

Study: Ukraine War Has Changed Russia's Nuclear Thinking



Kyiv Mayor Vitalii Klitschko shows the warhead of a Kh-47 Kinzhal Russian hypersonic missile shot down in Kyiv, Ukraine May 12, 2023.

LONDON (Reuters) -- The war in Ukraine has dented Russia's confidence in its conventional forces and increased the importance to Moscow of non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNWs) as a means of deterring and defeating NATO in a potential future conflict, a leading Western think-tank said on Monday.

NSNWs include all nuclear weapons with a range of up to 5,500 km (3,400 miles), starting with tactical arms designed for use on the battlefield - as opposed to longer-range strategic nuclear weapons that Russia or the U.S. could use to strike each other's homeland.

Monday's report by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) raised the question of whether Russia might be emboldened to fire a NSNW in the belief that the West lacks the resolve to deliver a nuclear response.

"The Russian perception of the lack of credible Western will to use nuclear weapons or to accept casualties in conflict further reinforces Russia's aggressive NSNW thought and doctrine," it said.

It said the logic of using a NSNW would be to escalate a conflict in a controlled fashion, "either to prevent the U.S. and NATO from engaging, or to coerce them into war

termination on Russian terms". Moscow denies wielding nuclear threats but several of President Vladimir Putin's statements since the onset of the war in Ukraine have been interpreted as such in the West - starting on day one of the Ukraine war when he warned of "consequences that you have never faced in your history" for anyone who tried to hinder or threaten Russia.

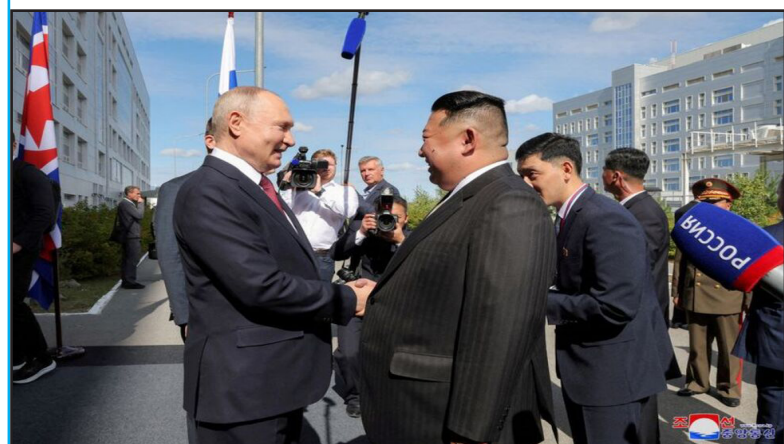
His warnings, however, have not prevented the U.S. and its NATO allies from providing massive military aid to Ukraine including advanced weapons systems that were unthinkable at the start of the war.

Putin has resisted hawkish calls to alter Russia's stated doctrine, which allows for nuclear use in the event of "aggression against the Russian Federation with conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is threatened". But he has shifted Russia's stance on key nuclear treaties and said he is deploying tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus.

Western analysts and policymakers have been closely tracking a debate among Russian military experts about whether Moscow should lower its threshold for nuclear use.

Last year, for example, Russian analyst Sergei Karaganov spoke of the need to threaten nuclear strikes in Europe in order to intimidate and "sober up" Moscow's enemies.

Kremlin: Putin May Visit North Korea 'in Foreseeable Future'



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un meets Russia's President Vladimir Putin at the Vostochny Cosmodrome in the Amur Oblast of the Far East Region, Russia, September 13, 2023.

SEOUL (Reuters) -- Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed his willingness to visit Pyongyang soon when he met with North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui in Russia last week, North Korea's state news agency KCNA reported.

Putin also thanked North Korean leader Kim Jong Un for his invitation to visit, KCNA said, citing North Korea's foreign minister's assistant office.

It would be the Russian leader's first trip to North Korea in more than two decades.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Monday that Russia hoped a Putin visit to North Korea, at Kim's invitation, would take place "in the foreseeable future", but he said no date had yet been agreed.

