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Tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus



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1. INTRODUCTION

Russia has deployed tactical nuclear weapons (TNW) and advanced delivery systems to the territory of its neighbour and military ally, Belarus.

The deployed arsenal includes nuclear warheads for Iskander-M short-range ballistic missiles, which have a range of up to 500 kilometres and carry yields of 5 to 50 kilotons, as well as free-fall nuclear bombs for specially modified Belarusian Su-25 attack aircraft.

More recently, in late 2025 and early 2026, Russia expanded this posture by deploying the "Oreshnik," a nuclear-capable hypersonic intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM), to the former Krychev-6 military airfield in eastern Belarus, just 5 kilometres from the Russian border.



Oreshnik missile system

While Belarusian forces have been trained to operate the delivery systems, the nuclear warheads themselves remain under the exclusive operational control and custody of Russia's 12th Main Directorate.

When we talk about tactical nuclear weapons (TNW)—also referred to as "non-strategic" nuclear weapons—we are referring to nuclear arms designed for regional or battlefield use rather than long-range, intercontinental strategic devastation.

Despite being categorized as "tactical" or "low yield", experts strongly warn against the dangerous public misconception that these weapons are "something small" or "almost okay". Their destructive capability is massive.

In the context of Russia's deployment to Belarus, these weapons primarily consist of special nuclear warheads for

Iskander-M short-range ballistic missiles and free-fall nuclear gravity bombs carried by modified Su-25 attack aircraft. Modifications were carried out by Russia so that the Belarussian planes met the technical, but also the political, requirements outlined by Russia. Ten are the planes which were

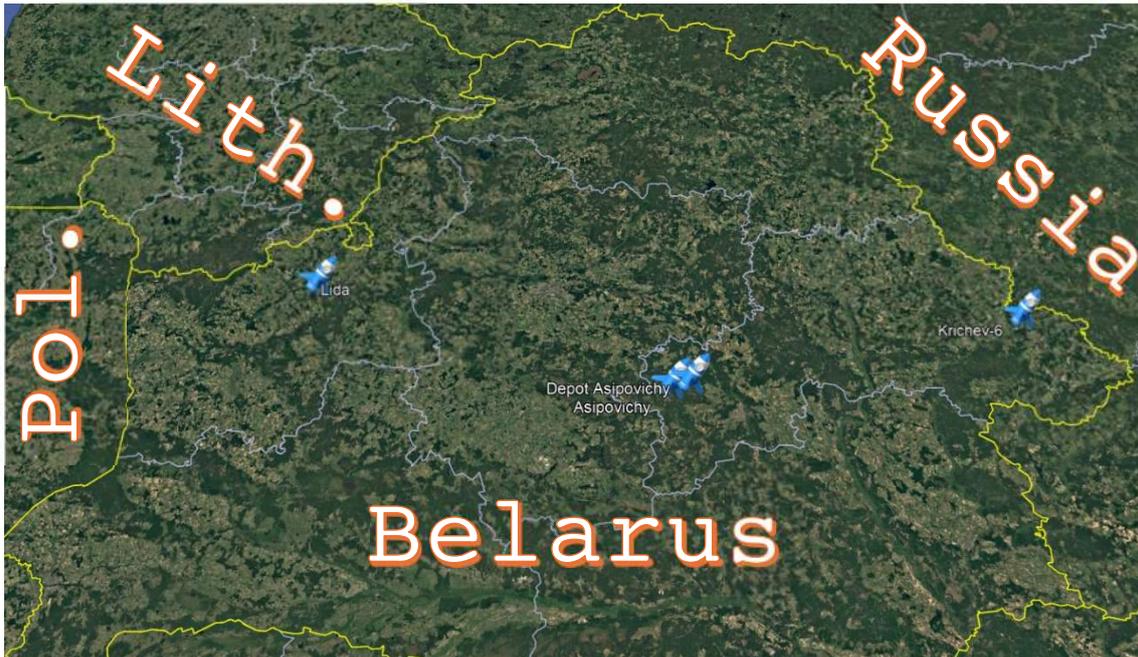
2. LOCATIONS AND SCALE OF DEPLOYMENT

The information has been scarce regarding the places where the TNW might have been deployed in Belarus. Several places have been mentioned:

Location	Deployed Weapons / Advanced Delivery Systems	Details
Krychev-6 airfield (near Krychau)	"Oreshnik" hypersonic IRBM, Tor-M2K, S-300, and Pantsir systems	Identified as the likely combat duty site for the nuclear-capable Oreshnik missile system, protected by a ring of advanced air defence and electronic warfare systems.
Asipovichy	Tactical Nuclear Weapons (Warheads)	Identified as one of the highly probable locations where Russian tactical nuclear warheads have been delivered and are actively stored.
Lida Air Base	Su-25 attack aircraft, Tactical Nuclear Weapons	Station for Russian Su-25 attack aircraft, which have been specifically modified and trained to carry nuclear payloads, and considered a possible storage site for tactical nuclear weapons.
Prudok Station / Military Unit 94017 (Vitebsk region)	Tactical Nuclear Weapon (TNW)	Used as a primary delivery, transfer, and storage hub (at the 2631st aviation base of missile armament and

	components, Iskander-M	ammunition) for TNW components and Iskander-M systems arriving from Russia via rail.
Zyabrovka Air Base (Gomel Oblast)	Iskander ballistic missiles, S-400, Pantsir	Since April 2022, the Russian military has maintained Iskander ballistic missiles, an S-400 battalion, and Pantsir air defense systems at this base.
Machulishchy Air Base (Minsk region)	Iskander missiles	Iskander missile systems have been deployed to this air base.
Baranavichy Air Base	S-400, Su-30SM, Su-24M	Base for permanently deployed Russian Su-30SM and Su-24M fighter aircraft, as well as S-400 air defense systems integrated into the joint air defense network.
Grodno	S-300	Permanent deployment site for S-300 systems belonging to the Russian 210th Air Defense Regiment under the framework of a joint training center.
Prybytki and Velikii Bokov Air Bases	S-400, Pantsir-S1	These bases near the southern border with Ukraine host two S-400 battalions and several Pantsir-S1 air defense systems

However, there are mainly three sites where their presence has been confirmed or it is highly likely due to different sources (assets on the ground, satellite imagery):



Site	Coordinates	System / Role	Confidence / Assessment
Lida Air Base	53.877, 25.377	Su-25 air-delivery / nuclear-sharing role	Probable. FAS assessed Lida as the most likely Belarusian Su-25 nuclear-sharing / air-delivery base. About 40 km from Lithuania and 120 km from Poland.
Asipovichy – 465th Missile Brigade base	53.288, 28.642	Iskander-M missile node	High. This is the clearest publicly identified Iskander-M site in Belarus.
Asipovichy training ground	53.296, 28.536	Training / support area for missile unit	High. FAS places it about 7 km from the brigade base.
Suspected depot	53.317, 28.813	Possible temporary nuclear-	Medium / suspected. FAS described it as

east/southeast of Asipovichy		warhead storage	a depot that might be undergoing upgrades for temporary nuclear-warhead storage; Belarusian officials reportedly refused to confirm or deny Osipovichy as the storage location.
Krichev-6 former airfield	53.73478, 31.91705	Probable Oreshnik deployment area	Medium-high / probable. Reuters reported researchers were about 90% confident this was the likely Oreshnik deployment area; near Krichev in eastern Belarus and about 5 km from the Russian border according to other analysis.

There are a few public statements and logistical indicators that provide a rough idea of the scale:

- **"Dozens" of warheads:** In December 2024, Lukashenko publicly stated that Belarus was hosting **"dozens"** of Russian nuclear warheads.
- **Delivery system constraints:** Experts note that the number of warheads is practically limited by the number of delivery systems available in Belarus, specifically the modified Su-25 ground-attack aircraft and the Iskander-M mobile short-range ballistic missile systems.
- **The Oreshnik deployment:** When it comes to the recently deployed "Oreshnik" hypersonic intermediate-range ballistic missiles, Lukashenko specified that a

"maximum of 10" (or no more than a dozen) of these particular missiles would be stationed on Belarusian territory.

- **Secretive rail shipments:** Monitoring by the Community of Railwaymen of Belarus tracked multiple phases of tactical nuclear weapon component deliveries throughout 2023 and 2024. These highly classified transfers involved dozens of train cars carrying personnel, components, and explosive materials to specific military units, though they do not reveal the exact warhead count.

Regardless of the precise number of warheads currently sitting in Belarusian storage facilities, all of these nuclear weapons remain under the exclusive custody and operational control of Russia's 12th Main Directorate (GUMO).

