

Putin Can Paralyze Ukraine Without Using Nuclear Weapons

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Global concerns have recently focused on Russian President Vladimir Putin's threat to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine, but there is still a question regarding the justification for resorting to these weapons, even though Moscow has not yet exhausted its other destructive weapons.

"A large part of the discussion in Washington and other Western capitals in the past few days has focused on Putin's supposed threat to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine, in response to the challenges," international affairs analyst and researcher Leon Hadar said in a report published by the National Interest. confronting what he considers to be Moscow's core national interests.

The specter of proliferation of nuclear weapons

"However, as we contemplate the specter of Russia deploying its nuclear arsenal that could lead to the 'Second Cuban Missile Crisis'," adds Hadar, a journalist, author and former fellow at the Cato Institute, we need to be reminded that a global superpower can cripple small or medium-sized, without resorting to the use of nuclear weapons. Once it uses the full force of its conventional weapons in Ukraine, Russia will force Washington into the same situation that no one won after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, when it concluded that saving a victim of Moscow's aggression would require direct US military intervention.

Contrary to our collective historical memory, the single most destructive raid in human history was not the United States' detonation of the atomic bomb over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, but the incendiary air raid on Tokyo by the United States Air Force, during two nights in March 1945. That raid left an estimated 100,000 Japanese civilians were killed, and more than a million were homeless. For comparison, the atomic bombing of Nagasaki killed between 40,000 and 80,000 people.

Destruction of urban centers

The numerous attacks on military forces, as well as on the civilian population, during World War II, including with German bombers and missiles targeting British cities, and the devastating bombing of Berlin, Dresden, and other German urban centers by the American and British air forces, were as devastating as the potential effect. For a tactical nuclear bomb, if not more.

The United States and its allies dropped more than 7.5 million tons of bombs on North Vietnam during the Vietnam War. While it prompted Hanoi to participate in peace negotiations in 1972, US bombings failed to force the North Vietnamese into submission, and caused horrific suffering to the civilian population.

turning point

On the other hand, the NATO bombing campaign against Yugoslavia during the Kosovo war in 1999, as well as the use of missiles to attack Belgrade and Pristina, marked a turning point in that war, and forced the then leader of Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milosevic, to agree a peace agreement, which eventually led to his downfall.

From this perspective, Hadar asks, “why would Putin use nuclear weapons before using his country’s full air power and other conventional weapons, including missiles, in order to force Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to agree to a deal that would guarantee Russian interests?”

“Putin must realize that the bombing of Kyiv, Lviv, and other Ukrainian urban centers could fail to bring Ukrainians to their knees, in the same way that the large-scale, gradual U.S. bombing of Hanoi did not lead to the complete surrender of the people of North Vietnam,” he said.

The bravery of the Ukrainians on the battlefield could lead Putin to consider the possibility that they would be willing to fight to the death.”

pressure

Or perhaps, in the same way that Milosevic in Serbia was forced to submit to Western demands in the wake of the frustrated attacks on Belgrade and Pristina, Zelensky will come under pressure from his own people to come to an agreement with Russia.

In general, Hadar wonders: “Is it really logical for the Ukrainian people to commit suicide at the national level in order to prevent Russia from occupying four regions in the eastern part of the country?” He adds: “Ukraine does not have nuclear weapons, which could threaten a global superpower like Russia. Even under the worst-case scenario from Russia’s point of view, Ukrainian forces will not be able to enter Moscow and impose a political solution to the war on the Kremlin. The only question is whether Ukraine will have the military capacity and political will to force Putin to withdraw from occupied Ukrainian territory.”

Moreover, the use of nuclear weapons for the first time since 1945 is risky, which could lead to a Western military response, which could spark an all-out global war, and the potential use of strategic nuclear weapons, not to mention transform the entire international community, including China India, against Russia.

Western military experts ask: “Why did Russia, which has more than 1,500 combat aircraft and extensive experience in bombing targets in Syria and Georgia, not take advantage of its great advantage over Ukraine, which is its air power, in the ongoing fighting in Ukraine?”

lack of experience

Russia's failure to gain air supremacy in Ukraine, some analysts suggest, may reflect its lack of experience using air power as a strategic tool, or more likely, that the Russian air force has hampered its full capabilities.

The bottom line is: "While Russian forces would certainly suffer many losses if they launched large-scale air attacks on Ukraine, the costs to Ukraine and its civilian population would be overwhelming."

Putin has already ordered a series of missile strikes against cities across Ukraine in retaliation for the explosion on a major Russian bridge he described as a "terrorist attack". This type of large-scale air attack against civilians, and critical infrastructure, would be very much in line with Russia's behavior in Chechnya, Syria and Georgia, which is based on the use of massive military force, while ignoring its impact on human lives.

Putin's strategy now will likely be to force the Biden administration and, in the process, Congress and the American people, as well as the United States' European allies, to decide whether they are willing to risk a direct confrontation with Russia in Ukraine, or to back off and start putting pressure on Ukraine to conclude an agreement with Moscow.

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