

## **Challenges And Threats Arising From The Build-Up Of Russia's Military Power; The Aggressiveness Of Russia's Military Doctrine**

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### **Abstract**

In recent years, Russia has significantly transformed its military strategy, adopting a more aggressive doctrine and heavily investing in the modernization of its armed forces and nuclear arsenal. These changes include the broadening of what constitutes a national security threat, lowering the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons, and demonstrating readiness for large-scale conventional military operations. As a result, Russia's new posture poses serious challenges to regional and global stability, undermines long-standing arms control agreements, and heightens the risk of military conflict, including scenarios involving nuclear escalation.

Regionally, the invasion of Ukraine and increasing pressure on former Soviet republics signify a renewed Russian ambition to reshape the post-Soviet security order. These developments have triggered a strong response from NATO and Western allies, leading to a new arms race and growing militarization in Europe. The erosion of mutual trust and transparency, coupled with Russia's willingness to use military force as a tool of foreign policy, threatens the foundations of international law and global security. Without constructive dialogue and arms control reform, the risk of unintended escalation and widespread instability will continue to grow

**Keywords:** Russian military doctrine, nuclear deterrence, Arms control, Ukraine crisis, European security

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## Introduction

The modern world is on the threshold of a new era of global challenges and threats, the main driving force of which is the rapid change in Russia's military strategy and policy. The last decades have been marked by a significant strengthening of Russia in the international arena, which is expressed not only in the modernization of arsenals of traditional and nuclear weapons, but also in changes in the military doctrine, which has become much more aggressive. These actions of Russia are of concern

and require careful analysis by the world community, since they carry the risks of regional and global instability.

Russia, possessing one of the largest nuclear arsenals in the world, is actively investing in the modernization of defense infrastructure and weapons. These steps significantly change the landscape of international security, introducing new elements in the strategy of global deterrence and expanding the horizons of the military use of the latest technologies.

Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the key aspects of this issue, assess the consequences for international law and regional stability. The latest changes not only increase the likelihood of armed conflicts, but also threaten the foundations of international nuclear deterrence, which makes it important to discuss and find ways to minimize possible risks. Russia's actions affect global and regional security. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a deep understanding of Russia's military strategy and its potential implications for the global order, which is critical to developing effective responses that can ensure long-term peace and stability.

In recent years, Russia has undertaken a major effort to build up its military power, modernize its armed forces, and update its nuclear arsenal. In parallel, the Russian military doctrine has transformed into a more aggressive and offensive one. These worrying trends pose a number of serious challenges and threats to regional and global security that require close attention from the international community.

After the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR, Russia's military potential was significantly reduced. However, with the rise of Vladimir Putin to power, the course was set to restore the country's military power. Since the 2000s, defense spending has steadily increased, amounting to over \$80 billion in 2022.

These funds were used for large-scale modernization of the Russian Armed Forces: purchasing the latest types of weapons, improving combat training of troops, and developing infrastructure. Russia also invested significant resources in the creation of modern nuclear weapons, hypersonic missiles and other strategic weapons.

In parallel with the build-up of military power, Russia has undergone a transformation of its military doctrine towards a more aggressive and offensive course. Key changes:

- Expanding the list of threats to national security and grounds for the use of military force.
- Allowing for the possibility of a preventive nuclear strike in the event of a threat to the existence of the state.
- Lowering the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons in regional conflicts.
- Readiness for large-scale conventional military operations.
- These changes are supported by more aggressive rhetoric from the Russian leadership, threats against other countries and a demonstration of readiness to use force to protect its interests.

### **Expansion of The List of Threats To National Security And Basis For The Use of Military Force In Russia**

In recent years, the Kremlin has taken a course to significantly expand the interpretation of the concept of "threats to national security" for Russia. At the same time, the list of grounds for allowing the use of military force to counter these threats has also expanded significantly. These alarming changes in Russian military doctrine and legislation pose a serious threat to regional stability and the world order based on international law.

The latest version of the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation (2021) mentions a whole range of non-traditional challenges.

