

Analytical report:
National security and defence
of Belarus (September 2021)

Minsk

The most important events of the month. On September 8, 2021, the arrival of the Su-30SM fighters of the Russian Aerospace Forces to the air base in Baranavičy to form a training and combat centre for joint training of the Air Force and Air Defence Forces of Belarus and Russia (hereinafter referred to as TCC). The number of planes arriving has not been reported, but most likely we can speak about 4 aircraft. The very next day, Russian fighters and the S-400 air defence missile systems that had previously arrived in Belarus took up combat duty with the Belarusian Air Force and Air Defence units.

The developments within the month. On September 1, 2021, Aliaksandr Lukashenka announced plans to supply a large consignment of weapons from Russia to Belarus “in the near future” . We have devoted a [special article](#) to this topic. However, to date, there is no specificity in this regard. And the topic itself has disappeared from the agenda of state propaganda.

On September 8, 2021, Lukashenka met the Chairman of the National Security Committee of Kazakhstan Karim Masimov. The prospects for cooperation between the countries’ special services were discussed.

On September 12, 2021, Lukashenka announced plans to purchase weapons in Russia for USD 1 billion until 2025. The list for the purchase includes S-400 anti-aircraft missile systems for deployment on the border with Ukraine and new batches of Tor-M2E, “... about a dozen aircraft” (we are obviously talking about 8 Su-30SM fighters), several dozen helicopters.

On September 10-16, Belarus hosted the active phase of the joint exercise “West-2021” with Russia. The event had a number of features, which we devoted a [special material](#) to.

The participating units trained:

- Covering the troops from the means of air attack of the enemy.
- Forcing a water barrier from the march and engaging in battle with a conditional enemy.
- Conducting a manoeuvrable defence with the support of artillery and aviation against superior enemy forces, as well as the fight against UAVs.
- Blocking the enemy and raiding his home site, destroying light aircraft and simulated enemy helicopters, destroying UAVs with BTR-70MB fire.
- Air strikes against training targets, including the use of Russian long-range bombers TU-22M3.
- Search and evacuation from the battlefield of the crew of the downed aircraft.
- Night landing of servicemen of Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan from Il-76MD aircraft. The landing area was not illuminated, the servicemen used night vision goggles. According to other information, Kazakh servicemen did not participate in this episode.
- Counteraction to fighter and assault aircraft operating at low and extremely low altitudes, as well as countering UAVs using camouflage and combat protection of the positions.
- Destruction of cruise missiles and fire support helicopters of a simulated enemy.

- Destruction of UAVs by fire from machine-gun armament of the T-72B tank and “Dragon” armoured vehicles, and the destruction of helicopters by the fire of the BMP-2 cannons and the Tunguska anti-aircraft missile and cannon system.

- Landing from helicopters with water landing and landing of tactical parachute troops to capture the island.

- Landing a battalion (more than 350 Russian and Belarusian paratroopers, about 30 pieces of equipment) from 20 Il-76MD aircraft.

During the exercise, the Russian strategic bomber Tu-95MS trained the breakthrough of the air defence zone and the destruction of ground anti-missile defence forces. The latter is a clear allusion to the US missile defence base in Poland.

On September 16, 2021, the CSTO summit was held in Dushanbe. Lukashenka traditionally (for the latest events within the Organization) used it to talk about the Western threat, which allegedly affects not only the interests of his regime, but also its formal allies. However, there is no evidence that this concern is shared by them or that they are at least interested in it.

The focus of the summit was put, as expected, on Afghanistan. Among the documents signed during the event, it is necessary to highlight the Plan for equipping the Collective Rapid Reaction Forces with modern weapons and equipment, as well as the Agreement on Jurisdiction and Legal Assistance in Cases related to the temporary presence of collective security forces and means in the territories of the CSTO member states.

Following the CSTO summit in Dushanbe, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit took place. It should be specially noted that Lukashenka did not meet with the head of the Chinese delegation, a member of the State Council of the PRC, Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi. The head of the Foreign Ministry of Belarus Uladzimir Makei met with him. The ministers discussed the “iron brotherhood” and “all-weather strategic partnership” between Minsk and Beijing. In contrast to this meeting, Wang Yi’s negotiations with the heads of the Central Asian countries had more specific topics and results: for example, Kyrgyzstan received Chinese financial assistance worth USD 100 million, as well as 1 million doses of the Covid-19 vaccine. The issues of economic, investment, infrastructure and military cooperation were discussed. A personal message from the Head of the People’s Republic of China Xi Jinping to the President of Kyrgyzstan has been conveyed. For Belarus, there were no Chinese gifts or personal messages.

