Oreshnik

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The Oreshnik is an operational Russian road-mobile intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) with multiple independently-targetable reentry vehicle (MIRV) capability. Likely modified from the RS-26 Rubezh, Russia used the Oreshnik against Ukraine in 2024 and 2026.[1] The Oreshnik's 2024 usage was likely the first time a MIRV was used in combat.[2]

Oreshnik at a Glance

ORIGINATED FROM
Russia

POSSESSED BY
Russia

CLASS
Mobile Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missile (IRBM)

BASING
Road-mobile

WARHEAD
Single or MIRV

RANGE
3,500-5,470 km

PROPULSION
Solid-fueled

STATUS
Operational

IN SERVICE
2024 – present

Oreshnik support vehicle. Photo: Russian Ministry of Defense/TASS

Oreshnik support vehicle. Photo: Russian Ministry of Defense/TASS

Oreshnik Development

The Oreshnik (Russian for hazel tree) is likely a modified RS-26 Rubezh.[3] The RS-26 was a Russian road-mobile, solid-fueled, intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) program discontinued in 2018 to prioritize funding the Avangard hypersonic boost-glide vehicle (HGV).[4] President Putin had indicated earlier in 2018 that the RS-26 would serve as a delivery vehicle for Avangard, prompting speculation that the Oreshnik may also have the capability to carry an HGV.[5] This assertion, however, remains unproven. Some Western analysts suggest Russia removed a booster stage of the RS-26 to create the Oreshnik, reducing its range, and reorienting the system toward conventional rather than nuclear warheads.[6]

Oreshnik Specifications

U.S. estimates of the missile's range vary between 3,500 and 5,470 km.[7] The Belarusian Ministry of Defense has claimed the missile's range to be 5,000 km.[8] Even the lower estimates would enable the Oreshnik to range most European capital cities from Russian territory. It uses a mobile transporter and launcher.[9]

President Putin has said the Oreshnik can travel at hypersonic speeds, which is not uncommon for ballistic missiles or their reentry vehicles. There is no available evidence it can carry a hypersonic boost-glide vehicle, like the Avangard.[10] Russia initially planned for the RS-26 to carry the Avangard, but pivoted to its deployment on ballistic missiles such as the SS-19 "Stiletto" and RS-28 "Sarmat" after the RS-26 was discontinued.[11] The Oreshnik has MIRV capability, making it significantly more difficult to successfully intercept than if it carried a single warhead.[12] Its demonstrated payload is six MIRV warheads, each capable of deploying six sub-munitions according to open-source estimates.[13] Utilizing a MIRV with sub-munitions reduces the need for multiple delivery platforms, allowing one missile to target multiple locations.

Oreshnik Specifications

Russia targeted Dnipro, Ukraine with an Oreshnik missile launched from Kapustin Yar on November 21, 2024, covering a distance of roughly 800 km.[14] During the strike, a MIRV bus dispersed six warheads, possibly the first time MIRVs were used in combat.[15] Although Ukrainian officials initially identified the weapon as an ICBM, further analysis suggested it was an intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM).[16] That strike's reported 15-minute missile flight time suggests that Russia likely employed a lofted trajectory.[17] Following the attack, President Putin framed the launch as a response to Ukrainian strikes on Russian territory with Western-provided missiles.[18] Other analysts speculate that the Oreshnik's use was part of a larger message to NATO and effort to pressure Ukraine into a cease-fire.[19]

In December 2025, Russia deployed Oreshnik missiles to eastern Belarus, likely at the Krichev-6 Aerodome, a former airbase five kilometers from the Russian-Belarusian border.[20] The site has a military-grade rail transfer point capable of receiving missile launchers by train.[21] President Lukashenko has claimed Belarus will host ten Oreshnik missiles, though space constraints at Krichev-6 would likely require dispersing them across additional sites.[22]

On January 9, 2026, Russia used the Oreshnik against an infrastructure facility in Lviv, Ukraine, as part of a larger missile strike.[23] The missile was likely launched from Kapustin Yar, a distance of about 1,448 km.[24] A senior Ukrainian official described the target as "the workshop of a state enterprise," while the SBU state security service said Russia was attempting to destroy civilian infrastructure during harsh weather conditions.[25] Ukrainian officials stated that the Oreshnik seemed to carry inert warheads. Nevertheless, the penetrations in both concrete structures and the surrounding forest are consistent with the deployment of several sub-munitions.[26] Russia's Ministry of Defense described the attack was retaliation for an alleged Ukrainian drone strike on one of President Putin's residences on December 29, 2025.[27] The claim of that attack is disputed by European Union and U.S. officials.[28]

Footnotes +

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