

What Would Really be Achieved by Russia Using Nuclear Weapons in Ukraine at This Point?

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They'd only advance the political goal of speeding up the resumption of peace talks on more of Russia's terms at major economic, financial, and reputational costs, not to mention risking World War III by miscalculation, since conventional means suffice for responding to all existing military threats.

There's been a lot of talk once again about Russia using nuclear weapons in Ukraine after Putin [declared](#) that a de facto state of war would be in place between his country and NATO if the West let Ukraine use their long-range weapons to hit targets deep inside of Russia. Medvedev also [ominously wrote](#) that the formal grounds for using nukes have already been met per Russian doctrine, contrary to what Karaganov earlier claimed when [calling for doctrinal reforms](#), and suggested that Kiev might soon be obliterated.

The question therefore arises of what would really be achieved by Russia using nuclear weapons in Ukraine at this point. Tactical ones are meant for stopping large-scale and mostly mechanized assaults, but neither side resorts to these anymore much due to how easily drones can stop them, which are paired with minefields and barriers to create formidable obstacles to such advances. Instead, units remain mostly dispersed and don't gather together anymore, which reduces the utility of tactical nukes.

Nevertheless, Ukraine still has bases, logistics facilities, and staging areas where a comparatively larger number of troops and equipment are stationed, and these could prospectively be targeted through those means. That said, they could also be targeted through conventional ones too without crossing the Rubicon of becoming the second country in the world to use these weapons during wartime. This only rarely happens though as proven by Ukrainian troops and equipment continuing to reach the front.

About that, Russia hasn't even attempted to take out a single bridge across the Dnieper thus far, so it wouldn't make sense to resort to tactical nukes to that end when conventional means could suffice if properly utilized in concentration and sequence should the political will ever arise to do so. It hasn't yet and might not ever due to perceived humanitarian/soft power and nebulous post-conflict political goals [continuing to take precedence](#) over immediate military ones.

Nuking those bridges could also risk contaminating all the downstream regions and therefore poisoning them indefinitely, which would pose a very serious risk to the health of Russian residents in Zaporozhye, Kherson, and Crimea, likely resulting in forced evacuations from all three territories. It's difficult to imagine that any Russian decision-maker, let alone

one [as rational as Putin](#), would believe that these hefty costs are worth it when conventional means could suffice as explained above.

Another possibility is nuking Kiev like Medvedev, who has a poor track record of accuracy for predicting Russian policy despite his prestigious position as the Deputy Chair of the Security Council as explained [here](#), hinted could be in the cards. Destroying a large city mostly inhabited by civilians despite the plethora of military and strategic targets there would expose Russia's prior condemnation of the US' nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as hypocritical and lead to universal vilification.

Although Medvedev insists that the already existing formal grounds for using nukes in Ukraine "make sense to the international community" in presumed reference to the Global South, China and India aren't expected to remain silent, to say nothing of approve. It was explained [here](#) that "[they'd] be under immense pressure to distance themselves from Russia, not just by the West, but also for appearance's sake since they wouldn't want to legitimize the use of nuclear weapons by their rivals."

There's also no way that they could uphold their reputations across the world if they didn't come out strongly against Russia's speculative replication of Hiroshima/Nagasaki in Kiev, which could kill hundreds of thousands of people in an instant. Hypothetically speaking, Russia might wager that the complex economic-financial interdependence [between](#) its own economy and those two's (especially regarding the energy trade) could deter them from sanctioning it, but the [EU precedent](#) suggests otherwise.

Nuking Kiev would therefore amount to sending a strong political message at immense economic, financial, and reputational costs with little of military significance to gain from this dramatic decision. In fact, any use of nukes whether tactical or strategic and regardless of the target could lead to China and India feeling pressured into meaningfully distancing themselves from Russia for the aforementioned reason. Russia should accordingly make sure that these costs are worthwhile if it decides to use them.

One of the scenarios in which the cost-benefit calculation might favor this could be the extreme one of dropping dozens of nukes from north to south to the west of the Dnieper in order to create a "green (radioactive) curtain" for stopping any large-scale NATO invasion force that might rush up to the river. At present, however, no credible indications exist to suggest that anything of the sort is being assembled despite continued concerns that this could be employed in the event of a [major Russian breakthrough](#).

The cascading consequences could inadvertently lead to the Third World War that Putin has [worked so hard to avoid](#) till now. It would therefore be done as a last resort out of desperation and only if Russia wanted to stop this advance instead of let it to reach the river to facilitate Ukraine's partition afterwards (unless Russia thought they'd cross it). In fact, using even one nuke at this point would be seen as an act of desperation since it would suggest that Russia can't conventionally respond to battlefield threats.

This might suffice for deterrence and speeding up the resumption of peace talks on more of Russia's terms since NATO might think that it's truly desperate enough to use nukes at scale due to its perceived weakness (whether objectively existing or not), but at tremendous cost to its other interests. Provided that Russia's conventional capabilities really are as formidable as thought, and there's no serious reason to doubt that, then it arguably isn't

worth Russia using nukes unless the variables drastically change.

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