

Analytical report:
National security and defence
of Belarus
(January 2022)

The most important events of the month. Throughout January the degree of quasi-militaristic rhetoric on the part of Belarusian officials grew. It looks like official Minsk decided to finally define its attitude to Ukraine as a threatening neighbour. At the same time, no concrete facts are provided to substantiate this conclusion, except for the broadcasting of anti-Ukrainian narratives of Russian propaganda.

The unscheduled Belarussian-Russian exercise “Union Resolve-2022” is also largely anti-Ukrainian. The event became the largest since the restoration of Belarus' independence in 1991. It involves units of the Eastern Military District of the Russian army. The exercise is strategic in nature and envisages practising a scenario of regional war between Belarus and Russia on the one hand and Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine on the other.

On January 17, 2022, Aliaksandr Lukashenka got acquainted with the concept of “Union Resolve”. He once again returned to the topic of militarization of the territory of the neighbouring countries along the borders with Belarus. He modestly concealed the reasons that prompted his neighbours to hide from Minsk behind the “wall of bayonets”. Poland was also accused of initiating the deployment of a multi-layered system of logistics and technical support near the Belarusian borders, which is a sign of preparation for war.

Lukashenka accused Ukraine of building up military forces on the border with Belarus, including some “radical nationalists”. He said that the design of the exercise was to involve confrontation with Poland, the Baltic states, and Ukraine. A later announced scenario of the exercise confirmed this.

A representative of the Belarusian General Staff stated following the event that:

- The size of the NATO contingent along the borders of Belarus is enough to unleash a conflict;
- The migration crisis is a "high-profile provocation", without specifying whose it is;
- The tasks "...in the southern operational direction" will be worked out with the grouping arriving in Belarus. It is not clear whether this will be a task exclusively for Russian troops, or whether it will be joint training activities.

The State Secretary of the Belarusian Security Council, Aliaksandr Valfovich, accused Ukraine of militarization “...to please its Western curators”. And he stated that “...at any moment a provocation can happen and the irreparable will ensue”.

During the regrouping of Russian units on the territory of Belarus for participation in the “Union Resolve” exercise the capabilities of the Russian transport infrastructure to ensure transportation of troops through the whole of Russia are being assessed.

Within the framework of the exercise, it is planned to practise not only the tasks of repelling external aggression and countering terrorism, but also of protecting the interests of the so-called “Union State”, without specifying what exactly is meant by the latter.

The developments within the month. For the first time this January, CSTO military contingents were used to stabilize the situation in one of the Organization's member states: on January 6, 2022, at Kazakhstan's request, Collective Peacekeeping Forces were sent there. Formally, to support local authorities in their selfless struggle

against strange insurgents in number of 20,000 men at once. However, in reality, by appealing to the CSTO, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has guaranteed himself Russian support in the intra-elite struggle, which began after the rapid deterioration of the health of former Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev. Nazarbayev, who up until the last moment retained a decisive influence on power in the country. In fact, it is a question of sharing Nazarbaev's political, power and financial "inheritance". And the CSTO was used in this struggle by one of the parties.

CSTO peacekeepers performed auxiliary functions and there was no information on their involvement in combat operations.

On January 14, 2022, a cyber-attack on Ukrainian government websites (about 70 resources in total) took place. According to a competent Ukrainian official, a hacker group affiliated with Belarusian intelligence may have been involved in this act. Its list includes attacks on Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and Ukraine, as well as anti-NATO propaganda actions.

On January 21, 2022, Lukashenka announced plans to create an "entire association" to protect the Belarus-Ukraine border. This was a consequence of the fact that the Ukrainian leadership is allegedly under external control (a hint to the West). We devoted a [special article](#) to this decision.

On the same day, the decision to form new military units on the border with Ukraine was also confirmed by the Defence Ministry. The generals also discussed with Lukashenka the prospects for the development of the air defence system until 2040.

It is worth recalling that A. Lukashenko announced plans to increase the staffing of the army by 5 thousand military personnel in order to form new units on the border with Ukraine in November last year.

On January 28, 2022, Lukashenka said Belarus will strengthen the power of its army. Missile production, unmanned aerial vehicles, small arms and ammunition, among other things, have already been put on stream. One and a half to two million citizens of Belarus should be able to use small arms to reliably defend the country against external threats.

In January, the Interior Ministry conducted a comprehensive exercise involving territorial internal affairs bodies and internal troops. Issues of "ensuring of public order, suppression of mass disturbances, as well as issues and tactical actions to eliminate terrorist groups, extremist groups and armed criminals" were worked out. All this was accompanied by a reference to the January events in Kazakhstan. About 1,200 men from three brigades were involved in the exercise.

Last month it was stated that the number of crimes reported in 2021 had fallen by 8%. More than 1.6 thousand people were convicted in politically motivated criminal cases in Belarus. Some indicators of crime related to illegal drug trafficking were also released:

- overdose deaths almost doubled in 2021;
- almost 2.5 times more juveniles were prosecuted for this type of crime;
- 31% more crimes related to drug trafficking were detected.

