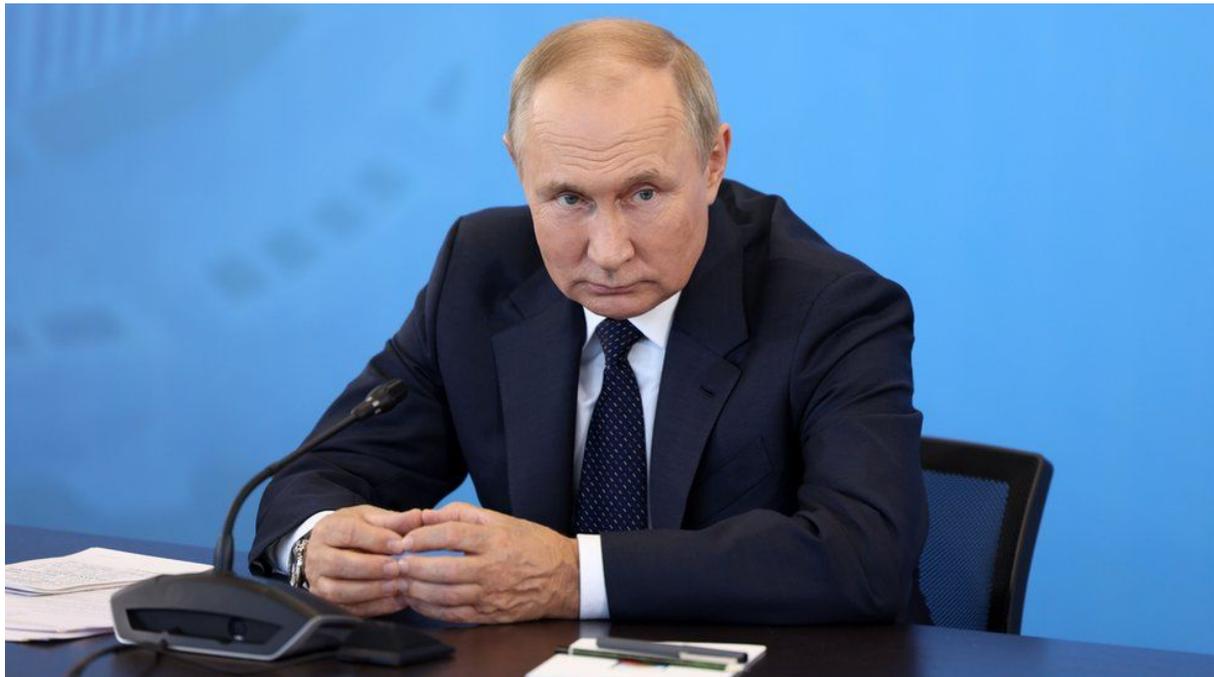


Ukraine war: Putin not bluffing about nuclear weapons, EU says

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Russia's president made a thinly veiled threat this week he could use nuclear weapons

The EU must take Vladimir Putin's threats he could use nuclear weapons in the conflict in Ukraine seriously, the bloc's foreign policy chief has said.

Josep Borrell told the BBC's Lyse Doucet that the war had reached a "dangerous moment".

His remarks come as Russia begins a partial mobilisation and moves to annex four regions of Ukraine.

Mr Putin has faced setbacks on the battlefield, with his forces pushed back by a Ukrainian counter-offensive.

"Certainly it's a dangerous moment because the Russian army has been pushed into a corner, and Putin's reaction - threatening using nuclear arms - it's very bad," Mr Borrell said.

Seven months since Russia's invasion of Ukraine began, analysts agree that President Putin's forces are on the back foot, but he said a "diplomatic solution" must be reached, one that "preserves the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine".

"Otherwise, we can finish the war, but we will not have peace, and we will have another war," he said.

In a rare address to the nation earlier this week, Mr Putin said his country had "various weapons of destruction" and would "use all the means available to us", adding: "I'm not bluffing."

"When people say it is not a bluff, you have to take them seriously," Mr Borrell said.

In the same speech President Putin announced the call-up of 300,000 Russians who have done compulsory military service, sparking protests and reports of people fleeing the country to avoid being sent to the front line.

It comes after a rapid counter-offensive in which Ukraine says it took more than 8,000 sq km (3,088 sq miles) back from Russian forces.

Now self-styled referendums on joining Russia are being held in four occupied regions. Ukraine has denounced these as annexation attempts, and reported that **armed Russian soldiers are going door-to-door collecting votes.**

Ukraine has dominated this year's UN General Assembly as this costly war drags on with no clear sense of a way out. Europe's foreign policy chief was surprisingly blunt and visibly pained.

He shared the anxious lament he was hearing everywhere he went. From friends on holiday, to leaders from around the world attending the UN General Assembly this week, they were all

asking him when this war would end. "Stop this war, I can't pay my electricity bill," was, he regretted, a common refrain.

