



Moscow Claims Poland Is the Lead Sponsor of Belarusian Protests; Minsk Calls Protests a “Color Revolution”

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By George Barros

The Kremlin framed Poland as a leader in sponsoring Belarusian protests for the first time and Belarus claimed the ongoing protests are part of a Western-sponsored “color revolution.” The Russian Foreign Ministry (MFA) dedicated a segment of its September 3 briefing to accusing Warsaw of providing direct financial, NGO, and influence operation support to the Belarusian opposition and said Poland is “at the forefront of the EU's unfriendly policy.”¹ The Kremlin has not previously framed Poland as the leader of Western interference in Belarus, but rather as a coconspirator along with Lithuania, Germany, the Czech Republic, the United States, Ukraine, and Canada.² The Kremlin may be setting information conditions to conduct hybrid operations against Poland.³

The Kremlin and Lukashenko reiterated false claims that the protests are an attempt at a color revolution. Belarusian Defense Minister Viktor Khrenin participated in a prescheduled defense ministerial along with member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Moscow on September 4.⁴ Khrenin said “color revolutions” are a major international security threat for the Kremlin-aligned block and used the current protests in Belarus as an example of an attempted but unsuccessful color revolution.⁵ ISW assessed the Kremlin will likely deepen its military footprint in Belarus by exploiting the false narrative of external threats to the Union State.⁶

Belarusian security forces forcefully entered a university building to detain student protesters for the first time on September 4. Security forces detained students demonstrating in solidarity with students whom Belarusian security forces had previously detained in street protests on September 1.⁷ Belarusian university administrators are cooperating with Belarusian security forces.⁸ Student demonstrations are not displaying anti-Kremlin symbols.⁹

Protests in Minsk on September 4 were larger than usual weekday protests. A few hundred women formed an impromptu march in Minsk to protest student detentions in the evening of September 4.¹⁰ Minsk residents demonstrated in a number of neighborhoods around the city as well.¹¹ These protests were larger than the usual weekday protest pattern. ISW did not observe anti-Kremlin symbols in posted media of these protests.

The Kremlin continues preparations for President Alexander Lukashenko’s upcoming summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow. The Kremlin said on September 4 that Lukashenko and Putin will discuss reopening the Russian-Belarusian border during their

upcoming meeting in Moscow.¹² The Kremlin has not yet confirmed the date of their meeting but it will reportedly be around September 10.¹³ ISW forecasted that Lukashenko may cede more of Belarus' remaining sovereignty to Russia at this summit.¹⁴

The Kremlin's decision to open the Russian-Belarusian border may enhance Moscow's capabilities to infiltrate personnel into Belarus. The Kremlin closed Russia's borders with Belarus as a COVID-19 precaution in March 2020.¹⁵ Resumption of regular traffic between Russia and Belarus may provide the Kremlin cover to infiltrate personnel into Belarus. The Kremlin reportedly deployed at least 600 Russian riot control personnel to Pskov – 200 kilometers away from Belarus – on September 2.¹⁶ The Kremlin confirmed on August 27 the existence of a Russian law enforcement officer reserve prepared to intervene in Belarus if the situation “gets out of control.”¹⁷ ISW assessed unmarked vehicles may already be transporting Russian riot control personnel to Belarus on August 30.¹⁸

The Kremlin likely seeks to prevent the tone of the protests from becoming anti-Russian. Anti-Kremlin backlash from the Belarusian population would disrupt the Kremlin's efforts to consolidate control over Belarus in the guise of voluntary Belarusian accession to the Union State mechanism. The Kremlin's overt support for Lukashenko began pushing elements of the Belarusian opposition into an anti-Russian direction for the first time on September 3.¹⁹ Belarusian protests remain overwhelming neutral on Russia as of this writing.

