⁶⁵

Zelenskyy subsequently called the NATO decision and the foreign ministers' meeting "weak" and "confused."⁶⁶ 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."⁶⁷

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).⁶⁸</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**.⁶⁹ 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.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ "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].

⁶⁶ "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>].

⁶⁷ Tweet by @ABaerbock, *Twitter*, March 4, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/ABaerbock/status/1499818157053255684>].

⁶⁸ "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>].

⁶⁹ "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>].

⁷⁰ "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)].

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 provide [MiG] fighter jets to the Ukrainians.”⁷¹ 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.⁷²

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.”⁷³ However, the Polish initiative had not been coordinated with the US government, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs **Victoria Nuland** said the same day.⁷⁴ 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.”⁷⁵

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</p>	

⁷¹ “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/>].

⁷² 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>].

⁷³ “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>].

⁷⁴ “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)].

⁷⁵ “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/>].

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 wanted to prevent Western support that could tip the balance and force a conflict with NATO, she concluded.⁷⁶

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."⁷⁷

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.⁷⁸

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.⁷⁹ 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."⁸⁰

⁷⁶ "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)].

⁷⁷ "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/>].

⁷⁸ "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)].

⁷⁹ "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>].

⁸⁰ "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.” ⁸¹	

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.⁸²

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.” ⁸³	

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.”⁸⁴

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.”⁸⁵

⁸¹ “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/>].

⁸² 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>].

⁸³ “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>].

⁸⁴ 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>].

⁸⁵ 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>].

27.	De-escalatory
<p>On the same day, 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 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.”⁸⁶ 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.⁸⁷</p>	

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.⁸⁸ The following day, **Blinken** also announced further US support of up to 200 million US dollars.⁸⁹

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.”⁹⁰

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.”⁹¹

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**.

⁸⁶ Tweet by @POTUS, *Twitter*, March 11, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/potus/status/1502353759455821833>].

⁸⁷ “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/>].

⁸⁸ “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].

⁸⁹ “\$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/>].

⁹⁰ “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>].

⁹¹ “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>].

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.” ⁹²	

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 contribute soldiers” to such a peacekeeping mission “if it can help put an end to this bloody war.”⁹³ 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.”⁹⁴ 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.⁹⁵

29.	De-escalatory
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. ⁹⁶	

⁹² “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>].

⁹³ 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/].

⁹⁴ “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].

⁹⁵ “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>].

⁹⁶ “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].

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.⁹⁷ 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.”⁹⁸ According to the White House, the 800 million US dollars package included additional 800 Stinger and 2,000 Javelin air defense systems and 100 advanced guided missiles.⁹⁹

30.	Warning
<p>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.”¹⁰⁰ This comparison could be interpreted as a potential legitimization for further Russian aggression, or even for threats involving nuclear weapons.</p>	

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.”¹⁰¹

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.¹⁰²

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

⁹⁷ 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/>].

⁹⁸ “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/>].

⁹⁹ “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>].

¹⁰⁰ “Meeting on socioeconomic support for regions,” *Website of the President of Russia*, March 16, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67996>].

¹⁰¹ “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/>].

¹⁰² 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>].

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.”¹⁰³ **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.”¹⁰⁴

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.¹⁰⁵

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.”¹⁰⁶

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.¹⁰⁷

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 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.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ “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>].

¹⁰⁴ “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].

¹⁰⁵ “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-loyd-j-austin-iii-and-slovakia-minister-of-defense-jarosl/>].

¹⁰⁶ 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].

¹⁰⁷ “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>].

¹⁰⁸ “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>].

31.	Warning
<p>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.¹⁰⁹</p>	

32.	De-escalatory
<p>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].”¹¹⁰</p>	

33.	De-escalatory
<p>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.¹¹¹ 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.”¹¹²</p>	

34.	Warning
<p>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 forces “could have clear consequences that would be hard to repair,” he continued.¹¹³ Lavrov expressed similar sentiments: “This would be the direct clash between the Russian and NATO armed</p>	

¹⁰⁹ 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>].

¹¹⁰ “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>].

¹¹¹ “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>].

¹¹² “Russia adheres to responsible approach to matter of use of nuclear weapons — diplomat,” *TASS*, March 22, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1425609>].

¹¹³ “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/>].

forces that everyone has not only tried to avoid but said should not take place in principle,” the Russian minister concluded.¹¹⁴ 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.”¹¹⁵ **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.”¹¹⁶

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.¹¹⁷</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 air-launched missile as planned.¹¹⁸ 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.¹¹⁹</p>	

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

¹¹⁴ “Lavrov: Sending peacekeepers could lead to clash,” *Yahoo news*, March 23, 2022 [<https://sg.news.yahoo.com/lavrov-sending-peacekeepers-could-lead-141252453.html>].

¹¹⁵ 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/>].

¹¹⁶ Nebi Qena and Cara Anna, “NATO: 7,000 to 15,000 Russian troops dead in Ukraine,” *AP News*, March 24, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-zelenskyy-kyiv-europe-nato-e35e54b40359e52f3ffd4911577b669a>].

¹¹⁷ 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>].

¹¹⁸ Tweet by @Armees_Gouv, *Twitter*, March 23, 2022 [https://twitter.com/Armees_Gouv/status/1506706444917383176].

¹¹⁹ 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>].

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.” ¹²⁰ On the following day, Biden echoed this sentiment, stating that a Russian use of chemical weapons “would trigger a response in kind.” ¹²¹	

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.¹²² 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.”¹²³

38.	Warning
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	

¹²⁰ “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].

