



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 642

November 3, 2025

### **The Zapad-2025 Theater Military Exercise: More Russian Nuclear Intimidation**

#### **Dr. Mark B. Schneider**

*Dr. Schneider is a Senior Analyst with the National Institute for Public Policy. Dr. Schneider previously served in DoD as Principal Director for Forces Policy, Principal Director for Strategic Defense, Space and Verification Policy, Director for Strategic Arms Control Policy and Representative of the Secretary of Defense to the Nuclear Arms Control Implementation Commission. He also served in the senior Foreign Service as a Member of the State Department Policy Planning Staff.*

In 1999, when Russia first announced nuclear escalation in the Zapad (West) military exercise, Russian Defense Minister Marshal Igor Sergeyev asserted, “Our Army was forced to launch nuclear strikes first which enabled it to achieve a breakthrough in the theater situation.”<sup>1</sup> Russia has been practicing nuclear weapons first use in the Zapad exercises ever since. The idea that nuclear escalation results in a Russian victory is the core of President Putin’s nuclear strategy, which he developed as the Secretary of the Russian National Security Council in the late 1990s.<sup>2</sup> It is a very dangerous theory of victory.

Usually, Russia leaks its nuclear escalation in its exercises to the Russian press rather than officially announcing it as it did in 1999.<sup>3</sup> Russia showcases its use of dual-capable (nuclear and conventional) missiles during its theater war exercises but it almost never says what types of warheads use are simulated.

This changed in 2024, when Russia announced that, in conjunction with Belarus, it would hold an unprecedented three-part, non-strategic (tactical) nuclear exercise.<sup>4</sup> It involved the simulated use of a large number of nuclear weapons types.<sup>5</sup> In this exercise, Belarus Security Council State Secretary Alexander Volfovich said, “Iskander tactical missile systems and Polonez operational-tactical complexes will be secretly withdrawn to designated positions



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 642 | November 3, 2025

---

where Belarusian servicemen will deal with issues of preparing, planning and using the special [nuclear] munitions.”<sup>6</sup>

In Zapad-2025, Russia and Belarus practiced non-strategic nuclear weapons use.<sup>7</sup> Just before this exercise, state-run TASS, Russia’s main official news agency, reported the exercise involved “...planning nuclear weapons deployment, including the use of the Oreshnik system [dual-capable MIRVed intermediate-range ballistic missile].”<sup>8</sup> In Zapad-2025, Russia also showcased its dual-capable hypersonic missiles. This exercise was preceded and followed by gross Russian provocations, including what appears to be a deliberate drone attack against Poland and the violation of Estonian airspace by three Russian Mig-31 nuclear-capable fighters.<sup>9</sup>

President Putin stated that the Zapad-2025 exercise was designed to “...ensure the unconditional protection of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Union State [Russia and Belarus].”<sup>10</sup> The Kremlin reported that, “Vladimir Putin also inspected weapons and military and *special* equipment engaged in the exercise.”<sup>11</sup> (Emphasis added). While not reported by the Kremlin, President Putin stated that defending Russia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity was against “any aggression by the United States.”<sup>12</sup> The reality was quite different. Polish Interior Minister Marcin Kierwinski said that Zapad-2025 practiced aggressive war scenarios against Poland.<sup>13</sup>

Putin said, “*The purpose of the [Zapad-2025] exercise is to rehearse all elements necessary to fully protect sovereignty, territorial integrity, and defend against any aggression.*”<sup>14</sup> (Emphasis in the original.) Putin has a very peculiar definition of aggression—e.g., resisting an unprovoked Russian attack and refusal to accept Russian domination. In addition, “Russia’s Defense Ministry released videos of nuclear-capable bombers on training missions as part of the drills that spread from Belarus—which borders NATO members Poland, Latvia and Lithuania—to the Arctic, where its naval assets practiced launches of nuclear-capable missiles, including the hypersonic Zircon missile.”<sup>15</sup> Reportedly, “Russian forces positioned *Iskander-M operational-tactical missile systems in Kaliningrad*, which are equipped for nuclear strikes, and performed electronic missile launches that simulated operational readiness without physical missile launches.”<sup>16</sup> (Emphasis in the original.)

