

Nightmare Scenario: Operational Miscalculation Triggering Nuclear War

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Since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Gen. Mark A. Milley, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, have tried to set up phone calls with Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Gen. Valery Gerasimov but the Russians “have so far declined to engage,” said Pentagon spokesman John Kirby in a statement Wednesday, March 23.

“A nightmare scenario would be a Russian missile or attack aircraft that destroys a U.S. command post across the Polish-Ukrainian border,” James Stavridis, a retired admiral who served as the Supreme Allied Commander at NATO from 2009 to 2013, [told the Washington Post](#) [1]. “A local commander might respond immediately, thinking the event was a precursor to a wider attack. This could lead to rapid and irreversible escalation, to include potential use of nuclear weapons.”

According to a [CNN report](#) [2] detailing a rare face-to-face meeting between Russian and US military officials last week, the US believes that the refusal for high-level meetings is due to Kremlin worries that the encounters would show them to be vulnerable if they allowed such meetings, because it risks a tacit admission that an abnormal situation exists, according to the readout of the meeting.

Though the assumption of vulnerability appears misconceived considering while the Pentagon has allegedly attempted to maintain high-level contacts with Russian counterparts, Secretary of State Antony Blinken has not attempted any conversations with his counterpart, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, since the start of the conflict last month.

The real reason the Russian military leadership has allegedly shunned maintaining high-level contacts with the Pentagon’s top brass appears to be the duplicitous and treacherous role played by the transatlantic NATO alliance of significantly escalating the conflict by

substantially increasing the NATO military footprint in Eastern Europe along Russia's western flank, publicly providing billions of dollars' worth lethal weapons to Ukraine's security forces and allied neo-Nazi militias while asininely claiming to be "peacemakers" extending chivalrous courtesies to the arch-rival.

Ahead of the NATO summit attended by President Biden Thursday, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg announced the transatlantic military alliance would double the number of battlegroups it had deployed in Eastern Europe.

"The first step is the deployment of four new NATO battlegroups in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia, along with our existing forces in the Baltic countries and Poland," Stoltenberg said. "This means that we will have eight multinational NATO battlegroups all along the eastern flank, from the Baltic to the Black Sea."

NATO [issued a statement](#) [3] after Thursday's emergency summit attended by Joe Biden and European leaders:

"In response to Russia's actions, we have activated NATO's defense plans, deployed elements of the NATO Response Force, and placed 40,000 troops on our eastern flank, along with significant air and naval assets, under direct NATO command supported by Allies' national deployments. We are also establishing four additional multinational battlegroups in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia."

Last week, President Biden announced an unprecedented package of \$1 billion in military assistance to Ukraine in addition to \$350 million previously pledged which was disbursed within days of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24. The new package includes 800 Stinger anti-aircraft systems, 2,000 anti-armor Javelins, 1,000 light anti-armor weapons, 6,000 AT-4 anti-armor systems and 100 Switchblade kamikaze drones.

Besides providing abundance of anti-aircraft and anti-armor munitions to Ukraine's largely conscript military and allied irregular militias, a senior US administration official [told Reuters](#) [4] Washington and its allies were also working on providing anti-ship weapons to protect Ukraine's coast. Ukrainian forces claimed on Thursday to have blown up a Russian landing ship in a Russian-occupied port.

Nonetheless, what must have exasperated Russia's military leadership is a [secret plan](#) [5] for a "peacekeeping mission" involving 10,000 NATO troops from the member states surreptitiously occupying western Ukraine and imposing a limited no-fly zone over Lviv and rest of towns which is allegedly being prepared by the Polish government.

The plan is seemingly on hiatus due to a disagreement between Polish President Andrzej Duda and Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the deputy prime minister of Poland and the head of Law and Justice (PiS) Party. Duda wants Washington's approval before going ahead, whereas Kaczynski appears desperate to obtain political mileage from the Ukraine crisis.

