

## Russia Responds to Threats from West with Nuclear Weapon Drills; Ukraine War Escalates

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**Glenn Greenwald (GG):** Ever since the United States and NATO decided to involve itself quite heavily in the war in Ukraine, the question that has always lurked, but never been answered is: What is the reason for the American people? Meaning what benefits do the American people get? Or what harm would they suffer if there was some change, or by shift, or no change at all in the people who run provinces in eastern Ukraine? How would that affect the lives of the American people in any way? And yet here we are, two and a half years into this war, over \$160 billion spent in totally unaccountable ways, some of which, if not a lot of which have disappeared into the coffers of corrupt officials in Kiev, as it is completely predictable. While the war itself does not make any progress, while the Ukrainian positions only weaken, and where even people in Ukraine are now recognising that the war is futile, it doesn't mean the conflict is stagnant. The risks of the conflict, which have always been very great and also very ignored by people in Washington who support this war, those things are continuing to increase, largely as a result of desperate and reckless statements by major political leaders throughout the West and now in the United States, vowing to deploy troops to Ukraine because of their desperation in watching their war aims fail. And the result of that is or should be extremely disturbing. From the New York Times today, quote, *Russia to Hold Drills on Tactical Nuclear Weapons in New Tensions With West*. Quote, "Russian officials claim the order was in response to comments from the West about the possibility of more direct involvement in Ukraine. NATO called Russia's announcement, quote, 'irresponsible', in contrast to NATO's threats to deploy French and British and American and NATO forces directly to fight the Russian army in Ukraine". Quote, "The announcement of the exercise was Russia's most explicit warning and its more than two year invasion of Ukraine that it could use tactical nuclear weapons there. The Kremlin said it came in response to comments by two European leaders that raised the prospect of more direct Western intervention in the war. The exercise, the Defence Ministry said, would involve forces of the Southern Military District, an area that covers Russian-occupied Ukraine and part of Russia's border region with Ukraine. It said the exercise would take place, quote, 'in the near future'."

Now, one of the officials that New York Times article was referring to, French President Emmanuel Macron and former British prime minister, currently the foreign minister of the UK, David Cameron, both of whom trifled with the idea – in Macron's case, more than trifled, basically threatened that they would deploy troops in Ukraine if that was the only way to achieve their war aims and fight the Russian army directly, which by definition would be World War three. It was also the Democratic Minority House Leader, Hakeem Jeffries, and we call him the House Minority Leader, but as he boasted today, and this it certainly true, even though the Democrats are nominally in the minority, they really run the House since the only votes that pass and that get brought to the floor once they tell Mike Johnson to bring to the floor, and then they pass with Democratic votes, because Mike Johnson's status and power depends on pleasing Democratic officials like Hakeem Jeffries. So he's absolutely right when he boasts that even though the Republicans nominally control the House, the real power in the House lies with Democrats, thanks to Mike Johnson. That's why they're protecting and saving his speakership. So Hakeem Jeffries, I think the most powerful member of the House, even though he's in the Democratic Party, nominally the minority, was one of the people who also talked openly about sending American troops to Ukraine to fight the Russians. Here's what he said on 60 Minutes last night.

**60 Minutes:** It was far beyond a regional conflict.

**Hakeem Jeffries (HJ):** We can't let Ukraine fall, because if it does, then there's a significant likelihood that America will have to get into the conflict. Not simply with our money, but with our servicewomen and our servicemen. We can either stop Russia in Ukraine by continuing our military and economic support, or we can face a challenging situation where Vladimir Putin and Russia are able to overrun Ukraine and then threaten NATO allies.

**60 Minutes:** No doubt that that's Putin's goal?

**HJ:** We have no doubt that if Vladimir Putin is successful in Ukraine...

**GG:** I'm not sure why that cut off mid-sentence, but what he went on to say is that we have no doubt if he's successful in Ukraine, he will then go on to try and conquer NATO countries. Now this is pure fantasy. The Russians have explained over and over why Ukraine is a particularly sensitive interest to them. And the fact that Western leaders are now talking openly about deploying troops to go fight Russia directly, a NATO-Russian war over Ukraine, with the Chinese standing behind the Russians saying they have unlimited Chinese support, is nothing short of complete madness to risk nuclear conflict or another World War over which people run the Donbas. That is madness. That is true madness.

