# Tobias Ellwood warns of possible tactical nuclear weapon use by Russia beyond Ukraine within five years



The ongoing war in Ukraine has fundamentally reshaped global security discussions, particularly around the threat of nuclear weapons. Former chair of the UK Defence Select Committee, Tobias Ellwood, has expressed alarming concerns regarding the potential use of tactical nuclear weapons by Vladimir Putin within the next five years. He emphasised that such a strike might not even occur in Ukraine, suggesting that it could target a different location as Russia tests Western responses to its military aggressions. “In the next five years, I could see a tactical nuclear weapon, a low-yield nuclear weapon, being used,” Ellwood warned. He urged expedited efforts to bolster the UK's military capabilities, particularly highlighting the necessity of acquiring more F-35A fighter jets for deterrent purposes.

Ellwood’s insights correlate with a broader narrative about the precarious nature of nuclear diplomacy in the context of the Ukraine conflict. Although tactical nuclear weapons are traditionally designed for battlefield use with yields as low as 1 kiloton, their deployment holds deep implications for international security. These weapons are not only compact and transportable, but they also fall outside the purview of arms control agreements, allowing countries like Russia to maintain a strategic ambiguity around their numbers and readiness.

Reports of Ukraine’s recent drone attacks on Russian military assets have underscored vulnerabilities in Moscow’s strategic framework. This sophisticated operation reportedly damaged a substantial portion of Russia's long-range bomber fleet, signalling Ukraine's increasing military capabilities and strategic reach. Analysts suggest that while the losses do not dismantle Russia's nuclear capabilities, they compel the Kremlin to reconsider its military strategies. The Ukrainian success in striking deep into Russian territory sends a clear message: the sustainability of a prolonged conflict is under pressure, especially as Western nations deliberate their military support for Ukraine.

Simultaneously, loud alarm bells have been sounded from Russia regarding its nuclear arsenal. President Putin has indicated that Russian nuclear forces are on ‘constant alert’ and assert that they have made advances in nuclear technology surpassing those of the United States. While he has voiced a readiness to employ nuclear weapons in the context of defending national sovereignty, observers note that he has yet to find a necessity to do so. The West, led by the US, UK, and France, continues to issue warnings, yet they have ruled out direct military intervention, keenly aware of the catastrophic implications of any nuclear engagement.

Strategically, Russia has bolstered its nuclear posture by relocating tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus, an ally positioned near NATO members. This development enhances Russia’s capacity to target Eastern and Central Europe while also laying bare the complexities of regional security in light of NATO's collective defence commitments. The interplay between military readiness and diplomatic engagement remains tenuous, as countries navigate the charged atmosphere of nuclear threats without crossing lines that could lead to escalation.

