

By deploying two nuclear submarines close to Russia, Trump has instinctively and precisely struck the nerve of Moscow's fears

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Russia's history has been shaped over centuries by existential threats, powerful invasions, and heavy losses, especially in the two world wars. The high level of Russia's nuclear armament can only be understood in this context: the focus is on deterrence through a guaranteed ability to launch a "second strike," a counterattack after any first strike by an enemy. Moving two such vessels on August 2 2025 close to the territory of an adversary is therefore a highly provocative maneuver— even if it remained unclear whether nuclear weapons were on board.

Arms control experts, especially from the US and Russia, have worked together for decades — for example, at Pugwash conferences — to emphasize the importance of avoiding escalation of any kind. There have been a number of technical mishaps, such as the crash of an aircraft carrying nuclear weapons in Spain, but there has never been an accidental nuclear explosion. Furthermore, military control is always difficult, partly because of the "practical constraint", the inherent necessity of prevention, which involves preempting the enemy in a confrontation. After all, once a nuclear war has started, communication technologies would quickly be severely disrupted, making any attempt at political control aimed at a ceasefire difficult.

The purpose of nuclear submarines is actually to be able to destroy any location on the planet from any point. This would only happen at the end of an escalating nuclear war, as a final act of retaliation. Such submarines are therefore not used for warfare, but as a deterrent. Deploying them close to an enemy's armed forces, land, and population emphasizes the aspect of warfare and intensifies the direct threat. This is precisely what could lead to a deliberately "limited" preventive strike by Russia against these threateningly close submarines. The ruthless destruction in Ukraine demonstrates what Putin is fundamentally capable of. Both sides, the US and Russia, are already "justifying" that the other side would be to blame if a nuclear war were to break out. For now, everything is quiet – but when there will be another urgency, or a further misunderstanding, then escalation may be more imminent, than before...

No other action by Trump has been as dangerous as this deployment. An aggressive NATO, as well as dangerous unilateral actions by the US, can drag us in Europe into greater danger than they can protect us. It is humanly understandable how we in Germany (the population, experts, politicians, some artists...) are repressing the danger: On August 2, there was a calm and factual reference to the deployment of the ships on television. But shortly afterwards, the TV presenters joked in a natural and friendly manner about comparatively harmless topics. Onlookers are invited and thereby seduced to ignore the risks, to take it easy.

Until now, I had the impression that all countries (except North Korea) had developed a heightened sense of caution in avoiding nuclear disasters after building up their own nuclear arsenals. For the first time, I now feel noticeably more at risk in Berlin than I have been in the last few decades. This is also due to the fact that NATO has begun a nuclear arms race in which the immediate threat to Russia will come more strongly than before from the territory of the country historically responsible for the worst attacks against Russia: Germany.