In September, the regime continued to force the topic of “terrorist threat” posed by its political opponents. So, on September 23, 2021, the State Security Committee of Belarus (SSC) announced the arrest of a citizen of Belarus who was importing weapons from Russia (sic!) for terrorist groups. Naturally, on the instructions of foreign customers in order to “... create conditions for the resumption of protest activity and the subsequent violent overthrow of the current government”. Further, Lukashenka said that paid agents of foreign special services were identified at large state-owned enterprises: they must transmit information to “collective West” about how it is planned to bypass Western sanctions.

On September 27, 2021, Lukashenka held a meeting with the heads of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the SSC, the State Border Committee and the Security Council of Belarus. During it the neighbouring countries were accused of pursuing a confrontational policy towards Minsk, unreasonable expansion of the military infrastructure and the military presence of third countries in the region. Ukraine has been accused of deploying NATO troops under the guise of exercises and training programs. It was stated that such behaviour of the Ukrainian authorities requires a joint reaction from Minsk and Moscow.

Kyiv was also accused of creating some kind of training camps for opponents of the Lukashenka regime.

It is interesting to note that although statements were made regarding military security issues, there were no representatives of the Ministry of Defence at the meeting. This means that the real reason for the meeting was not military challenges. One of them was the problem of illegal immigrants stuck in Belarus due to the impossibility of pushing them into the EU. Given the worsening weather conditions, this could become a real humanitarian problem. But most of all, the Belarusian ruler is worried that this situation does not cause the reaction of the public of Western countries, which Minsk was counting on.

In turn, Ukraine accused Lukashenka of broadcasting Russian anti-Ukrainian propaganda and turning Belarus "... into a continuous military base of Russia".

On September 29, 2021, it was announced that the SSC had suppressed the activities of the network organization "Rabochy Rukh". Which was aimed at gaining access to information of a limited nature of state industrial enterprises. Obviously, in order to transfer this information abroad, including to track the attempts of Lukashenka regime to bypass Western sanctions.

On September 30, 2021, a joint collegium of the border departments of Belarus and Russia was held. The parties discussed the implementation of an agreed border policy, ensuring border security, improving the interaction of border guards of the two countries, developing the infrastructure of the state border and the technical equipment of border guard units as part of the implementation of joint programs.

On the same day, it was reported about the arrival in Belarus of the first batch of Russian armoured personnel carriers BTR-82A. The second batch will arrive in November this year. The bulk of the new armoured vehicles will go into service with the 120th Mechanized Brigade. Several vehicles will be sent to the 72nd Joint Training Centre and the Military Academy of Belarus. Later it became known that part of the equipment was transferred to the 6th mechanized brigade for training specialists.

It is stated that the autumn conscription into the army in Belarus will begin a month earlier than usual - in October. The Ministry of Defence explains this with a combat training schedule.

In September, Belarus for the first time participated in the "Peace Mission 2021" exercise of the member states of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, where Minsk has observer status (under the patronage of Beijing). The anti-terrorist exercise took place on Russian territory. It included practicing the fight against UAVs and preventing attacks using chemical and biological weapons.

Last month, a tactical exercise with a mechanized battalion of the 120th mechanized brigade on raiding operations behind enemy lines was held. During the event the water obstacles were overcome, enemy objects were destroyed, the wounded were evacuated from the battlefield by air transport, battles with a conditional enemy in isolation from the main forces were fought.

Throughout September, the situation in the field of border security on the borders of Belarus with Poland and Lithuania continued to deteriorate. It can be stated that starting the migration blackmail of the EU, Lukashenka regime did not count on the ability of neighbouring countries to confront, especially on the fact that Vilnius and Warsaw themselves will demonstrate their readiness for escalation. The calculation of the official Minsk on forcing the EU to dialogue on its own terms under the threat of a worsening of the situation with illegal migration has failed miserably. We have dedicated a [special article](#) to this issue.

In September, Belarusian missile forces successfully carried out combat launches from the “Polonaise” MLRS at a distance of up to 100 km at the Kazakhstani Sary-Shagan training ground. Here it is necessary to note that 100 km is at least half the maximum range of available ammunition.

Conclusions. It is worth noting that although a joint TCC with Russia has been officially created in Belarus, nothing has been reported about its training function. As nothing is reported about the formation of two other joint training and combat centres on the territory of Russia. Which gives reason to consider the centre in Belarus as the first stage towards the creation of a Russian military base. We have devoted a [special article](#) to this event.

Further, there is no information on whether it is planned to “embed” the Russian S-400 air defence systems deployed in Belarus into the air defence system of our country. Most likely not. This allows us to consider the TCC in Belarus as an element of the air defence system of the Kaliningrad region. This only confirms the previous thesis that the centre is considered by the Russian side as the beginning of the creation of a military base.

