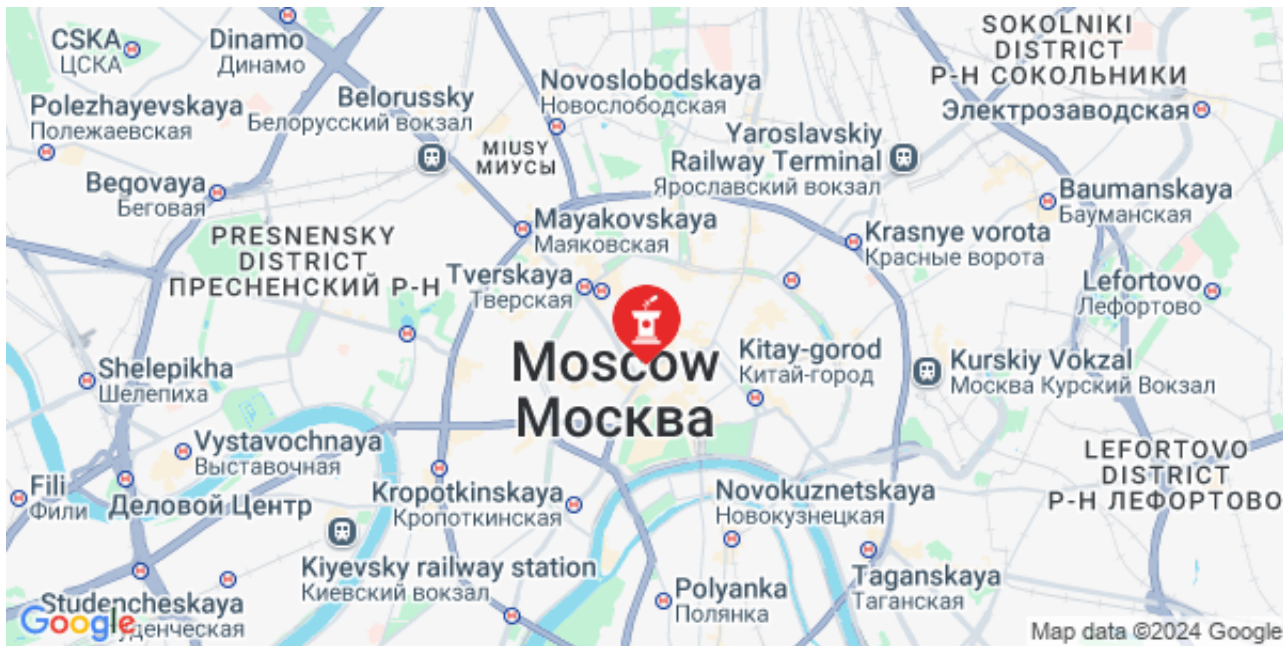




## Politics



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### **Russia & Ukraine Alert: President Putin lowers threshold for response in revised nuclear doctrine on September 25; unlikely to be reflective of readiness to deploy nuclear weapons**

#### Current Situation

- During a September 25 session of the Russian Security Council, President Vladimir Putin revised the national nuclear doctrine by expanding the threats under which the Kremlin would transition to the use of nuclear weapons.
- According to the amended doctrine, Moscow will consider “aggression against Russia by any non-nuclear state, but with the participation or support of a nuclear state” as a “joint attack” on Russia. However, the revised document does not specify whether such an attack will trigger a nuclear counterattack.
- Moreover, “reliable” intelligence confirming a “massive” imminent attack using conventional weapons targeting Russian territory and/or close ally Belarus will warrant the Kremlin’s use of nuclear weapons.
- President Putin cited the revision to emerging threats and risks against Russia, adding that Moscow could respond to a conventional attack threatening its “sovereignty” by transitioning to the use of nuclear weapons.
- Russia’s current nuclear doctrine proposed the use of nuclear weapons to respond to attacks using nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction (WMD) against Russia and/or its allies, as well as during major conventional attacks threatening national security.

- The announcement comes amid ongoing discussions in the UK and the USA over authorizing Ukraine's use of Western-provided long-range weapons to target military sites within Russian territory.
- Meanwhile, on September 25, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky cited domestic intelligence to confirm that Russian strikes would target three operational Ukrainian nuclear power plants (NPPs) in Khmelnytskyi, Mykolaiv, and Rivne before winter 2024.
- President Zelensky added that Russia was reportedly surveilling these NPPs using unspecified Chinese satellites. The warning was issued during President Zelensky's address to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and General Assembly (UNGA).

