

Russia Commander: Russia ready to use nuclear weapons if threatened

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Russia's top military commander said on Saturday that the country is prepared to use its nuclear weapons to defend itself and allies in the event of a severe external threat.

The Chief of the Russian General Staff, Gen. Yury Baluyevsky, told a conference at the Academy of Military Sciences in Moscow: "We do not intend to attack anyone, but consider it necessary that all our partners clearly understand, and that no one has any doubts, that the Armed Forces will be used to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Russia and its allies, including preventative action, and including the use of nuclear weapons."

Baluyevsky's comments come amid growing tensions between Russia and NATO over the alliance's expansion into the former Eastern Bloc, the United States' plans to deploy missile defense elements in Poland and the Czech Republic, and Moscow's increasingly assertive military stance.

Russia resumed strategic bomber patrol flights over the Pacific, Atlantic, and Arctic oceans last August, and on December 12, 2007 imposed a unilateral moratorium on the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, a key arms reduction pact.

Baluyevsky said that in order to protect Russia's interests, military force "can and must be used" when "all other means prove ineffective."

Programs to develop Russia's military must be closely linked to national fiscal planning, "taking into account the state's economic resources," he said.

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