Putin often cites defending Russia’s “sovereignty and territorial integrity” when he describes the combat role of Russian nuclear weapons and when he makes nuclear threats.<sup>17</sup> This first appeared openly in the text of the 2020 version of Russia’s nuclear doctrine.<sup>18</sup> (Previous versions were not made public.) However, it was discussed in the Russian press well before then.<sup>19</sup> For example, in 2008, General Yuriy Baluyevskiy, then-Chief of the General Staff and First Deputy Defense Minister, stated, “We do not intend to attack anyone, but we consider it necessary for all our partners in that to defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Russia and its allies, military forces will be used, including preventively, including with the use of nuclear weapons.”<sup>20</sup> The December 2024 version of Russia’s nuclear doctrine made it even more explicit.<sup>21</sup> Three of its paragraphs linked the use of nuclear weapons to the protection of Russian sovereignty and territorial integrity.<sup>22</sup> The new doctrine even allows for first nuclear use in response to a conventional attack on Russia and Belarus.<sup>23</sup>



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 642 | November 3, 2025

---

In Zapad-2025, the Kremlin allowed Belarus to take the lead in the explicit nuclear weapons use messaging. Putin may not have wanted to fuel the demands from “patriotic” (i.e., reckless) Russians that he initiate nuclear attacks against Ukraine. Putin reportedly has not undertaken this action largely due to pressure from China, upon which Russia is dependent.<sup>24</sup>

Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko stated that the Zapad-2025 exercise practiced everything, “From firing conventional small arms to nuclear warheads.”<sup>25</sup> This included the use of the nuclear-capable Oreshnik intermediate-range ballistic missile.<sup>26</sup> In addition, “The Belarusian Defence Ministry confirmed in a statement that the use of tactical nuclear weapons had been rehearsed along with the deployment of Russia’s intermediate-range Oreshnik ballistic missile that Moscow fired at Ukraine for the first time on November 21 last year.”<sup>27</sup>

Just before the Zapad-2025 exercise, Alexander Volfovich, head of Belarus’ State Security Council, told reporters that Minsk was exploring how to equip its Polonez rocket artillery system with nuclear warheads and how to turn the Oreshnik into a “joint missile.”<sup>28</sup> Belarus says that Russia has deployed dozens of tactical nuclear weapons in their country and that Russia has also provided nuclear-capable Iskander missiles to Belarus.<sup>29</sup> This increases Russia’s capability to target NATO Europe and Ukraine with nuclear weapons.

The nuclear element of Zapad-2025 takes on particular significance in light of Russia’s announced plan to deploy the Oreshnik missile this year. In May 2025, Russia’s TASS news agency reported that, “The Oreshnik missile complex is set to be deployed in Belarus by the end of this year, with the designated deployment sites already determined, according to Alexander Volfovich, the Secretary of the [Belarus] Security Council.”<sup>30</sup> In June 2025, Putin stated that serial production of the Oreshnik is underway.<sup>31</sup> In August 2025, Lukashenko, speaking about the Zapad-2025 exercise, threatened the use of nuclear weapons and stated that, “The Oreshnik missile system which Russia promised to deploy in Belarus before the end of the year is capable of carrying nuclear warheads, too.”<sup>32</sup> The current version of the Oreshnik has little utility without nuclear weapons.<sup>33</sup> With nuclear weapons, it is quite capable. The November 2024 attack on Ukraine demonstrated it could carry six warheads. Additionally, the deployment of Oreshnik missiles in Belarus this year would result in multiple new Russian violations of the New START Treaty which is set to expire in February 2026 and which Russia has proposed extending for another year.<sup>34</sup>

As usual, the announced size of the Zapad-2025 exercise (13,000 troops, although Putin later claimed 100,000 Russians were involved) was only a fraction of its real size but the number of troops participating was much lower than previous Zapad exercises.<sup>35</sup> It was Belarus that announced the downsizing of the exercise and moving it further away from its borders.<sup>36</sup> It probably reflected the desire of Belarus to minimize the risk of its involvement in a conflict with NATO. Downsizing probably also reflected the strain of the large Russian troop commitment and the heavy Russian casualties in its war of aggression against Ukraine.<sup>37</sup> Reportedly, the Ukrainian security service believes, “Currently, almost all combat-ready Russian ground forces units are involved in waging war against Ukraine (mainly conscripts are stationed at permanent deployment points, providing security / defense of military camps).”<sup>38</sup> (Emphasis in the original.)



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 642 | November 3, 2025

---

The United Kingdom's Defence Ministry assesses that Putin's claim that 100,000 Russian troops took part in the exercise is probably false and that it is likely that only 11,000 Russian troops, in Belarus, the Moscow and Leningrad military districts, including Kaliningrad, took part in the exercise.<sup>39</sup>

The relatively small size of the exercise made the nuclear escalation element even more ominous. Sviatlana Hieorhiyeuna Tsikhanouskaya, a Belarusian opposition leader and political activist, pointed out the risks associated with the nuclear element of the Zapad-2025 exercise. She wrote, "This poses a tangible threat not only to the region but also to Belarusians themselves."<sup>40</sup>

The Russian drone attack against Poland, two days before the Zapad-2025 exercise officially began, is quite ominous. Poland concluded that Russia had "deliberately targeted" NATO.<sup>41</sup> Reportedly, five of the drones flew directly at a NATO air base.<sup>42</sup> There was also a Russian drone incursion into Romania.<sup>43</sup> There were drone incursions, possibly undertaken by Russia, which shut down airports in Copenhagen and Oslo.<sup>44</sup> Reportedly, the Government of Denmark has "...identified three Russian-linked ships that potentially could have been used as launch platforms for drone overflights that closed down Copenhagen Airport on the night of September 22."<sup>45</sup>

