



Belarus Warning Update: Russia's Western Military District Prepares for October Exercises in Belarus

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By George Barros

Russia's Western Military District (WMD) continues to conduct command and control exercises—activities necessary for a sustained Russian deployment to Belarus. Brigade-sized (3,500 personnel) elements—including tank, motorized rifle, artillery, army aviation, and reconnaissance units—of the Moscow-based First Tank Army began exercises emphasizing unit cohesion and command and control effectiveness at the Mulino training ground in Nizhny Novgorod on September 28.¹

An unspecified sub-battalion-sized (200 personnel) element of the First Tank Army conducted exercises to defend a command post's communication systems against sabotage on September 29.² Unspecified combat crews practiced organizing command and control systems, logistics, occupying and concealing positions, and air defense on September 29.³ Rocket artillery and other fire elements conducted live fire exercises with UAV support on September 30 and October 2.⁴ These exercises at Mulino will continue until October 4.⁵

The Kremlin will likely use the upcoming Unbreakable Brotherhood exercises in Belarus to practice tasks necessary for reconstituting a multinational Soviet-style military organization. ISW assesses the exercises in Nizhny Novgorod, like other recent WMD exercises, are preparations for the upcoming Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Unbreakable Brotherhood command-staff exercises planned for October 12-16 at the Losvido training ground in Vitebsk, Belarus.⁶ The Kremlin will likely use Unbreakable Brotherhood exercises to continue testing battalion and regiment-level interoperability amongst combat units of several former Soviet states, including Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.⁷

The Kremlin may attempt to destabilize NATO with hybrid operations in the Baltics if Russia achieves freedom of movement in Belarus. An unspecified company-sized (100 personnel) naval infantry element of the Baltic Fleet conducted exercises emphasizing military equipment storage area protection in Sovetsk, Kaliningrad, on September 30.⁸ An unspecified battalion-sized (500 personnel) naval infantry element of the Baltic Fleet conducted exercises with amphibious beach landings, ground movements of 120 kilometers, and camouflaging positions at the Pavenkovo training ground in Kaliningrad on October 1.⁹

The Kremlin and Belarus cooperated to issue retaliatory travel ban sanctions against European Union (EU) leaders on October 2.¹⁰ The EU initially issued travel ban sanctions against 40 members of self-proclaimed president Alexander Lukashenko's inner circle, though not Lukashenko himself, on October 2.¹¹ Moscow and Minsk likely will intensify diplomatic cooperation given their joint efforts in the international information space to frame the West as conducting an intensifying hybrid war against the Union State.

The US Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) levied targeted economic sanctions against eight Belarusian officials involved in Lukashenko's electoral malfeasance or human rights abuses against protesters on October 2.¹² Lukashenko may intensify anti-US rhetoric or issue retaliatory sanctions in response.

Russian President Vladimir Putin continues to pressure Lukashenko for Union State integration. Putin called Lukashenko on October 2 to discuss implementing unspecified Union State agreements—likely military and economic integration agreements—that Lukashenko agreed to during their meeting in Sochi on September 14.¹³

ISW will continue monitoring the situation and providing updates.

¹ [https://tvzvezda\(.\)ru/news/forces/content/2020929455-W5iBE.html](https://tvzvezda(.)ru/news/forces/content/2020929455-W5iBE.html);

[https://function.mil\(.\)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316519@egNews](https://function.mil(.)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316519@egNews);

[https://tvzvezda\(.\)ru/news/forces/content/2020101429-](https://tvzvezda(.)ru/news/forces/content/2020101429-uXIItM.html?utm_source=tvzvezda&utm_medium=longpage&utm_campaign=longpage&utm_term=vi)

[uXIItM.html?utm_source=tvzvezda&utm_medium=longpage&utm_campaign=longpage&utm_term=vi](https://function.mil(.)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316783@egNews)

² [https://function.mil\(.\)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316783@egNews](https://function.mil(.)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316783@egNews);

[https://function.mil\(.\)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316791@egNews](https://function.mil(.)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316791@egNews)

³ [https://function.mil\(.\)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316783@egNews](https://function.mil(.)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316783@egNews);

[https://function.mil\(.\)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316791@egNews](https://function.mil(.)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316791@egNews)

⁴ [https://function.mil\(.\)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316951@egNews](https://function.mil(.)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316951@egNews);

[https://function.mil\(.\)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316948@egNews](https://function.mil(.)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316948@egNews);

[https://function.mil\(.\)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12317316@egNews](https://function.mil(.)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12317316@egNews)

⁵ [https://function.mil\(.\)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316020@egNews](https://function.mil(.)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316020@egNews)

⁶ <http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/09/belarus-warning-update-kremlin-is.html>;

⁷ <http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/09/belarus-warning-update-kremlin-is.html>

⁸ [https://function.mil\(.\)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316907@egNews](https://function.mil(.)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316907@egNews)

⁹ [https://function.mil\(.\)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12317129@egNews](https://function.mil(.)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12317129@egNews)

¹⁰ [https://www.mid\(.\)ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJEO2Bw/content/id/4366068](https://www.mid(.)ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJEO2Bw/content/id/4366068)

¹¹ [https://www.euronews\(.\)com/2020/10/02/belarus-eu-agrees-sanctions-on-40-officials-but-not-lukashenko](https://www.euronews(.)com/2020/10/02/belarus-eu-agrees-sanctions-on-40-officials-but-not-lukashenko);

[https://www.aljazeera\(.\)com/news/2020/10/2/eu-breaks-deadlock-to-impose-belarus-sanctions-turkey-on-notice](https://www.aljazeera(.)com/news/2020/10/2/eu-breaks-deadlock-to-impose-belarus-sanctions-turkey-on-notice)

¹² <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm1143>

¹³ [http://president.gov\(.\)by/ru/news_ru/view/telefonnyj-razgovor-s-prezidentom-rossii-vladimirom-putinym-24638/](http://president.gov(.)by/ru/news_ru/view/telefonnyj-razgovor-s-prezidentom-rossii-vladimirom-putinym-24638/);

[http://kremlin\(.\)ru/events/president/news/64145](http://kremlin(.)ru/events/president/news/64145)