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MINSK OR MOSCOW: WHERE IS THE 'RED BUTTON'?

Many analysts discuss how deeply Belarusian and Russian army structures are interconnected. Since 1990's, Minsk and Moscow have reached more than 30 agreements on military cooperation, moreover there are Russian troops on the ground in Belarusian territory. Still, the question whether this means any threat to Belarusian regime or even sovereignty of the country remains widely discussed.

Belarusian army is underfinanced, unmodernized, lacking motivation and is not playing any serious role in preserving current power of Belarusian regime. Lukashenko uses it with the purpose to get additional financial benefits from Moscow, while the future outcomes of this are not clear. After the Crimean occupation, some argue that Belarus could be the next target and Belarusian army is not prepared for such "hybrid" war.

Therefore, in this issue of the electronic newsletter "Bell" authors are trying to answer, where is

the 'red button' in Russian-Belarusian military cooperation? However, both authors agree that Kremlin does not have much control of Belarusian army, while military cooperation is inevitable because of Soviet period. In the first article Aliaksandr Papko states that Belarusian military industry needs Russian market and the stability of Lukashenko regime relies not on the military but on loyal bureaucracy, secret services and Ministry of Internal affairs.

In the second article Andrei Paratnikau argues that developments in Ukraine has changed the perception of Belarusian regime about the importance of defense forces. He states that there is a growing understanding in Belarus regarding the need to dismantle Russia's monopoly as its military security guarantor, while Russia needs CIS countries for its own military capabilities.

Vytautas Keršanskas, Editor

THE RED BUTTON DOES NOT MATTER: WHY BELARUSIAN AUTHORITIES ARE NOT AFRAID OF THEIR ARMY'S DEPENDENCE ON RUSSIA

Aliaksandr Papko

In recent years many Western researchers ask the question "where is the 'red button' controlling the Belarusian military?" They suppose that one day Russia may use its influence on the Belarusian military in order to make the Belarusian authorities obedient to its will, or even to overthrow them. However, I will argue that the Belarusian army cannot be used either to weaken Lukashenko's regime, or to reinforce it. The Belarusian army is too poor, is marginalised and lacks the ambition to be used in a power struggle.

Belarus: Deeply Dependent, but Uncertain Ally of Russia

Since the beginning of this century, many analyses have been written about the interconnections be-

tween the Belarusian and Russian military.¹ Several researchers argue that Belarusian authorities, to a large extent, have transferred control over the military forces to Russian-led structures. They affirm that such a policy significantly reduces the sovereignty and power of Belarusian leaders.² In my opinion the belief that Russian generals give orders to the Belarusian army is very wrong. However, the belief that the Belarusian military

¹ Павлюк Быковский, Военно-технические связи Беларуси с Россией, Wider Europe Review, Vol.5, No 2(16), Spring 2008. Available at: <http://review.w-europe.org/16/1.html>.

² Anaïs Marin, *Trading off sovereignty. The outcome of Belarus's integration with Russia in the security and defence field*. OSW Guest Commentary, Centre for Eastern Studies, No. 107, 25 April 2013. Available at: http://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/commentary_107.pdf.

It is reasonable to affirm, that without the Russian market the Belarusian defence industry would find it very difficult to survive.

can protect the country against an intervention of the type seen in Crimea is wrong too.

Since the mid-1990s, Belarus and Russia have concluded more than 30 agreements on cooperation in the military field.³ However, Minsk very often uses military cooperation as a tool with which to blackmail Russia and extract more economic benefits. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that Belarus will fulfil its allied obligations towards Russia, if those obligations go against the interests of the Lukashenko's regime. There is far less willingness of Minsk to transfer its sovereignty to Russia-dominated institutions than Belarusian officials declare. Nevertheless, it does not change the fact that the Belarusian and Russian military remain deeply interconnected.