Poland characterized the Zapad-2025 exercise as "very aggressive."<sup>46</sup> Lacking sufficient troop numbers to intimidate Europe to the degree Putin desired, he apparently deliberately resorted to a near act of war against Poland. Poland officially characterized the drone incursion as an "attack" on Poland.<sup>47</sup> It involved 19 drones; the drones were not armed but a defensive missile, which missed one of the drones, damaged a house.<sup>48</sup>

The drone attack was hardly a trivial development. Putin is testing the limits of what Russia can get away without consequence.<sup>49</sup> He would have to be incredibly foolish to start a war with NATO while struggling to defeat Ukraine; however, he could easily miscalculate. Polish President Donald Tusk stated that, "I want to emphasize very strongly that there is no reason to claim we're on the brink of war, but there is no doubt that this provocation exceeds the existing boundaries and is incomparably dangerous from Poland's point of view than all the others."<sup>50</sup> He added, "This situation brings us the closest we have been to open conflict since World War II."<sup>51</sup> Tusk noted that this was a test of NATO's ability to react to aerial threats.<sup>52</sup> This was "...the first time NATO planes have engaged potential threats in Allied airspace."<sup>53</sup>

General Alexis G. Grynkewich, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, stated that, "The violation of Poland's airspace earlier this week is not an isolated incident and impacts more than just Poland."<sup>54</sup> Russia's drone attack on Poland apparently so disturbed Belarus that, reportedly, "Belarus's armed forces notified Poland and Lithuania about the incoming drones via existing military-to-military communication channels."<sup>55</sup> This is additional evidence that the drone attacks were preplanned. Thus, despite Belarus' nuclear saber-rattling in the service of Putin, it apparently does not want to become involved in a Russian war against NATO. Poland invoked NATO Article 4 consultations. As a result, NATO's defensive presence in Eastern Europe was increased.<sup>56</sup>



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 642 | November 3, 2025

---

The Russian MiG-31 fighter incursion over Estonia also appears to be deliberate. It lasted 12 minutes and did not end until NATO jets (from three nations) were launched to intercept them. Estonia also invoked NATO Article 4 consultations.<sup>57</sup> The Russian fighters were armed.<sup>58</sup> A NATO spokesperson said it was "...yet another example of reckless Russian behaviour..."<sup>59</sup> After this incursion, in a prepared statement NATO indicated:

NATO has increased its military presence in the eastern part of the Alliance as a direct result of Russia's behaviour, which reflects a pattern of aggressive actions against its neighbours and the wider transatlantic community. Russia is the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area.<sup>60</sup>

NATO's North Atlantic Council stated that, "This incursion is part of a wider pattern of increasingly irresponsible Russian behaviour."<sup>61</sup> It added that, "We will reinforce our capabilities and strengthen our deterrence and defence posture, including through effective air defence."<sup>62</sup>

Reportedly, Estonia's Defense Minister Hanno Pevkur expressed readiness to "...host on its territory the future stealth F-35A fighters of the Royal Air Force (RAF), which the United Kingdom is set to acquire with nuclear strike capability provided by the United States."<sup>63</sup> (U.K. F-35As would initially carry U.S. B61 Mod 12 nuclear bombs.)

The European Union stated, "The military participation of other countries in ZAPAD-2025, in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine, including from the territory of Belarus, is a matter of serious security concern for the EU."<sup>64</sup>

Poland took seriously the threat of Russian military action against it during Zapad-2025 and it deployed 40,000 troops on its border with Belarus.<sup>65</sup> Russia had used the Zapad-2021 exercise as a cover for deployment troops for its invasion of Ukraine in early 2022.<sup>66</sup>

In the aftermath of Zapad-2025, the Russian drone attack on Poland and the fighter incursion in Estonian airspace, there were drone incursions that closed airports in Denmark and Norway, drone incursions over NATO airbases, and a second drone incursion, combined with cyberattacks, against the Copenhagen airport and Danish military sites.<sup>67</sup> Drone airport disruptions expanded to France and Spain.<sup>68</sup> Russia may have been involved.<sup>69</sup> The cyber element was part of Russian "hybrid warfare."<sup>70</sup> The drone element appears to be an expansion of hybrid warfare into a more potentially lethal form. Danish Defense Minister Troels Lund Poulsen said the drone incursions over Denmark's airports and military installations were a "hybrid attack."<sup>71</sup>

President Trump stated that the drone attacks "could be big trouble."<sup>72</sup> Their timing in relationship to Russia's Zapad-2025 exercise is important. After he was briefed on the incident, President Trump stated that the United States would defend NATO.<sup>73</sup> In an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council, U.S. Ambassador Mike Waltz stated, "The United States stands by our NATO allies in the face of these airspace violations, and I want to take this first opportunity to repeat and to emphasize the United States and our allies will defend every inch of NATO territory."<sup>74</sup> Soon after, President Trump wrote, "I think Ukraine, with the support of the European Union, is in a position to fight and WIN all of Ukraine back in its



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 642 | November 3, 2025

---

original form. With time, patience, and the financial support of Europe and, in particular, NATO, the original Borders from where this War started, is very much an option.”<sup>75</sup> Putin’s nuclear threats and irresponsibility clearly backfired.