Here is the French President, Emmanuel Macron, on May 2nd, so almost two weeks ago, in an interview with The Economist, who asked him about his vow that he would send French troops to Ukraine to fight Russia that was necessary to win the war. The Economist asked him, quote, "Do you stand by what you said about possibly sending ground troops to Ukraine?" Macron said, quote, "Absolutely. As I said, I'm not ruling anything out because we are facing someone who is not ruling anything out. We have undoubtedly been too hesitant by

defining the limits of our action to someone who no longer has any and who is the aggressor. Our capacity has to be credible to continue to help, to give Ukraine the means to resist. But our credibility also depends on a capacity to deter by not giving full visibility as to what we will or will not do. Otherwise we weaken ourselves, which is the framework within which we have been operating until now. In fact, many countries said in the weeks that followed that they understood our approach, that they agreed with our position and that this position was a good thing. I have a clear strategic objective: Russia cannot win in Ukraine. If Russia wins in Ukraine, there will be no security in Europe."

It was always the case that the minute the West defined victory in Ukraine as expelling all Russian troops from every inch of Ukrainian soil, including Crimea, which they've occupied since 2014, and view as an existential threat, their expulsion from Crimea to Russian national security, the minute the West defined victory in Ukraine was such maximalist war aims, it was always the case that the West was bound to be defeated. And what they're now saying is, it would be too humiliating for us to let things go as they're going, which is in the direction of Russia winning despite the hundreds of billions of dollars that we've sent there. So they're now toying with this thread, to send Western NATO, American, French, British troops to go fight the Russian army directly in order to prevent them from overrunning Ukraine. Of course, that means that the Russians are going to view those threats and take them very seriously and do things like begin testing battlefield nuclear weapons. The Washington Post May 3rd, the same time Macron was threatening the Russians with direct military confrontation, quote: *UK lifts restrictions on Ukraine's use of weapons against Russia*. Quote, "The remark signalled a sharp reversal in Britain's position, which had not allowed Ukraine to target Russian territory with British supplied weapons". "British Foreign Secretary David Cameron announced that Britain has given Ukraine permission to strike targets on Russian territory with the weapons in a new \$3 billion, multiyear aid package it is providing. Cameron's remarks – in an interview with Reuters during a visit to Ukraine – a sharp reversal in the position of one of Ukraine's staunchest supporters."

Now just imagine if you had Russia and China providing arms to one of the countries in our region, or in this case to make the matter far more apt, a country immediately on the American border and explicitly say, we're not just giving you these arms to use defensively if the United States invades, we're going to give you these arms to attack the United States on their soil, if you choose. Imagine what we would do to any country that did that. And imagine how much more seriously you would take that if it was preceded by eight years of interference by those countries, right in say Mexico on the US border. And yet, for some reason we are constantly told that we shouldn't worry about the threat of nuclear weapons. We should just carry on and just assume the Russians are bluffing. From Politico on March 1st, quote, *Putin's bluffing on nukes (for now), says top NATO official*. Quote, "'We do not see any imminent threat of Russia using these weapons', said Military Alliance's Deputy Secretary General. Putin issued the warning Thursday as French President Emmanuel Macron stood by his message that the West could not rule out sending troops to help Ukraine fend off Putin's full scale invasion. Quote, 'This really threatens a conflict with nuclear weapons', Putin said. NATO Deputy Secretary-General Mircea Geoana characterised Putin's nuclear

sabre-rattling as, quote, 'a discourse that delves into the logic of psychological intimidation rather than real intentions', in an interview with Spanish newspaper El Pais published Friday. He added, quote, 'We do not see any imminent threat of Russia using these weapons. But these statements are in themselves very dangerous, because they erode trust. Russia knows the consequence of taking such a step'."

