

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

The most important events of the month. The main event of the month was the traditional autumn command and staff exercise of the Belarusian army (hereinafter referred to as the command-staff exercise). Within its framework combating aggression against Belarus was trained. The adversary was some illegal armed group that, however, had aviation and technical means of influencing the communication system of the Belarusian army: the troops were preparing to act in conditions of unstable communication with the higher command.

The event was divided into two stages:

- stabilization of the situation and preparation for repelling aggression, organizing the interaction of multi-departmental forces;
- repelling the enemy's air attack, reducing the potential of its strike forces, retaining occupied lines, maintaining the combat capability of the troops in a dynamically changing environment.

The exercise had a research component. Thus, an inspection of the complex support system for troops during combat operations (intelligence, electronic warfare, communications, logistics, technical support, etc.) took place. The characteristics of new and upgraded models of weapons and military equipment of domestic production were checked as well.

During the exercise the troops trained:

- waging a battle to hold the front edge of the defence, counterattack, nighttime actions;
- the formation and command of mixed units with the means of strengthening (motorized rifle units together with tank, artillery and military air defence ones);
- the interaction of mechanized units with artillery, electronic warfare, UAV, army and ground attack aviation;
- covering the border area;
- destruction of the enemy assault force using artillery;
- repelling air attack by air defence forces of mechanized brigades.

Artillery performed a large number of fire tasks in the dark time. Artillery units made long marches in a short period of time, including at night, trained interactions with UAV units to detect and neutralize sabotage and reconnaissance groups of a conditional enemy. Once again, the Russian "Supercam S-350" UAV was used.

Within the framework of the command-and-control exercise, practical training on missile strikes of the MLRS "Polonaise" in a wooded area was held. Conditional launches were performed, a quick change of starting positions and the fight against saboteurs were trained.

The assault aviation and fire support helicopters have trained delivering reciprocal massive strikes at important enemy targets: airplanes and helicopters at the aerodrome and advanced ground base of army aviation, airfield infrastructure.

The Defence Council of Maladzechna, Valozhin and Minsk regions, as well as their territorial defence headquarters were involved in the command and staff exercise. The persons involved fulfilled their duties at the control points. A division of territorial troops was formed in Minsk. It trained the interaction with the forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs on:

- protection and defence of important objects;
- support of the martial law regime, duty at the checkpoints;
- patrolling the area in the city;
- the elimination of the breakthrough of saboteurs into the city and liberating of the administrative building seized by them.

The developments within the month. On September 4, 2018 the Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Belarus Yermukhamet Yertysbayev reported on the availability of a program to equip the Kazakh army with Belarusian military equipment.

On September 9, 2018 the 51st meeting of the Board of the Border Committee of Belarus and Russia was held. Among other issues, the parties addressed the implementation of a harmonized border policy, ensuring border security at the external border, improving the border infrastructure and technical equipment of border units for the period 2017-2021.

On September 12-14, Aliaksandr Lukashenka visited Uzbekistan. Within the framework of the visit Belarus proposed to establish joint production in the military industry in this country, both for the needs of the Uzbek army and in the interests of the countries of the region. An agreement on the development of military-technical cooperation was signed.

Belarus seeks to expand cooperation in the military-industrial complex with major Asian countries. On September 17, 2018 the prospects of forming a committee on military-technical cooperation of Belarus and Indonesia were announced. In addition, the 11th meeting of the Joint Belarusian-Myanmar Commission for Military-Technical Cooperation under the chairmanship of Major-General Ihar Dzemedzenka, First Deputy Chairman of the State Military Industrial Committee of Belarus (SMIC), and Rear-Admiral Myint Nwe, Deputy Minister of Defence of Myanmar, was held on September 27-29. The parties expressed satisfaction with the results of military-technical cooperation and confirmed their interest in its development. The current state of cooperation was analysed, perspective projects of bilateral military-technical cooperation were discussed and the procedure for their implementation was determined.

On September 18, 2018 a joint board of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus and Russia took place. Issues of cooperation in ensuring road safety and major international sporting events were considered. The event was a planned one, the topics discussed there give an idea of the most relevant areas of cooperation between law enforcement agencies of the two countries at the moment and nothing more.

On September 24, 2017, during a meeting between Aliaksandr Lukashenka with Security Council Secretary of State Stanislau Zas and Chairman of the State Border Committee Anatoly Lapo, the issue of increasing the number of border guards was discussed. Quantitative indicators are not known for certain. At the moment, the head of Belarusian has not approved the scheme proposed by the security forces, citing the

insufficient reasons and sources for increasing the number of border guard units. The expected expansion of the border service in certain areas will occur due to the redistribution of forces and means within the military and law enforcement agencies. Which means that the total size of the security forces will remain unchanged. After the meeting, it was stated that in 2018, the border service of Belarus had identified and detained about 100 weapons and 1,200 ammunition. The number of illegal transit migrants detained doubled: about 400 people. The surge was observed during the World Cup in Russia. We are talking about illegal immigrants who, under the guise of fans, got into the territory of a neighbouring country, and then, through Belarus, they hoped to enter the EU countries. There were more than 200 such people (that is, they gave an increase in illegal migration). Also this year, more than 400 kilograms of drugs were detained, which is 4 times more than in the same period last year.

The same day, according to the decision of the Minister of Defence of Belarus, the second stage of the comprehensive check of the Armed Forces began. The first one was held in March-April of this year. Then, for the first time, the 37th separate mechanized brigade was formed from those called up for military training.

As part of the comprehensive check, the most attention was paid to the issues of mobilization, equipping the created units with military and special equipment, which are in long-term storage and at the disposal of civilian state bodies and organizations (the latter is about 20 units). A total of about 650 people from the Brest, Homel, Minsk regions and the city of Minsk are reported to be called up to the training. At the same time, the issues of formations of military units of the brigade level were trained as well (albeit, on a smaller scale than in spring).

On September 24-28, a special forces competition with the participation of teams from Russia and Uzbekistan was held in Belarus.

On September 25, 2018, the International Exhibition of the Defence Industry ADEX-2018 opened in Baku. Belarusian exposition was one of the largest. It was visited by President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. Raman Halouchanka, SMIC chairman, personally informed the Azerbaijani leader about the opportunities and promising directions for the development of the national defence industry. Mr. Halouchanka also met with the Minister of Defence of Azerbaijan, Colonel-General Zakir Hasanov, during which bilateral military-technical cooperation was discussed.

On September 25-27, Aleh Belakoneu, Chief of the General Staff of the Belarusian Army, visited Latvia. Within the framework of negotiations with the Latvian military and civilian officials, the parties agreed on directions for the development of bilateral military cooperation in the short and medium term, discussed issues of regional security and allied commitments of their countries. Special attention was paid to the control over the use of airspace in the border strip and the possibility of exchanging information on aircraft flights.

On September 28, 2018, a meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the CIS was held in Dushanbe. According to President Lukashenka, the discussions were focused on security issues. At the same time, the head of Belarus mentioned some dangers and challenges, "... which are fraught with the actions of Western states and NATO at our borders". Allegedly, these issues were discussed in confidence with Vladimir Putin.

In September, Kazakhstan hosted a rescue exercise of the CSTO member states “Skala-2018”. Actions in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake in Central Asia were trained.

According to the information provided by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in September this year more than 3 thousand crimes in the sphere of illicit drug trafficking have already been identified, over half of which are related to marketing, 502 persons are involved in their commission. Almost 690 kg of narcotic drugs and more than 26 kg of psychotropic substances were withdrawn from the illicit trafficking. The bulk of narcotic drugs seized from illicit trafficking is transit hashish. At the same time, the Ministry of Internal Affairs notes that due to the high level of latency of drug addiction in Belarus there is a problem with understanding the real situation in the sphere of illegal drug trafficking and the dynamics of the level of drug addiction within the population.

Conclusions. The use of Russian UAVs of the lower price segment indicates problems in the domestic production of UAVs of a similar class. Previously, there were disagreements between the military and the defence industry on pricing and quality of products manufactured for the needs of the army.

During the command and staff exercise, the representatives of the territorial defence command bodies were in constant contact with a certain territorial defence command centre of the regional grouping of troops, and also interacted with the operational commands of the Ground Forces. It is not clear what kind of grouping of troops was mentioned. Taking into account the internal character of the exercise, we speak clearly not about the Belarusian-Russian regional grouping of troops. And why did the authorities of the territorial control of the Minsk region interact with the Western operational command? It is highly probable that the issue of changing the structure of the command and control of the Ground Forces during the exercise was studied: the abolition of constantly functioning operational commands created according to the administrative-geographical principle. Instead of them, in a threatened period of time, a unified command (group of troops) can be created in the threatened direction. It would include the forces and means necessary for the solution of the assigned tasks, including from the other security agencies.

Regarding the supply of military equipment from Belarus to Kazakhstan, we can primarily talk about radar systems of various classes, systems to counter the UAV and high-precision weapons, automotive equipment, secure communication systems (including services of the satellite communications system Belintersat), optics, and troop control systems. Obviously, the supply of remotely controlled weapons modules will continue. There is a high probability that Kazakhstan will purchase the “Polonaise” missile system.

During the Collegium of Border Agencies of Belarus and Russia, the issue of Moscow’s deployment of a border guard on the Belarusian-Russian border, as far as can be judged, was not discussed. It is obvious that Russia made the final decision in this part and sees no reason to change it.