Zapad-2025 and the other warlike incidents appear to be another Russian attempt to intimidate NATO. However, this time, the drone attacks appear to be an overt act of war. What we are seeing now is more than just Russian “hybrid warfare” that has been going on for about 20 years. As Michaela Dodge, a Research Scholar at the National Institute for Public Policy, writes, “The term ‘hybrid warfare’ has served to obscure Russia’s nature as a revisionist, imperialist, and nuclear-armed adversary.”<sup>76</sup> Worse yet, it is a nuclear-armed adversary with the lowest nuclear weapons use threshold in the world.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, the U.S. nuclear deterrent has been dramatically reduced since the end of the Cold War.<sup>78</sup> This decline must be reversed sooner rather than later. There is now discussion of Europe building a “drone wall” defense.<sup>79</sup> The Trump Administration’s pressure to force the Europeans to enhance defense spending is also vital. Both deterrence and defense capabilities must be bolstered. Russia’s aggression is a wake-up call to the West which has long deluded itself about the nature of Putin’s revanchist foreign policy goals.

<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Sokirko, “Top-ol, Top-ol!!,” *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, December 23, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Jacob W. Kipp, “Russia’s Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons,” *Military Review*, May-June 2001, <https://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p124201coll1/id/235/rec/6>.

<sup>3</sup> Mark B. Schneider, “Russian Nuclear Strategy,” *Journal of Strategy and Politics* (2017), Volume 2, Number 1, p. 134, <https://strategyandpolitics.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/russian-nuclear-strategy.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Mark B. Schneider. “The Russian Non-Strategic (Tactical) Nuclear Exercise,” *RealClearDefense*, September 17, 2024, September 17, 2024, [https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2024/09/17/the\\_russian\\_non-strategic\\_tactical\\_nuclear\\_exercise\\_058803.html](https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2024/09/17/the_russian_non-strategic_tactical_nuclear_exercise_058803.html).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> “Belarus gears up for trial run mounting nukes to delivery platforms,” *TASS*, May 7, 2024, <https://tass.com/defense/1785109>.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Osborn and Mark Trevelyan, “Moscow and Minsk rehearse launch of nuclear weapons deployed in Belarus, Lukashenko says,” *Reuters*, September 16, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/moscow-minsk-rehearse-launch-nuclear-weapons-deployed-belarus-lukashenko-says-2025-09-16/>.

<sup>8</sup> “Main part of Zapad-2025 exercise due near Borisov in Minsk Region – defense minister,” *TASS*, August 13, 2025, <https://tass.com/world/2001815>.

<sup>9</sup> “Poland scrambles aircraft after Russia launches strikes on Ukraine,” *Reuters*, September 20, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/poland-scrambles-aircraft-after-russia-launches-strikes-ukraine-2025-09-20/>; and, Andrius Sytas and Gram Slaterry, “Russian jets enter Estonia’s airspace in latest test for NATO,” *Reuters*, September 20, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/nato-member-estonia-says-three-russian-jets-violated-its-airspace-2025-09-19/>.

<sup>10</sup> Osborn and Trevelyan, “Moscow and Minsk rehearse launch of nuclear weapons deployed in Belarus, Lukashenko says,” *op. cit.*



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 642 | November 3, 2025

---

<sup>11</sup> “Zapad-2025 joint strategic exercise,” *Kremlin.ru*, September 16, 2025, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/78004>.

<sup>12</sup> “Putin: Zapad-2025 Drills Will Rehearse ‘Unconditional Defence’ of Union State, APT,” *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iyE-JFK-X9c>.

<sup>13</sup> “Russia: Russia flexes its military muscles at NATO’s doorstep days after sending drones to Poland,” *Asia News Monitor*, September 16, 2025, [https://dialog.proquest.com/professional/professionalnewsstand/docview/3250356687/fulltext/198BE75E335/1?accountid=155509&accountid=155509&site=professionalnewsstand&t:ac=198B.E75E335/1&t:cp=maintain/resultcitationblocksbrief&t:zoneid=transactionalZone\\_2920432bbe69d](https://dialog.proquest.com/professional/professionalnewsstand/docview/3250356687/fulltext/198BE75E335/1?accountid=155509&accountid=155509&site=professionalnewsstand&t:ac=198B.E75E335/1&t:cp=maintain/resultcitationblocksbrief&t:zoneid=transactionalZone_2920432bbe69d).