Mr Borrell was willing to say in public what many express in private - that Europe and its allies were struggling to control the narrative in this war as Russia spins the view that European sanctions against Russia were to blame for this suffering. But Moscow's new and worrying threats, including a thinly-veiled nuclear one, are also concentrating minds. Most Western leaders, including Mr Borrell, are still categorical about the need to stay the course in a conflict with many far-reaching consequences, most of all for Ukraine, but many others too.

Mr Borrell dismissed concerns that the EU's arms supplies were running low, and said it must continue providing military support to Ukraine, as well as applying economic sanctions against President Putin and his allies and conducting diplomatic activity.

He admitted that the rising cost of energy prices caused by the conflict was a matter of concern.

"People in my country tell me the price of the gas means we cannot continue working, we cannot continue making my business run," the Spanish politician said, adding he had heard similar concerns from leaders from Africa, South America and Southeast Asia.

Mr Borrell called on President Putin to play his part in reaching a negotiated solution, saying "in order to dance the tango, you need two".

"Everybody who has gone to Moscow, to the Kremlin to talk to Putin, they came back with the same answer, 'I [Putin] have military objectives, and if I don't get these military objectives I will continue the fight.' This is certainly a worrisome direction, but we have to continue to support Ukraine," he said.

Nuclear attack in Ukraine should spark ‘devastating’ Nato response, says Polish foreign minister

Zbigniew Rau rules out a nuclear reprisal but says the alliance is sending a clear message to Russia



A Ukrainian flag waves on a street of the recently liberated village of Vysokopillya, Kherson region. Poland’s foreign minister has warned any use of nuclear weapons by Russia should prompt a ‘devastating’ Nato response. Photograph: Genya Savilov/AFP/Getty Images

Julian Borger *in Washington*

Wed 28 Sep 2022 01.53 BST

Poland’s foreign minister, Zbigniew Rau, has said Nato’s response to any use of nuclear weapons in **Ukraine** should be non-nuclear but “devastating”.

Speaking on a visit to Washington, Rau said the alliance was in the process of delivering that message to Moscow.

The Russian military debacle in Ukraine, where its forces are being pushed back in the east of the country, has increased concerns that a desperate Vladimir Putin could resort to using a nuclear weapon, possibly a lower-yield tactical warhead, in a bid to shock Ukraine into halting its resistance to his invasion.

“To the best of our knowledge, Putin is threatening to use tactical nuclear weapons on Ukrainian soil, not to attack Nato, which means that Nato should respond in a conventional way,” Rau told the NBC News program **Meet the Press**. “But the response should be devastating. And I suppose this is the clear message that the Nato alliance is sending to Russia right now.”

The US national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, **warned on Sunday** that any nuclear use by the Kremlin would have “catastrophic consequences for Russia”, which had been “spelled out” in private conversations with Russian officials.

The Russian military has expanded conscription with the official aim of sending 300,000 more soldiers into Ukraine, though there are reports the real goal is considerably more. The mobilisation has triggered unrest and **an exodus across Russia’s borders**, particularly of draft-age men.

“Obviously, President Putin is losing the war in Ukraine,” Rau said. “So his reaction to it is to launch mobilisation. But the mobilisation doesn’t seem to help him win the war.”

The Polish foreign minister said Ukraine’s armed forces had already defeated Russia’s professional soldiers, so the new conscripts who were “poorly trained and poorly equipped” were unlikely to change the course of the war.

Rau said that if the mobilisation did lead to a breakthrough, it would be in Russian public opinion.

“So far, the war was popular, at least for the majority of the Russian population, up to 80%,” he said. “And now, every Russian family will have to take their own position towards the war, knowing that their loved ones can be sent there and they can be killed there.”

During his trip to Washington, Rau is not meeting any members of the Biden administration, but will see congressional leaders, Sullivan’s predecessor as

national security adviser, John Bolton, and will visit a new museum in the US capital dedicated to the victims of communism.

Poland suggests hosting US nuclear weapons amid growing fears of Putin's threats

Request is widely seen as symbolic, as moving nuclear warheads closer to Russia would make them less militarily useful



Andrzej Duda, the Polish president, in September. He said there was 'a potential opportunity' for Poland to take part in 'nuclear sharing'. Photograph: Waldemar Deska/EPA

Julian Borger *in Washington*

Wed 5 Oct 2022 22.46 BST

Poland says it has asked to have US nuclear weapons based on its territory, amid growing fears that Vladimir Putin could resort to using nuclear arms in Ukraine to stave off a rout of his invading army.

The request from the Polish president, Andrzej Duda, is widely seen as symbolic, as moving nuclear warheads closer to **Russia** would make them more

vulnerable and less militarily useful, according to experts. Furthermore, the White House has said it had not received such a request.

“We’re not aware of this issue being raised and would refer you to the government of **Poland**,” a US official said.

