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Russia and the use of nuclear weapons



Russia's Special Military Operation in Ukraine started in February 2022, when the Ukrainians suspended all communication channels with their Russian counterparts. Before that, Ukraine made blatant violations of all the mutual understandings between Russia and the West, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). It is to be remembered here that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the West and the Russian Federation mutually agreed that the NATO will not expand its borders. The then U.S. Secretary of State James Baker made it clear to the Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev that NATO has no desire of expansion, and it will move "not one inch eastward."

Besides the Western assurances, it was quite understandable that the West achieved what it wanted and its aspirations against the Russian Federation was over. However, the NATO's enlargement and knocking at Russia's doors made the Russian policymakers quite alarmed.

Russia's Defence Expenditure

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Russia is the 3rd largest [exporter](#) of major arms and has almost 11 percent of the global share in exporting arms, ammunition, and related equipment. Due to the ongoing Special Military Operation, currently, Russia is [spending](#) almost 140 billion USD on defence and citing the continuous support of the NATO to the Ukrainians, the figure is likely to go up.

Military Hardware acquired by Ukraine post-February 2022

According to the German research organization Kiel Institute for the World Economy, from February 2022 till February 2024, the United States (US) [pledged](#) or delivered arms, ammunition, and other related military equipment amounting to 46.2 billion USD to Ukraine. The same report indicated that till June 2024, the US military aid to Ukraine could reach as much high as 75.1 billion USD. Likewise, the European Union (EU) has [allocated](#) a total of 110.2 billion USD worth of military aid to Ukraine since January 2022 and there is a provision for allocating an additional 77 billion USD to help Ukraine fight Russia.

After the US, Germany is the second-largest donor of military aid to Ukraine since February 2022, and till February 2024, it has already spent a total of 10.7 billion USD worth of military aid to Ukraine.

So far, Ukraine received more than 352 armoured fighting vehicles from the US alone, 324 Main Battle Tanks (MBT) from Poland, and 26 air defence systems from Germany. Also, around 800 MBT were also delivered to Ukraine. The US [delivered](#) 201 howitzers and 39 Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (MLRS) including the M-142 HIMARS and M-270 long range Global Positioning System (GPS) guided rockets. Ukraine received more than 100 MLRS of various ranges and a total of more than 500 howitzers, including the British-made M-777 155 mm towed artillery and the US-made M-109 self-propelled artillery. Also, thousands of kamikaze drones have been provided to Ukraine to attack Russian armed forces and to raid the civilian structures.

Furthermore, the most devastating support provided to Ukraine by the US and NATO forces is satellite imagery with actionable intelligence. Such attempts include providing

Ukrainians with Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) for attacks on military as well as civil installations.

The West and Russia on the Ukrainian Battlefield

It is already mentioned that since February 2022 till now, the West along with its allies have invested around 200 billion worth of military aid in to Ukraine and are willing to go to great lengths to defeat Russia. They have sent their fighters to fight Russia in Ukraine and have already employed thousands of former military personnel as well as mercenaries. It is very strange that the US and its allies have been successful in encouraging almost 41 countries around the globe to give military aid to Ukraine. At the same time, many countries continue to deny aiding Ukraine. However, it is worthy to note that besides this ruthless and mindless strategy of the West, Russia is steadfast in executing its Special Military Operation in Ukraine and is fully determined to the disarmament and de-nazification of Ukraine.

Will Russia use nuclear weapons?

The US and NATO forces are deliberately increasing the scope and spectrum of the military operation in Ukraine. Until now, the conventional weapons have been used by both sides to conduct operations. However, being a historic great power, the Russian strategic restraint has its limits.

The research institution SIPRI [noted](#) that currently Russia has 1710 deployed nuclear warheads, whereas, it has 2670 stored nuclear warheads. Though, the International Relations scholars maintain that the relevance of nuclear weapons has greatly diminished due to the concept of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) and the reliance on conventional weapons for politico-military purposes. Nonetheless, the number of deployed as well as stored nuclear warheads is not much optimistic and the threat of operationalising Tactical nuclear weapons (TNW) is growing steadily. Currently, Russia [possesses](#) around, 1558 TNWs.

In the recent Ukrainian attack on the Russian Kursk region, the Ukrainians have used Western weapons, especially the British Challenger 2 MBT against Russia on Russian territory. A-Jazeera [noted](#) that “the Ministry of Defence in London declined to comment on which specific weapons Ukraine is using.” The report also indicated that Germany’s Parliamentary Defence Committee confirmed Ukraine’s use of German-supplied weapons against Russia on Russian territory. Germany’s Finance Minister Christian Linder [said](#) that it was legal and “Weapons were transferred under the responsibility of

Ukraine, which is defending itself against the aggressor and exercising its right to self-defence.”

«Russia has never started the rhetoric of nuclear escalation», Russian President Vladimir Putin said on 7 June during the plenary session of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF-2024). In his opinion, the case when the use of nuclear weapons is possible has not come. In addition, he asked not to mention the possibility of nuclear strikes in vain. Back in June 2023, the Russian president said that Russia had no need to use nuclear weapons. He noted that at the same time, Russia has more of them than NATO countries. He recalled that the US is the only state in the world that has used nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear state, thus setting a precedent. «We are ready to use weapons, including nuclear weapons, if it is a question of the existence of the Russian state, of damaging our sovereignty and independence. We have everything spelled out in our Strategy. We have not changed it», the president said.

In January 2023, Dmitry Medvedev, Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, [said](#) that «The defeat of a nuclear power in a conventional war may trigger a nuclear war». He added that «Nuclear powers have never lost major conflicts on which their fate depends».

Conclusion

Russia is a credible nuclear power; however, its strategic restraint has been put to test by the US and NATO forces by disproportionately arming Ukraine, committing their troops to fight Russia, and to gathering international mercenaries to launch attacks against Russia.

The statistics are quite alarming, as the US along with its allies continue to pour lethal weapons into Ukraine. In other words, another Charlie Wilson's War is in the making where the US is going to great lengths to harm Russia and its interests.

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