<sup>14</sup> “Putin names purpose of Russia-Belarus drills,” *RT*, September 16, 2025, <https://www.rt.com/russia/624791-putin-zapad-drills-goals/>.

<sup>15</sup> “Russia shows off conventional and nuclear military might in drills – and raises tensions with NATO,” *Pittsburgh Tribune - Review*, September 16, 2025, [https://dialog.proquest.com/professional/professionalnewsstand/docview/3251280694/fulltext/198D2731FA7/24?accountid=155509&accountid=155509&site=professionalnewsstand&t:ac=198D2731FA7/2&t:cp=maintain/resultcitationblocksbrief&t:zoneid=transactionalZone\\_3c432ccd3ef00](https://dialog.proquest.com/professional/professionalnewsstand/docview/3251280694/fulltext/198D2731FA7/24?accountid=155509&accountid=155509&site=professionalnewsstand&t:ac=198D2731FA7/2&t:cp=maintain/resultcitationblocksbrief&t:zoneid=transactionalZone_3c432ccd3ef00).

<sup>16</sup> “Russia-Belarus Joint Military Exercise ‘Zapad-2025’: Intel Briefing,” *Special Eurasia.com*, September 17, 2025, <https://www.specialeurasia.com/2025/09/17/russia-belarus-zapad-2025/>.

<sup>17</sup> “Plenary session of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum,” *Kremlin.ru*, June 7, 2024, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/74234>; Mark B. Schneider, “Putin’s Revision of Russian Nuclear Doctrine,” *RealClearDefense*, October 3, 2024, [https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2024/10/03/putins\\_revision\\_of\\_russian\\_nuclear\\_doctrine\\_1062615.html](https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2024/10/03/putins_revision_of_russian_nuclear_doctrine_1062615.html); and, “Meeting on implementing state armament programme for nuclear deterrence,” *Kremlin.ru*, July 26, 2012, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/16058>.

<sup>18</sup> “Putin approves state policy on nuclear deterrence – text,” *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, June 4, 2020, [https://dialog.proquest.com/professional/professionalnewsstand/docview/2409183356/fulltext/171E6F03B7B7D7382ED/2?accountid=155509&site=professionalnewsstand&t:ac=171E6F03B7B7D7382ED/1&t:cp=maintain/resultcitationblocksbrief&t:zoneid=transactionalZone\\_1728171393a](https://dialog.proquest.com/professional/professionalnewsstand/docview/2409183356/fulltext/171E6F03B7B7D7382ED/2?accountid=155509&site=professionalnewsstand&t:ac=171E6F03B7B7D7382ED/1&t:cp=maintain/resultcitationblocksbrief&t:zoneid=transactionalZone_1728171393a); and, Mark B. Schneider, “Putin’s New Nuclear Doctrine,” *RealClearDefense*, June 23, 2020, [https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2020/06/23/putins\\_new\\_nuclear\\_doctrine\\_115405.html#\\_edn1](https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2020/06/23/putins_new_nuclear_doctrine_115405.html#_edn1).

<sup>19</sup> Mark B. Schneider, “Putin’s Plan to Send Russians to Heaven,” *RealClear Defense*, December 01, 2018, [https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2018/12/01/putins\\_plan\\_to\\_send\\_russians\\_to\\_heaven\\_113995.htm](https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2018/12/01/putins_plan_to_send_russians_to_heaven_113995.htm).

<sup>20</sup> “Russia says could use nuclear weapons.” *NBC News*, January 20, 2008, <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna22743091>.

<sup>21</sup> Mark B. Schneider, “The Implications of Russia’s New Nuclear Doctrine,” *Information Series*, No. 615, National Institute for Public Policy, February 5, 2025, [https://nipp.org/information\\_series/mark-b-schneider-the-implications-of-russias-new-nuclear-doctrine-no-615-february-5-2025/](https://nipp.org/information_series/mark-b-schneider-the-implications-of-russias-new-nuclear-doctrine-no-615-february-5-2025/).

<sup>22</sup> Russian Federation Foreign Ministry, “Fundamentals of State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence,” December 5, 2024, [https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/international\\_safety/1434131/](https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/international_safety/1434131/).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> “China may have stopped Putin from using nuclear weapons, Blinken says,” *The Kyiv Independent*, January 4, 2025, <https://kyivindependent.com/china-may-have-stopped-putin-from-using-nuclear-weapons-blinken-says/>.

<sup>25</sup> Osborn and Trevelyan, “Moscow and Minsk rehearse launch of nuclear weapons deployed in Belarus, Lukashenko says,” *op. cit.*



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 642 | November 3, 2025

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.; and, “Russia-Belarus Zapad Drills to Practice Use of Tactical Nuclear Arms, Oreshnik – Reports,” *Sputnik News*, August 13, 2025, <https://sputnikglobe.com/20250813/russia-belarus-zapad-drills-to-practice-use-of-tactical-nuclear-arms-oreshnik---reports-1122605782.html>.