The deepest form of military cooperation between the two countries is the Belarus-Russia Regional Group of Forces established in 1997. Since 2009 the two countries also have a common air defence.⁴ According to the agreement on the Regional Group of Forces, in warfare Belarusian Armed Forces will create a joint group of forces with the Russian 20th Army and operate under the Russian command. In order to ensure the interoperability between the Armed Forces of two countries, regular joint exercises, such as Union Shield-2011 and West-2013 have been organised.⁵

As regards the common air defence, the 2009 agreement legalised a situation which had existed long before. Central command points of Russian and Belarusian air defence forces have been exchanging information about the situation in airspace for many years. Since 2009 the task to ensure the cooperation between them has been entrusted to the common commander. However, the process of establishing these formal structures of cooperation took almost 10 years. Moreover, from 2009 to 2013 the position of Commander of the Regional Air Defence System remained vacant, until the Russian authorities agreed to give this position to a Belarusian general.⁶

Belarus also participates in the Collective Security Treaty Organisation – a Russian-led military alliance, established in 1994. In 2009, Belarus

tried to sabotage the establishment of the Quick Response Collective Forces, a combined armed force comprising independent military units from the CSTO member states. Finally, it agreed to participate in the QRCF; however, the Belarusian contribution to the joint force remains minimal. The financial and organisational burden in the CSTO lies almost exclusively with Russia.⁷

The Belarusian and Russian military are deeply interconnected in the technical field. There is no need to explain that the Belarusian army still uses weapons inherited from the Soviet army. Most of the military factories, which deliver spare parts for weapon systems used by Belarus, are now on the territory of Russia. The Belarusian defence industry is deeply integrated in the Russian Defence Industry Complex. Although during Soviet period Belarusian economy was heavily militarised, it did not produce completed weapon systems. Belarusian enterprises produced only elements of weapons which were subsequently used by Russian military factories

At the beginning of the 21st century more than 120 Belarusian enterprises cooperated with 200 enterprises of the Russian defence industry. Belarusian factories produce sights and optics, automated command and control systems, as well as chassis for Russian weapon systems. Belarusian factories also participate in repairing and modernising Russian weapons.⁸ It is reasonable to affirm, that without the Russian market the Belarusian defence industry would find it very difficult to survive.

Belarus and Russia also cooperate in the military education field. Since 1998 about 1,300 Belarusian officers of different ranks have graduated from military schools of Russia's Defence Ministry.⁹ This figure is important; however, in comparison with almost 20,000 Belarusian officers it does not seem too big. Analysts often stress that Russia has military bases on Belarusian soil. Russian military objects include the radar station "Volga" in Hancavičy (Brest region) and the Russian Navy communication centre in Vilejka (Minsk region). Since December 2013, ten Russian Su-27 fighter-bombers have been deployed in Baranavičy (Brest region).

However, the number of Russian soldiers in Belarus does not exceed 2000.¹⁰ This figure does not

³ Anaïs Marin, *op. cit.*, p. 2

⁴ Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Belarus, *Cooperation with Russian Armed Forces*. Available at: http://www.mil.by/en/military_policy/cooperation.

⁵ Посольство Республики Беларусь в Российской Федерации, Региональная группировка войск Беларуси и России. Available at: <http://www.embassybel.ru/belarus-russia-relations/military/e5c10e1ff1a0.html>.

⁶ Александр Алесин, Москва разрешила Минску покомандовать единой системой ПВО, Белорусские Новости, 16.09.2013. Available at: http://naviny.by/rubrics/politic/2013/09/16/ic_articles_112_183014/.

⁷ Андрей Поротников, Беларусь в КСОР ОДКБ. Плечом к плечу с ненадежным союзником. Белорусские Новости, 29.03.2014. Available at: http://naviny.by/rubrics/politic/2014/03/29/ic_articles_112_185067/.

⁸ Павлюк Быковский, *op. cit.*

⁹ Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Belarus, *op. cit.*

¹⁰ РИА Новости, Военные базы РФ за границей. Справка, 15.02.2010. Available at: <http://ria.ru/spravka/20100215/209344182.html>.