ISW will continue monitoring the situation and providing updates

¹ [https://www.mid\(.\)ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4309873](https://www.mid(.)ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4309873)

² [https://www.mid\(.\)ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4307068](https://www.mid(.)ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4307068);
[https://ria\(.\)ru/20200901/belorusiya-1576566492.html](https://ria(.)ru/20200901/belorusiya-1576566492.html)

³ <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/08/warning-moscow-sets-conditions-for.html>

⁴ [https://www.mil\(.\)by/ru/news/105607/](https://www.mil(.)by/ru/news/105607/)

⁵ [https://www.mil\(.\)by/ru/news/105607/](https://www.mil(.)by/ru/news/105607/)

⁶ <http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/09/warning-kremlin-prepares-to-further.html>

⁷ <https://twitter.com/HannaLiubakova/status/1301826859701800961>; https://twitter.com/nexta_tv/status/1301838518415773696;

<https://twitter.com/BFreeTheatre/status/1301856224959434752>; https://twitter.com/nexta_tv/status/1301872244709261318;

<https://twitter.com/BFreeTheatre/status/1301837953078091776>;

<https://twitter.com/HannaLiubakova/status/1301855697324437504>;

<https://twitter.com/VoicesBelarus/status/1301825461920694272>;

<http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/09/warning-belarusian-opposition-begins.html>

⁸ <https://twitter.com/HannaLiubakova/status/1301855697324437504>;

<https://twitter.com/HannaLiubakova/status/1301835757083131904>;

<https://twitter.com/BFreeTheatre/status/1301864294641020928>

⁹ <http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/09/warning-belarusian-opposition-begins.html>

¹⁰ <https://twitter.com/BFreeTheatre/status/1301931199514972160>

¹¹ [https://t\(.\)me/nexta_live/10573](https://t(.)me/nexta_live/10573); [https://t\(.\)me/nexta_live/10567](https://t(.)me/nexta_live/10567); [https://t\(.\)me/nexta_live/10576](https://t(.)me/nexta_live/10576);

[https://t\(.\)me/nexta_live/10582](https://t(.)me/nexta_live/10582); [https://t\(.\)me/nexta_live/10578](https://t(.)me/nexta_live/10578); https://t.me/nexta_live/10575

¹² [https://riafan\(.\)ru/1308357-rossiya-gotova-otkryt-granicu-s-belorusiei](https://riafan(.)ru/1308357-rossiya-gotova-otkryt-granicu-s-belorusiei)

¹³ [https://www.newsru\(.\)com/blog/02sep2020/mos_luk.html](https://www.newsru(.)com/blog/02sep2020/mos_luk.html); [https://dni\(.\)ru/polit/2020/9/2/458507.html](https://dni(.)ru/polit/2020/9/2/458507.html);

[https://udf\(.\)by/news/main_news/217768-10-sentjabrja-belorusskij-prezident-priedet-v-moskvu-tam-budut-proishodit-jeti-samyerokovye-peregovory.html](https://udf(.)by/news/main_news/217768-10-sentjabrja-belorusskij-prezident-priedet-v-moskvu-tam-budut-proishodit-jeti-samyerokovye-peregovory.html)

¹⁴ <http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/09/warning-kremlin-prepares-to-further.html>

¹⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-51904909>; [https://rg\(.\)ru/2020/03/18/reg-cfo/rossiia-vremenno-zakryla-granicu-s-belorusiej.html](https://rg(.)ru/2020/03/18/reg-cfo/rossiia-vremenno-zakryla-granicu-s-belorusiej.html)

¹⁶ <https://twitter.com/ErlikhmanK/status/1301208662774554625>; <http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/09/warning-belarusian-opposition-begins.html>

¹⁷ [http://kremlin\(\(.\)\)ru/events/president/news/63951](http://kremlin((.))ru/events/president/news/63951) ; <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/08/warning-kremlin-announces-reserve-force.html>

¹⁸ <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/08/warning-militarization-of-lukashenkos.html>

¹⁹ <http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/09/warning-belarusian-opposition-begins.html>