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‘Peace-Loving, But Locked and Loaded’: Russia and Belarus to Rehearse Nuclear Strike in Zapad-2025 Drills

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Russia's Defense Minister Andrei Belousov and his Belarusian counterpart Viktor Khrenin. **Russian Defense Ministry**

The Russian and Belarusian armies will rehearse the potential use of the nuclear-capable ballistic missile Oreshnik at joint exercises next month, state media reported Wednesday, citing Belarusian Defense Minister Viktor Khrenin.

“We’ll work together with our Russian colleagues in planning for the use of this type of weaponry as part of the Zapad exercise,” Khrenin was quoted as saying by the state news agency Belta.

His phrasing suggests the weapon will be simulated, not test-fired, during the Zapad-2025 drills, which will take place from Sept. 12 to 16.

Earlier, the Belarusian military said the scaled-down exercises will feature air defense drills,

defensive combat scenarios, repelling incursions and tactical aviation support.

Khrenin described the Oreshnik missile and other nuclear weapons as a "key element of strategic deterrence" for Minsk.

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Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko previously asked Moscow to deploy Oreshnik missiles in Belarus on claims that his country faced threats from nearby NATO members Poland, Lithuania and Germany.

"We show our openness and peace-loving nature, but we must always remain locked and loaded," Khrenin told reporters after briefing Lukashenko behind closed doors on Wednesday.

The timing of the Zapad-2025 drills would align with Russian President Vladimir Putin's announcement last year that Belarus could host Oreshnik missiles in the second half of this year.

The Kremlin leader ordered the missile's test-firing in Ukraine in November 2024, with some observers describing the launch as part of a propaganda campaign to intimidate Western leadership and populations.

Putin announced the deployment of Russia's first operational Oreshnik unit earlier this month.

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