

Putin: Russia Would Direct Armed Forces at Aggressors

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Russian President Putin talks to media during news conference with his Finnish counterpart Niinisto following their meeting at Novo-Ogaryovo.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Tuesday that Russia would be forced to direct its armed forces at any countries which might threaten it, potentially adding to tensions with Western powers over its military ambitions.

Tension has flared with the West over Moscow's role in the Ukraine crisis, in which pro-Russian separatist forces have seized a large part of the country's east after Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014.

"We will be forced to aim our armed forces ... at those territories from where the threat comes," Putin told a joint news conference with Finnish President Sauli Niinisto after talks at a presidential residence outside Moscow.

Putin noted that Russia was most concerned about a long-running NATO project to build a missile defence system in Europe. Moscow has repeatedly expressed opposition to that, and earlier on Tuesday Putin said Russia would add more than 40 new intercontinental ballistic missiles to its nuclear arsenal this year.

"It is NATO that is moving towards our border and we aren't moving anywhere," he said.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on Tuesday accused Russia of unwarranted "saber rattling" over its intention to add to its nuclear arsenal.

Putin, who has overseen lavish military spending in spite of an economic crisis driven by weaker oil prices and sanctions, also said on Tuesday the best guarantee of Finland's security was for it to have neutral status.

On the Ukraine crisis, he repeated that Russia wanted Ukraine to repay the \$3 billion it lent to Kiev via a so-called "bailout bond" under former President Viktor Yanukovich.

"We have the right to demand early repayment of these funds, but we haven't done that due to the difficult state of the Ukrainian economy," Putin said.

The Russian leader also said he thought the Minsk peace deal on Ukraine was "fair and balanced" and that if Russia did not agree with its contents it would not have signed it.

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