

In Response to NATO Threat: Russian Armed Forces prepare for Nuclear Onslaught

By [Andrei Kislyakov](#)

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Barely a month into the new year, the military have already attracted a lot of attention. Following a mild verbal skirmish over ABM components after the holidays, Russian and foreign generals have decided to talk in the open.

In a move that mirrors recent discussion amongst Russia's own top brass, NATO's April summit in Bucharest is widely expected to discuss a report on a potential pre-emptive nuclear strike.

According to The Daily Telegraph, the authors of the report are convinced there is a real risk that terrorists could lay their hands on weapons of mass destruction in the near or immediate future. To counter this, the alliance may consider suppressing the enemy with nuclear weapons.

Though the report is likely to cause controversy in NATO countries, the authors appear to be merely echoing an idea originally broached by Russian Chief of General Staff Yury Baluyevsky. Speaking at a meeting of the Academy of Military Sciences on January 19, Gen. Baluyevsky declared that force should be used not only in the course of hostilities, but also to demonstrate the readiness of leaders to uphold their national interests. "We are not going to attack anyone," he reassured his audience, "but we want all our partners to realize that Russia will use armed force to defend its own and its allies' sovereignty and territorial integrity. It may resort to a pre-emptive nuclear strike in cases specified by its doctrine."

It is strange that many esteemed domestic military experts consider this statement simply a repetition of Russia's old military doctrine, which allowed it to use nuclear weapons first. Under the 2000 doctrine, Russia is ready to use nuclear weapons not only in retaliation against a nuclear attack, as was previously the case, but in response to "a large-scale conventional aggression in a situation critical for the national security of the Russian Federation and its allies." This certainly broadens the rules of engagement, but still does not envisage a pre-emptive nuclear strike without hostilities.

Gen. Balulevsky's announcement appears to change this, in which case Russia will need a new military doctrine. This is not a new task. In early March last year, the Security Council press service released a statement saying that the Security Council would revise the 2000 military doctrine to account for new realities. The statement added that the new doctrine would be drafted by the Security Council in conjunction with interested government bodies and a number of scientific institutions.

Baluyevsky thus made his recent statement at an organization which is quite suitable for the drafting of the new doctrine.

If the new doctrine endorses the General Staff's nuclear ideas, we will have new armed forces, with all the ensuing consequences.

First, these forces will become strictly offensive because of the very nature of a pre-emptive strike. This will require totally different mobilization plans and a new approach to recruiting for the Army and Navy. Considering the number and geography of military-political conflicts in which Russia is in some way involved, this will require the deployment of mobilized troops on a territory stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific.

It is not difficult to predict the economic consequences Russia would face in this case. But let's come back to the Armed Forces. Permanent readiness to resolve tasks militarily - by offensive operations in an indefinitely vast number of directions - implies the permanent enhanced combat readiness of all units, without exception. Otherwise the very idea of a pre-emptive strike will not work. For such a policy to be effective, Russia should be ready to deal this strike from a broad diversity of geographical locations on its own territory, neutral air space, and the world's oceans.

If Baluyevsky's words are heeded, Russia will have to equip all services of the Armed Forces with permanently combat-ready nuclear weapons. Nobody can guess who will use them first.

This only concerns tactical, rather than strategic, nuclear weapons. It is clearly impossible to counter terrorist threats in the South-East direction, or neutralize U.S. ABM deployment in Europe with intercontinental ballistic missiles or their submarine counterparts.

In other words, Russia will need a very broad range of non-strategic nuclear weapons. Such weapons are designed to destroy battlefield-targets, rather than entire cities, and could take the form of medium and shorter-range missiles launched from air, land or sea, as well as artillery ammunition and nuclear demolition charges.

Considering that Russia has a huge advantage over the United States in tactical warheads, bilateral relations could become quite complicated if we start deploying our weapons on the ground, in the air and at sea.

It would be natural to ask why Russia is choosing the offensive option, and whether there are alternatives to it. But that is a subject for another discussion.

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