¹²¹ “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/>]

¹²² “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>].

¹²³ “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>].

to doubt even the slightest that we are ready to give a worthy response to any infringement on our country, on its independence.”¹²⁴

The verbal escalation continued. Also on **March 26**, at a meeting with Ukrainian refugees in Poland, **Biden** called Putin a “butcher.”¹²⁵ 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.”¹²⁶ 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.¹²⁷ 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.”¹²⁸ 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.¹²⁹

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.¹³⁰

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 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

¹²⁴ 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>].

¹²⁵ 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>].

¹²⁶ “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/>].

¹²⁷ 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>].

¹²⁸ Humeyra 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/>].

¹²⁹ “US sanctions are impacting Russian economy: US ambassador to NATO,” *Fox News*, March 27, 2022 [<https://video.foxnews.com/v/6302023283001#sp=show-clips>].

¹³⁰ 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>].

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.¹³¹

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.”¹³²

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 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</p>	

¹³¹ “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>].

¹³² “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/>].

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.”¹³³

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.”¹³⁴

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.¹³⁵ This was “not a ceasefire,” however, stressed Presidential Administration member **Medinsky**.¹³⁶

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.¹³⁷

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 5.¹³⁸ Similarly, British Justice Minister **Dominic Raab** stated in a **March 30** interview that the United Kingdom would “not ... replicate unilaterally 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

¹³³ “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>].

¹³⁴ 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>].

¹³⁵ 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].

¹³⁶ “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].

¹³⁷ 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].

¹³⁸ 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>].

anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles, and it would always consider “other ... forms of support,” stressed Raab.¹³⁹

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.”¹⁴⁰ **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.”¹⁴¹

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.”¹⁴²

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.*¹⁴³

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

¹³⁹ Tweet by @BBCr4today, *Twitter*, March 30, 2022 [https://twitter.com/BBCr4today/status/1509094159570898945?s=20&t=a_UaA05UwgPvjQohNg-i_g].

¹⁴⁰ “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)].

¹⁴¹ “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>].

¹⁴² 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/>].

¹⁴³ 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].

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.”¹⁴⁴

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].”¹⁴⁵

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.” ¹⁴⁶	

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. ¹⁴⁷ 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. ¹⁴⁸	

¹⁴⁴ “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=SwRzRrz_2I].

¹⁴⁵ “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>].

¹⁴⁶ “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/>].

¹⁴⁷ 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/>].

¹⁴⁸ Oren Liebermann, “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.¹⁴⁹ 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.¹⁵⁰

On **April 2**, Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister **Hanna Malyar** declared that the entire Kyiv region had now been "liberated."¹⁵¹ 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.¹⁵² 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."¹⁵³ **Zelenskyy** went further, accusing Russia of "genocide."¹⁵⁴

Gruesome images from the Kyiv suburb of Bucha in particular also triggered an international outcry.¹⁵⁵ 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.¹⁵⁶

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.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, on the same day the **Council of the European Union** condemned "in the strongest

¹⁴⁹ 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>].

¹⁵⁰ 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>].

¹⁵¹ "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>].

¹⁵² 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>].

¹⁵³ "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>].

¹⁵⁴ 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/>].

¹⁵⁵ 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>].

¹⁵⁶ "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>].

¹⁵⁷ "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.”¹⁵⁸

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;¹⁵⁹ and promised to consider additional sanctions.¹⁶⁰

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.”¹⁶¹

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.*¹⁶²

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.”¹⁶³ In a press briefing on the same day, US Ambassador to NATO **Smith** provided

¹⁵⁸ “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/>].

¹⁵⁹ 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>].

¹⁶⁰ 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>].

¹⁶¹ “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>].

¹⁶² “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].

¹⁶³ “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.”¹⁶⁴ 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.¹⁶⁵

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.¹⁶⁶ On **April 5**, Ukrainian Ambassador **Andriy Melnyk** still requested Marder, Leopard and Gepard tanks from Germany.¹⁶⁷ **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.”¹⁶⁸

*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.*¹⁶⁹

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.¹⁷⁰ 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.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁴ “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/>].

¹⁶⁵ “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/>].

¹⁶⁶ 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>].

¹⁶⁷ “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>].

¹⁶⁸ “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].

¹⁶⁹ “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>].

¹⁷⁰ 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>].

¹⁷¹ 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.¹⁷²

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.¹⁷³ 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.¹⁷⁴

42.	Warning
<p>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.”¹⁷⁵</p>	

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.¹⁷⁶ 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.”¹⁷⁷ 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.”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷² 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/>].

¹⁷³ 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>].

¹⁷⁴ 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/>].

¹⁷⁵ “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/>].

¹⁷⁶ 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/>].

¹⁷⁷ “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>].

¹⁷⁸ “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.¹⁷⁹

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.¹⁸⁰

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.¹⁸¹ 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.¹⁸² 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.¹⁸³

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.¹⁸⁴ 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.”¹⁸⁵

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

¹⁷⁹ “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>].

¹⁸⁰ 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].

¹⁸¹ “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>].

¹⁸² 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>].

¹⁸³ “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>].

¹⁸⁴ 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>].

¹⁸⁵ 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.”¹⁸⁶ 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.¹⁸⁷

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.¹⁸⁸ 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.”¹⁸⁹ 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.”¹⁹⁰

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.¹⁹¹

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

¹⁸⁶ “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].

¹⁸⁷ 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>].

¹⁸⁸ 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>].

