

# Russian Official: West Could Trigger Nuclear War Over Ukraine



Delegates from Russia attend the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference in New York City, New York, U.S.

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Russia has dismissed the "utterly unfounded" speculations that it may use nuclear weapons in Ukraine, saying it would only use its nuclear arsenal in response to "direct aggression" by NATO countries over the ongoing conflict in the former Soviet state.

Russian diplomat Alexander Trofimov made the remark at the Tenth Review Conference for the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which was held at the United Nations on Tuesday.

He said the conflict in Ukraine did not warrant Russia's use of nuclear weapons, but Moscow could decide to use them in response to the use of weapons of mass destruction or a nuclear weapon attack that threatened the existence of the Russian state.

"None of these two hypothetical scenarios is relevant to the situation in Ukraine," the Russian diplomat said.

Trofimov further accused NATO countries of a "fierce hybrid confrontation" against Russia that now "dangerously balances on the edge of open military clash."

"Such a move would be able to trigger one of the two emergency scenarios described in our doctrine," he said. "We obviously stand for preventing this, but if Western countries try to test our resolve, Russia will not back

down." Russia began the military offensive in Ukraine on February 24. Since then, the United States and its Western allies have stepped up military support for Ukraine, sending a wide array of weapons to the country.

The Russian foreign ministry said on Tuesday that the United States was directly involved in the ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Russia has also previously accused the United States of coordinating military operations in Ukraine, saying the move amounts to Washington's direct involvement in military action against Moscow.

Separately on Tuesday, Russia said it was ready for talks with the United States on nuclear arms control, despite the ongoing standoff between Moscow and Washington over Ukraine.

Kremlin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov made the announcement a day after US President Joe Biden said Washington was open to talks on a new arms control deal to replace the New START treaty after it expires in 2026.

Peskov said such negotiations were long overdue, emphasizing that, "Moscow has repeatedly spoken about the necessity to start such talks as soon as possible as there is little time left."

"If the treaty expires without being re-

placed with a solid deal, it will negatively impact global security and stability, primarily in the areas of arms control," he added.

Peskov further noted that Russia had called for an early launch of the talks, but "until that moment, it has been the US that has shown no interest in substantive contacts on the issue."

He also stressed that negotiations on a new arms control pact could only be held "on the basis of mutual respect and taking into account mutual concerns."

In a statement on Monday, Biden voiced readiness to "expeditiously negotiate a new arms control framework to replace New START when it expires in 2026." However, he said Russia's "brutal aggression" against 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," he added.

New START was inked between Washington and Moscow in 2010 under Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev, the then-presidents of the US and Russia. Moscow and Washington agreed to extend the New START treaty in early 2021.

The treaty allows the two states to have no more than 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads and 700 deployed missiles and bombers. It also envisages a strict compliance verification process. Moscow and Washington hadn't started discussions about the pact's possible replacement until Russia sent troops into Ukraine in late February.

U.S. Responsible for Ukrainian 'War Crimes'

On Tuesday, Russia's Defense Ministry said that Washington bears "political, criminal, and moral responsibility" for "war crimes" committed by the Ukrainian military.

The statement came in response to an interview by a top Ukrainian spy, who revealed that Kiev consults with Washington before using U.S.-made HIMARS multiple launch rocket systems and that Washington actually has veto power over decision-making, RT reported.

## Congo Expels UN Peacekeeping Mission Spokesman After Protests



Thirty-six people, including four UN peacekeepers, were killed last week during protests against the missions.

KINSHASA (Dispatches) - The Democratic Republic of the Congo on Wednesday asked the spokesman for the United Nations peacekeeping mission, MONUSCO, to leave the country, blaming him for fueling tensions that led to deadly protests this week.

Thirty-six people, including four UN peacekeepers, were killed last week when hundreds of protesters vandalized and set fire to mission buildings in several cities in the region, east of the country.

Civilians accuse the mission, which has been in operation for more than 10 years, of failing to protect them from the armed gang violence that has long plagued the area.

The government says the spokesperson, Mathias Gillmann, made "lack of transparency and inappropriate" statements, which contributed to tensions between the people and MONUSCO.

"The Congolese government considers that the official's presence on national territory is unlikely to foster an atmosphere of mutual trust and calm between the Congolese and MONUSCO organizations," the statement said. Gillmann and deputy spokesman for

MONUSCO did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The Congolese government also said this week that it would reevaluate the mission's withdrawal plan following the protests, a decision MONUSCO said it supported.

Foreign Minister Christophe Lutundula said the mission would withdraw by 2024 according to a plan outlined last year but the government aims to hasten its departure.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres spoke to President Felix Tshisekedi of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and apologized for Sunday's incident, where UN peacekeepers opened fire and killed two residents in a border town.

In a phone conversation, Guterres conveyed his condolences and apologized for the incident, said Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for Guterres.

