

## Lukashenko Appears to Resist Kremlin Pressure to Request Russian Intervention in Belarus

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By Mason Clark

**President Alexander Lukashenko asserted he was in control of the situation in Belarus and does not require Russian help on August 28.** Lukashenko gave a defiant speech downplaying the need for Russian assistance during a visit to the city of Orsha in eastern Belarus on August 28.<sup>1</sup> Lukashenko stated the protests in the country and his claims of NATO pressure “are my problems, and I will solve them.” Lukashenko downplayed the possibility of a Russian intervention in Belarus, following Russian President Vladimir Putin’s August 27 announcement that Russia has prepared a unit of security forces to deploy to Belarus if necessary.<sup>2</sup> Lukashenko stated “we [Belarusians] will defend ourselves” and stated the Kremlin only seeks to defend itself through Belarus. Lukashenko claimed the Russian forces will only deploy in the event of NATO deployments on the “western border of the Union State.” The Kremlin, however, framed the reserve unit as “law enforcement officers” – not a military force aimed at protecting Belarus’ western border against NATO.

**Lukashenko may be resisting Kremlin pressure to request Russian assistance and facilitate a Russian intervention.** Lukashenko has acknowledged Russian support but deflected the need for Russian security forces since the Kremlin publicly offered to intervene in Belarus on August 15.<sup>3</sup> The Kremlin appears to want Lukashenko to formally request Russian support in order to justify a Russian deployment of military forces to Belarus, which would entrench Kremlin dominance over Belarus and establish a precedent for the use of Russian gendarmes in former Soviet states. The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) flight to Minsk the night of August 26 may have facilitated a meeting in which Kremlin representatives pressured Lukashenko to stick to the Kremlin’s desired information campaign of framing protests as a NATO-backed effort to target both Belarus and Russia, justifying Russian involvement. The Kremlin will likely apply further pressure on Lukashenko and retains the option to deploy forces to Belarus without Lukashenko’s approval.

**NEXTA announced plans for a third Sunday mass protest on August 30.** The NEXTA Telegram channel posted protest instructions for August 30 protests the night of August 27.<sup>4</sup> NEXTA directed protesters to gather in Minsk’s Independence Square at 2:00 pm local time on Sunday for the third straight week. NEXTA will likely issue detailed instructions and direct protesters throughout the day, as during previous Sunday protests.<sup>5</sup> NEXTA directed protesters in other cities to gather in city centers “according to local plans,” continuing its strategy of issuing detailed instructions in only Minsk.

**A NEXTA direction for protests to prepare “handmade gifts” for Lukashenko may provoke a response from Lukashenko and the Kremlin.** August 30 is Lukashenko’s 66<sup>th</sup> birthday. NEXTA will likely direct protesters against locations specifically tied to Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. NEXTA asked protesters to bring “creative handmade gifts for Lukashenko,” called on Belarusians to “let the usurper see what [we] will give him for his birthday,” and promised to publish a list of his residences.<sup>6</sup> NEXTA’s post may be simply referring to signs or art, but security forces may interpret the post as a threat to Lukashenko’s residences. Security forces may use the NEXTA post as a justification for a crackdown even though there is no evidence that NEXTA is calling for protester violence. If NEXTA posts addresses of Lukashenko’s residences and protesters approach them, conflicts may become more likely if security forces guard the locations.

**Belarusian security forces contained sporadic demonstrations in Minsk on August 28.** Several small protests with dozens to a few hundred participants occurred in Minsk on August 28 in the absence of protest instructions from NEXTA.<sup>7</sup> Security forces detained several protesters without violence throughout the day.<sup>8</sup> Belarusian police released the approximately 50 journalists detained the night of August 27 by the afternoon of August 28.<sup>9</sup> The journalists reported they were not harmed or formally charged but were warned against further coverage of the

protests.<sup>10</sup> Belarusian security forces with likely Russian support have deployed in force and contained protests in the past week, likely as an intimidation tactic to prepare for larger weekend demonstrations.

ISW will continue monitoring the situation and providing updates.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://president.gov.by/ru/news\\_ru/view/rabochaja-poezdka-v-orshu-24408/](http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/rabochaja-poezdka-v-orshu-24408/).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/08/warning-kremlin-announces-reserve-force.html>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/08/warning-belarusian-president-lukashenko.html>;  
<https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/08/warning-kremlin-begins-security-forces.html>.

<sup>4</sup> [https://t.me/nexta\\_live/9711](https://t.me/nexta_live/9711).

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/warning-nexta-telegram-channel-divides-protests-minsk-lukashenko-prepares-crackdown>; <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/warning-lukashenko-seems-lack-strategy-peaceful-protests-grow>.

<sup>6</sup> [https://t.me/nexta\\_live/9711](https://t.me/nexta_live/9711).

<sup>7</sup> <https://news.tut.by/society/698423.html>.

<sup>8</sup> [https://t.me/nexta\\_live/9745](https://t.me/nexta_live/9745); [https://t.me/nexta\\_live/9750](https://t.me/nexta_live/9750); <https://news.tut.by/society/698423.html>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://news.tut.by/society/698423.html>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://news.tut.by/society/698423.html>; <https://news.tut.by/society/698455.html>.