¹⁸⁹ “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/>].

¹⁹⁰ “Department Press Briefing – April 13, 2022,” *Website of the US Department of State*, April 13, 2022 [<https://www.state.gov/briefings/departments-press-briefing-april-13-2022/>].

¹⁹¹ 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>].

allegations that the United States had developed biological weapons in Ukraine and blamed Washington for the failure of bilateral negotiations on nuclear strategic stability.¹⁹²

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.¹⁹³

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."¹⁹⁴

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."¹⁹⁵

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.¹⁹⁶ In a similar vein, German Vice Chancellor **Habeck** revealed concerns among some NATO states that

¹⁹² "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>].

¹⁹³ 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>].

¹⁹⁴ 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/>].

¹⁹⁵ 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>].

¹⁹⁶ "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.¹⁹⁷ British media suspected a link between the Russian protest note and the backpedaling from Habeck, who had previously supported increased military assistance.¹⁹⁸

43.	Warning
<p>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.¹⁹⁹</p>	

44.	De-escalatory
<p>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> <p style="text-align: center;"><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>²⁰⁰</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.²⁰¹ “It is important that on a bipartisan and measured way we in Congress and the administration come to a

¹⁹⁷ 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/>].

¹⁹⁸ 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>].

¹⁹⁹ 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>].

²⁰⁰ “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>].

²⁰¹ 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>].

common position about when we are willing to go the next step and to send not just arms but troops to 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.”²⁰² 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.²⁰³

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.²⁰⁴

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.²⁰⁵ 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.²⁰⁶

45.	De-escalatory
<p>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.”²⁰⁷</p>	

²⁰² 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/>].

²⁰³ 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>].

²⁰⁴ 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>].

²⁰⁵ 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>].

²⁰⁶ 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>].

²⁰⁷ “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, anti-aircraft systems, anti-ship missiles, armed drones, armored trucks, personnel carriers and even tanks.”²⁰⁸ Around **April 18** and **19**, the United States ignored Russian warnings and conducted four transport flights with military assistance for Kyiv.²⁰⁹ 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.²¹⁰

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.²¹¹ 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.”²¹²

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. ²¹³	

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.”²¹⁴

²⁰⁸ 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>].

²⁰⁹ “World Bank slashes global growth forecast; Ukraine says Russia’s major offensive in the Donbas has started,” *CNBC*, April 19, 2022 [<https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/18/russia-ukraine-live-updates.html>].

²¹⁰ 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>].

²¹¹ 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>].

²¹² Alexander Ward and Quint Forgey, “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>].

²¹³ “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>].

²¹⁴ “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].²¹⁵

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.²¹⁶

47.	Warning
<p>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.²¹⁷ 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.”²¹⁸</p>	

²¹⁵ “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>].

²¹⁶ 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>].

²¹⁷ “Putin congratulates Armed Forces on successful launch of Sarmat ICBM,” *TASS*, April 20, 2022 [<https://tass.com/de-fense/1440607>].

²¹⁸ 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
<p>In any case, the Pentagon appeared unimpressed by the test.²¹⁹ 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.”²²⁰</p>	

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.²²¹

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.”²²²

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.

²¹⁹ “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/>].

²²⁰ “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/>].

²²¹ 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>].

²²² “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>].

*Russia is in dramatic trouble, the sanctions are causing enormous damage to Russia's economy, the string of military defeats can no longer be glossed over by any government propaganda. ... Putin is under tremendous pressure.*²²³

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.²²⁴

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.²²⁵ 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.”²²⁶

49.	Escalatory
<p>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.²²⁷</p>	

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.²²⁸

50.	Warning
<p>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.</p>	

²²³ 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>].

²²⁴ 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>].

²²⁵ 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/>].

²²⁶ “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>].

²²⁷ 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=Autofeed&CMP=tw_t_gu&utm_medium&utm_source=Twitter].

²²⁸ “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/>].

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 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.²²⁹

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.²³⁰

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.²³¹

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.²³² 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</p>	

²²⁹ “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/].

²³⁰ “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/].

²³¹ Tweet by @edgarsrinkevics, *Twitter*, April 25, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/edgarsrinkevics/status/1518701970781097991?s=20&t=TXViigQY8kFSFWrEBwfXGA>].

²³² 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>].

they are somehow in a confrontation with NATO,” he added.²³³ The risk of nuclear war was “vanishingly small.”²³⁴ Nor did Heapey 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 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.²³⁵

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.”²³⁶

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.²³⁷ US Defense Secretary **Austin** even expressed optimism that Ukrainian could win the war if it had “the right equipment.”²³⁸ 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.”²³⁹ 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.”²⁴⁰

²³³ “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>].

²³⁴ 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>].

²³⁵ 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>].

²³⁶ 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-cnntv/index.html>].

²³⁷ 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/>].

²³⁸ 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>].

²³⁹ 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>].

²⁴⁰ 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>].

52.	Escalatory
<p>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.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><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 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.</i></p> <p>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.²⁴¹</p>	

53.	Escalatory
<p>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.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><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>²⁴²</p>	

54.	Warning
<p>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</p>	

²⁴¹ “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/>].

²⁴² 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>].

nuclear aggression against the United States.” Hence: “We won’t succumb to nuclear blackmail,” nor “tolerate nuclear saber rattling and nuclear brinkmanship,” Sullivan concluded.²⁴³

55.	Warning / de-escalatory
<p>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.</p> <p>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.”</p> <p><i>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.</i></p> <p>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.²⁴⁴</p>	

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.”²⁴⁵

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>	

²⁴³ 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-cnnv/index.html>].