In the last 15 years the Belarusian army has become an asylum for people with low ambitions and increasingly low professional skills.

present a serious threat to the country's sovereignty. It is important to note, that Belarusian authorities have always been trying to use the presence of Russian military objects on Belarusian soil as an argument to ask for more economic subsidies from Russia. Moreover, there are reasons to assume that Minsk authorities have recently invited Russian jets to Belarus because they wanted to solve their own problems with Russia's helping hand. Belarus needed Russian Su-27 to replace its own fighter bombers, recently withdrawn from the service due to expired service life.¹¹

The mental dependency of Belarusian army officers on Russia is extremely strong. A large number of high-ranking officers were born in Russia and other Soviet republics. They still identify themselves with the USSR whose capital was Moscow, and not Minsk. Many of them see Belarus, not as an independent country, but rather as a part of the "Russian world", which is naturally subordinated to Moscow. The West remains for them the undisputable enemy. It is important to note, that the Belarusian Minister of Defence was born in Ukraine. Two among his four deputies were born in Russia.¹² Lower-level officers do not have such a mental attachment to Russia. However, like the rest of Belarusian society, Belarusian officers have been formed in Soviet-style official propaganda, which does not provide a clear explanation of why Belarus should be an independent state.

Why the Dependency on Russia Cannot Be Used for Political Purposes?

Despite the fact that the Belarusian military is mentally, technically and organisationally interconnected with Russia, it is difficult to imagine that such dependency would be used as a tool of political influence. The Belarusian army is too poor, ageing and marginalised to play any political role.

Belarus spends about USD 700 million per year on its military forces. It remains one of the main expenditures of the Belarusian budget. However, the Belarusian authorities spend almost double that amount on the police forces, secret services and courts.¹³ Government spending on the army is 1.1% of GDP. This figure is slightly higher than the government spending on education and

healthcare but lower than spending on agriculture. Since 2011 economic crisis Belarusian authorities have almost doubled the budget for the police and security services, while the spending on the military has not been increased. It clearly shows that the army is not on the list of priorities that the government is willing to finance in times when the risk of social discontent is increasing.¹⁴

If we compare the budget of the Belarusian army with the military budgets of neighbouring countries, we will clearly see that Belarusian armed forces are heavily underfinanced. The size of the Belarusian army officially is about 60,000. However, several researchers argue that the real (not nominal) size of Belarusian military forces is about 50,000 people.¹⁵ The government spends about USD 14,000 on each soldier per year. Estonia, for instance, spends double that on each serviceman – about USD 30,000. In comparison, Russia and Poland spend about USD 83,000, i.e. six times more than Belarus.

Less than one fifth of the USD 700 million Belarusian military budget goes towards the development of the armed forces, including acquisition of new weapons.¹⁶ The rest is spent on salaries, social benefits to servicemen and maintenance of the infrastructure inherited from the Soviet Union. It is not surprising that the Belarusian army equipment is getting more and more obsolete. Most modern Belarusian tanks, armoured person vehicles, fighter jets and helicopters date from 1989. There is no money in the Belarusian budget for modernisation.

Russia, despite the Agreement on the Regional Group of Forces, does not want to modernise the Belarusian army either. Moscow is only willing to maintain the Belarusian air defence forces, as it does not have its own air defence system in the West of the country and must therefore rely on Belarus. However, Moscow does not want to sell tanks, APCs or fighter jets to Minsk. The biggest modernisation of the Belarusian military took place in 2006, when Moscow sold Minsk 4 battalions of S-300 missile systems at extremely low prices.¹⁷ In 2011–2013 Russia delivered 3 battal-

¹¹ БЕЛТА, Су-27 снят с эксплуатации в ВВС Беларуси из-за нецелесообразности его использования – Двигалев, 14.11.2013. Available at: http://www.belta.by/ru/all_news/society/Su-27-snjat-s-ekspluatatsii-v-VVS-Belarusi-iz-za-netselesoobraznosti-ego-ispolzovanija--Dvigalev_i_651888.html.

¹² Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Belarus, *Leaders*. Available at: <http://www.mil.by/en/forces/squad/>.

¹³ Закон Республики Беларусь «О республиканском бюджете на 2014 год», Народная Газета, 31.12.2013. Available at: http://www.ng.by/ru/issues?art_id=82185

¹⁴ Павел Свердлов, Бюджет-2014: больше денег милиции и КГБ, меньше — на образование, культуру, Европейское радио для Беларуси, 12.12.2013. Available at: <http://euroradio.fm/ru/byudzhets-2014-bolshe-deneg-milicii-ikgb-menshe-na-obrazovanie-kulturu>.

