

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

The most important events of the month. On October 18, 2021 Lukashenka made changes in the command of the State Security Committee (SSC). At the same time, the details have not been officially reported. Moreover, for the first time, even the faces of the appointees were hidden from the public. It is only known that some of them are moving to equivalent positions, but to other regions of the country, which is a common practice in order to prevent the formation of clans on the ground. During the event, Lukashenka made a number of statements:

- so-called “collective West” wants to overthrow Lukashenka, but also to destroy the Belarusian statehood (including by force);
- it is fundamentally important to control the workers of large enterprises and the bureaucracy, and the appropriate institutions have been created for this;
- it is necessary to strengthen the protection of classified information of state bodies and enterprises (the latter is especially important in the light of efforts to minimize the consequences of Western sanctions);
- the SSC must facilitate state propaganda and counteract uncontrolled media, including by technical means (probably, we are talking about hacker attacks against independent information resources);
- opponents of the regime are accused of preparing sabotage at industrial facilities, including the military-industrial complex, and at facilities of the life support system;
- Poland and Lithuania are transporting the detained illegal immigrants further to the West.

At the same time, high-ranking officers of law enforcement agencies were sent to leading positions in the Academy of Sciences and the Ministry of Justice.

Since October, a series of Telegram resources (chats and channels) in Belarus have been declared extremist groups. Not only their creators, owners and administrators, but also the audience (as long as we are talking about active participants) fall under criminal responsibility. At the same time, the regime does not hide the purpose of this decision - to force people to unsubscribe from resources recognized as extremist groups.

The developments within the month. On October 5-8, the 21st meeting of the Belarusian-Russian intergovernmental commission on military-technical cooperation was held. From the official announcements it follows that the parties considered about 40 issues of various topics. In particular, they talked about the participation of Belarusian enterprises in the repair and maintenance of “modern military equipment”, interaction in the markets of third countries, and opposition to Western sanctions.

On October 11-22, the second stage of a comprehensive inspection of territorial defence command and control bodies took place in the Hrodna region. The work of officials of the regional and nine district executive committees on the management of the preparation of territorial defence was assessed. The first stage of verification took place in July.

On October 12-15, in the Minsk region, the training on the management of the formation of the headquarters of the territorial defence and territorial troops of the region was held. The event was attended by regional officials and representatives of military

commissariats, as well as reserve officers assigned to the main positions of the territorial defence headquarters and territorial troops battalions.

On October 13-14, Moscow hosted the traditional Meeting of the heads of security agencies and intelligence services of the CIS states on intelligence activities. Reportedly, topical issues of interaction of special services in the field of ensuring security and stability in the CIS countries were discussed in the context of the destructive impact of the “collective West” (first of all, of the United States) and attempts to “forcibly implant democracy” (as presented by the Russian participants). As expected, it was announced that there are deliberate attempts to destabilize the CIS countries, in which the Western special services are involving non-governmental and international organizations. It is interesting to note that it is not reported how much the anti-Western rhetoric of the head of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, Sergei Naryshkin, was supported by his colleagues from other countries. At the same time, Washington’s alleged plans to destabilize the CIS countries were discussed separately “on the eve of a number of elections at various levels that will be held in our states in the coming years”.

The second well-known topic of the meeting (and closer to the objective reality) was the threats emanating from Afghanistan.

The heads of the conditional intelligence community of the CIS met Vladimir Putin online. Who, unlike Mr. Naryshkin, in the open part of his address spoke about the threats of terrorism and international crime.

On October 18-23, within the framework of the CSTO joint operational-strategic exercise “Combat Brotherhood-2021”, the exercises “Echelon-2021”, “Search-2021” and “Interaction-2021” were held. 4,000 people and more than 500 pieces of equipment took part in the event.

As part of the exercise “Echelon-2021” on the material and technical support of the Collective Rapid Reaction Forces (hereinafter referred to as the CRRF), during the joint operation, the troops trained the mass refuelling of equipment, the repair of faulty equipment and weapons, the organization of a field warehouse for missile and artillery weapons, and the provision of food and water.

The “Search-2021” exercise with reconnaissance forces and means was aimed at practicing reconnaissance, organizing work at the command post, collecting, processing and analysing intelligence information, exchanging intelligence information between command posts and groups, ensuring the destruction of detected objects, conducting a special operation on capture and destruction of enemy targets.

During the exercise “Interaction-2021”, the troops trained a joint operation to localize a border armed conflict, including the seizure of a settlement.

The experience of the Russian army gained in Syria was used, and the repulse of a UAV attack was practiced.

On October 20, 2021, a joint collegium of the Defence Ministries of Belarus and Russia was held. During the event:

- documents to extend the validity of agreements on the deployment of two Russian military facilities on the territory of Belarus were signed;

- a new military doctrine of the so-called “union state”, which could not be accepted since the end of 2018 due to the opposition of the Belarusian side, was agreed upon (source);

- a plan for bilateral military cooperation for 2022, which includes 139 events, which on average corresponds to the intensity of previous years, was signed.

Later, the Russian side officially announced that the presence of Russian military facilities on Belarusian territory was extended for a 25-year period. That is, Minsk agreed to Moscow’s terms.

