

Hellfire R9X missile

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In news– The US military has recently used its 'secret weapon' named the Hellfire R9X missile to kill Al Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri on the balcony of a safehouse in Kabul.

What is the Hellfire R9X missile?

- Better known in military circles as the AGM-114 R9X, the Hellfire R9X is a US-origin missile known to cause minimum collateral damage while engaging individual targets.
- Also known as the 'Ninja Missile', this weapon does not carry a warhead and instead deploys razor-sharp blades at the terminal stage of its attack trajectory.
- The blades pop out of the missile and cut down the intended target without causing the massive damage to the surroundings which would be the case with a missile carrying an explosive warhead.
- Hellfire R9X missile is basically a modified version of the renowned Hellfire missile which was an anti-tank weapon developed in the 1980s and was later modified numerous times, especially after the 9/11 attacks, to target individuals.
- The missile is designed in a way that it can shove more than 100 pounds of metal in order to kill its target, be it a car or building.
- The most lethal aspect of the R9X is the halo of six long blades which are packed inside that deploy through the skin of the missile moments before impact to ensure that it shreds anything in its tracks.



- The **missile is known to have been in active service since 2017**. However, its existence became public knowledge two years later in 2019.
- **It is a variant of the original Hellfire missile family which is used in conventional form with warheads** and is traditionally used from helicopters, ground-based vehicles, and sometimes small ships and fast moving vessels.
- For several years now, the Hellfire family of missiles, including the 'Ninja Missile', are armed on Combat Unmanned Aerial Vehicles or drones that the US Military uses in offensive military operations around the world.
- **Hellfire is actually an acronym for Heliborne, Laser, Fire and Forget Missile** and it was developed in the US initially to target tanks from the Apache AH-64 attack helicopters.
- Later, the usage of these missiles spread to several other variants of helicopters and also ground and sea-based systems and drones.
- Developed by Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman, **the Hellfire missile has other variants such as 'Longbow' and 'Romeo' apart from the 'Ninja'**.
- In 2017, the 'Ninja Missile' was reportedly used to kill the then No. 2 leader of Al Qaeda, Abu Khayr Al Masri, in Syria. It was also used against other targets in Syria at around the same time.
- The damage caused to the vehicles which carried the targets, particularly the shredded roofs of cars, gave

the first clues that a normal warhead was not used on the missile and that it had sharp blades.

- It was used against Taliban targets in Afghanistan in 2020 and again in 2022.