¹⁵ Александр Класковский, Сколько солдат у Лукашенко? Белорусские Новости, 20.08.2013. Available at: http://naviny.by/rubrics/politic/2013/08/20/ic_articles_112_182725/.

¹⁶ Пресс-служба Министерства обороны, Военный бюджет-2007, Министерство обороны Республики Беларусь. Официальный сайт. Available at: http://mod.mil.by/voen_budjet.html.

¹⁷ Anais Marin, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

The stability of the Lukashenko regime relies not on the military but on loyal bureaucracy, secret services, riot police and militarised forces of the Ministry of Internal affairs.

ions of the Tor-M2 missile system to Belarus. The next period of modernisation is expected to be in 2015, when Belarus expects to obtain 4 battalions of the S-300 system and 4 Yak-130 training jets from Russia.¹⁸ All the rest of Belarus' weapons (with the exception of a very few) date back to Soviet times.

The Belarusian military is very far from the ideal of a highly professional and technologically advanced army. In the last 15 years the Belarusian army has become an asylum for people with low ambitions and increasingly low professional skills. The army command does not have enough resources for training or new equipment. Officers at all levels believe that if they speak openly about the problems facing the army they will certainly be punished, but the material conditions of their units will not improve anyway. Therefore, the majority of officers prefer to adapt to the existing system, hide the problems and pretend to be fulfilling their duties. Such a situation produces a culture of passivity and double-talk. Loyalty, and not professionalism becomes the major criterion for promotion in many units.

Several analysts point out that since 2011 mid-level officers (captains and majors) have been leaving the Belarusian army in droves.¹⁹ This phenomenon can be explained by several factors. First of all, salaries in the commercial sector have become equal if not higher than the ones in the military. Secondly, young ambitious people do not want to stay in the army which has been materially and mentally entrenched in a time warp since 1980s. Official ideology does not provide credible and unambiguous answers to the questions why the independent Belarusian state should exist and why citizens should defend independence. Therefore, many army officers lack motivation and sense in their service. Many officers, even high-ranking ones, are openly jealous of the salaries of their colleagues in the Russian army, which are 2-3 times higher.

In deeply consumerist and unpatriotic Belarusian society the prestige of military service is quite low. Military service attracts many people because of the opportunity to obtain subsidised loans to build a house. Many officers and professional soldiers leave the service after getting a new apartment. Others stay in the army because they

wait for early military retirement.²⁰ Petty corruption, e.g. stealing fuel or use of soldier labour for officers' private purposes, also exists in the Belarusian army, although this phenomenon is not as pervasive as it is in the Russian or Ukrainian military.

Conclusions: Why the Belarusian Army Is and Will Remain Marginalised

It is reasonable to conclude that the army described above does not have and cannot have political ambitions. Because of a 15-year-long negative recruitment process, army command is largely composed of people unwilling to take responsibility and make independent decisions. Despite their nostalgia for the Soviet Union and positive attitude towards Russia, they will not take an active role in any geopolitical power struggle in Belarus. The army will remain loyal to Lukashenko as long as he remains in power.

On the other hand, Belarusian authorities know perfectly well that military forces cannot be used as a tool to maintain their power if popular protests break out. Any attempt to put an obsolete Soviet military machine into motion will reveal its hidden problems. Neither state authorities nor generals are interested in that. Moreover, badly paid and therefore sceptical of the ruling elite, Belarusian officers will execute orders without too much enthusiasm. Belarusian authorities are also fully aware that a Soviet-style backward army is unable to prevent separatist conflicts inspired by external forces, similar to the conflicts which broke out in Donbas or Crimea.

All the facts presented above allow concluding that Belarusian authorities do not see the army either as a threat or as a tool to maintain their power. The stability of the Lukashenko regime relies not on the military but on loyal bureaucracy, secret services, riot police and militarised forces of the Ministry of Internal affairs. As has been already mentioned, in times of economic crisis Belarusian authorities do not want to invest in the military. Instead, they increase the amount of money spent on the secret services and the police.

