



Global Tensions: Russia and Belarus Launch Massive Nuclear Exercises Challenging NATO

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MOSCOW – Russia once again raises **the specter of nuclear** in response to the progressive European rearmament triggered by the conflict in Ukraine. Moscow's armed forces, in close coordination with those of Minsk, have **initiated a massive three-day military exercise**. At the center of the maneuvers is the deployment and potential launch of ballistic and cruise missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

The Russian Ministry of Defense has confirmed the mobilization of long-range aviation and strategic units belonging to two military districts. The Kremlin's stated objective leaves no room for interpretation: to test operational readiness to "prepare and execute" nuclear attacks aimed at "discrediting a potential adversary".

The Numbers of the Show of Force

This week's maneuvers are not limited to the Ukrainian borders but extend over an immense geographical area from Europe to the Pacific, primarily involving units not directly engaged in the ongoing conventional conflict.

The deployment numbers:

- Over **64,000** military personnel involved
- More than **7,800** pieces of military equipment
- Over **200** missile launchers
- More than **140** aircraft and **73** surface ships
- **13** submarines (including 8 missile submarines)



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Belarus is firmly integrated into this chessboard. President Aleksandr Lukashenko, firmly in power also thanks to Moscow's support after the 2020 protests, has integrated his forces with the Russian ones, after accepting in 2023 the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons on his territory.

The Diplomatic Clash and the Collapse of Treaties

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov pointed the finger at European countries, accusing them of fueling a medium-term escalation:

- **Moscow's position:** "Openly provocative actions in the nuclear field increase strategic risks and the danger of a frontal clash between NATO and our country," Ryabkov declared.
- **The contentious issues:** Moscow views with great concern the debate in Finland over the abolition of the historic ban on the use of nuclear weapons, as well as the plans of France and Poland for new military exercises in the Baltic Sea.

These tests occur at a very delicate historical moment, characterized by the total deterioration of international arms control mechanisms. In February, the **New Start formally expired**, the last treaty remaining in force between the United States and Russia that allowed for the limitation and mutual inspection of nuclear arsenals.



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From the Sarmat Missile to the Defense Doctrine: Unresolved Issues

The show of force comes just days after the announcement that the **Sarmat** (codenamed *Satan II* by NATO), the first post-Soviet heavy nuclear ballistic missile with a range declared by Putin of "over 35,000 kilometers," will be ready for combat by the end of the year (although the Kremlin had already announced its deployment in 2023).

The effectiveness of Russian nuclear deterrence, however, remains at the center of the debate, especially after recent Ukrainian drone attacks hit the same area of Moscow. Faced with press questions about the usefulness of such a devastating arsenal if the country cannot prevent incursions on its own territory, Kremlin spokesman Dmitri Peskov cut short, reinforcing Moscow's

line: the Russian nuclear doctrine provides for the use of the atom only and exclusively in case of **"threat to the very existence of the State"**.

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