The prime ministers of Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia traveled via train to the embattled Ukrainian capital of Kyiv and met with President Volodymyr Zelensky on March 15 in a show of support for Ukraine. De facto leader of Poland, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, accompanied them. Speaking on the occasion, Kaczynski said:

"I think that it is necessary to have a peace mission—NATO, possibly some wider

international structure—but a mission that will be able to defend itself, which will operate on Ukrainian territory.”

In response, Russian officials condemned Poland’s proposal to send NATO “peacekeeping forces” into Ukraine as a “very reckless and extremely dangerous” idea that would risk a full-scale war between the alliance and Moscow.

“This will be the direct clash between the Russian and NATO armed forces that everyone has not only tried to avoid but said should not take place in principle,” Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.

Regarding how operational-level miscalculations could lead to all-out war between belligerents, it’s pertinent to recall that on February 7, 2018, US B-52 bombers and Apache helicopters struck a contingent of Syrian government troops and allied forces in Deir al-Zor province of eastern Syria that [reportedly](#) [6] killed and wounded scores of Russian military contractors working for the Russian private security firm, the Wagner Group.

The survivors described the bombing as an absolute massacre, and Moscow lost more Russian nationals in one day than it had lost during its entire military campaign in support of the Syrian government since September 2015.

Washington’s objective in striking Russian contractors was that the US-backed and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) – which is mainly comprised of Kurdish YPG militias – had reportedly handed over the control of some areas east of the Euphrates River to Deir al-Zor Military Council (DMC), which was the Arab-led component of SDF, and had relocated several battalions of Kurdish YPG militias to Afrin and along Syria’s northern border with Turkey in order to defend the Kurdish-held areas against the onslaught of the Turkish armed forces and allied Syrian militant proxies during Ankara’s “Operation Olive Branch” in Syria’s northwest that lasted from January to March 2018.

Syrian forces with the backing of Russian contractors took advantage of the opportunity and crossed the Euphrates River to capture an oil refinery located to the east of the Euphrates River in the Kurdish-held area of Deir al-Zor.

The US Air Force responded with full force, knowing well the ragtag Arab component of SDF – mainly comprised of local Arab tribesmen and mercenaries to make the Kurdish-led SDF appear more representative and inclusive in outlook – was simply not a match for the superior training and arms of the Syrian troops and Russian military contractors, consequently causing a carnage in which scores of Russian nationals lost their lives.

A month after the massacre of Russian military contractors in Syria, on March 4, 2018, Sergei Skripal, a Russian double agent working for the British foreign intelligence service, and his daughter Yulia were found unconscious on a public bench outside a shopping center in Salisbury. A few months later, in July 2018, a British woman, Dawn Sturgess, died after touching the container of the nerve agent that allegedly poisoned the Skripals.

In the case of the Skripals, Theresa May, then the prime minister of the United Kingdom, promptly accused Russia of attempted assassinations and the British government concluded that Skripal and his daughter were poisoned with a Moscow-made, military-grade nerve agent, novichok.

Sergei Skripal was recruited by the British MI6 in 1995, and before his arrest in Russia in

December 2004, he was alleged to have blown the cover of scores of Russian secret agents. He was released in a spy swap deal in 2010 and was allowed to settle in Salisbury. Both Sergei Skripal and his daughter have since recovered and were discharged from hospital in May 2018.

In the aftermath of the Salisbury poisonings in March 2018, the US, UK and several European nations expelled scores of Russian diplomats and Washington ordered the closure of the Russian consulate in Seattle.

In a retaliatory move, Russia also expelled a similar number of American, British and European diplomats, and ordered the closure of American consulate in Saint Petersburg. The number of American diplomatic personnel stationed in Russia drastically dropped from 1,200 before the escalation to 120, and the relations between Moscow and Western powers reached their lowest ebb since the break-up of the former Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War in December 1991.