Joint Belarusian-Russian patrols of the Belarusian air border using Su-30SM multi-role fighters turned from an event in January into a routine activity.

Conclusions. “Union Resolve” implies a test of the so-called “Union State” response force, not the Regional Group of Forces. The latter is tested during the “West” and “Union Shield” exercises. The existence of a response force has not previously been reported. Russian units from the Far East and Eastern Siberia act as them.

The format of the “Union Resolve” and the statements of the Belarusian generals accompanying the exercise contribute to the final loss of the Belarusian regime’s subjectivity in the eyes of the West and Ukraine. Speaking about the protection of the interests of the so-called “Union State”, it is possible to assume that during the exercise the coercion of a third country to accept political demands/ultimatums was practiced.

The CSTO peacekeeping operation in Kazakhstan was the shortest peacekeeping operation in history, lasting only a week. This confirms the hypothesis of an internal political background to the events in that country. All the peacekeeping contingents were deployed by Russian military transport aircraft. The latter has demonstrated a high ability to organise operations of this format and scale. This was no surprise, since earlier Russian army exercises had practised the task of airlifting forces and equipment on a larger scale.

It should be noted that there is no clear understanding of the number of the CSTO peacekeeping contingent sent to Kazakhstan. Secretary General of the Organization Stanislau Zas talked about 2.5 thousand, Kazakh President K. J. Tokayev about slightly more than 2 thousand, Russian sources unofficially mentioned the figure of 5-7 thousand Russian servicemen only. The difference between the first two assessments of the competent officials directly involved in the event testifies to the rather chaotic conduct of the peacekeeping operation, when until the last moment even the scale of the necessary efforts was not clear. Moreover, the very involvement of peacekeepers contradicted CSTO documents.

It is interesting to note, that in Minsk not only they took the information about terrorist invasion in Kazakhstan very seriously, but also “creatively” developed this theory: western special services used terrorists in order to destabilize Kazakhstan and to create threats to Russian security from the south. And if the facts testified against this theory, so much the worse for the facts. Obviously, the following scheme of decision-making at the highest political level has taken shape in Belarus: first Lukashenka forms his opinion on a specific issue, after which the state apparatus creates a justification for the correctness of this opinion.

For Minsk, a concrete political outcome of the CSTO peacekeeping operation in Kazakhstan and Lukashenka’s perception of the events was just the emergence of problems with Uzbekistan: Tashkent reacted extremely negatively to the statements of the Belarusian ruler, that Uzbekistan would become the next link in the destabilisation chain.

The accusations of Belarusian intelligence involvement in the hacking attack on Ukrainian government resources is a new level in the escalation of relations between Kiev and Minsk. In fact, for the first time it has been officially announced that Belarusian state agencies were involved in a deliberate attack in cyberspace that harmed Ukraine. At the same time, it is worth bearing in mind that establishing the involvement in a cyber-

attack is a technically difficult task in itself. It is all the more difficult to establish the entity that might be behind the hacker group. In this connection, it is indicative that official Kyiv did not promote the issue. The Belarusian side ignored the accusations made by the Ukrainian side. We can assume that in the first case there is no direct evidence of Minsk's involvement in the cyberattack, while in the second case there are concerns that such evidence may have been obtained.

It has become evident that Lukashenka personally perceives Ukraine as a threat. Previously, his anti-Ukrainian outbursts could be regarded as an element of the regime's propaganda campaign. But the transition to the practical formation of new military units, which will require serious financial and organizational strains, means that this is the picture of the world in which the Belarusian ruler lives and operates.

Lukashenka did not specify what kind of missile weapons are mass-produced in Belarus. It is quite possible that what was meant was modernization of air-to-air and anti-tank missiles, as well as rockets for MLRS (including "Polonaise" with a range of up to 200 km).

Dreams of a two-million-strong army to defend Belarus against external aggression are unscientific fiction. It would require deployment of the necessary infrastructure for training people to use combat weapons. Which, in the current political realities of Belarus, can be viewed by the regime itself as a threat to its own existence. Earlier it was repeatedly stated that in case of war, Belarus would mobilize a 500,000-strong army.

However, even this figure seems an overestimate, rather it is a question of the size of the entire military organization of the state for the war period. That includes other power ministries, not only the army.

Speaking about the January manoeuvres of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus the following should be noted:

- Lukashenka regime considers the renewed protests to be a real and significant threat;
- it also proceeds from previously voiced allegations of Western involvement in the unrest in Kazakhstan, which was organised ostensibly to destabilise Russia.

The reasons for the growth of recorded crime in the field of drug trafficking in Belarus may be diverse, not necessarily related to physical growth in the volume of drugs consumed in the country. For example, because of increased efficiency of revealing and investigating these crimes, or because of improved law enforcement practices and qualification of criminal acts. It is impossible to draw an unambiguous conclusion about the growth of problems in this sphere only on the basis of official criminal statistics.