The hurdles in balancing military preparedness and diplomatic negotiation reflect a broader systematic issue, as nations grapple with threats that have once again come to define 21st-century global politics. As both sides prepare for potential confrontations, the quest for stability amidst chaos continues to command attention on the world stage.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/2066030/vladimir-putin-tactical-nuclear-weapons-attack-ukraine-war), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/132e4327-11da-4412-b36b-7363604879e6)
* Paragraph 2 – [[5]](https://apnews.com/article/05b0b3da546ae8411976936797bff68e), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/e04da727-ee9c-4e8c-94fa-2e7ad72bec24)
* Paragraph 3 – [[6]](https://www.axios.com/2022/10/07/biden-putin-russia-ukraine-armageddon), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/4569adf3-fa4d-4f9d-b736-c47c44d193d6)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://apnews.com/article/05b0b3da546ae8411976936797bff68e), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/e04da727-ee9c-4e8c-94fa-2e7ad72bec24)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/2066030/vladimir-putin-tactical-nuclear-weapons-attack-ukraine-war> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/132e4327-11da-4412-b36b-7363604879e6> - A recent Ukrainian drone attack on Russian strategic bomber bases has caused significant damage to Russia’s long-range aviation capabilities, with estimates suggesting 10 to 12 aircraft—potentially 20% of Russia’s operational bomber force—were destroyed or damaged. Ukraine executed a sophisticated plan involving drones hidden in trucks for 18 months to strike deep within Russian territory, far from the front lines. The bombers targeted, including the Tu-95 and Tu-22M3, are no longer in production, inflicting losses that may be irreplaceable for Moscow in the short term. The attack exposes vulnerabilities in Russia’s military planning and could compel changes in its tactics and deployment to prevent further losses. Analysts believe the blow will not dismantle Russia’s nuclear capabilities, as these bombers form a small percentage of its strategic nuclear triad. However, the strike underscores Ukraine’s strategic reach and determination ahead of ceasefire negotiations and sends a powerful message about the cost and sustainability of prolonged war. Additionally, Ukraine reportedly targeted the Kerch bridge with underwater explosives, further demonstrating its capability to strike high-value targets. The incident has sparked criticism within Russian pro-war communities, raising urgent questions about military oversight and strategic preparedness.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/4569adf3-fa4d-4f9d-b736-c47c44d193d6> - The European Commission has approved a joint venture between Britain's BAE Systems, Italy's Leonardo, and Japan's Aircraft Industrial Enhancement Co to lead the development of a next-generation fighter jet under the Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP). The venture, based in the UK, aims to produce an advanced combat aircraft by 2035, providing an alternative to the US's F-35 program amidst growing concerns among US allies over reliance on American defense systems, especially following shifts in US foreign policy under Donald Trump. The initiative reflects broader strategic goals to enhance defense capabilities in response to emerging threats from Russia and China. Brussels found no competition concerns with the collaboration and highlighted its strategy of encouraging international cooperation in military procurement, including with non-EU countries like the UK and Japan. The UK government also unveiled a ten-year defense strategy, committing billions to modernize its forces with new submarines, long-range weapons, and ammunition, reinforcing Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s emphasis on urgently strengthening defenses to deter conflict.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/e04da727-ee9c-4e8c-94fa-2e7ad72bec24> - Russian President Vladimir Putin has warned the West that Russia is prepared for nuclear war, claiming that its nuclear forces are on 'constant alert' and have surpassed the US in weapon development. This statement comes as Russia advances on the Ukrainian battlefield two years into its invasion. While Putin signaled readiness to use tactical nuclear weapons if Russia's sovereignty is threatened, he noted there has been no necessity to use them yet. Concerns over Russia's intentions led to joint warnings from the US, UK, and France, as well as from Chinese leader Xi Jinping. Despite the threats, Putin emphasizes a reluctance for surrendering annexed territories and a confidence in Russia's military progress in Ukraine. The West, including the US and European countries, has ruled out direct military intervention.
5. <https://apnews.com/article/05b0b3da546ae8411976936797bff68e> - Tactical nuclear weapons, with yields as small as 1 kiloton, are designed for battlefield use against troops, unlike the more powerful nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missiles. These weapons are compact and can be discreetly transported. Unlike strategic nuclear weapons, tactical nuclear arms are not covered by arms control agreements, and Russia has not disclosed details about their numbers. In response to the Western military support to Ukraine since the February 2022 invasion, Russian President Vladimir Putin has often referred to Russia's nuclear capabilities. Although initially aggressive in his nuclear rhetoric, Putin has later downplayed such threats. Russia's defense doctrine allows for a nuclear response to attacks threatening its state existence, though this has been vaguely defined. In 2023, Russia moved tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus, an ally near Ukraine and NATO members, to counter perceived Western threats. This move enhances Russia’s ability to target NATO allies in Eastern and Central Europe. Both Russian and Belarusian leaders have been tight-lipped about the specifics of the deployment.
6. <https://www.axios.com/2022/10/07/biden-putin-russia-ukraine-armageddon> - On Thursday, President Biden warned that the Russian invasion of Ukraine could escalate to the highest nuclear threat since the Cuban missile crisis if President Putin resorts to using nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons. This statement follows Kremlin officials’ hints at using such weapons as Russia annexed parts of Ukraine. Biden emphasized that Putin might be serious due to the underperformance of his military. The White House, however, stated there is no current indication that Russia plans to use nuclear weapons imminently. Meanwhile, Ukrainian forces have been reclaiming territory, and internal criticism is growing within Russia. The Biden administration has also announced a new $625 million security assistance package for Ukraine as the country accelerates its bid to join NATO.