The TCC creation actually cancels out the long-term game of official Minsk in “situational neutrality”. That is, it nullifies Lukashenka’s most important foreign policy asset. If Lukashenka regime allows the further expansion of the Russian military presence in Belarus, it will become a sign of its complete dependence on Moscow for the West. At the same time, an attempt to resist such an expansion creates a significant conflict potential for Belarusian-Russian relations.

Speaking about the prospects for the purchase of Russian weapons until 2025, voiced by Lukashenka, we note the following:

- In a successful year, the procurement budget of the Ministry of Defence of Belarus fluctuated around USD 260 million. So, a billion in 5 years indicates that significant opportunities for the purchase of new weapons for the Belarusian army are not expected.

- A squadron of 12 Su-30SM fighters was originally planned to be received by 2020, but it was not possible to allocate money for this project.

- It is not entirely clear what dozens of helicopters we are talking about. The delivery of 12 Mi-35 fire support helicopters is planned. Earlier the Belarusian military

showed interest in the light Russian Ansat helicopters, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Emergency Situations - in the Ka-226 and Ka-32. In addition, we have to note the plans to finally abandon the Mi-8 family helicopters inherited from the USSR, replacing them with new Russian aircraft. Up to 12 units of which can also be purchased.

- Placing the S-400 along the border with Ukraine is hardly advisable. If we assume that Belarus will still receive these weapons (however, taking into account the announced budget and the list of equipment proposed for the purchase, this prospect is dubious), we can most likely expect it to be deployed in the centre of the country to protect Minsk. The existing S-300 complexes (if by that time they have not yet worked out their resources) can be deployed in the Homiel region, which is an important agro-industrial and raw material region of the country, but is actually militarily unprotected.

Practicing the destruction of a ground-based missile defence system during “West-2021” gives reason to consider the exercise as (also) preparation for military operations against specific neighbouring states. Despite the fact that Belarusian and Russian military officials denied this.

It is worth noting that equipping the CSTO CRRF is a long-standing issue, the solution of which was constrained by a lack of financial resources. The plan obviously implies that this issue has been resolved in some way (obviously with Russian participation). Regarding the Agreement on jurisdictional issues in connection with the presence of the CSTO forces, we note that for two decades there was no need for such an agreement. Its appearance can be explained by the fact that in the future there will be a need to deploy CSTO forces on the territory of a member country for a period much longer than necessary for conducting exercises.

The broadcasting of anti-Ukrainian and anti-Western propaganda by Lukashenka is twofold. On the one hand, this is a demonstration of loyalty to the Kremlin. On the other hand, it should be borne in mind that Lukashenka himself adheres to openly anti-Western views and in this regard cannot share Ukraine’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations. The problem is that the rhetoric of the official Minsk pushes Kyiv not only to verbal solidarity with the West on the Belarusian issue. But also to join the Western sanctions against Lukashenka regime. Moreover, in the situation of an open confrontation of this regime with Poland and Lithuania, which are Ukraine’s main partners in the EU and NATO.

The actions of Lukashenka regime to counter the leak of information about plans to bypass Western sanctions indicate that they are taken very seriously and nervously in Minsk. The reason may be that there are no reliable solutions for levelling the negative consequences of these sanctions.

It is worth recalling that for the first time at the official level, the intention to purchase the BTR-82A for the needs of the Special Operations Forces was announced in 2015 with the start of deliveries in 2016. The choice of this particular product was dictated by the price factor. However, the idea was criticized by Lukashenka, who demanded to buy Belarusian products, even if they are of inferior quality. It is unclear why the new wheeled armoured vehicles were transferred for the purpose of rearmament (and not the formation of new units) in mechanized brigades (which are traditionally equipped with tracked armoured vehicles). The refusal to re-equip the airborne brigades with new armoured vehicles is unclear as well. Obviously, the supply of Russian

armoured vehicles is a serious blow to the ambitions of the Minsk Wheel Tractor Plant, which is aiming at the production of wheeled military equipment and for that reason considered Belarusian army as the first and main consumer.

Although the Ministry of Defence of Belarus explains the early conscription for military service with rich combat training this academic year, an attempt to hold the conscription before the new wave of the Chinese coronavirus seems to be a more likely reason. In this regard, we can say that the idea failed: a new wave of Covid-19 came to Belarus in September.

It is worth recalling that back in 2016, it was announced that missiles for “Polonaise” MLRS maximum range of 300 km entered service. In 2017, there was a fire test of the new missiles. Obviously, then it was about imported ammunition. In June 2021, it was reported about the start of testing a domestic missile with a range of up to 300 km for the “Polonaise”, which will last for several years. The first stage of the tests (throw tests) on the territory of a foreign state has already been performed.

