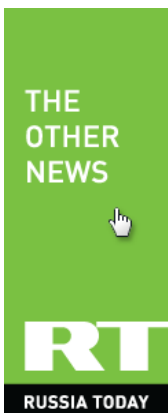


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24/01/2008 | [Moscow News, №03 2008](#)

Top Brass Defends Russia's Right to Preemptive Strike

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Russia underlined its right to a "preventive" nuclear strike this week in what military analysts interpreted as a move to introduce more clarity into the nation's defense doctrine. The statements, made by Chief of General Staff Yuri Baluyevsky on Saturday, were followed by naval exercises in the northern Atlantic that will feature over 40 aircraft of the Air Force. Though unrelated, the developments pointed to a Russia not so much on the offensive as a one that was eager to bring its defense doctrine in line with that of the Western world and make it more up to date with contemporary military demands.

"We are not planning to attack anyone. But our partners should clearly understand... that the armed forces will be used if necessary to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Russian Federation and its allies, including on a preventative basis, including with the use of nuclear weapons," RIA Novosti quoted Baluyevsky as saying Saturday at a scientific conference in Moscow. He underlined, however, that "military force can and must be used to demonstrate the decisiveness of the top leadership of the country" only as "a last resort" and when all other methods have failed.

"This is the clarification of the nuclear doctrine," Sergei Karaganov, a defense expert and the dean of the International Politics Department at the Higher School of Economics, told The Moscow News. "What [Baluyevsky] means is the enhanced deterrence doctrine, which was created in the United States" and used by NATO for decades.

And while Karaganov believes the statements might be interpreted more aggressively in the West, they are mostly meant to have a psychological impact.

"We have adopted the concept of preemption," he says, noting that it was previously not part of Russia's nuclear doctrine.

General Gennady Yevstafiyev, a former military intelligence officer, believes that though General Baluyevsky made some very important and necessary clarifications, there is nothing "extraordinary" about the statements. They are in line with the doctrine President Vladimir Putin began spelling out in 2000, which announced Russia's readiness to use nuclear weapons for the defense of itself and its allies.

Yevstafiyev pointed out, however, that Baluyevsky's comments should be understood in a context that includes some of the other statements made at the conference. "Soon we will not be able to maintain missile defense," Yevstafiyev told The Moscow News, echoing Col. Gen. Alexander Zelin, who told a conference at the Academy of Military Sciences in Moscow that over the next 12 years foreign powers will "obtain fundamentally new means and systems" and integrate intelligence, communications and navigation, leaving almost all of Russia's territory vulnerable.

"Under these conditions a potential enemy will gain the ability to carry out high-precision strikes, coordinated in terms of time and space, on practically any target on Russian territory," RIA Novosti quoted him as saying.

As for Baluyevsky's statements themselves, experts doubt they will have any serious impact on relations between Russia and NATO.

"This is not news for NATO," Karaganov said. "As for our allies, we will see who's ready to join our nuclear umbrella." Asked what potential allies might benefit from this kind of protection, Karaganov pointed to countries in Asia.

The statements came against a backdrop of the biggest military exercises staged in the Atlantic since the end of the Cold War as warships and nuclear bombers successfully test fired supersonic cruise missiles close to the Iberian Peninsula. The Moskva missile cruiser of the Russian Black Sea Fleet staged a successful live fire exercise, while 40 aircraft, including Tu-160 Blackjacks are set to take part. Col. Gen. Yuri Soloviev, meanwhile, announced this week that the Moscow Region would have a second unit operating a S-400 Triumph zenith anti-missile system by the end of the year.

By Anna Arutunyan

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