



Warning: Russia and Belarus Prepare for October Exercises in Belarus

September 25, 2020, 5:30 pm EDT
By George Barros

Russia’s Western Military District (WMD) is likely preparing for more exercises in Belarus. Unspecified Russian signals elements of the Moscow-based First Guards Tank Army performed over 300 special command and control and warning signals transmission exercises in the WMD in late September.¹ Signal elements practiced transmitting targeting information, deploying concealed field command posts in blackout conditions, and defending command and control infrastructure against weapons of mass destruction.

These exercises may be part of a larger WMD logistical undertaking to sustain a continuous or near-continuous conventional Russian military presence in Belarus. Belarusian signals elements began conducting similar field exercises in Belarus on September 21 to prepare for upcoming October exercises in Belarus.²

The Russian brigade tactical group (BTG) of the Ivano-based 98th Airborne Assault Division began to depart Brest, Belarus, via rail after Slavic Brotherhood exercises ended on September 25.³ The Kremlin continues to claim all Russian forces that participated in Slavic Brotherhood will return to Russia now that Slavic brotherhood exercises ended. Russia has offered no visual evidence that the two BTGs from the Pskov-based 76th and Tula-based 106th Airborne Assault Divisions are preparing to leave Belarus. ISW assesses that they likely will leave within a few days, and that different units will return for the announced October exercises.

Regiment-sized elements of the Kantemir Tank Division – likely elements of the 6th Separate Tank Brigade – concluded exercises at the Mulino training ground in Nizhny Novgorod on September 25.⁴ These likely snap exercises began on September 21.⁵

Russian military activity in the Western Military District will continue. Regiment-sized elements of a tank army, presumably the Moscow-based First Tank Army, will conduct exercises at the Mulino training ground from September 28 through October 4.⁶

Belarusian authorities claimed Belarusian civilians are asking the government to use lethal force to restore order for the first time. The Belarusian Ministry of Internal Affairs claimed Minsk residents are demanding Belarusian authorities use lethal force to neutralize protests on September 24.⁷ Such public communication may be an early indicator that Belarusian authorities intend to intensify applied force against protesters. Belarusian authorities intensified their detention campaign on September 19.⁸ Belarusian authorities likely seek to create the impression amongst the Belarusian population that protesting is a dangerous activity which most Belarusians do not support.

Belarus will likely become more economically dependent on Russia. Self-proclaimed president Alexander Lukashenko proposed to build a joint Russian-Belarusian seaport trade terminal – using Russian loans granted to Belarus – in Leningrad Oblast on September 25.⁹ Lukashenko’s leverage to resist Russian and Belarusian economic integration is likely degraded.

ISW will continue monitoring the situation and providing updates.

¹ [https://function.mil\(.\)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316185@egNews](https://function.mil(.)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316185@egNews)

² [https://www.mil\(.\)by/ru/news/106477/](https://www.mil(.)by/ru/news/106477/)

³ [https://function.mil\(.\)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316195@egNews;](https://function.mil(.)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316195@egNews;)
[https://tvzvezda\(.\)ru/news/forces/content/20209251246-](https://tvzvezda(.)ru/news/forces/content/20209251246-)

[SsbUH.html?utm_source=tvzvezda&utm_medium=longpage&utm_campaign=longpage&utm_term=v1](https://function.mil(.)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316176@egNews)

⁴ [https://function.mil\(.\)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316176@egNews](https://function.mil(.)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316176@egNews)

⁵ <http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/09/the-kremlin-deploys-brigade-sized-force.html>

⁶ [https://function.mil\(.\)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316020@egNews](https://function.mil(.)ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12316020@egNews)

⁷ [https://www.mvd.gov\(.\)by/ru/news/7423](https://www.mvd.gov(.)by/ru/news/7423)

⁸ Police detained approximately 400 out of 2000 women’s march participants on September 19, whereas police detained only dozens out of tens of thousands of women’s march participants on September 13.

[http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/09/warning-nexta-actively-encourages.html;](http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/09/warning-nexta-actively-encourages.html)

[http://spring96\(.\)org/be/news/99601;](http://spring96(.)org/be/news/99601) <https://www.rferl.org/a/police-make-arrests-in-minsk-as-women-keep-up-protests-against-belarus-s-lukashenka/30835111.html>

⁹ [https://eng.belta\(.\)by/president/view/lukashenko-invites-leningrad-oblast-to-build-joint-seaport-133770-2020/](https://eng.belta(.)by/president/view/lukashenko-invites-leningrad-oblast-to-build-joint-seaport-133770-2020/)