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Putin Says Belarus Could Host Oreshnik Missile in 2025

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Vladimir Putin and Alexander Lukashenko shake hands ahead of a meeting of the Supreme State Council of the Union State of Russia and Belarus. **Grigory Sysoev / POOL / TASS**

Russia could deploy its nuclear-capable hypersonic ballistic missile Oreshnik in Belarus late next year, President Vladimir Putin said Friday.

"It will become possible, I think, in the second half of next year, as the serial production of these complexes is ramped up in Russia," he said in a televised meeting with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko.

Putin's promise came in response to a request from Lukashenko, who claimed Belarus faced danger from neighboring NATO members Poland, Lithuania and Germany. The Russian president said the weapons would be part of the Russian Strategic Missile Forces, but that Belarus could determine their targets.

"[Deploying Oreshnik in Belarus] would seriously calm down some 'minds' that are already prepared to wage war against Belarus," Lukashenko said.

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Last month, Putin ordered Russia's missile forces to test-fire an Oreshnik missile, which struck the Ukrainian city of Dnipro. The Russian president boasted that the ballistic missile is impossible to stop with air defense systems.

Putin called the Dnipro strike direct retaliation to Washington's approval for Ukraine to fire U.S.-supplied ATACMS missiles into Russian territory.

Russia is not believed to have a large stockpile of Oreshnik missiles.

An anonymous former Russian defense engineer told The Moscow Times this week that it would likely take years to mass-produce the missiles given the bureaucratic inefficiencies and lagging innovation that plague Russia's defense sector.

AFP contributed reporting.

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