

**Analytical report:
Situation in the field of
national security and defence
of Belarus (February 2018)**

Minsk

The most important events of the month. The celebration of the anniversary of the creation of the Red Army may result in new foreign policy problems for Minsk. Despite the negative assessments of the Soviet past in neighbouring countries, their representatives took part in some form of solemn events timed to February 23.

In response, the Belarusian leaders made statements and actions that would be perceived as unfriendly in the neighbouring capitals of the NATO countries and in Ukraine. On February 22, 2018, Aliaksandr Lukashenka accused the West of the militarization of the region, announced the expansion of NATO to the east by fraud and repeated several other messages of Kremlin propaganda. Further, among the persons promoted in military rank on the anniversary date was the colonel of the Belarusian army (now a major-general), who was previously accused of anti-Ukrainian statements.

The developments within the month. On February 1, 2018 President Lukashenka, talking to the Chairman of the State Security Committee (SSC) Valery Vakulchik, stressed the special role of the agency in ensuring the security of the country. At the same time, it was said that "... state security for Belarus is primarily economic security". Lukashenka thanked the SSC for the results of the fight against corruption: "No one else in this plan has done more". At the same time, it was noted that the Prosecutor's Office, the Investigative Committee and the Ministry of Internal Affairs do not reach the level of effectiveness of the fight against corruption, demonstrated by the SSC.

On February 2, 2018 the first channel of the state Belarusian television showed an interview with the Chairman of the SSC Valery Vakulchik. The head of the agency spoke about the main priorities of the SSC's work. Firstly, it is fighting corruption and protecting the economic interests of the state. In 2017, the SSC worked on 630 criminal cases of corruption. The financial effect of the special service to protect the economic interests of the country for 2015-2017 amounted to BYN 500 million, which exceeds the budget allocated for the maintenance of the special service (in 2017, BYN 129 million). Secondly, it is counterintelligence. For the year 2017, the SSC identified and suppressed the activities of 11 agents and personnel of foreign special services. Thirdly, it is government communication. Journalists were shown a building that, as stated, is the center of government communications system management (although it is most likely not). Also, there was a presentation of a domestic communication technology, which is not only much cheaper than foreign analogues, but can become an export product in the foreseeable future.

On February 5-7, a delegation headed by Vice President of the Chinese Corporation "Great Wall" Gao Zhuofei visited Belarus to discuss the prospects for the development of the National Satellite Communication and Broadcasting System.

On February 7-9, Belarus was visited by a delegation headed by Assistant Minister of Defence of Serbia for Material Resources Nenad Miloradovich. He met the Chairman of the State Military-Industrial Committee of Belarus Aleh Dzvigalyou and the Deputy Minister of Defence of Belarus on arms Siarhey Simanenka. The results and prospects for the implementation of joint projects for military-technical cooperation (hereinafter referred to as MTC) were discussed. Representatives of the Ministry of Defence and the Military Technical Institute of Serbia held talks with the leadership of Belarusian defence enterprises on bilateral cooperation.

On February 8, 2018 Belarusian Foreign Minister Uladzimir Makei said that the mutual trust of Minsk and Moscow is important in ensuring the security of the Belarusian-Russian border. Accordingly, problems in this area are related to its deficit. Negotiations on the settlement of the issues of crossing the Belarusian-Russian border by third-country nationals still continue. Minsk hopes to conclude the corresponding agreement in the near future. However, throughout the whole 2017, Belarusian officials repeatedly stated the settlement of the situation on the border with Russia in the “near future”.

Also, Uladzimir Makei once again confirmed Belarus’ interest in de-escalation of confrontation in Eastern Europe. For this, a certain level of trust and dialogue is needed, including among military specialists.

On February 13, 2018 a meeting of the Security Council of Belarus took place. During it Aliaskandr Lukashenka criticized Russia for its reluctance to provide support in the rearmament of its formal allies. Also, he expressed displeasure with the results of the work of the Defence Ministry (including the lack of information work) and the Prosecutor’s office.

On February 14, 2018 Belarusian Defence Minister Andrei Raukou organized a press conference, during which he touched upon a number of topical issues of the state and development of the army.

Priorities for the development of the army until 2020 are: the increased readiness to withstand hybrid threats, the development of information confrontation capabilities (obviously, it is about information and psychological operations), the forces of special operations and territorial defence. The reduction of the mobilization needs of mechanized and amphibious brigades (which is possible due to the increase in their numbers) was stated. One of the priorities of the training of troops is dispersed operations by autonomous mobile groups.

The level of modern weapons in the army is 40%. In 2018 it is planned to deliver from Russia:

- 4 combat training aircraft Yak-130 (which will allow to form a squadron);
- the fifth battery of the Tor-M2E anti-aircraft missile system (which will allow the formation of the 1146th anti-aircraft missile regiment of the 5-pack battery that will be deployed near Astravets);
- “Podlet” radar, “Sopka-2M”, “Opponent-G”.

