

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

The most important events of the month. Throughout November, there was a rapid degradation of the state of border security on the border of Belarus and Poland. Organised groups of migrants continued their attempts to enter the territory of neighbouring EU countries. Which were often accompanied by the use of violence and objects used as weapons against representatives of the Polish law enforcement agencies.

From the side of the Polish authorities, accusations were heard not only of aiding illegal immigrants, but also of direct hostile actions on the part of representatives of the Belarusian military and law enforcement agencies.

As the situation worsened, the rhetoric of official Minsk became more and more belligerent, right up to the calling the neighbouring countries enemies and declarations of readiness to join Russia in the war against Ukraine. Neighbouring countries were accused of conducting military preparations with clearly aggressive goals towards Belarus under the pretext of countering illegal migration. At the highest level it was stated that there was an attempt to use the migration crisis as a pretext for armed pressure on Belarus from Poland, NATO and the United States.

It was also stated about the possibility of migrants receiving weapons from some unnamed sources in order to provoke an armed conflict on the border.

We have dedicated a number of materials to these events ([source](#), [source](#), [source](#), [source](#)).

It is obvious that using this belligerent rhetoric the official Minsk wanted:

- to increase pressure on the EU by the threat of the migration crisis escalating into a military one;
- to try to cause a split within the EU because of Warsaw's tough position on what is happening on the border;
- to involve Russia in this story, demonstrating the commonality of enemies (hence the statements about the destructive role of the United States, Poland and Ukraine, to which Vladimir Putin has a peculiar personal attitude).

We can say that none of these goals have been achieved. Russia, meanwhile, took advantage of the situation to demonstrate that Belarus is part of the Russian zone of influence, while not accepting any obligations to Minsk.

As a result of November, we have to state that the official Minsk is finally perceived by the neighbouring EU countries and Ukraine as a threat to regional security. In fact, Lukashenka regime is abandoning a long-term strategy of not creating threats to its neighbours (the so-called "donation of regional security/stability").

One can agree with the thesis of the Belarusian propaganda that a kind of "sanitary belt" is being formed around Belarus. But the official Minsk is modestly silent about who is responsible for this.

The developments within the month. On November 4, 2021, a meeting of the Supreme State Council of the so-called “union state” of Belarus and Russia took place. The previous similar event took place in the summer of 2018. It was originally planned that the meeting would be held in person. But the Russian side changed its format twice: first from face-to-face to online, then the start time was postponed to 17.00, after the end of the working day.

As a result of the meeting, a new joint military doctrine was approved (the previous one was adopted back in 2001).

On November 8-12, the CSTO exercise “Indestructible Brotherhood - 2021” took place. It became the final stage of the annual “Combat Brotherhood” manoeuvres. The issues of preparation and conduct of a peacekeeping operation have been trained. As part of the exercise, the military:

- carried out service at the checkpoint, inspected vehicles, escorted the convoys, performed landing tasks, stormed the building and freed the hostages;
- organised a refugee camp and carried out its protection, eliminated improvised explosive devices, patrolled the area.

Belarus was represented by the units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and a combined company of contract servicemen from the 38th Airborne Assault Brigade, but not the regular peacekeeping company of the 103rd Airborne Brigade.

On November 9, 2021, in an interview with one of the Russian propagandists, Aliaksandr Lukashenka once again made attacks on Ukraine and its authorities. For the first time, he voiced the threats (so far rather unfounded) to deploy “several divisions” of Iskander missile systems on the western and southern borders of Belarus: against Poland and Ukraine.

On November 10, 2021 the Ministry of Defence of Belarus reported that flights of the Russian strategic bomber aircraft along the borders of our country will be regular. This is supposedly a reaction to the military activity of neighbouring countries. On the same day, two long-range bombers TU-22M3 flew over Belarus as part of the exercises of the Unified Regional Air Defense System of Belarus and Russia.

The next day, two Russian strategic Tu-160 bombers imitated bombing at the Ruzhansky air range without using airborne weapons, while the fighter aircraft of the Belarusian Air Force trained their interception and escort.

On November 12, 2021 at the Hožski training ground, the Special Operations Forces of the Armed Forces of Belarus and the Airborne Forces of Russia as part of a combined battalion tactical group carried out joint tactical airborne assault. The troops trained to seize and hold a bridgehead, search and destroy objects, etc. The Belarusian

side presented this as a joint reaction to the military activity of the neighbouring countries. Russians did not comment on this event.

On the same day, it was announced that since August 2020, more than 5.5 thousand criminal cases related to protest actions have been initiated. More than 3.8 thousand of them were registered this year. Investigation of 1250 criminal cases has been completed.

On November 17-19, Tajikistan held a training exercise with the Collective Rapid Reaction Forces of the CSTO “COBALT - 2021”, dedicated to planning and conducting special operations to destroy illegal armed groups in the border area. As part of the event, the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Belarus studied the issues of using Belarusian rescuers as part of the CRRF special forces.

On November 18, 2021, the Minister of Defence of Belarus Viktor Khrenin during his visit to Uzbekistan held talks with the Minister of Defence of this country Bakhodir Kurbanov. The parties discussed the development of bilateral military cooperation and approved the corresponding plan for 2022.

On November 19, 2021, the statements of the Minister of Defence of Belarus Khrenin, which he made in an interview with the Al Jazeera TV channel, were made public:

- there is no need to deploy Russian military bases in Belarus, since Russian troops are not far away anyway;
- military activities along the western borders of Belarus are elements of preparation for war;
- unnamed neighbouring countries put forward territorial claims against Belarus through their media (the minister did not give any details);
- Belarus does not plan to increase the size of the army, despite the growing tension on the western borders;
- Minsk is allegedly working on obtaining Russian Iskander tactical missile systems.

On November 22, 2021, Lukashenka signed decree No. 450 “On the Interdepartmental Commission on Countering Extremism and Combating Terrorism”, as well as Decree No. 451 “On ensuring the state of emergency” .

On November 23, 2021, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces Major General Viktor Hulevich made a number of statements:

- it is planned to increase the intensity of combat training of troops to prevent a sudden attack on the country. The army will train the operational creation of groups of forces in various operational directions, various options for repelling military aggression against Belarus;
- the migration crisis was created by the West (!), and Minsk is forced to react to the intensification of military activity along the outer contour of the state border;

- Lithuania, Latvia and Poland are increasing their military capabilities, and the Chief of the General Staff called the behaviour of Ukraine aggressive towards Minsk. As a result, a “belt of unfriendly states” is being formed around Belarus.

On November 29, 2021, Lukashenka held a meeting with the generals on the state of affairs on the country’s borders. The event essentially became an ideological base for the command of law enforcement agencies:

- the West uses migrants as a way to deter the Belarusian army in the event of a conflict with Russia ;

- Lukashenka accused Ukraine of readiness to unleash a war in Donbass;

- in the event of a new Russian-Ukrainian war, Minsk will oppose Kyiv together with Moscow;

- in the event of a military confrontation with neighbours, one must also remember about the units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which have the necessary combat training;

- Belarus has become a link in a chain of aggravation of the military situation in the region, neighbouring countries are called enemies, whose plan is not fully known.

Prime Minister Raman Halouchanka was pompously instructed by Lukashenka to use every opportunity “... to support the army now”.

Further, Defence Minister Khrenin again accused the NATO countries of building up their offensive potential near the borders of Belarus.

On November 30, 2021 Lukashenka gave an interview to another Kremlin propagandist. During which it was stated that:

- if nuclear weapons are deployed on the territory of neighbouring NATO countries, Russian nuclear weapons may be deployed in Belarus;

- Belarus and Russia will conduct military exercises on the Belarusian-Ukrainian border in the winter months, i.e. at a time when, according to Ukrainian intelligence, a new Russian invasion of Ukraine is possible;

- it is possible to increase the staffing of the Belarusian army by 5 thousand servicemen to deploy units on the border with Ukraine.

On 30 November 2021, a joint Belarusian-Russian air patrol of the Belarusian state border began in the air space as a response to the increased activity by neighbouring NATO countries.

In November, it was announced that the Belarusian Air Force plans to receive Mi-35P fire support helicopters in mid-2022. It is unclear whether we are talking about the first batch of equipment (which is most likely 4 units), or the Russian manufacturer will

transfer all 12 vehicles next year. It was previously planned that the first four helicopters will arrive this year. But, probably, this is due to the limited financial possibilities of the Belarusian budget.

In November, a meeting with officials of the territorial defence management bodies was held. The participants of the event got acquainted with the procedure for obtaining from arsenals and bases of the Ministry of Defence of certain types of weapons and equipment.

Conclusions. The joint military doctrine of Belarus and Russia has not been published and it is premature to judge about the content. But it is worth noting that its text was finally agreed by the parties at the end of 2020. It is obvious that the approval of the document was held by Minsk as a political trump card for the Kremlin. Lukashenka had to use it right now, before the constitutional referendum. At the same time, we note that the parties did not allow the text of the doctrine to leak: previous practice shows that Russia gladly made public all the facts that can be interpreted as confirming the failure of Minsk as a regional actor. Thus, in November, the Russian side published documents on the consent of the official Minsk to extend the period of Russia's use of two military facilities in Belarus for another 25-year period (the Belarusian regime diligently avoids this topic). It can be assumed that the joint military doctrine does not contain formulations that infringe on the sovereignty of Belarus, and the document itself is conceptually declarative.

Statements about the possibility of deploying Iskander missile systems in Belarus seem unlikely to become reality. The financial capabilities of the Belarusian regime do not allow hoping for the purchase of these weapons. Moscow has never been inclined to give gifts in the form of modern weapons. So if this weapon appears in our country, it will be more likely within the framework of the creation of a Russian military base (which the Belarusian regime opposes). The weapons will be under the full control of the Kremlin, and Belarusian officials will be allowed to look at the Iskander on big holidays, but not to come very close to them. For the rest, we are talking about the insinuations of Lukashenka regime, which are an instrument of blackmailing the West.

Official Minsk, as expected, presents the presence of Russian long-range and strategic bombers in the Belarusian sky as a fact of support from the Kremlin for Lukashenka regime. Moreover, it was the Belarusian side that initiated the overflights of the bombers. But Putin himself suddenly announced that these are planned measures that are carried out on a regular basis. Later, Moscow continued to assert the planned nature of the event, which is not directed against third countries.

Obviously, decrees #450 and # 45 are timed to coincide with the upcoming constitutional referendum and are part of the regime's preparation for this important event. At the same time, it should be noted that the interdepartmental commission on countering extremism and combating terrorism is becoming a working body under the

State Secretary of the Security Council of Belarus. This means the expansion of the functionality and powers of the State Secretariat, which was announced at the beginning of this year.

Speaking about the joint Belarusian-Russian patrolling of the border of Belarus in the airspace, it is worth paying attention to its frequency: judging by official reports – a couple of times a month. This means that now we are talking more about a symbolic act.