From the perspective of the Belarusian authorities, the main reason for the existence of the Belarusian army is to show the Kremlin that Belarus protects Russia against the West. President Lukashenko uses this argument to obtain economic support from Russia. Belarusian authorities will finance their military only at a level, which allows this illusion to be maintained. And there are no reasons to suppose that this situation will be changed in the near future.

¹⁸ Белорусские Новости, Россия поставит в Беларусь четыре зенитных ракетных дивизионов С-300, 11.04.2014. Available at: http://naviny.by/rubrics/society/2014/04/11/ic_news_116_434620/.

¹⁹ Николай Ницук, Тяжелые времена для армии Белоруссии, Военно-промышленный курьер, № 28 (496), 24.07.2013. Available at: <http://vpk-news.ru/articles/16805>.

²⁰ Ibidem.

Until recently, the army was a minor institution of the state power system. Developments in Ukraine forced them to change the approach.

DEBRIS OF THE EMPIRE

Andrei Paratnikau

Belarus inherited an army of around a quarter of a million from the dissolved Soviet Union. Like other post-Soviet states, our country had to reduce the numbers several times during the economic crisis of the nineties, so now we have an army of only 43,000. During the first ten years of this century they called these cuts 'reforms', though it was actually a ruination.

The Belarusian military is armed with Soviet-era weapons and led by people whose careers date back to the USSR. The situation in Russia is not very different from what we have in Belarus. They are still exploiting the Soviet heritage too, both in terms of personnel and equipment. The Belarusian and Russian armies still retain the Soviet-style in many regards.

Belarusian and Russian military leaders often served or studied together during Soviet times. Even generals of today's Belarus all had to study at the Military Academy of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia in Moscow until 2006.

These objective factors are basic preconditions for the current level of military cooperation between our countries.

However, the Soviet legacy will not last forever. The generation change of military chiefs will be complete in 3 to 5 years in Belarus. New people who are joining the ranks only know the USSR from history books. What they follow are Western standards of consumption. Do not trust their for-show anti-Americanism: rather than an ideological stance, this is simply envy of someone better off.

The place of the military in the power system

Until recently, the army was a minor institution of the state power system. The regime saw the army as an attribute rather than a key tool.

Developments in Ukraine forced them to change the approach. With the final destination of this shift still not clear, both the government and society came to understand the need for an effective and reliable military. The Belarusian elite used to view Moscow as a merely hypothetical threat. However, the annexation of Crimea showed that the Kremlin is ready to invade even friendly nations.

So far, special security services are the key security fundamental of the Belarusian regime, rather than the army or the police. Statements that the

Belarusian KGB is just a branch of the Russian FSB are nothing but speculation.

Why the West is not interesting

It should be noted that the participation of Minsk in Moscow-initiated integration projects, including military ones, has a clear rationale, since the West is not offering Belarus any considerable financial incentive. On the other hand, the Russians are willing and still able to provide economic and financial benefits in return for geopolitical dominance. Very vague and unsustainable dominance, by the way.

Belarus is still using military equipment from Soviet armories. The costs of modern Western weapons are completely unrealistic for Belarus. In the meanwhile, the country needs large new batches of arms to uphold its defence capabilities. Belarus has limited resources. The only choice available is to maintain and repair the existing weapons. Cooperation with Russia looks an inevitable must at this point.

No trust in Moscow

Contrary to the financial and economic areas, Russia's assistance to Belarus' military capacity is small in absolute figures. Minsk would like much more. This situation is at odds with Moscow's declarations of top priority given to bilateral Russo-Belarusian relations. Moreover, in recent years, Russia has started to supply its newest weapons to Belarus in its "for export" version, with limited functionality. This is an indication of a lack of trust between the two countries, though bilateral agreements stipulate equal conditions for complete sets of military production.