It is worth paying attention to the following events of the army’s combat training in October:

- Exercise of the parachute battalion of the 103rd Vitebsk airborne brigade on conducting reconnaissance and combat operations with the use of UAVs in the territory occupied by the enemy.

- A tactical flight exercise with UAV units to detect camouflaged objects using “Mosquito” UAVs. It has not been officially announced which units were involved in the training. Apparently, we are talking about the 5th special forces brigade.

- A command and staff exercise with the 120th mechanized brigade involving about 900 troops, 28 tanks, 35 armoured combat vehicles, 15 multiple launch rocket systems.

The State Secretary of the Security Council of Belarus Aliaksandr Valfovich paid a working visit to Kazakhstan. Within its framework he met with the heads of the law enforcement agencies of this country and visited the military-industrial enterprises of Kazakhstan and the National University of Defence. During the visit, a plan of cooperation between the offices of the security councils of the two countries for 2022 - 2023 was signed.

Conclusions. The accusations of Poland and Lithuania of facilitating the transfer of migrants across their territory further to the West are an attempt by the Belarusian regime to split the EU’s position on the issue of migration blackmail.

The appointment of generals to civilian positions was undertaken with the aim of strengthening control over specific areas, in order to prevent unpleasant surprises for the regime. It is worth recalling that there were many employees of the Academy of Sciences among the active participants in the protests. The legal profession in Belarus depends on the Ministry of Justice. The need to strengthen control over these areas may be caused by the preparation of the regime for a new political campaign.

Recognizing media resources as extremist groups, the regime sets the task of breaking information chains, isolating independent media from the audience under the threat of criminal punishment. At the same time, the reason for such actions is not hidden: the upcoming political campaign, which includes at least a constitutional referendum.

The practice of recognizing Telegram resources as extremist groups by Lukashenka regime has already had a definite effect in the form of a decrease in the number of subscribers to certain Telegram resources. However, this is unlikely to lead to a decrease in the number of active consumers of information, or participants in chats. In addition, some of the popular Telegram channels began to acquire their own Internet sites located

outside Belarus. The regime will be able to block direct access to them from the country. But, firstly, there are available ways to bypass blocking. And secondly, the ability to calculate active users/participants of such platforms will be sharply reduced. It will also be difficult to track the dynamics of the popularity of such resources.

Speaking about the meeting of the Belarusian-Russian Commission on Military-Technical Cooperation, it can be assumed that the discussion was about the prospects for organizing in Belarus maintenance of Russian-made military equipment, which is purchased for the needs of the Belarusian army (primarily aircraft and air defence equipment). The possibility of the Belarusian military-industrial complex to enter the international markets with similar services in cooperation with the Russian one was discussed as well. It is also worth noting that the prospect of admitting the Belarusian military-industrial complex to direct participation in the fulfilment of the Russian defence order, which Minsk has been achieving for many years without much result, was not mentioned during the event.

Of the 10 states remaining in the CIS, only 3 are pluralistic political systems. The rest are authoritarian regimes at best, with a high level of corruption and social stratification of the population. Such systems have traditionally tended to blame external enemies for internal failures. At the same time, they somehow overlook the fact that if Washington were seriously interested in changing the ruling groups in the CIS states, it is doubtful that even the Putin regime would have been able to withstand. It is interesting to note that the Russian spokesman made statements on behalf of the heads of all the special services attending the meeting. But the media do not cite the statements of other participants on this topic. Obviously, if anti-Western narratives were dominant at the meeting, then Russian propaganda would not fail to take advantage of this.

It is obvious that the epidemiological situation has an impact on the conduct of combat training activities of the CSTO CRRF. It results in reducing the number of participants and combining events. Despite the almost universal vaccination of military personnel in the CSTO countries. Thus, Covid-19 has become and will remain for the foreseeable future a serious factor affecting, among other things, the military activity of states.

The October agreements between the Ministries of Defence of Belarus and Russia have a double meaning for Belarus:

- On the one hand, this is a demonstration of loyalty to the Kremlin. In return for which Lukashenka can demand concessions from Russia on various issues.

- Extending the lease term for military facilities is not only loyalty, but also an attempt to tie the Kremlin to the existing regime in conditions of its dubious legitimacy (and, as a consequence, the legal vulnerability of its obligations on behalf of the country). The idea is that, being interested in maintaining its military presence in Belarus, Russia will support those political forces that do not question the new agreement on military facilities, and oppose those Belarusian politicians who dispute it. The latter will have an obvious pro-Western orientation.

- At the same time, military cooperation with Moscow will be used by the Belarusian regime to put pressure on the West (whose policy allegedly forces Lukashenka to come closer to Russia on an anti-Western platform). This is a clear manipulation: both the extension of the lease and the signing of a new joint military

doctrine were inevitable. The alternative to them is a direct conflict with the Kremlin, which Minsk can't afford under any circumstances, only because of the importance of Russia as a sales market and economic partner.

We would like to draw your special attention to the fact that the topic of the imminent receipt of a large consignment of weapons from Russia has disappeared from the agenda. While on September 1, 2021 Lukashenka spoke about it as a fait accompli.

