

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: [The Great Un-rattling](#)

The Takeaway:

- The risk of nuclear conflict and nuclear disaster in Ukraine is alarmingly high, but the U.S. is taking steps to mitigate it.
- Nuclear issues – and especially issues of nuclear security – are important topics for negotiations, and can produce risk reduction even as the overall conflict rages on.
- It is important that discussions between the U.S. and Russia on nuclear issues continue despite the war in Ukraine, especially as we approach expiration dates for important arms control agreements.

Nuclear Risk in Ukraine

At his UN General Assembly speech last week, President Biden continued his policy of meeting Vladimir Putin's nuclear provocations with pitch-perfect responses aimed at de-escalating the situation. Just hours after Putin ham-fistedly reminded the world that Russia "has different types of weapons as well" – practically wagging his eyebrows to underscore the nuclear innuendo – Biden [reiterated](#) the fundamental truth that "nuclear war can never be won and must never be fought." Biden's level-headed response to Putin's saber-rattling reflects his handling of the nuclear threats at play in Ukraine. He has consistently avoided measures that would lead to nuclear brinkmanship and, as we learned last week, his administration has undertaken quiet [diplomacy](#) between Washington and Moscow aimed at avoiding nuclear miscalculation.

Yet Putin's speech, for all of its bluster, also included a frank admission of vulnerability that offers an opening for broader diplomacy to limit nuclear risk. The Russian president described the situation at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (ZNPP) – a nuclear power facility that has been caught in the conflict's crossfire – as "nuclear blackmail." His concern derives from the idea that, in the event that damage from bombs or shells causes a radiation leak at ZNPP, prevailing winds would push the radiation eastward into Russia. In an attempt to underline that nuclear disaster is a universal threat, Putin cautioned that "the wind rose can turn around," and people west of Zaporizhzhia could be harmed by a disaster there as well.

Disaster at ZNPP can't be prevented through military means – fighting near the plant is where the threat comes from in the first place. The risk can only be mitigated through diplomacy. That process is already ongoing, with multi-party talks about protecting the plant resulting in the deployment of a team from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to the plant to

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support its safe operation. Today, there are two IAEA experts indefinitely stationed at the plant, providing risk assessments to the international community and advising the plant operators on how to prevent catastrophe.

Yet the risk remains high. The IAEA experts [reported](#) shelling and landmine explosions near the plant this week, close enough to shatter windows near the turbine halls. IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi has repeatedly called for a “nuclear safety and security protection zone” to be established around the plant, and talks with Russia and Ukraine toward that goal are ongoing. Those talks, and broader discussions about how to prevent disaster at ZNPP, are an opportunity for the U.S. to continue and expand its efforts to reduce nuclear risks in Ukraine. Indeed, the Biden administration and Congress are already taking steps in this direction, appropriating \$35 million in the Ukraine supplemental passed this week for the Department of Energy to “prepare for and respond to potential nuclear and radiological incidents in Ukraine, provide equipment and sensors to augment Ukrainian capabilities, assist Ukrainian partners with security of nuclear and radiological materials, and prevent illicit smuggling of nuclear, radiological, and dual-use materials.”

Funding and prioritizing nuclear security cooperation at sites like ZNPP are a way to lower nuclear risk in Ukraine, both directly and indirectly. Directly, the funds can help the Ukrainian government and the IAEA take steps to prevent the mishaps that can occur when artillery combat mixes with nuclear power production. Indirectly, they signal that the United States’ strong condemnation of Putin’s imperialist invasion and its support for Ukrainian sovereignty does not mean that the U.S. refuses to engage with Russia on issues that affect the safety of people everywhere.

In his UN speech, President Biden said, “No matter what else is happening in the world, the United States is ready to pursue critical arms control measures.” The conflict in Ukraine tests that commitment, at a moment when the global nuclear arms control regime is growing shakier by the day. The U.S. and Russia have the largest stockpiles of nuclear weapons on earth, and the future of nuclear arms control requires that they work together to limit and reduce those stockpiles. Diplomacy and cooperation to address the nuclear challenges posed by ZNPP can help keep lines of communication open for greater progress on reducing the threat of nuclear weapon use.

BURIED LEDES

The labor movement is participating in the protests in Iran, with oil workers [warning](#) the government that they will go on strike if the crackdown does not end. The Organizing Council of Oil Contract Workers said, “We support the people’s struggles against organized and everyday violence against women and against the poverty and hell that dominates the society.” The

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people of Iran are making their voices heard and the political demands and economic demands are now fully intertwined. This strike would cripple a key component of Iran's economy.

In Naypyitaw, Myanmar a court controlled by **the military junta** [sentenced](#) **the deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi** and Australian citizen and former economic adviser Sean Turnell to three years in prison each under a violation of the "secrets" law. Suu Kyi's detainment is yet another blow to the rise of the Nobel Peace Prize winner, who was state counselor (equivalent to prime minister) from 2016-2021 after already spending 15 years under house arrest over a 21 year span for her political activities. This latest sentence comes on top of the over 20 years the military junta has already convicted and sentenced Suu Kyi to on separate politically motivated charges. This is the same Military Junta responsible for [genocide](#) against the Rohingya people and driving 740,000 people from their homes.

The British Pound reached its [lowest recorded level](#) this week after falling more than 20 percent this year. Currently, one British Pound is nearing 1:1 parity with the US dollar, with £1 = \$1.03. The main trigger for a major value drop this week was an announced spending and tax plan by the new conservative government in London, which includes steep tax cuts for the rich. The Bank of England purchased government bonds in an emergency move. Out of the 38-member Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Britain has the worst performing economy outside of Russia. This is an ongoing decline in economic performance that started from the United Kingdom's 2016 withdrawal from the European Union.

Russia and the United States are in a struggle to control the International Communication Union (ITU), a UN agency that develops technical standards for technology. The struggle will play out among the 190 member countries, who will vote for President Biden-endorsed American Doreen Bogdan-Martin or Rashid Ismailov, a former Russian official. China and Russia put out a joint statement last year calling for preserving "the sovereign right of the state to regulate the national segment of the internet." The fight is being [framed](#) as a democracies versus authoritarian control of an influential if little known institution. The ITU sets standards for cell phones, texts, smart home devices and even connected cars.

On Wednesday, President Biden, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and Secretaries of State and Commerce, Antony Blinken and Gina Raimondo, respectively, [hosted the first Pacific Island Summit in order to introduce the first Pacific Island Strategy](#). The summit included an announcement of \$810 million to expand aid to the Pacific Islands, on top of \$1.5 billion in support the US has given the islands over the past decade. The State Department will expand the diplomatic missions from six to nine nations. Separately, the investments will include upgraded submarine cables to improve communications networks and a strengthened regional health infrastructure. While the White House acknowledged there has been a need to "step up our game" among the Pacific islands, the main takeaway is that this is an investment in a larger

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competition with China – and one that comes with no acknowledgment of the United States' harmful actions in the region, including nuclear weapons tests.

Manchester United, saved by several game cancellations in the aftermath of the Queen's deaths, remains coasting on the high of a lucky [victory](#) in the Europa League against Moldova's Sheriff Tiraspol. They're likely to come back down to earth this coming Sunday in a game against English Premier League juggernaut Manchester City. Meanwhile, the World Cup is now weeks away, and the Danish national team recently [announced](#) that they are wearing jerseys at the tournament protesting host country Qatar's labor practices.