



OE WATCH

FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

RUSSIA

20 AUGUST 2026

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in Massive Strike To
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Moscow Showcases Oreshnik Ballistic Missile in Massive Strike To Intimidate Western Adversaries

By Dodge Billingsley

On 24 May, Russia launched a massive coordinated aerial attack against Ukraine. With nearly 600 drones and 100 missiles launched, the **Oreshnik**, a road-mobile intermediate-range ballistic missile with multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles, garnered the most attention and Western condemnation.¹ According to the first excerpted article from Finland's public broadcasting company YLE, Russia's use of the Oreshnik is "not an escalation in itself" but is intended as a show of force. The article points out that the Oreshnik is a nuclear-capable missile, and the mere demonstration of its capability is likely meant to intimidate Ukraine and the West. A short statement from Russia's Ministry of Defense published in its own newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* (the second excerpted article) claims the 24 May attack was in retaliation for earlier Ukrainian attacks on Russian civilian targets and that Russia only attacked enterprises of Ukraine's military-industrial complex and military logistics and command centers. It did not explain the logic of launching the Oreshnik.

The Oreshnik is a hypersonic missile that operates at a steep trajectory and is capable of carrying six independent warheads fitted with six submunitions, for a total of 36 possible points of impact. The Oreshnik is also a costly weapon

system in short supply. It is estimated that there are fewer than half a dozen Oreshnik missiles in existence, and at least three have been used in Ukraine, beginning with a strike on Dnipro in 2024.²

"Oreshnik arouses fear because it can be equipped with nuclear warheads and is difficult to counter."

Despite the physical damage being relatively limited, according to the third excerpted article from the Russian government newspaper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, the Oreshnik munitions "are rendered invulnerable by their flight

trajectory—characterized by a sharp ascent followed by a steep dive; their high speed; and their ability to strike specific, individual targets." Video of the strike demonstrates that the Oreshnik is essentially a dense-area saturation weapon, and while the submunitions used on the 24 May strike carried no explosive warheads, the kinetic energy at impact is capable of causing substantial damage.³ Although there was no significant damage in the May 2026 strike, Moscow likely intended to signal to the West it has such a weapon and is willing to deploy it.



Six submunitions from one of the six warheads impact Dnipro, Ukraine in 2024. *The first known use of the Oreshnik intermediate range ballistic missile.* (Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oreshnik_\(missile\)_-_media/File:Oreshnik_missile_submunitions_impacting_Dnipro,_Ukraine,_November_2024.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oreshnik_(missile)_-_media/File:Oreshnik_missile_submunitions_impacting_Dnipro,_Ukraine,_November_2024.png))

Source: “Venäjän Orešnik-isku on merkki ilmasodan kiihtymisestä, sanoo Ilmari Kähkö – ”Odotettavissa pahempaa (Russia’s Oreshnik strike is a sign of an escalation in the air war, says Ilmari Kähkö – “expect worse”),” YLE (Finland’s public broadcasting company) 24 May 2026. <https://yle.fi/a/74-20227645>

Russia launched hundreds of drones and almost a hundred missiles into Ukraine. One of them was a powerful medium-range ballistic supersonic missile called Oreshnik.

The use of the Oreshnik has been condemned today in different parts of Europe. German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul called it “shocking” and a “new escalation” in the war.

Oreshnik arouses fear because it can be equipped with nuclear warheads and is difficult to counter. Russia is trying to arouse fear by using the missile, says military scientist Ilmari Kähkö. The use of Oreshnik last night had no particular military impact compared to other missiles, and according to Kähkö, it was not a significant escalation either.

Since the missiles are not loaded with nuclear weapons, but could be, the use of the Oreshniks is a symbolic act by

Russia. In addition to instilling fear, the Oreshnik attacks may be a show of force towards the home front... There has been pressure on Russia to do something spectacular, and this is a spectacular act that will make headlines, Kähkö says.

Russia has warned about the Oreshniks in advance. On previous occasions and probably this time too, Russia announced its intention to use the Oreshniks in advance to the United States. This time too, the intention was known, as Zelenskyi said yesterday, Saturday, that he had received information that Russia was preparing to use the missile.

The ground warfare has stalled, but Ukraine is carrying out increasingly large air strikes on Russia and Russia is increasing its attacks on Ukraine. It is likely that the air warfare will take more and more turns and worse is expected on both sides.

Source: “Заявление МИД России (Statement of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs),” *Krasnaya Zvezda* (official news outlet of the Russian Foreign Ministry), 26 May 2026. <http://redstar.ru/zayavlenie-mid-rossii-3/>

In connection with the strikes of the armed forces of the Kiev regime on the civilian population of Russia, the Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement on 25 May 2026: The bloody attack on the educational building and dormitory of the Luhansk State Pedagogical University in Starobelsk (LHP), committed by the Armed Forces of Ukraine on the night of May 22 with the use of UAV, was another blatant evidence of the Nazi and terrorist nature of the Kiev regime, which deliberately strikes civilians, does not stop before the cold-blooded murder of children.