Why should we be so blithely dismissive of the Russian threat to use tactical nuclear weapons, especially when the West is saying we may send troops to fight the Russian army directly? The United States and Russia came extremely close to nuclear annihilation several times during the Cold War. The most obvious and relevant example being when the Soviet Union, at the request of the Cuban government, put nuclear weapons in Cuba as a deterrence against US invasion, and the mere placement of those nuclear weapons so close to American soil made the United States essentially enter a game of chicken with the Russians, saying, we will nuke you unless you remove those weapons. And it doesn't even have to be that the leaders go insane and decide that they're going to use nuclear weapons. That can easily happen through miscommunication and misperception, especially when tensions are so high and the countries barely talk to one another. In fact, history credits a single Russian submarine commander for averting nuclear war between the two countries because the submarine thought that things that were landing on it were actually a US attack with nuclear weapons, and they called Moscow, ready to launch until this commander realised that the US wasn't actually attacking it. That's how close the world came to nuclear annihilation. That at least the Cold War was at stake and the countries were in each other's regions, which is exactly what's happening now, although with really nothing at stake other than who will govern various parts of eastern Ukraine. And yet this has been the attitude from the start. From the Atlantic, Tom Nichols in June of 2023, a fanatical supporter of the US war in Ukraine, the US involvement in the war in Ukraine. Quote: *Putin Talks Tough While Ukraine Makes Gains*. "Ukraine's counter offensive is on the move, but so are Putin's nuclear weapons. Quote, "Putin is trying to turn up the global temperature with some swagger about nuclear weapons. This past March, Putin said that he would base Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus, close to Ukraine. Moscow and Minsk have signed a formal agreement and Putin now claims that the first weapons have arrived in Belarus. The leader of a nuclear-armed power sounding like Tony Soprano is alarming, but Putin is likely emphasising Russia's nuclear deterrent because its conventional forces have been repeatedly humiliated in combat". Remember what we were always told, that the Russians were losing the war, that the triumphant Ukrainians were firstly expelling them from the country, that Russia was being humiliated in defeat, that was just nine months ago. And now everyone acknowledges that Russia is advancing. The Ukrainian front lines are falling back, that the Ukrainians have no chance to win this war for so many reasons, just including the lack of people who are willing to go fight on the front lines. And of course, these people who settle this, just like happened in the Iraq war and every other war that they made false statements about that never came to be true, have no accountability. Of course, they're not going to go back and say, I know we told the American people that the Ukrainian counteroffensive was right around the corner, it was going to vanquish Russia, and none of that happened. He goes on, quote, "More to the point, although Russia still has a large military, Moscow has lost its best units and most

highly trained officers and soldiers after a year of ghastly losses on the ground. As for Putin's threats, the Russian president seems to be venting and showing off, which is one way to know that we are not yet in a crisis. Putin is indulging his usual vulgar sense of humour, and though Americans like Russians, also have some colourful local expressions, it is better for the Americans and NATO to be the resolute adults in the room, as they have been since the beginning of this criminal Russian onslaught". So just place your bets on the fact that Russia is just bluffing. They don't really consider this an existential threat. They wouldn't really use tactical nuclear weapons even in the face of Western threats to go fight the Russians directly, just assume that won't happen and just carry on with your lives – all to determine who governs eastern Ukraine.

Now, one of the people who actually, inadvertently or otherwise admitted how dangerous this war was was one of the prime sponsors, Joe Biden, who said in October of 2022, as recounted by NBC News and many other outlets, Joe Biden warns the risk of nuclear 'Armageddon' is the highest since the Cuban Missile Crisis. Quote, "The president says it was the first time since 1962 that there has been a, quote, 'direct threat' of nuclear weapons being used as Russian President Vladimir Putin's military struggles in Ukraine". "Late last month, Putin renewed nuclear threats he made at the onset of Russia's invasion. Quote: 'If the territorial integrity of our country is threatened, we will certainly use all the means at our disposal to protect Russia and our people', the Russian leader said in a televised national address. Quote, 'I'm not bluffing', he added. Biden said Thursday that he takes Putin's threat seriously. Quote, 'We've got a guy I know fairly well. He's not joking when he talks about potential use of tactical nuclear weapons or biological or chemical weapons, because his military is, you might say, significantly underperforming'. 'I don't think there's any such thing as the ability to easily use a tactical nuclear weapon and not end up with 'Armageddon',' Biden said."