**Source:** [Kremlin.ru](https://kremlin.ru)

## Assessments & Forecast

1. The Kremlin's decision to lower its threshold for the use of nuclear weapons is likely aimed at deterring increased Western support for Ukraine by instilling fear of a potential nuclear confrontation. This is especially true, considering that Moscow has expressed concerns over the ongoing policy deliberations in the UK and the USA regarding Ukrainian long-range strikes into Russian territory.
2. Moreover, the announcement aligns with the precedent of Moscow engaging in escalatory nuclear rhetoric ahead of/during notable political discussions regarding the conflict, especially those that involve the West reiterating its sustained support for Kyiv. This is evidenced by Putin announcing the resumption of intermediate-range missile production on June 28 as Kyiv secured multiple long-term security guarantees from the West on June 27, as well as Moscow's May 8 announcement of tactical nuclear weapon drills amid discussions on potential Western troop deployment in Ukraine and before the June 15-16 Ukraine Peace Summit in Switzerland.
3. **FORECAST:** Given this, coupled with the major consequences of a potential nuclear attack, the revised doctrine is unlikely to be reflective of Moscow's readiness to use nuclear weapons targeting Ukraine or any other country. Potential global and domestic repercussions, as well as national security and humanitarian consequences, will further deter Moscow from shifting to nuclear weapons. Amid persistent domestic opposition from hardline critics of President Putin over the lax Russian nuclear doctrine, Moscow is likely to continue engaging in escalatory nuclear rhetoric, attempting to portray itself as being serious about a potential nuclear confrontation.
4. Although the revision reportedly aimed to provide "clarifications" regarding the Kremlin's right to use nuclear weapons, the document remains largely open to interpretation. Indeed, the lack of clarity regarding a Russian nuclear counterattack if targeted by Western missiles and whether the response will be limited against the aggressor alone validates this. The vagueness of Russia's nuclear doctrine is likely to be a deliberate move, considering this provides the Kremlin sufficient scope for modifications.
5. **FORECAST:** The revision of the doctrine is liable to push the UK and the USA to limit the scope of or wholly restrict Ukrainian long-range strikes into Russian territory in the near term. This is backed by the precedent of NATO refusing to deploy Western troops in Ukraine after Moscow's May 8 announcement of tactical nuclear weapon drills in Russia.
6. **FORECAST:** While initial reactions from Western political-military experts toward the revision acknowledge the seriousness of Moscow's announcement, they are unlikely to prompt the West from completely withdrawing sustained support for Kyiv even if they deny long-range strikes into Russia. That said, the potential for the move to persuade the West to encourage Ukraine to enter peace talks with Russia in the medium term cannot be ruled out. Indeed, the conflict's continued strain on Western military stockpiles and finances is anticipated to expedite such calls. Moreover, the Kremlin's September 23 announcement expressing its willingness to study the terms of Kyiv's "Victory Plan" – a proposal aimed at strengthening Ukraine's future negotiating position – is likely to possibly set the stage for such a dialogue.
7. **FORECAST:** Despite President Zelensky's warning of a potential Russian attack targeting the three operational Ukrainian NPPs, Moscow is unlikely to carry out such a strike, as discussed

above. That said, Russia is anticipated to engage in aerial strikes, including massive barrages of missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), targeting Ukrainian energy infrastructure ahead of and during winter 2024. Based on the precedent of such strikes carried out during winter seasons in 2022 and 2023, repaired and operational hydroelectric power plants (HPPs) and thermal power plants (TPPs) remain particularly vulnerable to such attacks, given their widespread impact on power supply.

## Recommendations

### Russia

1. Avoid all travel to the Kursk region in Russia due to the reported incursion and State of Emergency announced by authorities.
2. Avoid nonessential travel to Russia due to the underlying threat of military mobilization, arbitrary detention, and increased risk of spillover violence in regions bordering Ukraine.
3. Remain cognizant of authorities' updates regarding travel prohibitions on individuals deemed eligible for military conscription.
4. Foreign citizens in Moscow and other areas in western Russia are advised to review evacuation plans in case of emergencies.
5. It is recommended to have emergency plans in place in case of further deterioration in the security landscape.
6. Foreign companies operating in Russia are advised to remain cognizant of government regulations and decrees that pose risks to business continuity and operations.
7. Avoid discussions concerning the political, economic, and military situation, even with friends and family.
8. Avoid meeting strangers, discussing the political situation, or using any anti-Russia rhetoric in public.
9. Those intending to travel between Russia and its neighboring European countries are advised to remain cognizant of authorities' updates regarding land border restrictions. Review options for departing Russia, including air, rail, and land routes, with the understanding that certain options may become unavailable with short notice.

### Ukraine

1. Avoid all travel to Ukraine due to the ongoing hostilities.
2. Those operating in the East, South, and Center of Ukraine are advised to minimize outdoor travel and avoid inter-city travel due to the increase in artillery fire and airstrikes.
3. Avoid all travel to Crimea due to the ongoing conflict and the potential for sporadic attacks on civilian and critical infrastructure facilities.
4. Those continuing to operate in the North and West of Ukraine are advised to adhere to air raid sirens over the coming days due to the heightened threat of missile and UAV attacks by Russian forces.
5. Identify the nearest shelter, which may be a Metro station, and proceed towards it when air sirens are sounded. Prepare emergency kits of food, water, medicine, and clothing in case needed.
6. Considering the heightened risk of unpredictable power outages, take mitigatory measures, such as confirming that business locations have working generators, sufficient access to fuel for longer periods, and access to several flashlights. Keep necessary electronics constantly charged.
7. For more information on the security situation and assistance please contact [intel@max-security.com](mailto:intel@max-security.com)