<sup>27</sup> “Moscow and Minsk rehearse launch of nuclear weapons deployed in Belarus,” *Cyprus Mail*, September 16, 2025, [https://dialog.proquest.com/professional/professionalnewsstand/docview/3251098566/fulltext/198D29707D6/1?accountid=155509&accountid=155509&site=professionalnewsstand&t.ac=198D29707D6/1&t.cp=maintain/resultcitaitonblocksbrief&t.zoneid=transactionalZone\\_3c51604d96b97](https://dialog.proquest.com/professional/professionalnewsstand/docview/3251098566/fulltext/198D29707D6/1?accountid=155509&accountid=155509&site=professionalnewsstand&t.ac=198D29707D6/1&t.cp=maintain/resultcitaitonblocksbrief&t.zoneid=transactionalZone_3c51604d96b97).

<sup>28</sup> “Belarus looking at how to arm its missile systems with nuclear warheads,” *Cyprus Mail*, August 21, 2025, [https://dialog.proquest.com/professional/professionalnewsstand/docview/3241609572/fulltext/1988A516BC2/5?accountid=155509&accountid=155509&site=professionalnewsstand&t.ac=1988A516BC2/1&t.cp=maintain/resultcitaitonblocksbrief&t.zoneid=transactionalZone\\_bfec48725a4f8](https://dialog.proquest.com/professional/professionalnewsstand/docview/3241609572/fulltext/1988A516BC2/5?accountid=155509&accountid=155509&site=professionalnewsstand&t.ac=1988A516BC2/1&t.cp=maintain/resultcitaitonblocksbrief&t.zoneid=transactionalZone_bfec48725a4f8).

<sup>29</sup> “Lukashenko Says Dozens Of Russian Nukes Deployed in Belarus,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 24, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/belarus-lukashenko-russia-nuclear-weapons/32920346.html>; and, “Belarus looking at how to arm its missile systems with nuclear warheads,” *Reuters*, December 25, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/belarus-says-russia-deployed-iskander-missile-systems-ready-use-2022-12-26/>.

<sup>30</sup> “Oreshnik will appear in Belarus by yearend, deployment sites determined – Security Council,” *TASS*, May 28, 2025, <https://tass.com/defense/1965025>.

<sup>31</sup> “Meeting with graduates of higher military schools.” *Kremlin.ru*, June 23, 2025, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/77240>.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Mark B. Schneider, “Military and Arms Control Implications of the New Russian Oreshnik Missile,” *RealClearDefense*, December 17, 2024, [https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2024/12/17/military\\_and\\_arms\\_control\\_implications\\_of\\_the\\_new\\_russian\\_oreshnik\\_missile\\_1079036.html](https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2024/12/17/military_and_arms_control_implications_of_the_new_russian_oreshnik_missile_1079036.html).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> “Zapad 2025: What the Russia-Belarus military exercise will reveal about Lukashenko’s intentions,” *Chatham House*, September 4, 2025, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/09/zapad-2025-what-russia-belarus-military-exercise-will-reveal-about-lukashenkas-intentions>.

<sup>36</sup> Yauheni Preiherman, “Belarus Downsizes Zapad-2025 to Reduce Escalation Risks,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume 22, Issue 84, June 11, 2025, <https://jamestown.org/program/belarus-downsizes-zapad-2025-to-reduce-escalation-risks/>.

<sup>37</sup> United Kingdom Ministry of Defence, “Intelligence Update,” September 19, 2025, <https://x.com/DefenceHQ/status/1969042409372704783>.

<sup>38</sup> “Ukrainian security service on the Zapad-2025 exercises: no offensive group was detected, but provocations are possible,” *Belsat.eu*, August 8, 2025, <https://en.belsat.eu/88612878/ukrainian-security-service-on-the-zapad-2025-exercises-no-offensive-group-was-detected-but-provocations-are-possible>.

<sup>39</sup> “Intelligence Update,” op. cit.

<sup>40</sup> “Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya’s statement on the Zapad-2025 Belarus-Russia military exercise,” *Tsikhanouskaya.org*, September 14, 2025, <https://tsikhanouskaya.org/en/news/sviatlana-tsikhanouskayas-statement-on-the-zapad-2025-belarus-russia-military-exercise.html>.



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 642 | November 3, 2025

---

<sup>41</sup> “Poland Says Its Air Force Has Concluded The Russian Drone Incursion Was ‘Deliberately Targeted’ at NATO,” *Breitbart News*, September 12, 2025, <https://www.breitbart.com/europe/2025/09/12/poland-says-russian-drone-incursion-was-deliberately-targeted-at-nato/>.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Rebekah Koffler, “Putin has his finger on the nuclear trigger. The risk of an accident is enormous,” *The Telegraph*, September 22, 2025, <https://uk.news.yahoo.com/putin-finger-nuclear-trigger-risk-234126300.html>.

