

With Putin Losing in Ukraine, Will He Now Go Nuclear?

Not since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 has the world been this close to nuclear war.

The reason: one month into Russia's illegal and reprehensible invasion of Ukraine, it is now clear to the world—and to the Kremlin—that Vladimir Putin is losing the war.

Putin isn't used to losing.

He cannot afford to lose, or be seen as losing.

He has put Russian nuclear forces on "high alert."

He has warned the West of "consequences you have never seen."

Russian military doctrine actually authorizes the use of tactical battlefield nuclear weapons to prevent defeat in a land war in Europe, something former Russian president Dmitri Medvedev discussed publicly just days ago.

What's more, on March 25, "Russia's ambassador to Iraq, Elbrus Kutrashev, said in an interview on Al-Nujaba TV (Iraq) that Russia launched its special operation in Ukraine because it had 'reliable information' that the Ukrainian government had been preparing to use a dirty nuclear bomb against Russian territory, interests, or nationals," according to a translation by the Middle East Media Research Institute.

Is Putin in the process of creating a pretext to justify the use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine?

I wish this were all a bad dream.

Or the subject of fringe speculation.

But something very dark is in motion.

We need to look at it carefully.

We also need to pray that Putin doesn't cross the line.

In a moment, I'll share with you excerpts from a new study just released in Washington on recent changes in Russian nuclear doctrine that are very worrisome.

But let's first look at just how badly Putin is losing this war.

Russian Troops Are Being Slaughtered in Ukraine

First, most pundits and political analysts said Putin wouldn't invade Ukraine, that he was just bluffing.

Next, most pundits and political analysts said Putin would crush Kyiv quickly.

Neither prognostication has proven accurate.

Ukraine's military has proven far feistier and tactically agile than most outsiders would have guessed.

And despite a sluggish, sleepy start, NATO is finally awakening to the Putin problem and flowing anti-tank weapons, anti-aircraft missiles, ammunition and other military supplies into Ukraine in growing numbers. As a result, Russian troops are being slaughtered on the battlefield.

NATO estimates that between 7,000 and 15,000 Russian troops have been killed so far.

The Ukrainian government puts the number slightly higher, claiming that its military has killed more than 16,000 Russian troops.

Given that Putin's invasion force was an estimated 150,000 troops, give or take, this would suggest that upwards of 10% of the Russian forces have been killed.

“By way of comparison, Russia lost about 15,000 troops over 10 years in Afghanistan,” notes *Time* magazine. What’s more, a NATO official says that between 30,000 and 40,000 Russian soldiers are estimated “to have been killed or wounded.”

If true, that would suggest upward of one-third of Russia’s invasion forces are combat ineffective.

Moscow’s Losses Mounting

Moscow has also lost 561 battle tanks. Many have been destroyed by Ukrainian forces. Some have simply run out of gas, been abandoned by Russian forces and then stolen by Ukrainian farmers who drag them away with tractors.

Russia has also lost an estimated 1,625 armored personnel carriers. And 115 fighter jets. Plus another 126 combat helicopters.

Meanwhile, one nation after another is imposing real economic sanctions on Russia.

Western businesses are leaving Russia. Oligarchs are having their assets frozen. Putin is becoming an international pariah.

Even as the world heralds Volodymyr Zelenskyy as a hero.

What Does Russian Military Doctrine Say About the Use of Nuclear Weapons?

With Putin losing, cornered and humiliated, the prospect of him being assassinated or overthrown rises.

But so does the possibility that the would-be Russia czar dramatically escalates the conflict, hoping to win in one or two knock-out blows.

A growing number of intelligence officials and security analysts are growing worried that Putin may turn—and turn

soon—to the use of tactical battlefield nuclear weapons.

“Russia has altered and adjusted the Soviet nuclear strategy to meet its new circumstances in a post-Cold War world,” notes a new Congressional Research Service study that was released on March 7. “It explicitly rejected the Soviet Union’s no-first-use pledge in 1993, indicating that it viewed nuclear weapons as a central feature in its military and security strategies.”

Did you catch that? Putin is now willing to use nukes first.

“Russia has revised its national security and military strategy several times in the past 20 years, with successive versions appearing to place a greater reliance on nuclear weapons,” the report finds.

For example, the military doctrine issued in 1997 allowed for the use of nuclear weapons ‘in case of a threat to the existence of the Russian Federation.’” The doctrine published in 2000 expanded the circumstances when Russia might use nuclear weapons to include attacks using weapons of mass destruction against Russia or its allies “as well as in response to large-scale aggression utilizing conventional weapons in situations critical to the national security of the Russian Federation.” In mid-2009, when discussing the revision of Russia’s defense strategy that was expected late in 2009 or early 2010, Nikolai Patrushev, the head of Russia’s Presidential Security Council, indicated that Russia would have the option to launch a ‘preemptive nuclear strike’ against an aggressor ‘using conventional weapons in an all-out, regional, or even local war.’

The final draft, apparently, did not actually include the explicit statement indicating the willingness by the Kremlin to use nuclear weapons preemptively, even in a major—and losing—conventional war.

But clearly it was being considered, and perhaps Putin didn’t

want his intentions to be so obvious and thus kept those lines out of the final draft.

Might Putin Use Tactical Nukes as a Way to 'Escalate to De-Escalate'?

The Congressional Research Service (CRS) study made several other important points.

The Kremlin considers NATO forces near its borders a threat to its security and existence. They shouldn't, of course, NATO forces have never invaded Russia or dreamt of doing so.

But Putin and his inner circle say they must defend themselves against a hostile NATO.

"In an environment where Russia also has doubts about the effectiveness of its conventional forces, its doctrine allows for the possible use of nonstrategic nuclear weapons during a local or regional conflict on its periphery," the CRS study notes. "The doctrines do not say that Russia would use nuclear weapons to preempt such an attack, but it does reserve the right to use them in response."

"Although Russia does not use the phrase in any of these recent versions of its military doctrine, analysts both inside and outside the U.S. government often refer to this approach as the 'escalate to de-escalate' doctrine," the CRS study continues. "Russian statements, when combined with military exercises that seemed to simulate the use of nuclear weapons against NATO members, led many to believe that Russia might threaten to use its nonstrategic nuclear weapons to coerce or intimidate its neighbors."

"These threats could occur prior to the start of a conflict, or within a conflict if Russia believed that the threat to use nuclear weapons might lead its adversaries (including the United States and its allies) to back down. This doctrine, when combined with Russian statements designed to remind

others of the strength of Russia's nuclear deterrent, seemed to indicate that Russia had increased the role of nuclear weapons in its military strategy and military planning."

What Does Putin Do Next?

It should be noted that Putin put Russian nuclear forces on "high alert" on Feb. 28.

At the beginning of his invasion of Ukraine.

When he thought he was going to win, and win quickly.

What does Putin think 33 days later, when his forces and military hardware are being wiped out?

When his fighter jets are routinely being shot out of the sky?

When McDonald's is shutting down all 850 of its restaurants in Russia?

When showings of the new *Batman* movie—and all Hollywood movies—has been canceled in Russia?

When the list of economic sanctions imposed on Russia is mounting?

When the Russian ruble is collapsing and inflation is at its highest level there in 24 years?

What does Putin do next? Does he have any conventional military cards up his sleeve? Or might he actually resort to using nuclear weapons?

Pray this doesn't happen.

Pray this wicked man is stopped before he crosses the line.

Pray for the people of Ukraine—and Russia—to be spared from such madness. And for peace and security and freedom to be restored in Ukraine.

And pray without ceasing.

For as dark as Europe has become over the last month, it could get much darker still. {eoa}

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