

Kremlin escalates threats against the West

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On 21 November, Russia launched a medium-range ballistic missile of a new type, identified by the US as a modified version of the prototype RS-26 Rubezh intercontinental ballistic missile, which targeted the Yuzhmash/Pivdenmash plant in Ukraine's Dnipro. On the same day, Vladimir Putin declared that the attack was a response to Ukrainian strikes using US and British manufactured missiles (ATACMS and Storm Shadow) on 19 and 21 November, which targeted sites within Russian territory. He asserted that such attacks could not have occurred "without the direct involvement of the military experts" from the countries producing these missiles.

Putin further claimed that these developments introduced elements of a global dimension to the conflict. Consequently, he stated that Russia "considers itself entitled to use its weapons against the military facilities of those countries that allow to use their weapons against our [Russian] facilities". In this context, the Russian leader hinted at the possibility of further attacks on Ukraine using similar missile systems, which he emphasised were beyond the capability of US missile defence systems to intercept.

Commentary

- The deployment of a new experimental missile against Ukraine serves primarily as a political gesture with limited significance for the military situation. However, Putin's statement represents yet another instance of rhetorical escalation by Russia, aimed at intimidating Western public opinion and pressurising Washington and European capitals. Moscow's objective is to discourage them from increasing support for Ukraine and, in particular, to reintroduce restrictions on the use of Western-provided missiles. Furthermore, the Russian attack and Putin's remarks are intended to compel the West to pursue a swift resolution to the conflict by making unilateral concessions to Russia.
- Over the next two months, Russian is likely to intensify its military actions against Ukraine and engage in provocative behaviour towards the West, remaining below the threshold of a direct missile strike on Western targets. These actions aim to bolster Moscow's position in anticipation of peace negotiations that the Donald Trump administration is seeking to initiate.