These include: unfriendly policies of foreign states, the spread of extremist ideologies and nationalism, information warfare, attempts at external influence on the public consciousness of Russians, destabilization of the domestic political situation in the country, etc.

Such a broad interpretation gives the Kremlin unlimited scope for declaring almost any internal or external factor as a threat to Russia's interests. And therefore grounds for using military force to eliminate it. Particularly alarming changes have occurred in the nuclear doctrine of

Russia (On the Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Nuclear Deterrence, 2020). In theory, the preventive use of nuclear weapons is allowed in the following situations:

- **a)** receipt of reliable information about the launch of ballistic missiles attacking the territory of the Russian Federation and (or) its allies;
- **b)** the use of nuclear weapons or other types of weapons of mass destruction by the enemy on the territory of the Russian Federation and (or) its allies;
- **c)** the enemy's impact on critical state or military facilities of the Russian Federation, the destruction of which will lead to the disruption of the response of nuclear forces;
- **d)** aggression against the Russian Federation using conventional weapons, when the very existence of the state is at risk. The last admitted case is extremely vague, implying the possibility of using nuclear weapons even in a regional armed conflict. That is, the possibility of local or regionally limited nuclear strikes is envisaged, taking into account the circumstances and the degree of threat. This contradicts the principle of non-use of nuclear weapons and preventing their escalation.

Thus, Moscow has taken a course to lower the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons in its military doctrine. Allowing for the possibility of Russia launching a preemptive nuclear strike if its existence is threatened opens the door to a number of risky scenarios for the escalation of a nuclear conflict even within the framework of conventional regional wars. In fact, this creates a potentially unlimited list of grounds for justifying a preemptive nuclear strike in local conflicts with the use of conventional weapons.

Such unilateral revisionism in the sphere of nuclear deterrence poses a direct threat to global security and stability.

For most of the Cold War, nuclear powers were restrained from the practical use of nuclear weapons by the realization of the inevitability of mutual destruction in the event of a nuclear war. The principle of mutually assured destruction acted as an effective deterrent to conflict escalation.

After the collapse of the USSR and the end of the bipolar confrontation, a new balance of nuclear forces was formed in the world between the Russian Federation, the United States, China and a number of other states. Despite numerous disagreements and tensions, the official nuclear

doctrines of these powers continued to follow the principle of no first use of nuclear weapons and their role as a purely deterrent.

Such a dangerous innovation in the Russian nuclear doctrine violates a long-standing international "taboo" on the use of nuclear weapons. This taboo has been in place for decades, since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and has become one of the few universal prohibitions in international law.

By allowing for the possibility of a "small nuclear war" or "limited" nuclear strikes under certain conditions, Moscow significantly lowers the threshold for initiating a nuclear conflict. This increases the risks of unintentional escalation and the situation spiraling out of control in future armed clashes involving Russia.

The stated Russian position, in essence, represents a departure from the principles of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and a declared revision of the mutual nuclear deterrence regime.

The reaction may be a desire by other nuclear powers to protect themselves by lowering their own thresholds for the use of nuclear weapons, which in the long run will lead to the collapse of nuclear arms control regimes. This also unties the hands of states and forces seeking to obtain nuclear weapons to achieve their goals through blackmail and threats. In the context of blurred criteria, "existence under threat" becomes a universal justification for any nuclear adventure. From the point of view of supporters of the new Russian nuclear doctrine, its goal is to strengthen nuclear deterrence and to form a red line, the violation of which will entail unacceptable consequences for a potential aggressor. However, there is a flip side to the coin. Excessive statements by the Kremlin about its readiness to use nuclear weapons in regional conflicts can be perceived as a signal of weakness and vulnerability of Russia itself in the realities of the modern conventional confrontation of powers.

Western countries have a significant advantage in conventional high-precision weapons and the ability to non-nuclearly deter Russian aggression through sanctions, restrictions on access to financial markets and high technologies. The transformation of Moscow's nuclear doctrine towards more aggressive nuclear behavior looks like an attempt to compensate for this lag with the nuclear factor and raise the stakes in a hypothetical conflict.

