

Weekly Intelligence Brief

A Chanticleer Intelligence Brief Project



Tensions between Russia and Ukraine's allies give rise to nuclear threats

Lex Martin
Deputy Head of Desk
Europe Desk

On 13 MAR, Russia warned that the ongoing war in Ukraine could expand geographically due to the ill-considered actions of the United States and France, which are member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Some observers argue that this is the biggest tension in Moscow's relations with the West since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. Russia also responded angrily after

French President Emmanuel Macron last month refused to rule out sending troops to Ukraine. Putin said that "Russia was technically ready for nuclear war and that if the United States sent troops to Ukraine, it would be considered a significant escalation of conflict."

Russian Foreign Minister spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told reporters that the situation around Ukraine has started to become more dangerous, and the West is now "on the edge of the abyss." She advised the West to give up on the idea of strategically defeating Russia

and to stop supporting Ukraine. The West now is grappling with how to support Kyiv against Russia, which now holds control of one-fifth of Ukrainian territory. Kyiv has responded by saying it is defending itself against a conquest designed to erase its national identity.

We can assess with high confidence that it is likely tensions are going to continue to grow if the West continues to aid Ukraine, and we can also assess with high confidence it is unlikely that Russia will resort to using nuclear weapons.

United States and Iranian officials held secret indirect meetings in January 2024

Brandon Macallair

Senior Analyst
Middle East Desk

On 10 JAN, the United States and Iran held closed-door indirect talks in Oman. The talks discussed the war in Gaza, the Houthi attacks on shipping in the Red Sea, and Iranian proxy militia attacks on US forces in Iraq. The Iranian and American delegations sat in separate rooms and Omani officials delivered messages between them.

American officials said Iran requested the indirect meetings in January. The

first open-source report of these meetings occurred in the week of 11 MAR. The US objective from these talks was for Iran to pull back its proxies such as Hamas and the Houthis. Iran wanted the United States to immediately deliver a ceasefire in Gaza. While the potential of future meetings was discussed, media sources have not reported subsequent meetings.

We assess with high confidence that it is likely that this indirect meeting was unsuccessful in accomplishing either side's objectives. Since 10 JAN, the war in Gaza, Houthi attacks on shipping in the Red Sea, and Iranian proxy attacks

have continued. We assess with high confidence that public or private diplomatic talks will continue, and there is a roughly even chance of their success in resolving the aforementioned conflicts in the Middle East.



The seizure of US guns going into Mexico and its effect on the opioid epidemic

Jeremy Kerr

Analyst
Americas Desk

United States border agents are cracking down on gun trafficking across the southern border as part of an effort against Mexican drug cartels. US Customs and Border Protection intercepted over 1,000 guns before they crossed into Mexico in 2023. These guns would have strengthened the cartels' operations. This is what has led US authorities to believe is the blame for a surge in American overdose deaths. In 2023, the United States suffered more

than 100,000 fatal drug overdoses. Most of those deaths involved fentanyl and other synthetic opioids, many of which were synthesized in Mexico before being smuggled over the border.

In 2023, an audit concluded that firearms trafficked into Mexico that come from the United States and a high demand for illegal drugs have caused negative effects on both sides of the border. Many of last year's seizures involved assault rifles, which US authorities say are among the cartels' weapons of choice. In early 2023, border agents found 34 assault rifles trying to cross into Mexico. From 2017 to 2022

the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, reported nearly 124,000 guns were recovered at crime scenes in Mexico. Once traced they found that 68 percent of those guns, which amounts to more than 83,000, came from the United States.

We can assess with high confidence that it is highly likely that if thousands of guns continue to make their way across the US-Mexico border, cartels will gain more strength leading to both US and Mexican citizens being put at risk.

Weekly Intelligence Brief

Editor-in-Chief
Tessa Bentley

Associate Editors
Aubrey Belanger
Samuel Lockett
Jordan Maple

For access to past issues and other Chanticleer Intelligence Brief projects, visit our website, cibrief.org/publications/wib

