

# Russia Plays War in Belarus

On 12 March, Minsk and Moscow agreed that Russia will deploy 15 fighters jets in Belarus in reaction to NATO's drills on the border between Poland and Belarus.

However, Belarus remains reluctant to support Russia in the Crimean conflict either politically or militarily. Lukashenka`s regime wants to simply show its loyalty and get its hands on some new equipment.

Belarusian military dependence on Russia remains critical. Belarus conducts only small drills on its own, and many Belarusian officers have received their training in Russia.

Purchases of Russian-made arms at discounted rates remains almost the only opportunity for Belarus to update its own arm supplies, though the country`s military industry maintains strong ties with Russian companies.

Belarus' military dependence on Russia is the result of a deliberate policy continuously implemented by Lukashenka. Belarusian authorities are well aware of the fact that the Kremlin will always financially support Belarus, because it views Belarus as a buffer zone for Russia.

## **Belarusian Army Will not be a Party to the Crimean Conflict**

Although Belarus remains officially a neutral country the Kremlin likes to play war with the West within its borders. The decision to have 15 fighters jets relocated shows that Lukashenka has made a concession to the Kremlin, but this does not mean that Belarus is going to fight for Russia.

It seems that regime wants to testify to its loyalty to the Kremlin after its recent refusal to support Russia in the Crimean conflict. Belarus, it cannot be forgotten, has a

strong desire to acquire new military equipment as well.

On 13 March, six Russian Su-27s and three military transport planes landed in Belarus. The same day, Lukashenka said that the redeployment took place at Russia's request. Also on 13 March, the Ukrainian MFA expressed its concern about Russia's attempts to involve Belarus in Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

For many outsiders, [Lukashenka](#) looks like the Kremlin's vassal and the Belarusian army like a division of Russia's armed forces. However, the Belarusian authorities have [refused to support](#) the actions of Russia in the Crimea and Belarusian troops continue to remain within the country's borders.

As a member country of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, Belarus can refuse to support any Russian offensive. According to the Charter of the CSTO, Belarus should support other members only during defensive actions. Furthermore, Putin has so far failed to publicly admit that Russian troops have entered Ukraine. Belarus cannot support these troops so long as they remain officially unrecognised.

Belarusian obligations to Russia within the framework of the [Union State](#) remain limited to real warfare. Military expert Alexander Alesin explains that "the only way that Belarus will participate in Crimea is to go there with a peacekeeping mission with a UN mandate and at the consent of Ukraine."

### **Belarusian Military Dependence on Russia**

Although Belarus has neither politically nor militarily supported Russia in the Crimean conflict, the Belarusian army remains deeply dependent on Russia.

After the creation of the [United Regional System of Air Defense](#), Russia has effectively gained full control over the Belarusian air force. In the near future, the first Russian military [air base](#) in Belarus will begin to operate. This

facility is the first of its kind that was personally authorised by Lukashenka. The Belarusian authorities have inherited two other Russian military sites from their predecessors.

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Military cooperation has always been the sacred cow of the Union State of Belarus and Russia. Even during periods of crises between the countries, military collaboration has continued unphased. The existence of a regional army group for the Union State make Belarusian troops effectively subordinate to Russia. Belarus lacks even its own ground force command.

Belarus conducts only small-scale training exercises on its own and [operational drills](#) with Russia every two years. The so-called [“West” drills](#) have repeatedly made Belarus' relations with Lithuania and Poland very tense. However, some experts argue that Warsaw and Minsk have found that by speculating on an imaginary threat emanating from each other, Poland and Belarus can get money from their own allies in Moscow and Washington, respectively.

Belarus lacks the opportunity to acquire new weapons at market prices and is therefore condemned to begging for them from Russia. In 2012, the Belarusian ruler caused outrage by [asking Russia to finance](#) his country's military. Russia gives great discounts on their wares, but regularly delays the delivery of military supplies. Belarus [is still waiting](#) for four Yak-130s and several S-300s to replace their old S-200s.

On 19 February, the Belarusian Ambassador to Russia announced that Belarus will receive Yak-130s in 2015. Previously, Lukashenka said that Russia would support and deliver several military aircraft, but none of this has come into fruition. Russia requires real money from its western partner,

not just loyalty.

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Many of Belarus men-in-arms continue to receive their military education in Russia. The Secretary of the Security Council [Aliaksandr Miashueu](#), the Chairman of the State Military-Industrial Committee [Siarhei Huruliou](#), the Chairman of the State Border Committee [Leanid Maltsau](#) and the Minister of Defence [Iuryi Zhadobin](#), all studied in Russia.

According to the Polish Centre for Eastern Studies, “in 2012, fewer than 800 people began officer training in Belarus, while as many as 600 individuals attended courses in Russian military schools.” However, it is noteworthy, that Belarusian officers study in Belarus also in civilian universities. It seems that Centre for Eastern Studies missed this data.

The Belarusian [military-industrial complex](#) continues to work primarily with Russia. Even when Belarus fulfils arms contracts with other countries, it still requires components that are produced in Russia. Moreover, Russia [keeps pushing](#) for the sale of the MZKT, a Belarusian manufacturer that produces a chassis of world-renowned quality, something that some have speculated could even happen this year.

### **Conscious Policy of the Regime**

The military dependence of Belarus on Russia is the result not only of the Kremlin's efforts, but also the policy of Lukashenka's regime. Belarus remains reluctant to pay for its own army. The authorities have never afforded the nation's armed more than 2% of the GDP. In the 2000s, the spending was regularly at a level of approximately 1.5% of the nation's GDP.

At the moment, it seems that Russia has also become reluctant

to pay – because Belarus is losing its role as the main military ally of Russia. In 2014, Russia is set to start supplying five battalions with the air defence missile system S-300PS to Kazakhstan – free of charge.

In the case of Belarus, Russia requires payment for weapons, albeit with discounts. While there are only three Russian military sites in Belarus, Kazakhstan hosts eleven Russian military sites. The total space they occupy is about the half of Belarus.

However, Belarus will remain an important Russian ally, since it is situated to the west of Russia's heart. Given this, Russia will have to continue to dole out funding, although it will do so in a more and more humiliating manner. The Kremlin will continue to increase its influence, but this does not necessarily mean that the Belarusian army will be a tool of Russian foreign policy.