²⁴⁴ “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/>].

²⁴⁵ “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/>].

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.

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.

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.²⁴⁶

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.²⁴⁷

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.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ “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)].

²⁴⁷ “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.mediaset.it/mondo/lavrov-in-esclusiva-su-zona-bianca-russia-non-ha-mai-smesso-dialogo-per-evitare-guerra-mondiale_49548127-202202k.shtml].

²⁴⁸ 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>].

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 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.²⁴⁹

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.²⁵⁰

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. ²⁵¹ 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.²⁵² 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.”²⁵³

²⁴⁹ 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>].

²⁵⁰ “Russian War Report: Belarus launches “combat preparedness test,” *Atlantic Council*, May 6, 2022 [<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/russian-war-report-belarus-preparedness-test/#belarus>].

²⁵¹ “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>].

²⁵² 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>].

²⁵³ Alexander Ward and Quint Forgy, “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>].

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."²⁵⁴ 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 then they make their own decisions and they take their own actions."²⁵⁵ 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.²⁵⁶

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."²⁵⁷

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</p>	

²⁵⁴ 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>].

²⁵⁵ "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/>].

²⁵⁶ 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>].

²⁵⁷ 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/>].

Ukraine had intended to obtain nuclear weapons and had a biological weapons program, while criticizing Poland’s openness to host US nuclear weapons.

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.”²⁵⁸

59.	De-escalatory
<p>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.”²⁵⁹</p>	

60.	Warning
<p>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.²⁶⁰</p>	

61.	Warning
<p>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.²⁶¹</p>	

62.	Warning
<p>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 poten-</p>	

²⁵⁸ 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>].

²⁵⁹ “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>].

²⁶⁰ 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>].

²⁶¹ 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/>].

tial 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.²⁶²

Other former officials also underlined the “dramatic nature” of a Russian nuclear use. On **May 9**, former US Secretary of State and National Security Adviser **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 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.”²⁶³

63.	De-escalation
<p>Some evidence suggests that Moscow also sought to signal restraint. On May 9, Russia celebrated the 77th 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.²⁶⁴ 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.²⁶⁵ 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.²⁶⁶ And yet, the Russian leader neither mentioned nuclear weapons nor announced a general mobilization, as some observers had expected him to do.²⁶⁷</p>	

²⁶² 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>].

²⁶³ 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>].

²⁶⁴ “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>].

²⁶⁵ 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>].

²⁶⁶ “Victory Parade on Red Square,” *Website of the President of Russia*, May 9, 2022 [<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/68366>].

²⁶⁷ Holly Ellyatt, “All-out war on Ukraine? Putin could be gearing up for something big this ‘Victory Day,’” *CNBC*, May 9, 2022 [<https://www.cNBC.com/2022/05/06/putin-could-look-to-declare-victory-in-ukraine-by-may-9-victory-day.html>].

64.	De-escalation
<p>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.²⁶⁸</p>	

65.	Warning
<p>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 Russia 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 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.</p> <p>However, Haines interpreted Russia’s nuclear rhetoric as an attempt “to deter the United States 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.”²⁶⁹</p>	

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.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ 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/>].

²⁶⁹ “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)].

²⁷⁰ “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/>].

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 peace.”²⁷¹ Some observers interpreted this comment as a sign that France wanted to find a compromise solution by making concessions to Russia.²⁷²

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**.²⁷³

66.	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.” ²⁷⁴
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²⁷¹ “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/>].

²⁷² 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/>].

²⁷³ 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/>].

²⁷⁴ 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/>].

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** stressed on **May 12**. “We won’t help Putin save face by paying with our territory. That would be unjust.”²⁷⁵ France’s attempts to find a “way out for Russia” were “in vain,” he added.²⁷⁶ 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.²⁷⁷

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.²⁷⁸

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.”²⁷⁹

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.”²⁸⁰ According to later comments from an anonymous US official, the Administration was at that point not worried about statements urging negotiations over

²⁷⁵ 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/>].

²⁷⁶ 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/>].

²⁷⁷ 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>].

²⁷⁸ “Kremlin warns against attempts to interfere in Russia’s special operation in Ukraine,” *TASS*, May 12, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1449925>].

²⁷⁹ “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.].

²⁸⁰ “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/>].

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.²⁸¹

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.”²⁸² 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.²⁸³ On the same day, another call took place between German Chancellor **Scholz** and **Putin**, reportedly initiated by the German side.²⁸⁴ “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**.²⁸⁵

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.²⁸⁶ 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.²⁸⁷

²⁸¹ 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/>].

²⁸² “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/>].

²⁸³ 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/>].

²⁸⁴ “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>]

²⁸⁵ “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>].

²⁸⁶ 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>].

²⁸⁷ 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>].

Following his phone call with **Putin**, **Scholz** further declared on **May 13** that “there must be a ceasefire in Ukraine as quickly as possible.”²⁸⁸ Yet, in a subsequent interview on **May 15**, he elaborated that Germany wanted to “help Ukraine defend itself.”²⁸⁹ 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 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.²⁹⁰

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.”²⁹¹

Military developments also impacted the political environment. On **May 14**, Russia conducted drills with Su-27 fighter jets near Kaliningrad.²⁹² 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.²⁹³ 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.²⁹⁴

²⁸⁸ Tweet by @Bundestkanzler, *Twitter*, May 13, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/Bundestkanzler/status/1525079306514440194>].

