Putin threatens military action if NATO rejects Russian ultimatum

President Vladimir Putin said Sunday that if NATO does not provide binding guarantees to curtail military deployments in Eastern Europe and to bar Ukraine from membership in the alliance, he will be forced to consider a variety of options, including a military response.

Putin's demands are contained in a pair of draft treaties Russia submitted to NATO earlier this month.

POLITICO reported that Putin, whose remarks aired on Russian state TV Sunday, expressed concerns about the possibility of missiles being deployed in Ukraine if the former Soviet satellite joins NATO.

"We have nowhere to retreat," Putin said. "They have pushed us to a line that we can't cross. They have taken it to the point where we simply must tell them; 'Stop!'" When asked about the exact nature of the response he was proposing, Putin said it would "depend on what proposals our military experts submit to me."

NATO is unlikely to agree to Putin's terms. "NATO member countries decide who is a member of NATO, not Russia," White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters, according to The Washington Post. President Biden has threatened increased sanctions if Russia invades Ukraine.

The Russian military announced Saturday that more than 10,000 Russian troops had returned to their bases after a month of drilling on the Ukrainian border, Reuters reports. Despite this reduction, Russia still has tens of thousands of troops stationed on the Ukrainian border, and intelligence analysts continue to warn that an invasion could be imminent.

Russian state media frequently refers to Ukraine as "a colony of the West" and smears Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, without evidence, as a drug addict, according to BBC. Over 14,000 people have been killed in fighting between Ukraine's military and Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine since 2014.