
PUTIN URGING RUSSIAN OFFICIALS TO RETURN TO RUSSIA

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Russian president Vladimir Putin's administration issued an informal request for Russian officials abroad to return home, but not because they believe war is imminent.

On 12 October 2016, the British tabloid Daily Mail posted an article reporting that Russian President Vladimir Putin had "ordered" ranking Russian officials living abroad to return home, along with their families, with the implication that such an action presaged an anticipation of an international armed conflict:

Russia is ordering all of its officials to fly home any relatives living abroad amid heightened tensions over the prospect of global war, it has been claimed.

Politicians and high-ranking figures are said to have received a warning from president Vladimir Putin to bring their loved-ones home to the 'Motherland', according to local media.

The request seems to have been prompted by an issue of public relations within Russia, not by concerns that war is about to break out.

The Daily Mail cited the Russian-language news web site Znak, which posted a piece entitled "Home!" Translated from Russian, the piece said that Putin's administration had issued an informal request, not an order, that Russian officials and their family members who are living abroad return home. The piece discussed not a pending military conflict, but a public perception problem stemming from Russian elites' sending their children to be educated at expensive Western schools while their homeland is in the midst of challenging the West and jockeying with the U.S. for global power. It does not seem to be a red flag that World War III is imminent.

While the Daily Mail cited growing international tensions between Russia, the United States, and other Western countries such as France, the Znak piece instead discussed a tabloid story about the daughter of a foreign minister's returning to Russia with a foreign accent after living in the

United States, and other similar anecdotes. Znak quotes political scientist Vitaly Ivanov as saying, roughly translated:

Education of the Russian elite children abroad is subject to the constant complaints and derision against the regime ... You can not serve two gods, one must choose.

The Znak piece also discussed proposed legislation that would require the children of Russian officials to be educated in Russia. Even though the Russian-language news site indicated that the request by the Russian government had more to do with domestic politics than with any external events, that didn't stop multiple gossip and clickbait sites such as the Daily Star from claiming that Putin was ordering officials home in preparation for a nuclear "World War III":

It comes after Russia held civil defence drills for 40 million citizens in apparent preparation for an apocalyptic nuclear war.

Ash Carter, US secretary of state, has told the Pentagon Russia could be plotting a "unprecedentedly terrible attack" using its superior nuclear firepower.

This segment was a mischaracterization of Carter's statement. The U.S. Secretary of Defense made his comments as part of a broader speech on 26 September 2016 to airmen at Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota about the nature of nuclear deterrence amid a global superpower chess game. Carter said that even if, for example, Russia or North Korea perpetrated a small-scale but still terrible nuclear attack, the U.S. would remain staunchly loyal to its allies:

Despite the changes since the end of the Cold War, the nature of deterrence has not changed, the secretary said. Even in 2016, deterrence still depends on perception — what potential adversaries see, and therefore believe — about our will and ability to act, he said. This means that as their perceptions shift, so must our strategy and actions.

A large-scale nuclear attack is not likely, the secretary said. The most likely scenario is the unwise resort to smaller but still unprecedentedly terrible attacks, for example by Russia or North Korea, to try to coerce a conventionally superior opponent to back off or abandon an ally during a crisis, Carter said. We cannot allow that to happen, which is why we're working with our allies in both regions to innovate and operate in new ways that sustain deterrence and continue to preserve strategic stability.

NATO is reexamining the nuclear strategy to integrate conventional and nuclear deterrence to deter Russia, he said.

Meanwhile, across the Pacific, the United States engages in formal deterrence dialogues with its allies Japan and South Korea, Carter said, to ensure were poised to address nuclear deterrence challenges in Asia.

The alarmist stories also pointed to a large-scale, three-day disaster drill involving 40 million people undertaken by Russia as evidence the country was preparing for nuclear war. Some also quoted strategist Stanislav Belkovsky, who told Znak the move could be to "prepare elites for some big war." However, it is unclear whether Belkovsky's statement was lost in translation and instead referred to a domestic political war between governmental factions, since the rest of the comment discussed a widening wedge between Putin and "his own elite." Furthermore, the Russian emergency ministry maintained the drills were to prepare for a massive disaster of either man-made or natural origins.

While it is true that tensions between Russia, the United States, and other Western countries are high, we found no sound evidence that Putin was "ordering" officials and their families to return as part of preparation for "World War III." These seem to be fear-mongering claims conflating various and possibly unrelated Russian domestic affairs with international tensions.

Kaynak/Source: