

Sarmat on Combat Alert: Russia Activates World's Heaviest Nuclear ICBM Unit

Description

via [Military Watch Magazine](#)



The Russian Armed Forces have placed the new RS-28 Sarmat intercontinental range ballistic missile system on combat alert, following an announcement by President Vladimir Putin in February that combat duties would begin later in the year. Head of the Russian state owned space corporation Roscosmos Yuri Borisov confirmed the operationalisation of the new missile system. The Sarmat was [first test fired](#) in April 2022, and is intended to replace the R-36M2 Voyevoda system that became operational in 1988. President Putin previously commented that the missile "is capable of overcoming all modern means of anti-missile defence. It has no analogues in the world and won't have for a long time to come," referring to it as a "truly unique weapon [that] will strengthen the combat potential of our armed forces." This echoed similar statements from across figures in the government and defence sector. The new missile is the heaviest in the world at over 208 tons, and is deployed from fortified silos rather than mobile launch vehicles unlike the complementary but much lighter Yars missiles which can deploy from both as they are around a quarter of the size.



Yars ICBM on Mobile Launch Vehicle

Activation of the first Sarmat unit comes five and a half years after the system was announced alongside other important asymmetric weapons systems by President Putin in early March 2018, with the Avangard hypersonic glide vehicle designed for the Sarmat and the Voyevoda also having been announced at the time. Avangard vehicles are deployed by missiles in their terminal stages to more reliably evade interception, and have no near peer analogues elsewhere in the world. The activation of the Sarmat unit has further widened the gap between Russian and the United States in the capabilities of their ground based strategic missile forces, with the American ICBM arsenal being by far the oldest and least sophisticated in the world comprised of Minuteman III missiles from the 1970s which have seen relatively few updates to their capabilities. The Sarmat unit's activation has occurred as growing warnings emerge from within within the Western world that escalation of tensions between NATO and Russia could result in a more open conflict, as the Western alliance has continued to increase its military involvement in the Russian-Ukrainian War from deployment of [active combat units](#) to the frontlines to provision of [access](#) to its vast satellite network. The Sarmat has an 18,000 km range and carries up to 15 multiple independent reentry vehicles, compared to the Yars system which carries just 4-6 warheads and has a much shorter range which limits the trajectories on which it can approach the American mainland. A single Sarmat is potentially able to devastate an area greater than the size of France or Texas.