And yet we've proceeded with this war as though somehow what's at stake there makes risking nuclear war, let alone spending hundreds of billion dollars and sending huge numbers of young Ukrainian people who are unwitting conscripts to their death, worth it. Professor John Mearsheimer, one of the most frequent guest on our show, we think he's one of the most prescient and clear eyed foreign policy analyst was recently on Piers Morgan, where they began to discuss the ongoing war in Ukraine, which Piers Morgan supports, and it veered into a broader discussion of the fairy tale narrative that a lot of people have about US foreign policy that John Mearsheimer was able to quickly, but very importantly, debunk. So I want to show you this because I think everyone should listen to this. It's crucial not just to the foreign policy we are pursuing in Ukraine, but also with China and Taiwan and also financing the war in Israel. Listen to how this discussion went.

**John Mearsheimer (JM):** You want to remember that if you look at what's happening in the conventional war, it looks like Putin is going to win, despite the fact that we've now passed this large scale arms package for Ukraine, Putin is likely to win.

**Piers Morgan (PM):** Why is that not a terrible thing for America and the West?

**JM:** Because you have to prioritise the threats that you face in the world. And the fact of the matter is that what happens in Ukraine does not matter that much to the United States. I know for people like you, this is a life and death matter. The thought of any country on the planet that the West defends losing is a major defeat and has catastrophic consequences. I mean, you felt this way about us pulling out of Afghanistan. But I think that places like Afghanistan, even places like Ukraine, don't matter that much...

**PM:** Actually, on that I didn't really. I felt with Afghanistan, America should have kept a small military presence there to maintain some kind of order. And I think I was justified in saying that, given what's happened since. I thought throwing the country back to the Taliban was a catastrophic error of judgement, and it wouldn't have happened in the way it's happened if America kept a couple of thousand troops there, as it does all around the world in endless bases. So it seemed to me, having done many, many years of hard work in Afghanistan as a response to 9/11, to then simply just overnight throw everybody out, and leave the country to the Taliban, particularly for women's rights, never mind anything else, I thought was an abrogation of America's duty and the UK.

**GG:** Now, obviously that's the British mindset, that you just go around the world controlling the entire world, keeping your military all over the world. Obviously, the British no longer have anywhere near the ability to do so, so they constantly call on the United States to do it for them so they can feel tough and purposeful. The idea that keeping 2000 troops, some tiny residual force trapped on a base in Bagram or whatever, was going to enable the United States to govern and control that country and prevent the Taliban from surging – the Taliban walk right back into power as soon as the United States left – is laughable. But so is the idea that the United States has the responsibility to go around the world controlling every country, even where we have no vital interests and have the American public pay for it. Now listen to how this conversation evolved.

**JM:** Right. But this is your worldview, which is that the United States has a responsibility to be everywhere...

**PM:** Not everywhere, but they should certainly be preserving freedom and democracy. Otherwise, why self-style yourself as leader of the free world? You either are a leader of the free world, an America still has, I think half the world's military, firepower, obviously one of the biggest economies, you either are that entity, leader of the free world or you're not. And if you are and what comes with that is a responsibility to protect freedom and democracy when it comes under attack from totalitarian regimes, I would think.

**JM:** I think if you look at the history of American foreign policy, it's very hard to make the case that our principal goal has been to protect freedom and democracy. The United States has a rich history of overthrowing democracies around the world, and we have a rich history of siding with some of the world's biggest dictators. So this idea that we're out there protecting freedom and democracy, and it's our principal goal, in my opinion, doesn't mesh with reality.