²⁸⁹ 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].

²⁹⁰ 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>].

²⁹¹ “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)].

²⁹² “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/>].

²⁹³ 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>].

²⁹⁴ 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>].

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."²⁹⁵ Undeterred by this statement, Finland and Sweden submitted official letters requesting to join NATO on **May 18**.²⁹⁶

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.²⁹⁷ 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.²⁹⁸

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.²⁹⁹

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.³⁰⁰ In a similar vein the US Ambassador to NATO **Julianne**

²⁹⁵ "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].

²⁹⁶ "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].

²⁹⁷ 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>].

²⁹⁸ 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/>].

²⁹⁹ 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>].

³⁰⁰ 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].

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.”³⁰¹

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 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.³⁰²

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.³⁰³ 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.³⁰⁴ 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.”³⁰⁵ 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.³⁰⁶

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

³⁰¹ 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/>].

³⁰² 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>].

³⁰³ 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>].

³⁰⁴ 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>].

³⁰⁵ Tweet by @JanHavranek2, *Twitter*, May 27, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/JanHavranek2/status/1530168599608012800>].

³⁰⁶ “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)].

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.”³⁰⁷

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.³⁰⁸ 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 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.³⁰⁹

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. ³¹⁰	

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. ³¹¹	

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.”³¹² The statement, which seemed to conflict with previous media reports according to which

³⁰⁷ „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-scholzs-speech-to-davos-2022-in-full/>].

³⁰⁸ “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/>].

³⁰⁹ 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>].

³¹⁰ “Госиспытания 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].

³¹¹ “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>].

³¹² 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>].

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.³¹³ “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.³¹⁴ **Medvedev** reportedly called Biden’s statement “reasonable” explaining that Russia would have attacked whoever took the “criminal” decision to strike Russian cities.³¹⁵

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</i></p>	

³¹³ 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>].

³¹⁴ Tweet by @McFaul, *Twitter*, May 30, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/McFaul/status/1531367206948261888>].

³¹⁵ 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>].

*completely unacceptable to us as well as the rest of the world and would entail severe consequences.*³¹⁶

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.³¹⁷

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.”³¹⁸ 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.³¹⁹ 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.³²⁰ 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.³²¹

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.”³²²

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

³¹⁶ 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>].

³¹⁷ 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>].

³¹⁸ “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/>].

³¹⁹ 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/>].

³²⁰ “Slovakia to provide Ukraine with howitzers - Slovak president,” *Yahoo news*, May 31, 2022 [<https://news.yahoo.com/slovakia-ukraine-howitzers-slovak-president-174626214.html>].

³²¹ 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/>].

³²² Lara Seligman, Alexander Ward and Quint Forgey, “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>].

battlefield against Russia for the first time.”³²³ 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.³²⁴ According to anonymous US officials, the decision was made only after Ukrainian leaders promised not to strike targets within Russia with these systems.³²⁵ 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 systems.³²⁶ 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.³²⁷

70.	De-escalatory
<p>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.”³²⁸</p>	

71.	Warning
<p>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.”³²⁹</p>	

³²³ Mike Stone, “EXCLUSIVE U.S. 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/>].

³²⁴ “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>].

³²⁵ 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>].

³²⁶ 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>].

³²⁷ “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-lyukseburgu-75533>].

³²⁸ 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>].

³²⁹ 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].

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.”³³⁰ 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.”³³¹

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 Ukrainians,” although “US or western fighters are options that should be explored as soon as possible” as well.³³²

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.³³³ 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.”³³⁴ 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.”³³⁵

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

³³⁰ Christelle Bertrand, “EXCLUSIF. Emmanuel Macron à La Dépêche du Midi : ‘La réforme des retraites entrera en vigueur dès l’été 2023’ (EXCLUSIVE. 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>].

³³¹ Tweet by @DmytroKuleba, *Twitter*, June 4, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/DmytroKuleba/status/1533073469570789377>].

³³² 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>].

³³³ “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>].

³³⁴ 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/>].

³³⁵ 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>].

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.³³⁶

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.³³⁷

Certain nuclear narratives retained their own dynamic however. On **June 12**, Polish member of the European Parliament and former Foreign Minister **Radoslaw Sikorski** reportedly stated that “Russia has violated [the Budapest] memorandum and therefore the West can give Ukraine the opportunity to defend its independence,” including with nuclear warheads.³³⁸ 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.³³⁹

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.³⁴⁰

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.³⁴¹ The US Department of Defense subsequently announced additional security assistance for

³³⁶ 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>].

³³⁷ “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>].

³³⁸ Tweet by @nexta_tv, *Twitter*, June 12, 2022 [https://twitter.com/nexta_tv/status/1535839743975510016].

³³⁹ 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>].

³⁴⁰ 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>].

³⁴¹ Paul McLeary and Quint Forgy, “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>].

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.”³⁴² 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.”³⁴³

72.	Warning
<p>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.³⁴⁴</p>	

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.”³⁴⁵

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.”³⁴⁶ On the other hand, on the same **June 16**, Italian Prime Minister **Mario**

³⁴² “\$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/>].

³⁴³ “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>].

³⁴⁴ 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)].

³⁴⁵ “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/>].

³⁴⁶ 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>].

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;³⁴⁷ 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.”³⁴⁸

73.	De-escalatory
<p>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 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.”³⁴⁹</p>	

74.	Warning
<p>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.”³⁵⁰</p>	

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.³⁵¹

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

³⁴⁷ 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/>].