KCNA's Korean-language report on Sunday suggested Putin intended to visit soon, but its later English report said he was "willing" to do so at an early date.

During Choe's visit, Russia thanked North Korea for its support and solidarity in its Ukraine military

operation, KCNA said.

Moscow and Pyongyang also expressed serious concern over provocative acts by the United States and its allies against North Korea's sovereign rights, while agreeing to cooperate in dealing with the regional situation, the report said.

The cooperation between Pyongyang and Moscow will be in line with the spirit of the UN Charter and other international laws, it added.

After taking over from Boris Yeltsin in 1999, Putin visited Pyongyang in July 2000 for a meeting with Kim Jong Il, the father of Kim Jong Un.

The Russian president accepted Kim's invite when they met in Russia for a summit in September, Peskov said previously.

Kim and Putin's growing ties in recent years have worried Washington and its allies who have condemned arms trade between the two countries as a violation of multiple UN Security Council resolutions.

Pyongyang's transfer of ballistic missiles and other weapons to Russia for use against Ukraine and its continued development of nuclear and ballistic missile programs demand attention and coordinated action, Jung Pak, U.S. senior official for North Korea, said at a meeting with the nuclear envoys of South Korea and Japan in Seoul on Thursday.

Chinese Comic Strip Warns of Foreign Threat to Rare Earths

BEIJING (Reuters) -- China's chief intelligence agency posted on social media a comic strip featuring foreign-looking characters secretly extracting rare earths, in a story portraying the country's strategic metals under threat from covetous "overseas organizations".

The comic strip, published on the State Security Ministry's official WeChat account, showed security officers uncovering "suspicious" exploration and mapping activities by a group of people supposedly doing survey work for real estate development.

No foreign government or agencies were named in the comic strip, and the ministry did not specify any measures to counter foreign "interest" in China's rare earths.

China, the world's largest producer of rare earths accounting for nearly 90% of global refined output, last year introduced restrictions on exports of the elements germanium and gallium, used widely in the chip-making sector, citing the need to protect national security and interests.

It also banned the export of technology to make rare earth magnets, in addition a ban on technology to extract and separate rare earths.

The restrictions have fanned fears that the supply of rare earths might ignite tensions with the West, particularly the United States, which accuses China of using economic coercion to influence other countries. Beijing denies the claim.

The United States has previously imposed restrictions on China's access to advanced chips and chip-making tools

that could fuel breakthroughs in artificial intelligence and sophisticated computers for its military.

Rare earths, used widely in lasers, military equipment and consumer electronics, have grown in demand along with the rapid development of new energy vehicles, wind power and inverter air conditioners.

"As technology grows in leaps and bounds, some primary minerals have become rare strategic resources," a police character in the comic said.

"China boasts rich resources of these minerals. Overseas organizations have already had their eyes on them."

Set in fictional Xishan Mining Area - described as an area rich in critical and scarce mineral deposits that could bring breakthroughs in super-semiconductor technology - the comic depicts two officers that were sent to the area undercover as lost hikers to gather information.

State-controlled Global Times described the comic as underscoring the importance of safeguarding key mineral resources as China-U.S. trade frictions and global geopolitical tensions have turned the global competition for rare earths into an issue of national security.

The newspaper said the United States, Japan and the European Union, among others, have for a long time "coveted China's rare earth mineral resources".

"They have even resorted to infiltration, bribery, and espionage to achieve their goals," Global Times said, quoting Li Baiyang, an associate professor of intelligence studies at Nanjing University.

Storm Isha Paralyzes Life in UK, Ireland



A car drives through flood water after heavy rain from Storm Isha, Swynnerton, Britain, January 22, 2024.

LONDON (Guardian) -- One person has died and tens of thousands of people remain without power after Storm Isha wreaked havoc across the UK with gusts as high as 107mph.

The wild weather led to widespread power cuts. About 40,000 households in Northern Ireland were without power on Monday morning, down from a height of 53,000.

In Scotland 1,000 households were without power and in Cumbria, one of the worst-hit English counties, there were about 8,000 homes without. Electricity North West said the estimated restoration time was 5pm Tuesday, but this was a "worse-case scenario".