<sup>44</sup> Stine Jacobsen and Surbhi Misra, “Drone sightings disrupt flights at Copenhagen, Oslo airports,” *Reuters*, September 22, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/copenhagen-airport-halts-traffic-due-drone-sightings-police-says-2025-09-22/>; and, “Drone flights shut airports in Denmark, Norway as anxiety over Russia soars,” *The Washington Post*, September 23, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2025/09/23/drones-denmark-norway-russia-airports/>.

<sup>45</sup> “Denmark Thinks Russia-Linked Ships Launched Copenhagen Airport Drone Raid,” *Maritime-executive.com*, September 23, 2025, <https://maritime-executive.com/article/denmark-thinks-russia-linked-ships-launched-copenhagen-airport-drone-raid>.

<sup>46</sup> “Putin names purpose of Russia-Belarus drills,” *RT*, September 16, 2025, <https://www.rt.com/russia/624791-putin-zapad-drills-goals/>.

<sup>47</sup> “Poland officially confirms that it engaged and shot down multiple Russian drones that entered Polish airspace tonight,” *Reddit.com*, September 10, 2025.

<sup>48</sup> Edward Luttwak, “Will Putin call Nato’s bluff? European militaries are a paper tiger,” *UnHerd*, September 6, 2025, <https://unherd.com/2025/09/will-putin-call-natos-bluff/?lang=us>.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Tara Suter, “Poland closest to open conflict since World War II, prime minister says,” *The Hill*, September 10, 2025, <https://thehill.com/policy/international/5495721-poland-donald-tusk-conflict-russia-drones/>.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Howard Altman, “Poland Says Russia’s Mass Drone Incursion Was ‘A Test,’” *The War Zone*, September 11, 2025, <https://www.twz.com/air/poland-says-russias-mass-drone-incursion-was-a-test-as-it-closes-airspace-on-border>.

<sup>53</sup> “Eastern Sentry to enhance NATO’s presence along its Eastern flank,” *Shape NATO.int*, September 12, 2025, <https://shape.nato.int/news-releases/eastern-sentry-to-enhance-natos-presence-along-its-eastern-flank>.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Yauheni Preiherman, “Belarus and Poland Share Military Information Despite Worsening Political Relations,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume 22, Issue 122, September 17, 2025, <https://jamestown.org/program/belarus-and-poland-share-military-information-despite-worsening-political-relations/>.

<sup>56</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “NATO launches ‘Eastern Sentry’ to bolster posture along eastern flank,” September 12, 2025, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_237601.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_237601.htm).

<sup>57</sup> “Estonia seeks Nato consultation after Russian jets violate airspace,” *BBC*, September 20, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/czrp6p5mj3zo>; and, Sophie Tanno, “Poland scrambles jets as Russia launches massive aerial assault on Ukraine,” *CNN*, September 20, 2025, <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/09/20/europe/poland-russia-aerial-assault-ukraine-intl>.

<sup>58</sup> North Atlantic Council, “Statement by the North Atlantic Council on recent airspace violations by Russia,” September 22, 2025, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_237721.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_237721.htm).

<sup>59</sup> Sytas and Slattery, “Russian jets enter Estonia’s airspace in latest test for NATO,” op. cit.



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 642 | November 3, 2025

---

<sup>60</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "NATO's military presence in the east of the Alliance," September 19, 2025, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_136388.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm).

<sup>61</sup> "Statement by the North Atlantic Council on recent airspace violations by Russia," op. cit.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> "Due to the incursion of Russian MiG-31s, Estonia is considering allowing the future deployment of British F-35A fighters with nuclear capability on its territory," *Militar.com*, September 23, 2025, <https://www.zona-militar.com/en/2025/09/23/due-to-the-incursion-of-russian-mig-31s-estonia-is-considering-allowing-the-future-deployment-of-british-f-35a-fighters-with-nuclear-capability-on-its-territory/>.

<sup>64</sup> "Statement by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the joint strategic, military exercise ZAPAD-2025," European Council of the European Union, September 17, 2025, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/09/17/statement-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-eu-on-the-joint-strategic-military-exercise-zapad-2025/>.

<sup>65</sup> Sion Pennar, "Poland sends 40,000 troops to border before Russian military drills," *TVP World*, September 11, 2025, <https://tvpworld.com/88865149/poland-deploys-40000-soldiers-to-border-as-russia-holds-drills>.

<sup>66</sup> "Belarus looking at how to arm its missile systems with nuclear warheads," op. cit.

