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Gorbachev Warns Tensions Over Ukraine Could Spiral Into Nuclear War

By The Moscow Times

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Former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev looks on during a presentation of his new book "After Kremlin" in Moscow, Dec. 26, 2014.

BERLIN — Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev warns that tensions between Russia and European powers over the Ukraine crisis could result in a major conflict or even nuclear war.

"A war of this kind would unavoidably lead to a nuclear war," the 1990 Nobel Peace Prize winner told Der Spiegel news magazine, according to comments released on Friday.

"We won't survive the coming years if someone loses their nerve in this overheated situation," added Gorbachev, 83. "This is not something I'm saying thoughtlessly. I am extremely concerned."

Watch the Video: Mikhail Gorbachev Talks to The Moscow Times About Ukraine

Tensions between Russia and Western powers rose after pro-Russian separatists took control

of large parts of eastern Ukraine and Russia annexed Crimea in early 2014.

The United States, NATO and the European Union accuse Russia of sending troops and weapons to support the separatist uprising, and have imposed sanctions on Moscow.

Russia denies providing the rebels with military support and fends off Western criticism of its annexation of Crimea, saying the Crimean people voted for it in a referendum.

Gorbachev, who is widely admired in Germany for his role in opening the Berlin Wall and steps that led to Germany's reunification in 1990, now warns against Western intervention in the Ukraine crisis.

"The new Germany wants to intervene everywhere," he told Der Spiegel. "In Germany evidently there are a lot of people who want to help create a new division in Europe."

The elder statesman, whose "perestroika" restructuring policy helped end the Cold War, has previously warned of a new cold war and potentially dire consequences if tensions are not reduced over the Ukraine crisis.

The diplomatic standoff over Ukraine is the worst between Moscow and the West since the Cold war ended more than two decades ago.

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