In the current conditions, the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation will begin to consistently strike enterprises of the Ukrainian military-industrial complex in Kiev, including specific sites of design, production, programming and preparation for the use of UAVs used by the Kiev regime with the assistance of NATO specialists responsible for the supply of components, the provision of intelligence and targeting. Strikes will be carried out both on decision-making centers and on command posts.

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Source: Alexey Komolov, “В Европе объяснили, почему “Орешник” недосыгаем для ПВО Украины (Europe Explains Why “Oreshnik” Is Beyond the Reach of Ukrainian Air Defenses),” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (Russian government newspaper), 26 May 2026. <https://rg.ru/2026/05/26/v-evrope-obiasnili-pochemu-oreshnik-nedosiagaem-dlia-pvo-ukrainy.html>

The “Oreshnik” munitions are rendered invulnerable by their flight trajectory—characterized by a sharp ascent followed by a steep dive—their high speed, and their ability to strike specific, individual targets.

On the night of May 24, the Russian Armed Forces launched a massive strike against Ukrainian military command facilities, employing the “Oreshnik” system alongside Iskander, Kinzhal, Zircon, and other missiles. Ukraine subsequently acknowledged that its air defense systems were unable to repel this attack.

This strike served as a response to a terrorist attack carried out by Kyiv against a college and dormitory in Starobelsk, which resulted in the deaths of children and teenagers.

It was noted that this marked the third time the “Oreshnik” system has been deployed since the start of the Special Military Operation, representing a significant combat test of the weapon under real-world conditions involving countermeasures from NATO assets.

Notes:

- 1 For more on Russia’s Oreshnik missile, see: Missile Threat, CSIS Missile Defense Project, last updated 12 January 2026. <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/oreshnik/>
- 2 There is additional reporting that possibly two Oreshnik missiles may have been launched on the 24 May strike against Ukraine. While one struck on the southern outskirts of Kiev as reported, another may have gone down in Russia controlled Donetsk region. See report by: *Prosleduet Media*, which translates “To Be Continued,” on Telegram, @prosleduet_media. https://t.me/prosleduet_media/23173
- 3 The *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* article above features embedded video of the Oreshnik submunition’s impact on Bila Tserkva. The video is dramatic and clearly shows the speed and descent of the 36 submunitions hitting the ground in six waves of six.

Russia Upgrades Nuclear Reactor Capabilities To Advance Arctic Ambitions

By Les Grau

Power generation in the Arctic is an expensive challenge. According to the excerpted article published in Norway-based *The Barents Observer*, Russia is addressing the challenge by upgrading and installing a next-generation small modular reactors designed for floating nuclear power plants and nuclear-powered icebreakers.

According to the article, Rosatom, which builds the RITM-200 and the upgraded RITM-200S, has now delivered 13 RITM-200 models and one RITM-200S. Additional 200S models are at various stages of production. One is earmarked for the icebreaker *Leningrad* and two for the icebreaker *Stalingrad*. Eight other reactors are earmarked for four floating

nuclear power plants, while four more are designated for “two-yet-to-be-built land-based small nuclear power plants, one in Yakutia and one in Uzbekistan.” These plants may support industry, isolated population centers, mines and mineral extraction sites, and military facilities, further strengthening Russia’s position in the Arctic region.



The city and port of Murmansk, Rosatom’s base for nuclear-powered icebreakers.
(Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Murmansk_%2819616461005%29.jpg)

“The RITM-200S is a significantly upgraded next-generation small modular reactor designed for floating nuclear power plants. Installation work is now set to begin at a shipyard in St Petersburg.”

Source: Thomas Nilsen, “Here comes the next-generation reactor for Arctic floating plants,” *The Barents Observer*, (Norway-based online newspaper covering the Euro-Arctic region and Northern Russia), 27 May 2026. <https://www.thebarentsobserver.com/news/here-comes-the-nextgeneration-reactor-for-arctic-floating-plants/451422>

The RITM-200S is a significantly upgraded next-generation small modular reactor designed for floating nuclear power plants. Installation work is now set to begin at a shipyard in St Petersburg. Rosatom on 27 May announced via Telegram that construction of the first reactor aimed for Russia’s second-generation floating nuclear power plants has been completed. The

reactor will be sent by rail to the Baltisky Shipyard in St. Petersburg where it will be installed.

Each of the new floating nuclear power plants will be equipped with two RITM-200S reactors, a slightly modified version of the RITM-200 reactors Russia is using on its newest generation nuclear-powered

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icebreakers. While the icebreaker reactor model has a thermal capacity of about 175 MWth, the ones designed for power plant use have a capacity of about 198 MWth.

A total of four second-generation floating nuclear power plants—destined for Cape Nagloynyn on the northern coast of Chukotka in Siberia—will be built and delivered to the Arctic by 2031. The first RITM-200S reactor was loaded onto a rail wagon inside the manufacturing hall at the ZiO-Podolsk plant just south of Moscow.

According to Rosatom, the production plant in Podolsk has now delivered 13 RITM-200 reactors and one RITM-200S reactor. The state nuclear corporation added that 14 more are at various stages of production.