In the interests of the national army, the Belarusian military-industrial complex is working on:

- modernization of armoured vehicles (T-72 tanks, BTR-70 for special operations forces)
- development of a command and staff vehicle based on the modernized BTR-60;
- creation of a line of satellite communication stations;
- development of a line of domestic armored vehicles, both cat and wheeled ones (to replace MTLB and MTLB-U);
- production of the MLRS “Polonaise” and missiles with a launch range of 300 km;
- modernization of existing complexes for control of artillery fire and creation of the new ones.

Also, the Vostok-D and Rosa-RB radars, radio monitoring and monitoring complexes, UAVs, about 1 thousand MAZ vehicles of various modifications, optical targeting and surveillance devices, equipment for military personnel, small arms will be delivered to the troops.

In 2019, Belarus expects to receive Russian Su-30SM aircraft (sources of financing of procurement are not reported). It is stated that because of the western embargo, the Russian manufacturer allegedly can not yet deliver the aircraft to Belarus.

There is the aim to bring the share of modern weapons and military equipment to 50% (source).

Based on the results of the inspection of military units conducted after the death of Aliaksandr Korczych, 48 criminal cases were initiated. The Defence Minister noted the worsening of the characteristics of persons conscripted for urgent military service:

- almost 5% have committed crimes before;
- 12% were registered with the police;
- 2/3 committed administrative offenses;
- 2.4% were registered with the narcologist, 3.5% - with the psychiatrist (in 2017, 154 people were commissioned from the army for psychiatric diseases);
- more than 2% have experience of using narcotic drugs (source).

The head of the Defence Ministry recognized the problem of reducing the level of patriotism and readiness for the protection of the country among young people.

On February 20, 2018, the SMIC Chairman Aleh Dzvihalyou met the commander of the Air Force of Peru Javier Ramírez Guillén in Minsk. The officials discussed the further development of military-technical cooperation in a wide range of areas.

The same day, while meeting the Foreign Minister of Algeria Abdelkader Messaelya, Aliaksandr Lukashenka expressed interest in the development of military-technical cooperation with this country.

It is necessary to pay attention to the visits to Belarus of the defence ministers of Azerbaijan and Serbia, which was not covered by the Belarusian official media. On February 22, 2018 Minister of Defence of Azerbaijan Colonel-General Zakir Hasanov arrived in Minsk to participate in the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the creation of the Red Army. Zakir Hasanov was also scheduled to meet with the military-political leaders of Belarus and visit enterprises of the military-industrial complex.

On the same day, Minister of Defence of Serbia Alexander Vulin arrived in Minsk on a visit. At the meeting in the Ministry of Defence of Belarus, the prospects of bilateral military-technical cooperation, participation in peacekeeping operations, export of military products to the markets of third countries were discussed. Separately, the Serbian party touched upon the issue of deliveries of combat aircraft. The meeting was attended by the SMIC head Aleh Dzvihalyou.

In February, a number of events for the combat training of the army and territorial troops took place:

- mechanized units were preparing to conduct combat operations in urban conditions;

- defence from the attacks by subversive and reconnaissance groups of the conventional enemy on the positions of their own units was trained;

- in Hrodna, there were training camps for the recruitment of territorial troops. It is reported that anti-aircraft machine guns ZPU 4, anti-tank missiles “Metis”, anti-tank grenade launchers of SPG 9, automatic mortars “Vasilek” were provided to the territorial defence troops.

At the end of February, a traditional annual meeting on military security and defence issues of the state with the participation of heads of regional and Minsk executive committees, as well as their deputies on territorial defence issues and military commissars was held. Among other things, participants were trained to organize the defence of settlements, to use of artillery and anti-tank units of territorial troops, and to command territorial defence forces using digital means of communication.

Conclusions. The Belarusian authorities during the celebration of the anniversary of the Red Army demonstrated a lack of understanding of the political context and inadequate perception of their own role in regional politics. Those European and Ukrainian politicians and officials who adhere to the idea of Belarus’ lack of autonomy in matters of security received additional confirmation of their position. This, of course, complicates the task of building constructive communication of our country with NATO and Ukraine.

The SSC is a special service of universal competence. The sphere of its responsibility goes beyond the scope of intelligence and state security. It is highly likely that Lukashenka’s dissatisfaction with the results of the work of various ministries and departments will increase the role of the SSC as a source of information and a centre for working out solutions on a wide range of issues. This can lead to the transformation of the special services into a source of staff for the system of state administration. However, the general personnel crisis of the authorities did not bypass the SSC either. That’s why it’s not a fact that people from special services will be successful managers.

In whole, Aliaksandr Lukashenka rarely thanks government agencies, confining himself to more general assessments (positive/negative, satisfactory/unsatisfactory). The public comparison of the results of work of different law enforcement agencies was a mistake. Moreover, the criteria for such an assessment are not clear. Therefore, their objectivity is questionable. Such public comparisons undermine the credibility of the leaders of the “backward” agencies, and hence - they “shake” the state system as a whole.