Widespread power cuts in the Republic of Ireland were affecting more than 170,000 properties.

The entire UK was subject to Met Office wind warnings on Monday although the freakishly high gusts recorded overnight were not expected to return. They included 107mph on the Tay Road Bridge at Dundee, recorded by Transport Scotland and 99mph at Brizlee Wood, an air defense radar station in Northumberland.

The winds brought down trees across the UK including three at the Dark Hedges, a tunnel of beech trees in County Antrim made famous by their appearance on

Game of Thrones.

Fallen trees badly affected transport. Traffic Scotland reported that stretches of the M9 and M74 were among roads closed throughout the night, while the A1 southbound was closed at Thorntonloch due to an overturned lorry.

Numerous ferry crossings and flights were cancelled because of the storm.

There were also aborted landings at airports in the UK and Ireland, and many more scary ones.

A rare red warning for wind in north-east Scotland was in place until 5am on Monday, with amber warnings covering much of the UK until 6am and further yellow warnings covering the entire country until noon.

A further yellow warning for wind for Scotland, Northern Ireland, north Wales and northern England was active from 4pm on Tuesday until noon on Wednesday.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland said the weather was putting "significant pressure" on the 999 system and urged people to report non-emergencies online or by calling 101.

Storm Isha is the ninth named storm to hit the UK since the season began in September. The worst of the windy weather was over for the week, the Met Office said.

Hundreds of Thousands Protest Right-Wing Extremism in Germany



People gather in front of the Reichstag building, seat of the lower house of parliament Bundestag, to protest against right-wing extremism in Berlin, Jan. 21, 2024.

FRANKFURT/BERLIN (Reuters) -- Hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets across towns and cities in Germany this weekend as the country enters a second week of nationwide protests against the right-wing AfD party.

Demonstrations have gained momentum after reports emerged from investigative news website Correctiv of a meeting of right-wing extremists in Potsdam at which migration policies including mass deportations of people of foreign origin were discussed.

The AfD, which is polling second in nationwide surveys, has denied the reported migration plans are party policy.

Rallies were held in Berlin, Munich and Cologne, as well as in more traditional AfD voting strongholds in eastern Germany such as Leipzig and Dresden, with turnout in many places far higher than expected.

Organizers in Munich ended the demonstration early due to overcrowding with around 100,000 participants, according to police. Protest organizers said 200,000 people attended. At the start of the event in Berlin, there were 30,000 people and the number was growing, police said.

Several tens of thousands also took to the streets in Cologne and Bremen on Sunday. Event organizers estimated around 300,000 people demonstrated nationwide on Saturday.

"It's a signal to the world that we won't let this happen without commenting on it," said protestor Steffi Kirschenmann, a social counselor based in Frankfurt, one of tens of thousands that gathered peacefully in sub-zero temperatures in Frankfurt's centre on Saturday.

Lord Mayor of Frankfurt, Mike Josef, addressed crowds on Roemer Square, which he reminded protesters was the same spot where the Nazi regime had burnt books.

Business leaders have voiced their concerns, with Siemens Energy supervisory board chairman Joe Kaeser telling Reuters the reports trigger "bitter memories".

President Frank-Walter Steinmeier has seen the rallies across Germany against right-wing extremism as a sign of strength. In a video message distributed on Sunday, Steinmeier said: "You are standing up against misanthropy and right-wing extremism, these people encourage us all."

He called for an alliance of all democrats, saying "Let's show that we are stronger together."

News in Brief

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- Two U.S. Navy SEALs who went missing in the Gulf of Aden earlier this month during a raid on a boat have not been located following an exhaustive search and their status has been changed to deceased, military officials said on Monday. The SEALs were reported missing after boarding the vessel in a Jan. 11 operation near the coast of Somali, the U.S. Central Command said on X. A joint operation carried out by the United States, Spain and Japan searched more than 21,000 square miles of ocean for the missing SEALs, CENTCOM said in the statement. That mission had now become a recovery operation, CENTCOM said. U.S. Central Command forces on Saturday claimed that they struck a Yemeni anti-ship missile that was aimed into the Gulf of Aden and prepared to launch, the U.S. military said. Yemeni armed forces have claimed their attacks on Israeli ships are aimed at supporting the Palestinians in Gaza.