The last icebreaker reactor manufactured was completed on 14 May this year and is intended for the Leningrad nuclear-powered icebreaker, also under construction at the Baltisky Yard where the floating power plants will be made ready.

Three more icebreaker reactors will be delivered: one more for the Leningrad and two for the Stalingrad. Eight other RITM-200S reactors mentioned in the Rosatom release are for the four floating nuclear power plants. The last four are for two yet-to-be-built land-based small nuclear power plants, one in Yakutia and one in Uzbekistan.

Kremlin Weaponizes Transnistrian Citizenship To Increase Recruitment, Facilitate Annexation

By Lionel Beehner

In May, the Kremlin issued a decree to simplify Russian citizenship procedures for residents of the separatist Moldovan region of Transnistria. Moldovan President Maia Sandu warned that Moscow's move is designed to facilitate the mobilization of additional Moldovans for Russia's war in Ukraine. According to the excerpted interview with online Ukraine news agency Ukrainska Pravda, Sandu noted that Moscow "probably need[s] more people to send...to war in Ukraine," suggesting that the decree serves both manpower and geopolitical objectives.¹

The measure, signed by Russian President Vladimir Putin, streamlines access to Russian passports for residents of the unrecognized territory of Transnistria, where Russian troops have maintained a presence since the early 1990s. Additionally, some experts in Russia tie the move to a referendum on the incorporation of Transnistria into Russia.² The decree follows a broader pattern in which Moscow has distributed Russian passports in contested or separatist territories—including Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Crimea, and the Donbas—prior to pursuing deeper political or military integration. The development further highlights how citizenship policy and passports can function as a tool of hybrid warfare. By weaponizing legal status and identity,



A couple walks in Tiraspol, Transnistria, May 9, 2014. (Source: Clay Gilliland, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/26781577@N07/13954559447>)

“Probably they need more people to send to the war in Ukraine.”

— Moldovan President Maia Sandu

Russia can expand influence in contested spaces without immediate conventional military escalation.

According to the article, Sandu noted that many Transnistrian residents had previously pursued Moldovan citizenship following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, believing Moldovan documents offered greater security and international mobility than Russian passports. Moscow's recent decree likely represents an attempt to reverse that trend while reasserting Russian influence in the region. The decree also increases the number of individuals Moscow could claim as "Russian citizens abroad," a justification previously used by the

Kremlin to legitimize intervention or coercive diplomacy in neighboring states.

Finally, the decree may signal renewed Russian interest in annexing or otherwise incorporating Transnistria. Since 2022, Russian officials and state media have periodically invoked the need to "protect" Russian-speaking populations and citizens in neighboring territories. Expanding citizenship in Transnistria could lay the groundwork for future political claims, especially if Moscow seeks to increase leverage over Moldova or create additional pressure points along Ukraine's southwestern flank.

Source: Iryna Kutielieva, Roman Petrenko, “Санду: РФ может использовать предоставление гражданства жителям Приднестровья для мобилизации (Moldova’s Sandu says Putin wants more troops through Transnistria citizenship decree),” *Ukrainska Pravda*, 17 May 2026. <https://newsukraine.rbc.ua/news/moldova-s-sandu-says-putin-wants-more-troops-1779009213.html>

Moldovan President Maia Sandu believes that such a decision is an attempt at covert mobilization of the region’s population for the war against Ukraine.

“Probably they need more people to send to the war in Ukraine,” the president noted. She suggested that this is one of Russia’s tactics aimed at threatening Moldova over its efforts to reintegrate Transnistria.

“Since the war in Ukraine began, most of the people from the region took their Moldovan citizenship because they felt safer to have the citizenship of the Republic of Moldova and not the citizenship of Russia,” Sandu emphasized.

Asked whether Putin could block Moldova’s accession to the EU because of the Transnistrian issue, she replied that “only the EU can decide whether Moldova can become part of the EU or not. Russia has nothing to do with it.”

On May 15, Putin signed a decree simplifying admission to Russian citizenship for residents of Transnistria. According to the document, the right to simplified acquisition of a Russian passport was granted to adult and legally capable persons permanently residing in the territory of the unrecognized region.

In response to such actions, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy stated that Russia wants to designate Transnistria as its territory. According to the head of state, the Kremlin pursues two key goals: to legitimize the occupation status of Moldova’s region and to find a new mobilization resource to recruit soldiers for the front.

Given the presence of a Russian contingent in the region and potential threats, at the beginning of May, Ukraine strengthened its defense on the border with unrecognized Transnistria. On the southwestern frontiers, the military is actively building a layered defense system and strengthening protection capabilities.

Notes:

- 1 The timing of the Kremlin’s May decree is notable: Russian forces continue to face manpower demands in Ukraine, while Moldova accelerates its European Union accession process. Sandu characterized the move as part of a broader Russian strategy intended to pressure Moldova and complicate reintegration efforts with Transnistria, where Russia currently lacks a direct land corridor to the territory.
- 2 See: “News of the week,” *НЕЗЫГАРЬ*, 17 May 2026. <https://t.me/s/russicaRU>