However, such a step can only worsen the strategic lag of the Russian Federation as other nuclear powers inevitably increase their efforts to develop adequate nuclear deterrence and missile defense measures. Instead of increasing security, this will only lead to further isolation and vulnerability of Russia in the nuclear sphere. Thus, the aggressive militarization of Russia's military doctrine is a challenge to the global security system.

## **Threat To The Arms Control Regime**

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has dealt a serious blow to the global arms control and disarmament architecture that has been built up over decades. By ignoring existing international agreements, Moscow has undermined the philosophy of containing the arms race and ensuring strategic stability. Fundamental agreements on limiting strategic offensive weapons, banning nuclear weapons tests, controlling conventional armed forces in Europe, and other foundations of the modern world order have been discredited. The principles of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which the Kremlin has begun to threaten in the event of third-party intervention, are under threat. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that Russia itself was a direct participant and initiator of many of these international non-proliferation and arms control regimes. After the Cold War, it joined most of the fundamental agreements. However, since the mid-2000s, The Kremlin's course of demonstrative military build-up and the renaissance of the nuclear doctrine began to conflict with its commitments in the sphere of disarmament and arms control. The Russian leadership began to be dominated by the idea of the benefits of unilaterally ignoring international agreements.

The turning point was Russia's unilateral withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in 2019. Then Moscow refused to extend the Open Skies Treaty and paralyzed the activities of the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty mechanisms.

The US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty led to the Kremlin making excuses for ignoring its commitments on strategic offensive weapons in the future. Western attempts to resume negotiations on missile arms control and non-strategic nuclear weapons were met with demonstrative disregard.

Thus, by the beginning of hostilities in Ukraine, the arms control regime was in a state of deep crisis. By unleashing the war, Russia violated the

norms of international humanitarian law prohibiting the use of indiscriminate violence against civilians.

Obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and UN Security Council resolutions prohibiting the use of chemical weapons in warfare against civilians were ignored. However, the main challenge was Russia's violation of the rules of the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

In violation of the provisions of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Moscow has repeatedly threatened to use nuclear weapons in the event of third countries intervening in the conflict.

Against the backdrop of Russian aggression in Ukraine, approaches to control over conventional armed forces in Europe are also being revised. Moscow demonstratively ignores restrictions on the movement of troops across borders during crises. The concentration of huge groups near the borders of Ukraine is seen as a threat to the security of all of Europe.

It is obvious that the new reality will require a radical reform of the entire arms control regime.

### **Russia's Readiness For Large-Scale Conventional Military Operations**

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, shocked the world. Moscow's actions demonstrated its readiness to wage a large-scale war in Europe and challenged the existing international security system.

The fighting in Ukraine has revealed Russia's impressive military capabilities, but it has also exposed serious miscalculations and shortcomings in its armed forces. It serves as a warning about the real threat posed by the Kremlin's further military build-up.

In the first weeks, the Russian army acted in accordance with modern military doctrine, launching massive missile and bomb strikes against military installations and critical infrastructure. High-precision cruise missiles "Kalibr" and "Iskander", as well as hypersonic "Kinzhal" were used to hit targets. Such attacks were intended to paralyze the enemy's air defense, communication and control systems. However, the Ukrainian troops showed much greater resilience than Moscow expected, and the promised lightning-fast advance of Russian tank columns to Kyiv encountered stubborn resistance. The "overwhelming impact" plan failed.

Russia then switched to traditional tactics of conducting offensive operations with the massive use of artillery and aviation. Ukrainian cities

were bombed, and civilians became targets. The destructive actions of Russian troops in Ukraine indicate that the chosen tactics contradict the principles of conducting modern conventional warfare.

Despite successes in a number of operations, the Russian army faced serious problems with logistics, communications, coordination and supply of troops. There was also a critical shortage of modern high-precision munitions. There were numerous command miscalculations, unprepared personnel and huge uncompensated losses in equipment.

As a result, Russia was forced to declare a partial mobilization to replenish the significantly thinned ranks of the army. Poorly trained reservists are sent to the front, there is a shortage of qualified personnel. The military-industrial complex is unable to cope with the large-scale needs of the front.