³⁴⁸ “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].

³⁴⁹ “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>].

³⁵⁰ Tweet by @US_STRATCOM, *Twitter*, June 17, 2022 [https://twitter.com/US_STRATCOM/status/1537848521910525952].

³⁵¹ 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-bundeskanzler-will-gesamtkonzept-zum-einsparen-von-energie-31962160.html>].

to put the interests of preserving the NPT above opportunistic goals.” Moscow was “determined to cooperate with all interested countries” to strengthen the treaty.³⁵²

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 “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.³⁵³

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.”³⁵⁴

Meanwhile, an increasing number of reports suggested that Ukraine now had insufficient weaponry to withstand the Russian offensive.³⁵⁵ Conversely, throughout the month of June, Russian forces had made slow but steady advances in the Eastern Luhansk and Donetsk regions.³⁵⁶

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

³⁵² Post in the 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>].

³⁵³ 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>].

³⁵⁴ 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>].

³⁵⁵ 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-ubr/index.html>].

³⁵⁶ 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>].

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.”³⁵⁷

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.”³⁵⁸

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.³⁵⁹ 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.³⁶⁰ 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.³⁶¹

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.³⁶² 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.³⁶³ Also on **June 23**, the **Pentagon** announced military assistance for Ukraine worth 450 million US dollars, including four additional HIMARS.³⁶⁴

³⁵⁷ 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>].

³⁵⁸ “Зампред СБ счел неподходящим время для переговоров с США по СНВ (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>].

³⁵⁹ “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-hebt-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>].

³⁶⁰ 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/>].

³⁶¹ 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>].

³⁶² “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>].

³⁶³ “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/>].

³⁶⁴ “\$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/>].

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.”³⁶⁵

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.³⁶⁶

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.”³⁶⁷</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.³⁶⁸ During a virtual address at the Summit, Zelenskyy asked for more military assistance and suggested the war should end “before winter sets in.”³⁶⁹ 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 “condemna-</p>	

³⁶⁵ 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>].

³⁶⁶ 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>].

³⁶⁷ “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>].

³⁶⁸ “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>].

³⁶⁹ “Ukraine war: G7 pledges to stay with Ukraine until the end,” *BBC News*, June 27, 2022 [<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61954445>].

tion 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.”³⁷⁰

77.	De-escalatory
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. ³⁷¹	

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.”³⁷²

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.”³⁷³ 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.³⁷⁴

³⁷⁰ “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-erklaerung-ukraine-en-data.pdf?download=1>].

³⁷¹ “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>].

³⁷² “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/>].

³⁷³ “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].

³⁷⁴ 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>].

78.	Warning
<p>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.³⁷⁵ “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.³⁷⁶</p>	

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 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.³⁷⁷ On **June 29**, **Biden** moreover announced significant additional US deployments to Europe including “more destroyers, air defense systems and ... troops.”³⁷⁸ 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.*³⁷⁹

³⁷⁵ 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>].

³⁷⁶ 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>].

³⁷⁷ “2022 NATO Summit,” *Website of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, July 1, 2022 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_196144.htm].

³⁷⁸ Alexander Ward and Quint Forgy, “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/>].

³⁷⁹ “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].

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.”³⁸⁰ 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 repositioning 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 Emmanuel Macron announced a similar pre-assignment of French forces to the battlegroup in Romania.*³⁸¹

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.”³⁸²

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

³⁸⁰ 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>].

³⁸¹ 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)].

³⁸² “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>].

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.”³⁸³

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.³⁸⁴

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 have to respond in a mirror manner and create such threats to the territories from which threats are created to us,” he added.³⁸⁵

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.³⁸⁶

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.”³⁸⁷ 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.³⁸⁸

³⁸³ “NATO 2022 Strategic Concept,” *Website of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, June 29, 2022 [<https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/>].

³⁸⁴ “Madrid Summit Declaration,” *Website of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, June 29, 2022 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_196951.htm].

³⁸⁵ “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>].

³⁸⁶ “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>].

³⁸⁷ “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/>].

³⁸⁸ 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>].

July 2022: Nuclear narratives loosing steam

On **July 5**, NATO Allies signed the Accession Protocols for Finland and Sweden, which then had to be ratified by every Ally.³⁸⁹

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.”³⁹⁰ According to a Ukrainian officer the high number of casualties and territorial losses were starting to negatively impact the morale of Ukrainian troops.³⁹¹ 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.”³⁹²

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.” ³⁹³	

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	

³⁸⁹ “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].

³⁹⁰ “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>].

³⁹¹ 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>].

³⁹² 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>].

³⁹³ “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].

attempts to obtain a nuclear weapon, stating that this would be “like giving a grenade to a madman.”³⁹⁴

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.³⁹⁵

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] 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.³⁹⁶

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.”³⁹⁷

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.”³⁹⁸ 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**.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁴ 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/nedopustimo-voobshche-govorit-o-vozmozhnosti-yadernoy-voyny-matvienko>].

³⁹⁵ 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>].

³⁹⁶ “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/>].

³⁹⁷ “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>].

³⁹⁸ Tweet by @oleksiireznikov, *Twitter*, July 9, 2022 [https://twitter.com/oleksiireznikov/status/1545847314044129287?s=20&t=0WReKYV0bEnjaoZaw5_J0Q].

³⁹⁹ 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>].

