

Russia condemns US nuclear bomb plans

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REUTERS

The US military is concerned that Russia is underestimating US capability

Moscow has condemned US military proposals to develop new, smaller atomic bombs mainly to deter any Russian use of nuclear weapons.

Russia's foreign minister called the move "confrontational", and expressed "deep disappointment".

The proposals stem from concerns that Russia may see current US nuclear weapons as too big to be used.

This could mean, according to the US military, that those weapons are no longer an effective deterrent.

Russia's counterblast

The Russian foreign ministry accuses the US of warmongering in its statement, issued less than 24 hours after the US proposals were published.

The latest thinking was revealed in a Pentagon policy statement known as the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR).

Russia says it will take "necessary measures" to ensure Russian security.



EPA

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov - "disappointed"

"From first reading, the confrontational and anti-Russian character of this document leaps out at you," the statement says.

A foretaste of Mr Lavrov's anger came in a statement on Friday from the Russian senator and defence expert Frantz Klitchevich, who dubbed it "a very dangerous bet on breaking up the world strategic balance of forces" in favour of the US.

What is behind the US proposals?

They are not just about Russia.

The US military is worried about the nuclear arsenal becoming obsolete and potential threats from countries such as China, North Korea and Iran.

Nuclear weapons by country, 2017



Note: Israel has never confirmed or denied that it has nuclear weapons.
All figures are approximate.

Source: SIPRI

BBC

But a major US concern is over Russian perceptions. The document argues that smaller nuclear weapons - with a yield of less than 20 kilotons - would challenge any assumption that US weapons are too massive to serve as a credible deterrent. Such bombs would have the same explosive power as the one dropped on the Japanese city of Nagasaki at the end of World War Two, killing more than 70,000 people.

"Our strategy will ensure Russia understands that any use of nuclear weapons, however limited, is unacceptable," the document says.

The proposed "tactical" nuclear weapons would not increase America's arsenal, which is already considerable, but would repurpose existing warheads.

Critics have accused the Trump administration of challenging the spirit of non-proliferation agreements.

What is the US doing to its nuclear weapons?

Land-based ballistic missiles, submarine-launched missiles, and air-delivered weapons - to be extensively modernised as begun under ex-President Obama

Proposed modification of some submarine-launched nuclear warheads to give a lower-yield or less powerful detonation

Return of sea-based nuclear cruise missiles

China accuses US of 'Cold War mentality' over nuclear policy

6 hours ago



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The US nuclear force is based on land, sea and air-based weapons

China has urged the US to drop its "Cold War mentality" after Washington said it planned to diversify its nuclear armoury with smaller bombs.

"The country that owns the world's largest nuclear arsenal, should take the initiative to follow the trend instead of going against it," China's defence ministry said on Sunday.

The US military believes its nuclear weapons are seen as too big to be used and wants to develop low-yield bombs.

Russia has already condemned the plan.

Iran's foreign minister claimed it brought the world "closer to annihilation".

What is the new US policy?

The US is concerned about its nuclear arsenal becoming obsolete and no longer an effective deterrent. It names China, Russia, North Korea and Iran as potential threats.

Where are the world's nuclear weapons?

The Pentagon document released on Friday, known as the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), argues that developing smaller nuclear weapons would challenge that assumption. Low-yield weapons with a strength of under 20 kilotons are less powerful but are still

devastating. The policy also proposes:

Land-based ballistic missiles, submarine-launched missiles, and air-delivered weapons - to be extensively modernised, as begun

under ex-President Obama

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Return of sea-based nuclear cruise missiles

Countering the "growing threat from revisionist powers", such as China and Russia, was at the heart of **America's new defence strategy announced last month**.

What did China say?

China said on Sunday it "firmly" opposed **the Pentagon's review of US nuclear policy**.

The defence ministry in Beijing said Washington had played up the threat of China's nuclear threat, adding that its own policy was defensive in nature.

"We hope that the United States will abandon its Cold War mentality, earnestly assume its special disarmament responsibilities, correctly understand China's strategic intentions and objectively view China's national defence and military build-up," its statement said.

China has used the Cold War label before to criticise US policy. Late last year it denounced Washington's updated defence strategy and urged the US to abandon "outdated notions".

In the NPR document, the US accused China of "expanding its already considerable nuclear forces" but China defended its policy on Sunday saying it would "resolutely stick to peaceful development and pursue a national defence policy that is defensive in nature".