The TV report on February 2, 2018, dedicated to the SSC, was the first of its kind with the participation of the head of the special services at least for the last 7 years. And in general, its content repeats the newspaper interview of Valery Vakulchyk, which he gave in December 2017. The main messages of both materials: the SSC protects the country from external threats; the special service protects people’s money, fighting corruption and abuse; thanks to the SSC, Belarus can earn money on the export of new high-tech products; employees of state security restore justice. Obviously, the SSC has set itself the task of improving its image. Belarusian special services are distinguished by super-closeness from society even in comparison with their counterparts from the Russia and Ukraine, which are at war. In the conditions of the economic crisis, this closeness plays against the SSC: taxpayers are not inclined to approve spending, the need for which is not obvious to them.

We should especially note that the presence of Belarus's own cryptographic school means a further reduction of Russia's influence in the post-Soviet space, since the achievements of Belarusian specialists will be unambiguously offered to the interested CIS countries.

The main components of the National Satellite Communication and Broadcasting System "Belintersat" are the communications satellite and the ground control centre created by the "Great Wall" Corporation. "Belintersat" is a component of the digital communication system of the state military. "Great Wall" is a part of the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC), a manufacturer of communication satellites, heavy rocket launchers, air defence systems, unmanned aerial vehicles and precision munitions. CASC and Belarusian SMIC in September 2016 agreed on a "road map" for cooperation. "Precision Electromechanical Plant" is the operator of the "Belintersat" system and the manufacturer of the MLRS Polonoise. It is also a probable developer of a national medium-range anti-aircraft missile system. Earlier, the intention of Belarus to increase the satellite group "Belintersat" by another 1-2 devices was announced. It is highly likely that the visit of representatives of "Great Wall" corporation to Minsk is connected with the prospects of launching a second communication satellite for Belarus. Which means the financial success of "Belintersat".

In Minsk, there are concrete proposals for cooperation for the Serbian military-industrial complex. Belarus may be interested in the achievements of Serbia in the production of munitions of various caliber, artillery and tank guns (their parts, especially trunks), rocket fuel, armored vehicles (including the modernization of tanks). The latter may be due to the high cost of the Russian package of tank modernization to the T-72B3 level.

Official Minsk consistently adheres to the development of a dialogue on security issues with its neighbours and NATO. The problem is that in 2017 the status of Belarus, as an independent actor in the sphere of regional security, was significantly devalued. Following the results of the Belarusian-Russian exercise "West-2017", NATO and Ukraine perceive the Belarusian army as part of the Russian military machine. Dialogue of Belarusian military experts with colleagues from the countries of the Alliance has become more complicated. It is a difficult question how soon the perception of Belarus in the West will start to change. Relations with Minsk are not a priority for any of the neighbouring countries. Even not speaking about the EU, NATO and the United States. The Belarusian issue is not included in the regional political agenda. In addition, the dialogue between official Minsk and the European Union still causes disappointment of both sides.

It should be noted that the Western embargo does not interfere with the supply of Su-30SM for the needs of the Russian army and for export, for example, to Myanmar. Obviously, the main problem is the financial one. The statements of the Belarusian Defence Ministry on the supply of fighter aircraft in the next year are skeptical: a long production cycle requires prepayment for equipment in the coming year in the amount of not less than USD 140 million. In the budget for the current year there are no such expenses. There is also no information on possible crediting of the supplies.

Speaking about the share of modern weapons in the Belarusian army, it is worth remembering that we are talking about weapons samples, and not about the number of units of modern weapons. Modern samples can count just a couple of units.

The silence of Belarus regarding the visit of the Azerbaijani Defence Minister is caused by the reluctance to attract additional attention to the Belarusian-Azerbaijani military-technical cooperation.

The official Minsk decided not to speak about the visit of the Serbian Defence Minister for another reason. It is necessary to note that a year ago during a visit to Minsk then Prime Minister of Serbia Alexander Vučić allegedly reached an agreement on the transfer of 8 MiG-29 fighters and 2 battalions of Buk SAM from Belarus to Serbia. The deliveries were planned for 2018. In November 2017, it was planned to sign a relevant agreement. This information was distributed by foreign media. The Belarusian official media did not provide any specifics about the possible transfer of arms to Serbia. Obviously, there are some general agreements. It is another matter that they are not formalized and can exist at the level of an oral agreement between Alexander Vucic and President Lukashenka. The transfer of fighters to Serbia could be linked to the delivery of new aircraft to Belarus. Before receiving new fighters, Belarus side will not be able to transfer the promised MiG-29 to Serbia. Regarding the supplies of Buk SAM, it was not clear from the outset whether these are SAMs from the reserves or ones serving in the Belarussian army. In the latter case, the possibility to provide the weapons to Serbia was associated with the prospects of adopting the Belarusian medium-range anti-aircraft missile system. Probably, it is precisely the impossibility of fulfilling the agreements in 2018 that dictated the reluctance of the Belarusian authorities to draw attention to the visit of the Serbian Defence Minister.