81.	Warning
<p>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.”⁴⁰⁰</p>	

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.” 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.”⁴⁰¹

82.	Warning
<p>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.”⁴⁰²</p>	

⁴⁰⁰ “US, allies teetering on brink of military confrontation with Moscow, says diplomat,” TASS, July 12, 2022 [<https://tass.com/politics/1478711>].

⁴⁰¹ “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/>].

⁴⁰² Post on Telegram channel of Dmitry Rogozin, Telegram, July 12, 2022 [https://t.me/rogozin_do/3313].

83.	Warning
On the same day, July 12 , the US military conducted two successful hypersonic missile test. ⁴⁰³	

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.⁴⁰⁴ 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."⁴⁰⁵

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 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.⁴⁰⁶

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."⁴⁰⁷ 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.⁴⁰⁸

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 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."⁴⁰⁹ The fact that "no one in

⁴⁰³ Alexander Ward and Quint Forney, "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>].

⁴⁰⁴ 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>].

⁴⁰⁵ Alexander Ward and Quint Forney, "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>].

⁴⁰⁶ "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>].

⁴⁰⁷ "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>].

⁴⁰⁸ "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].

⁴⁰⁹ 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>].

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.⁴¹⁰

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**.⁴¹¹

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.”⁴¹²

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.⁴¹³

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.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹⁰ 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-instcenirovkakh-kak-metode-politiki-zapada>].

⁴¹¹ “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/>].

⁴¹² “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/>].

⁴¹³ “Лавров: поставки дальноточного 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>].

⁴¹⁴ “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/>].

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.”⁴¹⁵</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.”⁴¹⁶ Yet he added that “Russia’s unjustified war against Ukraine, dangerous actions, and escalatory nuclear rhetoric seriously call into question its commitment to that January joint statement.”⁴¹⁷

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.⁴¹⁸

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

⁴¹⁵ “Fireside Chat with General Charles Q. Brown,” *YouTube account of The Aspen Institute*, July 20, 2022 [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSBUoRP8eDw>].

⁴¹⁶ “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/>].

⁴¹⁷ “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/>].

⁴¹⁸ 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>].

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.”⁴¹⁹

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.⁴²⁰ White House spokesperson **Kirby** reportedly also confirmed the US government was considering whether it could supply fighter jets to Ukraine, although this would “not” be “something that would be executed in the near-term.”⁴²¹ 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.”⁴²²

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.”⁴²³

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

⁴¹⁹ “Closing Fireside Chat with Jake Sullivan,” *You Tube Account of The Aspen Institute*, July 22, 2022 [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K0M4vYSPU04>].

⁴²⁰ “\$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/>].

⁴²¹ “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/>].

⁴²² 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>].

⁴²³ 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>].

not prepared to do that at this point,” he explained, “but there are good arguments being made.”⁴²⁴ 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.⁴²⁵

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.⁴²⁶

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.⁴²⁷ 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 says it is mounting a counteroffensive to take back the Southern port city of Kherson.”⁴²⁸ 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.”⁴²⁹

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.⁴³⁰

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

⁴²⁴ Alexander Ward and Quint Forney, “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>].

⁴²⁵ Alexander Ward and Quint Forney, “‘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>].

⁴²⁶ Tweet by @haynesdeborah, *Twitter*, July 25, 2022 [<https://twitter.com/haynesdeborah/status/1551542980913373186>].

⁴²⁷ 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>].

⁴²⁸ 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>].

⁴²⁹ 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>].

⁴³⁰ “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/>].

launching missiles that would allow Washington to stop any potential attacks if they were unhappy with the intended target,” he reportedly stated.⁴³¹

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.⁴³²

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.⁴³³

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.”⁴³⁴

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.”⁴³⁵ 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

⁴³¹ 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/>].

⁴³² 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>].

⁴³³ Josh Hawley, “Why I Won’t Vote to Add Sweden and Finland to NATO,” *The National Interest*, August 1, 2022 [<https://nationalinterest.org/feature/why-i-won%E2%80%99t-vote-add-sweden-and-finland-nato-203925>].

⁴³⁴ “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/>].

⁴³⁵ “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>].

up nuclear weapons. There was no place in the world for “nuclear deterrence based on coercion, intimidation, or blackmail,” he stressed.⁴³⁶ Similar statements came on **August 1-2** from, for instance, Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister **Mykola Tochytskyi**;⁴³⁷ German Foreign Minister **Annalena Baerbock**;⁴³⁸ Swedish Foreign Minister **Ann Christin Linde**;⁴³⁹ Belgian Foreign Minister **Hadja Lahbib**;⁴⁴⁰ Japanese Prime Minister **Fumio Kishida**;⁴⁴¹ the **EU**;⁴⁴² Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland **Marcin Przydacz**;⁴⁴³ and Dutch Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs **Thijs van der Plas**.⁴⁴⁴

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 1.⁴⁴⁵</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</p>	

⁴³⁶ “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].

⁴³⁷ “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].

⁴³⁸ “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>].

⁴³⁹ “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].

⁴⁴⁰ “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].

⁴⁴¹ “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].

⁴⁴² “General Statement,” *Website of Reaching Critical Will*, August 1, 2022 [https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/revcon2022/statements/1Aug_EU.pdf].

⁴⁴³ “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].

⁴⁴⁴ “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].

⁴⁴⁵ 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].

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.”⁴⁴⁶

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 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.”⁴⁴⁷

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.”⁴⁴⁸

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

⁴⁴⁶ “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>].

⁴⁴⁷ “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>].