3. IMPLICATIONS OF THE DEPLOYMENT OF TNW

This deployment serves several critical military and geopolitical ends:

- **Compensating for degraded conventional forces:** By forward-deploying nuclear-armed systems, Russia is increasing its reliance on nuclear deterrence to offset the severe depletion of its conventional military forces during the prolonged war in Ukraine. It creates a "use-it-or-lose-it" scenario for these weapons, signalling to NATO that any direct conflict on Belarusian territory risks rapid nuclear escalation.
- **Coercing and intimidating NATO and the West:** The deployment acts as a tool of psychological warfare and "nuclear blackmail". Stationing these systems—especially the Oreshnik, which can reach targets across all of Europe—in Belarus drastically shortens strike distances and flight times to European capitals and NATO's eastern flank (such as Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia). This compresses NATO's decision-making window in a crisis and is intended to deter Western military support for Ukraine while forcing adversaries to accept Russian demands.
- **Subjugating Belarus and eliminating its sovereignty:** Beyond countering NATO, a primary goal of the deployment is to cement Moscow's total control over Belarus. Hosting Russian nuclear weapons establishes a permanent Russian military presence in the country and provides a permanent pretext for Russian forces to occupy Belarus to "ensure the security" of the

warheads. This effectively traps Belarus as a strategic extension of the Russian Federation, ensuring that the Belarusian regime cannot break free from Moscow's sphere of influence or undergo a democratic revolution without triggering a Russian military intervention.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In late 2021, an internal Kremlin strategy document titled "Strategic Goals of the Russian Federation in the Belarusian Direction" was drafted, **outlining a comprehensive, phased plan to effectively absorb Belarus into the Russian Federation by 2030.**

The document was reportedly developed by the Russian Presidential Administration's Directorate for Cross-Border Cooperation—supervised by Dmitry Kozak and headed by Alexei Filatov—with **significant input from Russian intelligence agencies, including the FSB, SVR, and GRU.**

The leaked blueprint details a step-by-step subjugation of Belarus through the legal and institutional framework of the "Union State", relying on economic, military, and socio-political coercion rather than overt warfare.

The strategy is divided into three distinct phases:

- **Short-term goals (by 2022):** These focused on establishing pro-Russian pressure groups within the Belarusian political and economic elite while severely limiting the influence of nationalist and pro-Western forces. Other objectives included completing constitutional reform on Russian terms, expanding joint military exercises, and forcing Belarus to re-route its trade from Baltic and Polish ports to Russian ports.
- **Medium-term goals (by 2025):** This phase aimed at expanding the infrastructure for Russia's military presence in Belarus and preventing any NATO military exercises on Belarusian territory. It also outlined the simplification of procedures to issue Russian passports to Belarusian citizens, alongside the unification of the two countries' customs legislation, tax codes, energy, and transport systems.
- **Long-term goals (by 2030):** The final phase envisions full "Russian incorporation" and total control. This would be achieved by establishing a unified legal system, introducing a single currency, and creating a common securities market. A major component of this phase is the full "Russification" of the country, ensuring the dominance of the Russian language over the

Belarusian language and controlling the nation's cultural and information spaces.

Western intelligence officials and analysts have assessed the leaked document as "absolutely plausible and realistic". Experts note that the timeline and specific objectives align perfectly with the actual acceleration of integration programs, as well as the deep military and economic dependencies Russia has forced upon Belarus since the 2020 protests.

For his part, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko publicly dismissed the document as a "fake leak" generated to create friction and "split" the alliance between Minsk and Moscow.

However, while denying it as an active strategy, Lukashenko acknowledged that such proposals might have been floated by Russian government officials around three years prior during discussions on integration roadmaps.

Despite his denials, the ongoing deployment of Russian military assets, including tactical nuclear weapons and advanced missile systems to Belarus, indicates that this 2030 strategic subjugation is actively underway.

It must be highlighted that the deployment of TNB in Belarus does not ameliorate the range or use of TNB against European countries, given that Russia has at its disposal territories such as Kaliningrad. Deterrence remains untouched.

So, this deployment has more implications for Belarus in terms of violation of its sovereignty and the permanent presence of Russian armed forces which have the mandate and the training to operate this type of weapons.

Putin is leveraging the Ukraine war to strengthen control over Belarus and pursue his objectives in Ukraine, showing no intention of backing down or abandoning his goals.