Speaking about the prospects of the Belarusian-Uzbek military-technical cooperation, we note that there is only concrete information regarding the repair and modernization of the weapons of the Uzbek army. The joint production is a matter of a more distant (and nebulous) future in the framework of the “Belarusian technologies plus

Uzbek money” scheme. The statement about the readiness to modernize the equipment in the interests of the countries of the region is rather to make the Belarusian proposals look more attractive than a real business plan. The armies of the countries of the region are relatively small, there are threats of interstate conflicts in Central Asia, but they are controlled. In addition, Kazakhstan is actively investing in the development of its own defence industry. It also has plans to export its military products to its neighbours.

In Tashkent, Lukashenka stated the readiness to create missile weapons for the needs of Uzbekistan: to create, not to export already existing samples. It is very likely that this is a template that has proven its efficiency: the creation by Belarusian specialists of weapons under the order and at the expense of the customer. At the same time, the production site is located in Belarus.

Traditionally, the details of the cooperation of the Belarusian military-industrial complex with foreign countries are reported sparingly. Regarding Myanmar, it is reliably known about modernization of the air defence system of this country with the participation of Belarusian industry. Obviously, this project was accompanied by the provision of training services. The potential of Belarusian military industry allows to offer Asian countries services for the repair and modernization of Soviet armour and aircraft equipment. There is a high probability of interest on the part of Myanmar to the developments of the Belarusian military industry in the field of secure communications, radar, systems to combat high-precision weapons and unmanned aerial vehicles.

In itself, the number of weapons seized by border guards says little. It is not known how much of the seized belongs to the category of military weapons/ammunition, and how many – to civilian. It should be remembered that in neighbouring countries the weapons prohibited from free usage in Belarus, are allowed. The dynamics of the situation regarding the sizing of military weapons and ammunition at the border over the past 10 years is really interesting. However, such data is not published. This suggests that the proportion of military weapons/ammunition in the total volume of the seized is relatively small.

It is worth noting that during the comprehensive check of the Army conducted in March-April it was not reported that this was only the first stage. Also, here was no information on the disbandment of the 37th Mechanized Brigade. The need for the second stage of the comprehensive check could be related to the elimination of the deficiencies identified during the first stage when developing the mobilization process.

Uzbek soldiers in Belarus are not frequent guests. Lukashenka has not developed a personal relationship with the late President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov. Currently, Minsk seeks to intensify cooperation with Tashkent, including in the security sphere. The reason is Lukashenka’s desire to enlist the support of Uzbekistan, which, after Ukraine’s participation in Ukraine’s CIS has ceased, is the second most populous country in the organization. It clearly has ambitions to take its rightful place in the conditional hierarchy of the post-Soviet space. Official Minsk seeks to find another strong partner, and better - an ally. The goal is obvious: the neutralization of Russia’s efforts to consolidate the military and political space of the former Soviet Union.

A visit by one of the highest military officials of Belarus to a NATO country is not an often event. Latvia demonstrated a high level of openness: the Belarusian delegation visited military infrastructure facilities; received information about the combat training

events held in the territory of Latvia, the composition and mission of the multinational battalion tactical group of NATO; observed the military equipment of the Latvian Armed Forces and NATO forces located in Latvia.

Latvia is a comfortable partner for the Belarusian authorities. There are no hard historical or political contradictions between Minsk and Riga, and extensive economic ties stimulate the search for new areas of cooperation. In addition, Latvia is one of the few NATO countries that supports the expansion of the Alliance's dialogue with Belarus. Obviously, being on the line of a new split, Minsk and Riga do not want the situation in Eastern Europe to escalate and would like to avoid unpleasant surprises for each other. This creates a basis for a broader and trusting dialogue not only at the level of military departments. The openness of Latvia regarding the NATO forces stationed in the country, their combat potential and mission give the official Minsk additional arguments in a dialogue with Moscow about the absence of the need to expand the Russian military presence in Belarus.

Following the meeting of the CIS Council of Heads of State in Dushanbe, a number of documents in the field of security were approved: Interstate Program of Joint Measures to Combat Crime for 2019-2023; Agreement on cooperation of the CIS member states in combating crimes in the field of information technology. This was about law enforcement sphere. It is obvious that the leaders of the states discussed conflicts in the post-Soviet space. But in this situation everyone has their own problems. And it is unlikely that Lukashenka's concerns about NATO's activity generally aroused the interest of other heads of state: firstly, most of the CIS countries have a positive dynamic of cooperation with the Alliance; secondly, they have the opportunity to formulate their position on the basis of their own sources of information, and not the concerns of the official Minsk; thirdly, it is obvious that Belarus is trying to use the factor of regional security to bargain with the Kremlin on issues that have nothing to do with security itself.

