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Moscow Sends Nuclear Warning to NATO as Tensions Rise in the Baltic

By Reuters

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A Russian Yars missile system. **Vitaly V. Kuzmin (CC BY-SA 4.)**

Russia has warned NATO that it is willing to resort to the use of nuclear weapons if the Western military alliance tries to enforce a blockade of the Kaliningrad region, a Russian exclave bordering the Baltic Sea.

In a document sent to NATO and seen by Reuters, Russia accused the alliance of a "dangerous and reckless course" that entailed "high risks of the outbreak of a direct armed conflict."

The document said this included the possibility of "Russian strikes against decision-making centers in the alliance's member states right from the outset."

"Russia will be ready to use the entire arsenal of forces and capabilities at its disposal, including nuclear weapons, in order to defend its territory should NATO countries undertake any attempt aimed at isolating the Kaliningrad region from the rest of the country," the

diplomatic note said.

The warning underscores Moscow's concerns about what it sees as a growing NATO threat to Kaliningrad, a heavily militarized region wedged between Poland and Lithuania.

In a written response seen by Reuters, NATO said it was a defensive alliance committed to countering threats to its members. "None of NATO's exercises or activities pose a threat to the territory of the Russian Federation," it said.

"We call upon the Russian Federation to end its unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine. We urge the Russian Federation to refrain from increasingly reckless behaviour towards the Allies and to cease its irresponsible nuclear rhetoric," the response added.

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In addition to the private warning, Russian embassies in at least three European countries have issued statements in the past three days accusing NATO of escalating tensions through military exercises and planning scenarios involving Kaliningrad.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov described these as diplomatic reminders to "hotheads in Europe."

Russia's relations with European governments have dramatically worsened this year. European officials have increasingly accused Russia of stepping up a so-called "hybrid" war against the bloc through acts of sabotage.

The Kremlin has dismissed those allegations, as well as warnings from some European officials that Russia is preparing for a possible military attack against NATO.

"I would say that the Russian letter is only another Russian attempt to intimidate Europeans, and that the response by NATO is firm and responsible," a NATO diplomat told Reuters. "[It] reaffirms that we will not be dissuaded from supporting Ukraine."

But a senior European Defense official said it was the first time since the Cold War that Russia is "threatening us like this. So, this is serious."

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