⁴⁴⁸ 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/>].

rocket attacks on residential areas and civilian infrastructure in populated areas of Donbas and other regions, which have resulted in mass deaths of civilians.”⁴⁴⁹

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.”⁴⁵⁰

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.⁴⁵¹

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.⁴⁵² 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**.⁴⁵³

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.” ⁴⁵⁴	

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 Pol-	

⁴⁴⁹ “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/>].

⁴⁵⁰ 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>].

⁴⁵¹ 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>].

⁴⁵² 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>].

⁴⁵³ 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>].

⁴⁵⁴ “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].

icy **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.⁴⁵⁵

In the following days there were growing concerns, intensified fighting near the Russian-controlled Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant could lead to a nuclear accident.⁴⁵⁶ 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.”⁴⁵⁷

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.⁴⁵⁸

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.⁴⁵⁹ 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.”⁴⁶⁰

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.⁴⁶¹ 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

⁴⁵⁵ 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/>].

⁴⁵⁶ 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>].

⁴⁵⁷ “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>].

⁴⁵⁸ “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/].

⁴⁵⁹ “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].

⁴⁶⁰ “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].

⁴⁶¹ “\$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/>].

“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.⁴⁶²

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 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.”⁴⁶³

Also on **August 9**, US President **Biden** signed the instruments of ratification for Sweden and Finland’s accession to NATO.⁴⁶⁴

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.⁴⁶⁵

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.⁴⁶⁶ While one anonymous Ukrainian official reportedly denied responsibility for the explosion, another claimed the opposite.⁴⁶⁷ The **Ukrainian Defense Ministry** wrote that it could “not establish the

⁴⁶² “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/>].

⁴⁶³ “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].

⁴⁶⁴ Zeke Miller, “Biden formalizes US support for Finland, Sweden joining NATO,” *AP News*, August 9, 2022 [<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-nato-biden-finland-6a04422190bdd7e75440f7e176a88109>].

⁴⁶⁵ 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>].

⁴⁶⁶ 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>].

⁴⁶⁷ 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>].

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.”⁴⁶⁸ The following day, an anonymous Ukrainian official reportedly confirmed that the explosion had been an attack carried out by Kyiv’s special forces.⁴⁶⁹ According to Ukrainian sources and satellite imagery, nine Russian aircraft were destroyed in the blast, although this was denied by the Russian side.⁴⁷⁰

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 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.”⁴⁷¹ 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.⁴⁷²

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.⁴⁷³

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. ⁴⁷⁴	

⁴⁶⁸ 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].

⁴⁶⁹ 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/>].

⁴⁷⁰ 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>].

⁴⁷¹ “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/>].

⁴⁷² “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>].

⁴⁷³ 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/>].

⁴⁷⁴ “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/>].

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 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.”⁴⁷⁵

89.	De-escalating
<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.”⁴⁷⁶</p>	

⁴⁷⁵ “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>].

⁴⁷⁶ “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?>].

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.⁴⁷⁷ **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.”⁴⁷⁸

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.⁴⁷⁹ 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 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.”⁴⁸⁰ 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.”⁴⁸¹

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.”⁴⁸²

⁴⁷⁷ 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>].

⁴⁷⁸ “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>].

⁴⁷⁹ 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>].

⁴⁸⁰ 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>].

⁴⁸¹ 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/>].

⁴⁸² “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].

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,⁴⁸³ which led media to speculate, whether the long-awaited Ukrainian counteroffensive in the South was finally coming.⁴⁸⁴ 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.⁴⁸⁵

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.⁴⁸⁶ The article 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."⁴⁸⁷ 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.⁴⁸⁸

90.	De-escalating
<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' 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:</p>	

⁴⁸³ "\$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/>].

⁴⁸⁴ 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>].

⁴⁸⁵ 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>].

⁴⁸⁶ 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-waffen-fuer-die-ukraine-so-geht-s-meinung-a-3a08af51-3b65-47b1-8bb6-a0756575a08d?sara_ecid=soci_upd_KsBF0AFjflf0DZCxpPYDCQgO1dEMph].

⁴⁸⁷ Marina Korbaki, "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-mit-forderungen-nach-mehr-waffen-fuer-die-ukraine-heftige-kontroverse-aus-a-cd2dd130-a95b-4691-92ee-702e44b22c9e>].

⁴⁸⁸ 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>].

“The key word in both scenarios is *aggression*,” 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.”⁴⁸⁹

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.”⁴⁹⁰

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’**.⁴⁹¹

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.⁴⁹² 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.⁴⁹³ 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.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁸⁹ 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/primenenie-iadernogo-oruzhiia-vozmozhno-tolko-v-poriadke-otveta-na-napadenie>].

⁴⁹⁰ 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/primenenie-iadernogo-oruzhiia-vozmozhno-tolko-v-poriadke-otveta-na-napadenie>].

⁴⁹¹ “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/>].

⁴⁹² “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/>].

⁴⁹³ 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>].

⁴⁹⁴ “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>].

Anna Clara Arndt is a Research Assistant in the International Security Division

Dr Liviu Horovitz is a Research Associate in the International Security Division

The authors would like to thank Paul Bochtler and Daniel Kettner for their support preparing the graphic representation in this paper, as well as Lydia Wachs and Dr Jonas Schneider for their comments on an earlier version of the text.

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SWP

Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik
German Institute for International and Security Affairs

Ludwigkirchplatz 3–4
10719 Berlin
Telephone +49 30 880 07-0
Fax +49 30 880 07-100
www.swp-berlin.org
swp@swp-berlin.org

doi: 10.18449/2022WP08