The secretary-general said the United Nations is totally committed to peace and to coordinating and working with the Congolese armed forces, and that effective dialogue is needed to solve the situation and bring about stability in eastern DRC, according to the spokesman.

## News in Brief

LONDON (Middle East Eye) - The British coastguard denied assistance to a UK lifeboat trying to rescue 86 migrants in the Mediterranean in May, citing a potential "political fallout" over getting "too involved", the paper has found. Communication logs from the night of 29 May show that Aurora, a lifeboat owned by UK charity Search and Rescue Relief, responded to a distress call from migrants off the North African coast, after their boat began to sink. There were 20 children on board. As Aurora set off to rescue the migrant boat, which was about to capsize, the UK coastguard communicated that getting "too involved" in the rescue presented a "potential risk to rep" for the coastguard.

ABUJA (Reuters) - Nigeria's military will use maximum firepower to uproot the armed groups that are behind mounting insecurity in the country, the airforce said on Wednesday, amid concerns that the situation, if unchecked, could impact a general election in February. Attacks by Takfirir insurgents in the northeast and kidnappings for ransom and killings of villagers in the northwest have become an almost daily occurrence in Nigeria. But the militants have carried a number of attacks outside their northeastern enclave, raising fears that their networks may be spreading to other parts of the country. Nigerian Air Force (NAF) head Air Marshal Oladayo Amao told commanders during a Tuesday meeting that the security situation "remains fluid and uncertain" with armed groups moving between northern states, a statement released by NAF on Wednesday said.

## EU Facing Winter Energy Crisis, Borrell Warns



Russia stands poised to further cement its position as Europe's top supplier.

BRUSSELS (RT) - The EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell has warned that the EU may run out of gas during the upcoming winter season amid supply shortages.

"Europe is facing a perfect storm: energy prices are up, economic growth is down and winter is coming," the EU's high representative for foreign affairs and security policy wrote, in a blog published on the website of the Diplomatic Service

of the EU. There is "real uncertainty" over whether the EU will have enough gas and whether it will be able to afford it, Borrell said in the piece, titled "Europe's energy balancing act," describing the upcoming winter as "exceptional."

His comments come amid a reduced flow of natural gas from Russia, a major supplier to the bloc. Borrell warned that countries of the

continent must prepare for a possible total cut-off by Moscow, and suggested that Europe has struggled to replace Russian supplies.

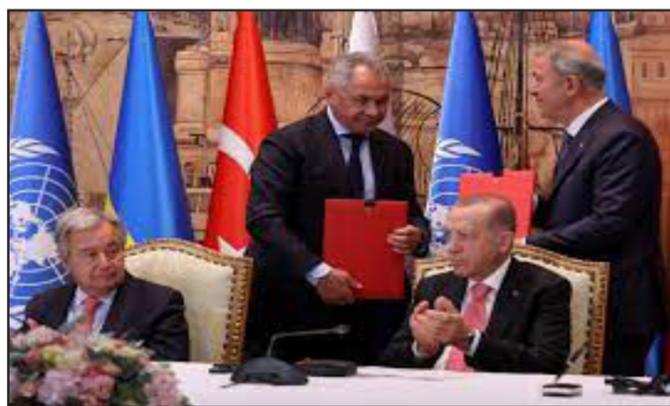
"The hard truth is that for this winter, we are approaching the limits of what extra gas we can buy from non-Russian sources. So, the bulk will have to come from energy savings, i.e. demand reduction," he wrote.

Last month the EU approved a plan that would see member states voluntarily reduce their gas consumption by 15%, to enable the bloc to accumulate the fuel ahead of winter. In case of an emergency, the voluntary reduction may become mandatory.

Action by Borrell, the bloc has managed to reduce the share of Russian gas in its imports from 40% at the beginning of the year to around 20% today, by buying more LNG and receiving gas via pipelines from Norway, Algeria and Azerbaijan.

Russia has repeatedly said it remains a reliable supplier and honors its contractual obligations, but that international sanctions are preventing pipeline operator Gazprom from delivering gas to the EU at full capacity.

## Schroeder: Ukraine-Russia Grain Deal Could Expand Into Ceasefire



Kyiv and Moscow signed a deal on Friday to free up Ukrainian grain exports that have been blocked since February.

BERLIN (Al-Jazeera) - The deal between Ukraine and Russia to unblock Ukrainian grain exports may offer a way forward to a possible ceasefire in the five-month conflict, said former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, a friend of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"The good news is that the Kremlin wants a negotiated solution," Schroeder told Stern weekly and broadcasters RTL/ntv on Wednesday, adding he had met Putin in Moscow last week.

"A first success is the grain deal, perhaps that can be slowly expanded to a ceasefire," he said.