Duda’s announcement appears to be the latest example of nuclear signalling as the US and its allies seek to deter Putin from the first nuclear use in battle since 1945, while preparing potential responses if deterrence fails that would have maximum punitive impact while containing the risk of escalation to all-out nuclear war.

Previous war games conducted by US administrations have shown that is a fine, and fuzzy, line to tread, given the uncertainty over Putin’s state of mind, and his record of giant miscalculations over **Ukraine**.

Duda’s remarks on basing nuclear weapons followed changes in the constitution of neighbouring Belarus that would allow Russian nuclear weapons to be based on its territory.

The Polish president said there was “a potential opportunity” for Poland to take part in “nuclear sharing”, by which pilots from the host country are trained to fly missions carrying US nuclear bombs, which are stored on their territory.

“We have spoken with American leaders about whether the United States is considering such a possibility. The issue is open,” **Duda told Gazeta Polska**.

Moving US nuclear weapons into Poland could be a violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Nato-Russia Founding Act in 1997, after the end of the Cold War in which Nato stated it had no plan to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members. Russia has meanwhile violated its own commitments under the act.

Nuclear experts also added it made little strategic sense for Poland or Nato.

The **Federation of American Scientists** (FAS) estimates the US has 100 nuclear weapons left over in Europe in the aftermath of the cold war, spread among the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Italy and Turkey.

They are all B61 bombs which had been seen as militarily obsolete with no mission in the event of a war with Russia. Arms control experts have long called for them to be removed from Europe.

However, they have been modernised as the B61-12, with fins that allowed its fall to be guided, which is expected to enter service this year. The bombs have also been designed to be carried by new F-35A Lightning II stealth fighter jets, which would potentially make it part of the active US nuclear arsenal.

Hans Kristensen, director of FAS's nuclear information project, said the B61-12 storage sites in Europe are being upgraded and strengthened.

“The reason they’re doing that is to protect that force against what they consider the growing threat from Russia’s conventional missiles, so it would be an extraordinarily strange development if Nato therefore decided to move nuclear weapons closer to the Russian borders,” Kristensen said.

Poland has raised the issue at a time when the prospect of nuclear weapons use is higher than at any time since the cold war, and arguably since the Cuban missile crisis 60 years ago this month.

Putin has threatened to use all means at his disposal to defend Russian territory at the same time as declaring the annexation of four more Ukrainian regions. He made the declaration as Russian troops were in retreat in the face of a Ukrainian counter-offensive.

The White House has warned of “catastrophic consequences” if Putin did resort to using nuclear weapons, but did not specify what those would be. It has said it has warned Russian officials privately, but it is not clear how much more specific those warnings have been.

Zbigniew Rau, the Polish foreign minister, said last week the consequences should be **non-nuclear but “devastating”**. David Petraeus, who was formerly the head of US Central Command and CIA director, said on Sunday that one possible response would be **US-led Nato conventional strikes** on Russian forces inside Ukraine and even the sinking of Russia’s Black Sea fleet.

In reality, Nato is unlikely to be part of any response, as it would require agreement by its 30 members. More likely it would involve Washington and its closest allies like the UK.

“There are ongoing discussions and have been for a while about various scenarios and how we might react,” an official in Washington said. US European Command is also doing scenario planning, the official said, adding that “there is no concrete set of actions” planned.

The dilemma facing the military planners is how to act in such a way that Putin does not benefit militarily from using a nuclear weapon, but not so forcefully that escalation spins out of control and leads inexorably to nuclear war between Nato and Russia.

Much would depend on what Putin did. The Russians could stage a “demonstration” nuclear detonation over the Black Sea, or a high-altitude airburst that generates an electromagnetic pulse that fries the electricity infrastructure of any city below.

Those actions however, would cause international outrage with little if any effect on the course of the war. The use of a nuclear weapon against Ukrainian military targets or a city, with the aim of shocking Kyiv into surrender or acceptance of partial Russian occupation would represent a far greater transgression.

The range of responses in that case would include further sanctions, including secondary sanctions targeting anyone or any country buying Russian oil. Stepping up arms supplies to Kyiv, including longer range missiles and jets the Ukrainians have been demanding, is another option.

Actual Nato strikes against Russian military targets in Ukraine, would represent a huge leap, turning the conflict into a war between Russia and Nato, something policymakers have spent nearly 80 years trying to prevent.

“The reaction to nuclear use would be just as important as the nuclear use itself,” Mariana Budjeryn, senior research associate at the project on managing the atom at the Harvard Kennedy School’s Belfer Centre.

“If it does force Ukraine into some kind of settlement and the allies think we’re throwing in the towel on this, then it does show that hey, nuclear arms really get you what you want,” Budjeryn said.

“If nuclear weapons are used, and that only makes everyone a lot more upset and hardens the resolve and somehow stops Russia in its tracks, then it’s a different story.”