Russia provides Belarus with military technical assistance very selectively. It is limited to things potentially usable for Russian interests, e.g. air-dromes, armoury warehouse facilities, air defence, and communication and management. This is why Russia did not transfer Su-30 fighters, previously used by India, to Belarusian air forces. The transfer of four anti-aircraft S-300 missile divisions is also on hold. Prospects for supplies of Iskander missile systems is out of the question.

There is a growing understanding in Belarus regarding the need to dismantle Russia's monopoly as its military security guarantor. Minsk is expanding its military cooperation with Ukraine, China and some other countries. Despite political contradictions, Belarus still maintains a dialogue

The military leadership is under the tough control of at least two security centers: the KGB Military Counterintelligence and the Operations and Analysis Center.

with the NATO. The national military industry is also developing, though not fast enough.

For years, the Belarusian government has been consistent in cutting dependence on Russia in terms of training military personnel. Currently, Belarus delegates only a negligible amount of military students to study in Russia. They study curriculum there as foreigners, at a limited level, something that again pushes the Belarusian government to educate their military specialists at home. They have created an aviation school 'from scratch', as well as a Department of Intelligence, the Department of the General Staff for top command training, etc. Belarus has been sending about 100 persons annually to study in Russia in recent years, compared to the 600–800 officers per year trained at home.

Keeping powder dry

The Belarusian system of territorial defence is not capable of defying NATO even in theory. However, it is applicable in the third generation warfare that Russia and Ukraine are oriented to. It is also capable of neutralising a hybrid war, similar to the one being led by Russia against Ukraine now. Moreover, during trainings in April²¹ this year the Belarusian military imitated power projection over a distance roughly equal to that separating its military bases and the Russian border. For the first time ever, troops of the Ministry of Interior and the army were trained to suppress riots in cities and retake seized administrative buildings. It was done very demonstratively and clearly not for a Western audience.

Ideology shift is also under way. The Ministry of Defence is trying to reconcile the Soviet mythology of Victory in World War 2 with other periods of national history, especially the times of the Great Duchy of Lithuania and the Duchy of Połack. Military ideologists try to avoid politicisation by focusing on the personalities of individual commanders and statesmen as well as tangible heritage (weapons, defence facilities and heraldry, etc.) These efforts are not consistent, yet. The ideology machine is divided between predominantly elderly past-oriented Russophiles and the younger pro-Belarusian generation. The watershed is visible between the newspaper *Vo Slavu Rodiny* (*For the Glory of the Fatherland*) and the magazine *Armiya*, the first being a typical Soviet-era "media outlet" and the second much more modern and reasonable.

The Belarusian government is making efforts to meet the needs of troops using national produc-

tion, especially in the areas of critical importance (primarily information and communication systems). However, budget spending on national military industry remains insignificant.

There are many domestic projects appearing as competitors to the Russian military industry: unmanned aerial vehicle, radar systems, outfit, and the anti-aircraft defence system projects Stilet and Alebarda.

Personnel policy in the military deserves a separate mention. The Belarusian opposition often questions the loyalty of high-ranking security officials of non-Belarusian origin. However, they tend to overlook that the authorities have blackmail materials against nearly all high-ranked appointees. Any manifestation of a lack of loyalty results in well-grounded criminal persecution. The military leadership is under the tough control of at least two security centers: the KGB Military Counterintelligence and the Operations and Analysis Center.

Money grows out of the gun

The Belarusian regime creatively rephrased Mao's idea: "Power grows out of the barrel of a gun". In Minsk, it sounds like this: "Money grows out of the gun to help preserve power". To obtain economic benefits from Moscow, Minsk participates in Russia-led integration projects, including military ones.

Belarus is a member of three Moscow-initiated defence projects: Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), United Regional Air Defence System, and the bilateral group of troops of the so-called Union State of Belarus and Russia.

Since 2012, Russia has been trying to reactivate CSTO. It has announced re-armament of CSTO Quick Response Collective Forces with modern Russian weapons by 2015. This has not happened yet, except for supplies of small arms and operating equipment. The troops even wear the uniforms bought for Russian budget money, but only during joint trainings. In-between trainings they are kept in storage. Financial limitations of member states and Russia's inability to provide them with sufficient support seem to be the reason. Plans to re-arm the CSTO Quick Response Forces date back to 2009 and they are still plans.