The Razoni, the first grain-carrying ship with left Ukrainian ports in wartime with more than 26,000 tonnes of corn, safely anchored off Turkey's coast on Tuesday.

An inspection team of Turkish, Ukrainian, Russian and UN officials - working under the Joint Control Centre (JCC) - started to inspect the vessel on Wednesday.

After the checks are complete, it will sail off towards the Lebanese city of Tripoli.

The easing of Russia's blockade has raised hopes that a growing food crisis, in which millions in the world face hunger, can be thwarted.

If the first shipment reaches its final destination without obstacles, 16 other ships are expected to leave Ukraine to export grain to the world market.

The move was made possible earlier this month when Russian defense minister Sergei Shoigu and Ukrainian infrastructure minister Oleksandr Kubrakov signed agreements with UN and Turkish officials on reopening blocked Black Sea delivery routes.

Schroeder also said solutions to problems such as Crimea could be found over time, "maybe not over 99 years, like Hong Kong, but in the next generation".

He said an alternative to NATO membership for Ukraine might be armed neutrality, like Austria. The future of the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine, the scene of fierce fighting, however, was more complicated, he said.

"A solution based on the Swiss cantonal model will have to be found," he said, adding it would have to be seen if Putin would go back to a pre-war "contact line" in a ceasefire.

Schroeder, chancellor from 1998 to 2005, has criticized the war in Ukraine but refused to condemn Putin, whom he still calls a close personal friend.

Distancing himself from Putin now would not help the situation, he said.

## Sri Lanka Leader Proposes 25-Year Plan for Crisis-Hit Nation

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Sri Lanka's new president said Wednesday that his government is preparing a national policy roadmap for the next 25 years that aims to cut public debt and turn the country into a competitive export economy as it seeks a way out of its economic disaster.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe in his speech to Parliament said Sri Lanka needs long-term solutions and a strong foundation to stop a recurrence of economic crises.

Massive public protests have blamed Wickremesinghe's ousted predecessor, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, and his powerful family for years of mismanagement and corruption that have bankrupted the nation and led to unprecedented shortages of essential imports like fuel, medicine and cooking gas. But many are still skeptical of Wickremesinghe and accuse him of trying to protect the former leader and his relatives.

Sri Lanka announced in April that it is suspending repayment of foreign loans. Its total foreign debt is \$51 billion, of which it must pay \$28 billion by 2027.

Wickremesinghe said his government had initiated negotiations with the International Monetary Fund on a four-year rescue plan and had commenced the finalization of a debt restructuring plan.

Wickremesinghe had said earlier that negotiations with the

IMF have been difficult because of Sri Lanka's bankruptcy and that an expected early August target for an agreement with the agency was not possible and is now expected in September because of social unrest in the country.

He said the hardships had eased somewhat with reduced power cuts, fertilizers being brought in for cultivation and cooking gas distribution improving.

Instead of relying on foreign loans for fuel imports, Sri Lanka should initiate a system where export income and foreign workers' remittances are used for purchases, Wickremesinghe said.

"We also have to limit selected imports in order to balance the payments for fuel. On the other hand, fuel supply has to be curtailed. These hardships would need to be borne until the end of this year."

He thanked neighboring India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi for giving Sri Lanka a breath of life by providing timely assistance through credit lines and loans to buy food, medicine and fuel.

Wickremesinghe said the government's aim is to create a surplus in the primary budget by the year 2025 and to bring down public debt, currently at 140% of GDP, to less than 100% by 2032.

MOSCOW (AP) — A massive fire engulfed a warehouse outside Moscow on Wednesday, killing at least one person, injuring 13 others and leaving two missing, officials said. The fire, at a warehouse belonging to Russia's leading online retailer, Ozon, affected an area of 50,000 square meters (540,000 square feet). Emergencies officials said that one person died in the fire, and Moscow region Gov. Andrei Vorobyov said that two people are unaccounted-for. Officials said that two of the injured were hospitalized. Huge plumes of black smoke rose into the skies over the area near the town of Istra northwest of Moscow.

AMSTERDAM (Reuters) - The Dutch government on Wednesday declared a water shortage, following an unusually dry summer with no rain forecast for the coming two weeks. Brutal heatwaves gripped large parts of Europe and the United States last month, bringing about calls for more efforts to tackle global warming, which scientists say makes spells of extremely hot weather more frequent and deadly. With two-thirds of the Dutch population living below sea level, droughts can quickly become an acute problem in the Netherlands, leading to rivers silting up and hampering water traffic.

ATHENS (Reuters) - The head of Greek intelligence told a parliamentary committee his agency had spied on a journalist, two sources present said, in a disclosure that coincides with growing pressure on the government to shed light on the use of surveillance malware. The committee's closed-door hearing last week was called after the leader of the socialist opposition PASOK party lodged a complaint with top court prosecutors over an attempted bugging of his mobile phone with surveillance software.