<sup>67</sup> "The Guardian view on Nato airspace incursions: Russia is testing European and US will. It won't stop here," Editorial, *The Guardian*, September 25, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/sep/25/the-guardian-view-on-nato-airspace-incursions-russia-is-testing-european-and-us-will-it-wont-stop-here>; Jean-Philippe Liabot & Euronews, "Unidentified drones spark security alert at French military base," *Euro News*, August 26, 2025, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2025/09/26/unidentified-drones-spark-security-alert-at-french-military-base>; and, Michael Rios and Lex Harvey, "Drones close a Denmark airport for a second time in a week," *CNN*, September 25, 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/09/24/europe/denmark-aalborg-airport-closed-drones-latam-intl>.

<sup>68</sup> "Mystery drones now spark chaos in Spain as flights diverted from Fuerteventura after days of incursions across Europe," *The Sun*, September 28, 2025, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/36853989/mystery-drones-spain-flights-diverted/>.

<sup>69</sup> "Russia Link Possible in 'Serious Attack' on NATO's Denmark," *Newsweek*, September 23, 2025, <https://www.newsweek.com/nato-denmark-drones-russia-copenhagen-airport-10473830>.

<sup>70</sup> Nedelcho Mihaylov, "Cyber Dimensions of a Hybrid Warfare," Cyber Peace Institute, April 8, 2025, <https://cyberpeaceinstitute.org/news/cyber-dimensions-of-a-hybrid-warfare/>.

<sup>71</sup> "Denmark May Trigger NATO Article 4 Over Drones Chaos: 'Hybrid Attack'," *Newsweek*, September 25, 2025, <https://www.newsweek.com/nato-denmark-drones-hybrid-attack-airports-10642013>.

<sup>72</sup> "Donald Trump Warns of 'Big Trouble' After Russia Enters NATO Airspace," *Newsweek*, September 19, 2025, <https://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-warning-russia-nato-airspace-estonia-2132829>.

<sup>73</sup> Ryan King, "Trump warns US will defend Poland and Baltics if Russia keeps escalating: 'We don't like it'," *New York Post*, September 23, 2025, <https://nypost.com/2025/09/21/us-news/trump-warns-us-will-defend-poland-and-baltics-if-russia-keeps-escalating-we-dont-like-it/>.

<sup>74</sup> "United States vows to defend NATO allies after Russian airspace violations," *York Dispatch*, September 23, 2025, <https://www.yorkdispatch.com/story/news/2025/09/22/us-vows-to-defend-nato-allies-after-russian-airspace-violations/86300787007/>.

<sup>75</sup> Matthew Lee, Aameter Madhani, and Illia Novikov, "Trump says he now believes Ukraine can win back all territory lost to Russia with NATO's help," *Associated Press*, September 23, 2025, <https://www.wcnc.com/article/news/nation-world/ukraine/trump-ukraine-win-back-all-territory-lost-to-russia-nato/507-348d71fd-3dc2-4a1e-b52d-549f8e308c62>.



## INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 642 | November 3, 2025

---

<sup>76</sup> Michaela Dodge, “Russia Is at War with the West,” *Information Series*, No. 636, National Institute for Public Policy, September 11, 2025, [https://nipp.org/information\\_series/michaela-dodge-russia-is-at-war-with-the-west-no-636-september-11-2025/](https://nipp.org/information_series/michaela-dodge-russia-is-at-war-with-the-west-no-636-september-11-2025/).

<sup>77</sup> Schneider, “The Implications of Russia’s New Nuclear Doctrine,” op. cit.

<sup>78</sup> Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear Deterrence, Chemical, and Biological Defense Policy and Programs, *Nuclear Matters Handbook 2020 [Revised]*, <https://www.acq.osd.mil/ncbdp/nm/NMHB2020rev/chapters/chapter1.html>.

<sup>79</sup> Andrew Gray, Jacob Gronholt-Pedersen and Ingrid Melander, “EU leaders back ‘drone wall’ to repel Russia after airspace violations,” *Reuters*, October 1, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/eu-leaders-discuss-drone-wall-denmark-days-after-airspace-violations-2025-09-30/>.

The National Institute for Public Policy’s *Information Series* is a periodic publication focusing on contemporary strategic issues affecting U.S. foreign and defense policy. It is a forum for promoting critical thinking on the evolving international security environment and how the dynamic geostrategic landscape affects U.S. national security. Contributors are recognized experts in the field of national security. National Institute for Public Policy would like to thank the Sarah Scaife Foundation for the generous support that made this *Information Series* possible.

The views in this *Information Series* are those of the author(s) and should not be construed as official U.S. Government policy, the official policy of the National Institute for Public Policy, or any of its sponsors. For additional information about this publication or other publications by the National Institute Press, contact: Editor, National Institute Press, 9302 Lee Highway, Suite 750, Fairfax, VA 22031, (703) 293- 9181, [www.nipp.org](http://www.nipp.org). For access to previous issues of the National Institute Press *Information Series*, please visit <http://www.nipp.org/national-institutepress/informationseries/>.

© National Institute Press, 2025