Nevertheless, Russia's continuing colossal superiority in artillery systems and manpower allows it to continue offensive operations. If it were not for the unprecedented support of Western countries for Ukraine in the form of arms supplies, personnel training, and intelligence, the outcome of the campaign would have been completely different.

Russia's actions on the battlefield show that its armed forces retain the ability to wage a protracted and destructive war by mobilizing human and industrial resources. However, the quality of personnel, equipment, and troop command leaves much to be desired. If Russia continues its policy of building up its military potential by modernizing the army and navy, it may soon have at its disposal armed forces of a completely new quality.

## **New Threats to Europe**

The Kremlin's decision to invade was a direct consequence of a long-term strategy of increasing military power and reorienting doctrinal guidelines.

Against the backdrop of aggressive rhetoric and militaristic propaganda, Russian society has developed beliefs in the possibility of using force to achieve foreign policy goals.

In this case, one cannot discount the increased danger of further escalation of the conflict between Russia and NATO and Western countries. The Kremlin has become convinced of its ability to conduct major conventional actions and may be inclined to further increase its offensive potential to increase pressure on its neighbors. Moscow may



decide to break diplomatic restrictions and concentrate troops near the borders of Poland, Romania and the Baltic states, preparing for an armed conflict.

Russian military doctrine already provides for the possibility of the preventive use of nuclear weapons to de-escalate a conventional conflict with NATO. An increase in conventional offensive weapons will only strengthen Moscow's desire to rely on its nuclear arsenal as a means of coercion and blackmail. The apogee of the new wave of militarization may be the Kremlin's attempt to revise the results of the Cold War and go against the fundamental principles of European security, including the inviolability of borders and the territorial integrity of countries. In the face of an increased military threat, Moscow may demand the withdrawal of foreign troops and nuclear weapons from the territory of new NATO members.

A negative scenario assumes Russia's drift towards confrontation with the West, the growth of revanchist sentiments in the political establishment. In this case, the world will be threatened by the risk of an unintentional military escalation between Russia and NATO due to miscalculations, misunderstandings or problems in communications. The consequences of such a conflict are unpredictable and catastrophic.

## **New Arms Race in Europe**

Russia's military aggression against Ukraine has triggered the biggest security crisis in Europe since the end of the Cold War.

Now, more than ever, there is a risk of a full-fledged arms race and uncontrolled militarization on both sides of the divide between Russia and the West. Effectively containing the increased threats is becoming increasingly difficult due to the collapse of existing conventional arms control treaties.

The atmosphere of growing mistrust has already led to urgent measures to build up military power on both sides. The reaction of the United States and its NATO allies to the escalation of Russian aggression has become the most decisive since the Cold War.

Additional contingents of troops and air squadrons have been introduced into Eastern Europe. Heavy weapons are being deployed, new military bases and logistics points are being created. One of the main goals has become a significant strengthening of NATO's eastern flank.

In response to Russian ultimatums, the Alliance has revised its defense concept, recognizing the increased threat from Moscow. Defense spending and rearmament programs of the participating countries, led by the United States, are urgently increasing.

However, Russia is not staying away from the flaring up of the new arms race. The Kremlin views the escalation of NATO actions as an attempt to contain and weaken the influence of the Russian Federation in the post-Soviet space, a direct threat to national security.

Moscow has stepped up programs to develop the latest high-precision weapons of the strategic and operational-tactical class. Pressure has increased on its CSTO allies with the aim of involving them in the confrontation.

In the regions adjacent to the conflict zone and the borders with NATO, Russia's military presence is also increasing.

As a result, we are witnessing an unprecedented buildup of armed forces and a concentration of troops by both sides since the end of the Cold War - both NATO and Russia and its allies. With the outbreak of hostilities in Ukraine, the deterrent effect of the agreements on control over conventional weapons, previously in effect in Europe, has been largely lost. Russia and NATO have a wide range of military-technical measures at their disposal to put pressure on their opponents, including the deployment of additional troop groups, the movement of military contingents, and increased intelligence activity.

The previous balance of power and mutual deterrence is being replaced by a dangerous confrontation with difficult to predict consequences.