ROCHESTER, N.H. (AP) -- Donald Trump set aside months of criticism and mockery of Ron DeSantis on Sunday night, celebrating his onetime Republican rival as his newest supporter after the Florida governor ended his presidential campaign and endorsed the former president. "I just want to thank Ron and congratulate him on doing a very good job," Trump said at the outset of his remarks. "He was very gracious, and he endorsed me. I appreciate that, and I also look forward to working with Ron." Trump described DeSantis as "a really terrific person." Earlier in the day, DeSantis said via video that he would be ending his campaign two days before New Hampshire's first-in-the-nation GOP primary. "I signed a pledge to support the Republican nominee, and I will honor that pledge," he said, before adding a dig at the remaining contender, Nikki Haley. DeSantis described the former UN ambassador and onetime South Carolina governor as a stand-in for "the old Republican guard of yesteryear, a repackaged form of warmed-over corporatism."

MOSCOW (Reuters) -- Russia is taking all "necessary measures" to defend its citizens and key infrastructure from Ukrainian attacks, the Kremlin said on Monday, a day after Moscow accused Kyiv's forces of killing 27 people in shelling of a Russian-held city in eastern Ukraine. Also on Sunday Russian company Novatek was forced to suspend some operations at a huge Baltic Sea fuel export terminal after what Ukrainian media said was the latest in a series of Ukrainian drone strikes on Russian energy facilities. "The (Russian) Ministry of Defense, our air defense assets, other relevant agencies are taking necessary measures to protect against this kind of terrorist attack," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told a regular news briefing. "The Kyiv regime is continuing to show its vicious side in that they are striking civilian infrastructure. They are striking people, civilians," he said, branding Sunday's attack on the city of Donetsk a "heinous act of terrorism".

BEIJING (Reuters) -- A Chinese research vessel is on its way to the Maldives, according to an Indian military official and an independent researcher, as new Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu deepens ties with Beijing, distancing from New Delhi. It is likely to raise concern in New Delhi, which has previously viewed the presence of such vessels close to its shores, including in Sri Lanka in 2022, as problematic. These vessels are not military ships, officially, but India and others worry about the military use of their research. Relations between traditional friends New Delhi and Male have soured since President Muizzu took office in November riding an "India Out" campaign. Both New Delhi and Beijing vie for influence on the tiny Indian Ocean nation but the new government in Male is pivoting towards China and has asked India to withdraw its nearly 80 troops stationed there.

GENEVA (Reuters) -- The global fight against malaria took a stride forward on Monday as Cameroon launched the world's first routine vaccine program against the mosquito-borne disease that is projected to save tens of thousands of children's lives per year across Africa. Around 40 years in the making, the World Health Organization (WHO)-approved RTS,S vaccine developed by British drugmaker GSK is meant to work alongside existing tools such as bed nets to combat malaria, which in Africa kills nearly half a million children under the age of five each year. After successful trials, including in Ghana and Kenya, Cameroon is the first country to administer doses through a routine program that 19 other countries aim to roll out this year, according to global vaccine alliance Gavi. Around 6.6 million children in these countries are targeted for malaria vaccination through 2024-25.

BEIJING (Reuters) -- A landslide in China's Yunnan province killed eight people on Monday and dozens were missing as rescue operations continued in snowy, freezing temperatures. At least 47 people from 18 households were missing, state-owned China Central Television (CCTV) reported. Eight of the missing people had been found dead on Monday afternoon, according to Zhaotong Daily, a local state-owned media outlet. Another two people were hospitalized for injuries to the head and body, the national health commission said. The landslide hit two villages in the southwestern city of Zhaotong at about 5:51 a.m. (2151 GMT), covering houses in brown mountain soil at the foot of a hill, state-owned China Central Television (CCTV) reported.