Notwithstanding, five years following a potentially catastrophic incident that could've inundated Islamic State's former capital Raqqa and many towns downstream Euphrates River in eastern Syria and caused more deaths than the deployment of any weapon of mass destruction, the New York Times [reported in January](#) [7] that at the height of US-led international coalition's war against the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, US B-52 bombers struck Tabqa Dam with 2,000-pound bombs, including at least one bunker-busting bomb that fortunately didn't explode.

In March 2017, alternative media was abuzz with reports that the dam was about to collapse and entire civilian population downstream Euphrates River needed to be urgently evacuated to prevent the inevitable catastrophe. But Washington issued a gag order to the corporate media "not to sensationalize the issue."

The explosive report noted that the dam was contested between the US-backed and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, the Syrian government and the Islamic State. A firefight broke out in which SDF incurred heavy casualties. It was then that a top secret US special operations unit Task Force 9 called for airstrikes on the dam after repeated requests from the Kurdish leadership of the SDF.

"The explosions on March 26, 2017, knocked dam workers to the ground. A fire spread and crucial equipment failed. The flow of the Euphrates River suddenly had no way through, the reservoir began to rise and authorities used loudspeakers to warn people downstream to flee.

"The Islamic State group, the Syrian government and Russia blamed the United States, but the dam was on the US military's 'no-strike list' of protected civilian sites, and the commander of the US offensive at the time, then-Lt. Gen. Stephen J. Townsend, said allegations of US involvement were based on 'crazy reporting.'"

It's worth noting that it was the same rogue Pentagon General Stephen J. Townsend, currently the commander of US AFRICOM and then the commander of Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) - Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) responsible for leading the war against the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, whose "operational miscalculation" was responsible for the reckless confrontation an year later in February 2018 when US B-52 bombers struck Russian military contractors, killing and wounding scores, a tragic incident that brought two nuclear

powers engaged in the Syrian conflict almost to the brink of a full-scale war.

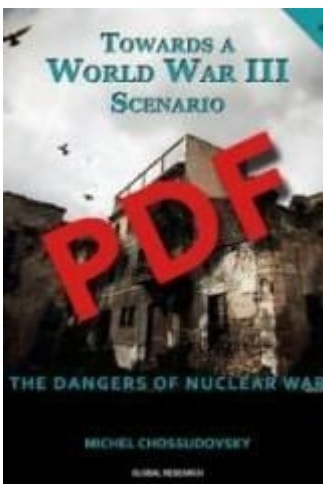
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Notes

- [1] [Top Russian military leaders repeatedly decline calls from US](#)
- [2] [Inside a rare US meeting with a Russian general in Moscow](#)
- [3] [NATO doubles battlegroups in 'Eastern Flank' States](#)
- [4] [Russia signals scaled-back war aims, Ukrainians advance near Kyiv](#)
- [5] [Secret Plan to Send 10,000 NATO "Peacekeeping Troops" Into Ukraine](#)
- [6] [Russian toll in Syria battle was 300 killed and wounded](#)
- [7] [A dam in Syria was on a 'no-strike' list. The US bombed it anyway](#)



["Towards a World War III Scenario: The Dangers of Nuclear War"](#)

by Michel Chossudovsky

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[Michel Chossudovsky](#) is Professor of Economics at the University of Ottawa and Director of the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG), which hosts the critically acclaimed website www.globalresearch.ca. He is a contributor to the Encyclopedia Britannica. His writings have been translated into more than 20 languages.

Reviews

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Michel Chossudovsky exposes the insanity of our privatized war machine. Iran is being targeted with nuclear weapons as part of a war agenda built on distortions and lies for the purpose of private profit. The real aims are oil, financial hegemony and global control. The price could be nuclear holocaust. When weapons become the hottest export of the world’s only superpower, and diplomats work as salesmen for the defense industry, the whole world is recklessly endangered. If we must have a military, it belongs entirely in the public sector. No one should profit from mass death and destruction.

–Ellen Brown, author of ‘Web of Debt’ and president of the Public Banking Institute

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