Any miscalculations by the parties in assessing the enemy's intentions may lead to an unintentional increase in tension and the escalation of a local provocation into a large-scale armed conflict.

At the same time, elements of strategic parity in nuclear weapons between Russia and the United States are preserved at the global level, which limits the possibility of a direct large-scale clash. At the same time, in the event of further escalation, Moscow may try to use tactical nuclear weapons within the framework of its new concept of "escalation for de-escalation".

We cannot discount the possibility of NATO involving third countries in the conflict. In this case, the threat of a full-scale military confrontation

in the region will take on real contours. Against this background, attempts to resume practical negotiations on restoring the system of control over conventional armed forces and military activity in the region on a fundamentally new basis are of particular importance. Until recently, it was considered an established fact that the continuation of the policy of containment would be based on maintaining mutual transparency and predictability. However, Russian aggression against Ukraine has cast doubt on the very possibility of achieving this.

### **Post\_Soviet Area**

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has marked the beginning of a new round of geopolitical struggle in the post-Soviet space. The Kremlin has decisively embarked on the path of forceful pressure and threats against the former Soviet republics, trying to assert its dominant influence in one form or another.

For Russia, maintaining control over key countries in Eastern Europe, Transcaucasia and Central Asia is a vital task. In addition to territorial and resource ambitions, it is about preventing the expansion of Western influence and the creation of potentially hostile alliances on its borders.

The war in Ukraine has become a test of strength for the entire regional security architecture built by Moscow in the post-Soviet period. At first, the Russian leadership counted on the successful implementation of the Ukrainian scenario in other parts of the former USSR. However, the massive invasion of the largest republic of the former Union after Russia has caused a wary reaction both among Moscow's allies and among countries pursuing a more independent policy. A serious split has emerged in the ranks of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a military-political bloc under the auspices of Russia. Other CSTO members have been forced to distance themselves from Russian aggression in Ukraine. There is a threat of the organization's collapse and a change in the vector of foreign policy by individual members.

In response, the Kremlin has stepped up its threatening rhetoric. There have been demands to develop a unified approach to the West's anti-Russian sanctions. Similar tactics are being used in relation to former Soviet republics pursuing a multi-vector policy.

In Central Asia, Moscow continues its policy of bargaining and pressure against Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

Particular attention is being paid to influencing Belarus, the most important strategic ally in the Western direction. There are attempts to establish a guardianship regime and actual external control through the build-up of direct Russian military presence and pressure on Lukashenko. Thus, regardless of the outcome of the Ukrainian campaign, Russia is seriously considering the possibility of using a wide range of military and political levers to restore its dominant position in other parts of the post-Soviet space.

The medium-term course involves intensifying coercive measures against the former Soviet republics, relying on the power of the renewed army and demonstrating readiness for limited military operations and interventions under one pretext or another.

In this regard, the countries of the region are faced with the task of developing a coordinated strategy to counter this expansionism. Containing further escalation will require not only economic levers, but also an increase in military and political potential.

## Conclusions

Thus, the build-up of military power and the change in Russia's doctrine create **a number of serious security threats in Europe and the adjacent regions:**

- Increased tension and risk of military conflict between Russia and NATO countries, especially in Eastern Europe and the Baltics.
- Increased pressure and threats against former Soviet republics in the struggle for spheres of influence.
- Further destabilization of the situation in Ukraine.
- Undermining of arms control and disarmament regimes.
- Arms race and militarization of the region in response to Russia's actions.

### Threats to global security:

In addition to regional threats, Russia's actions pose serious challenges to global security:

- Undermining the foundations of international law and the UN collective security system.
- Escalation of the risk of using nuclear weapons in regional conflicts.

The spread of destabilizing weapons technologies, such as hypersonic weapons.

- Militarization of outer space and the space arms race.
- Intensification of information warfare and propaganda at the global level.

### **Threats to regional security:**

- Strengthening Russia's military potential and changes in its military doctrine increase risks to regional stability. This includes the possibility of conflicts on the borders, as well as the risks of escalation of tensions within the Central Asian region.
- Changes in Russia's nuclear policy may undermine treaty obligations in the area of deterrence and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

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