**GG:** That is always the most staggering point to me, is that Americans are still capable of believing, or in this case, a subject of the British Crown, is still capable of believing, that the reason we keep fighting all these wars all over the place is because we want to protect and spread freedom and democracy. It's like a sixth grade fairy tale. The United States's closest and most important allies in the Middle East are the two most savage and tyrannical regimes; the one in Saudi Arabia, the other in Egypt. We have repeatedly helped overthrow democratically elected governments like we did in Ukraine. In Egypt after the fall of the dictator Hosni Mubarak, when the protesters were in Tahrir square demanding democracy, we cheered them, even though we had supported Mubarak for 30 years. And then Egypt finally had their first democratic election, but because they made the mistake of electing somebody the West disliked Mohamed Morsi, the United States helped General Sisi, the current leader, the dictator of Egypt, overthrow in a military coup the democratically elected government of Egypt. And John Kerry, who was the Secretary of State under Obama at the time, called it an advance of democracy in Egypt. So we constantly are helping uproot democratic governments and implanting dictators all over the world, so how can you be so childish and so gullible to believe that the reason we're going to war in any place is because we want to spread freedom and democracy all over the world. This is a complete contradiction of the most basic knowledge about US foreign policy, past and present. Now, I know it sometimes falls harshly on ears to hear someone like Mearsheimer say, Look, we have to pick and choose what is important to us. We can't just go around the world defending every country, intervening in every country, controlling every country and the reality is, Ukraine is not that important to the United States. I know it sounds so harsh. Oh, what about the people of Ukraine? But this has always been the basis of American foreign policy. It's called vital interests. We identify what our vital interests are, meaning the things that we're willing to go to war over, and then things that are not in the vital interest, things we're not willing to go to war over. And the view that who governs Ukraine is not in our vital interests was one that was defended not only by Donald Trump, but also by Barack Obama. In March of 2016, he gave a major foreign policy interview to the Neocon Jeffrey Goldberg, the editor in chief of The Atlantic, and Jeffrey Goldberg spent a lot of the time attacking Obama for having been weak in the face of Russia, for not giving Ukraine lethal arms, for not confronting the Russians in Syria. And there you see it: *'The Obama Doctrine': The Atlantic's Exclusive Report on the US President's Hardest Foreign Policy Decisions*. And here's what Obama said about why he was unwilling to arm the Ukrainians, even though members in both parties like John McCain and the war mongers in the Democratic Party were demanding he do so. Goldberg wrote, quote, "Obama's theory here is simple: Ukraine is a core Russian interest, but not an American one, so Russia will always be able to maintain escalatory dominance there. Quote," The fact is that Ukraine, which is a non-NATO country, is going to be vulnerable to military domination by Russia no matter what we do', Obama said, 'there are ways to deter, but it requires you to be very clear ahead of time about what is worth going to war for and what is not. Now, if there's someone who wants to claim in this town that we would consider going to war with Russia over Crimea and eastern Ukraine, they should speak up and be very clear about it. The idea that talking tough or engaging in some military action that is tangential to that particular area is somehow going to influence the decision making of Russia or China is contrary to all the evidence we have seen over the last 50 years'."

So it was President Obama who was mocking the idea that we would ever go to war with Russia over control of Crimea and eastern Ukraine because, as he said, and Donald Trump also viewed it the same way, obviously, Crimea and eastern Ukraine will always be of great vital interest to Russians, that's right on the other side of their border, the part of their border that was twice invaded in World Wars during the 20th century, but it is not and never will be a vital interest to Ukraine. All that changed, since Obama, the hero of American liberalism, said that statement – which was not very controversial at the time except in warmongering in Neocon circles in Washington – all that changed was that in 2016, the most cataclysmic event for American liberals happened, which was the defeat of Hillary Clinton by Donald Trump. And they needed to be given a reason and a villain, a scapegoat to blame other than Hillary Clinton and the Democrats. And they were told eventually, after a long list of other villains, New York Times, Julian Assange, Jill Stein, etc., that the main reason Trump won was because: Russia. And they've been feeding on this anti-Russian animus for so long that you could draw a straight line between the Russiagate hoax, that the CIA and the FBI manufactured and unanimous Democratic support in Washington for this war in Ukraine. A war that even though it's getting more and more futile, it's also getting more and more dangerous.

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