The Kremlin suggested a scheme for reforming the armed forces of CSTO member states by turning them into *de facto* branches of the Russian military. The idea failed.

Ambitious plans of CSTO have little financial grounding. No one is willing to pay for the integration of the post-Soviet defence area, except Moscow.

²¹ Belarus Security Blog, "National security and defense situation (April 2014), 2014-05-26. <http://www.bsblog.info/national-security-and-defense-situation-april-2014/>

The Belarusian regime creatively rephrased Mao's idea: "Power grows out of the barrel of a gun". In Minsk, it sounds like this: "Money grows out of the gun to help preserve power".

The so-called Union State of Belarus and Russia is another platform for military cooperation. However, the level of integration falls well below that of bilateral cooperation between the US and Canada or UK and South Korea. It resembles coordination rather than cooperation. The Belarusian government enjoys full control over its defence capabilities. Belarusian elites do not want to accept any subordination to Moscow. Established back in 1997, the regional group of troops of Belarus and Russia is still of an imputed value. Only a war can make it really function.

The Russo-Belarusian United Regional System of Air Defence IS a working scheme, but it is not unique. The joint CIS Air Defence System, working in parallel, has been in place for more than two decades; Russia is providing Armenia with air defence and has established a joint air-defence system with Kazakhstan, too.

There was a clear need to establish these institutions, since air defence systems of CIS countries are just fragments of the former Soviet system. Russia's support is crucial to keep them battle-ready.

Minsk and Moscow were in negotiations on the United Regional Air Defence System for years. Lukashenko approved the agreement as late as 13 February 2012, although defence ministers signed it as early as 3 February 2009.

The Commander of the United Regional Air Defence System possesses quite modest functional duties in peace time. They include the coordination of air defence activities of parties, submitting proposals on development of the System, preparing plans of group's combat application. In wartime, he acquires rights to manage the System directly. Consensus is needed for all major decisions. A treaty on the System is signed for a period of five years, something that gives Minsk extra leverage with which to press Moscow to agree on a prolongation.

Why Moscow needs CIS

To some extent, Russia has no other choice but to continue attempts to consolidate the defence capacity of CIS countries. Post-Soviet countries depend on Moscow's technical assistance, but Russia also depends on their military production. Two factors are responsible for this: first, having inherited 80 per cent of the Soviet military industry, Russia can

only produce 17 per cent of the output on its own, without Ukraine or other CIS member states. Second, the ruination of the manufacturing base and the culture of labour in Russia have reached a critical level, making even space and aviation industries vulnerable to quality flaws. This forces the Russian military industry to ship production to CIS. The Kremlin instinctively tries to maintain control over countries it critically needs for survival.

However, Moscow is very hesitant to allow the Belarusian military industry to provide supplies for the Russian army, if the Russian industry has similar production to offer. Back in September 2012, Putin promised to establish equal conditions for supplies of Belarusian and Russian military industries. However, only consumer industries actually enjoy equal rights with the Russians.

Conclusions

Belarusian and Russian cooperation in the military sector is a complicated and controversial phenomenon. Political statements and realities often differ. Given the fact that Belarus will continue to be armed with Soviet weapons for many years to come, the national interests demand interaction with Moscow in the military sphere, regardless of who has power in Minsk.

Concerns about Russia using Belarusian military officers for its own interests are groundless. Particularly because of the fact that the army has no impact on anything and is under the strong control of the security services.

The level of integration in NATO is much higher than in CSTO. Moscow undertakes steps to ensure control over the military capabilities of CSTO member states, including Belarus. However, all Moscow's integration projects have one common feature: bombastically launched, they end up as epic failures.

Belarus depends on Russia in military terms as much as Russia depends on Belarus, because of the technological ruination of Russian industry.

Regardless of numerous joint groups of troops or united systems of air defence, and even the fact that they are headed by Russian generals, as long as Belarusian soldiers are under the command of Belarusian officers and generals, even if the latter are nostalgic about Soviet times, the Belarusian army will fulfil orders of its own political leadership only.

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