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Russia and Belarus Launch Joint Nuclear Drills

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An Iskander missile system. **Russian Defense Ministry**

Russia and Belarus launched joint military exercises on Monday to practice the combat deployment of tactical nuclear weapons, marking the first such drills since Moscow deployed its Oreshnik hypersonic ballistic missile system to Belarusian territory.

The Belarusian Defense Ministry said the drills aim to test the military's readiness to move and deploy nuclear weapons from unplanned launch sites. The exercises involve missile units and air force detachments working in coordination with the Russian army, it said.

"The primary focus will be on practicing concealment measures, long-distance movements and calculating the deployment of forces and assets," the ministry said in a statement.

It added that the drills are a scheduled event and are "not directed against third countries and do not threaten regional security."

There was no immediate comment from Russia's Defense Ministry.

Related article: Russia Slates Sarmat ICBM Deployment for Late 2026

The deployment of the nuclear-capable Oreshnik system to Belarus late last year followed claims by Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko that his country faced threats from neighboring NATO members.

Tensions have escalated further, with Lukashenko announcing a "targeted mobilization" of domestic forces last week and declaring that the country was preparing for potential conflict.

Ukraine has ordered reinforcements along its northern border with Belarus over claims that Russia is preparing a new offensive from there.

The exercises on Monday coincide with a broader breakdown in international nuclear arms control. The collapse of the New START treaty in February formally removed the final remaining caps on the U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals.

President Vladimir Putin and other Russian officials have frequently engaged in nuclear sabre-rattling since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in order to deter Western countries from sending military aid to Kyiv.

Last week, Russia said it successfully conducted a test launch of its Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missile, which it plans to deploy by the end of this year.

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