

# Moscow Pushing for an Air Base, Protecting Transport Infrastructure – Belarus Security Digest

Despite the worsening situation in the region and Alexander Lukashenka's bellicose rhetoric, spending on national security will not see an increase in 2015. Even common threats have failed to unite post-Soviet countries: leaders of CSTO countries more often than not can engage in talking more than action.

CIS countries are concerned about the security of their transportation infrastructure, fearing the consequences of terrorist attacks on major transportation hubs. Belarusian aircraft manufacturers hope to enter international markets with help from the Russian United Aircraft Corporation.

**Moscow wants an air force base, Minsk pretends not to hear its calls.** On 23 December 2014, the defence ministers of Russia and Belarus met. The Russian side has again publicly voiced the idea of increasing its military presence in Belarus. At the same time, the wording of the statement was rather vague: to increase the number of aircraft and helicopters at an air force base in Belarus without specifying the legal status of this base.

It is unclear whether this wording was unintentional, or it was a result of Minsk' unwillingness to formalise legally the creation of a Russian base. It should also be noted that the Belarusian sources omitted the topic of build-up of Russia's military presence in Belarus. This phenomenon has already become tradition.

**CIS security services seek to protect its transportation infrastructure.** On 5 December 2014, the CIS countries signed a protocol on cooperation in the field of protection of transport infrastructure and vehicles against acts of unlawful interference. The drafting of a coordinated policy of development of transportation networks and a build-up of international transportation corridors in the CIS are among the economic priorities of the Commonwealth.

Meanwhile, up to 70% of the terrorist attacks in the world take place in transport or using the vehicles. A shutdown of a major transportation hub due to sabotage can cause environmental and economic damage. The security of transportation sites and infrastructure are among the priorities of the security services and law-enforcement agencies of the CIS countries. A coordinated strategy of countering terrorist activities in transportation supports their claims to deal with the issue.

Back in November, CIS countries discussed protecting transportation infrastructure against terrorist attacks.

**The State Border Committee keeps the border locked tight.** On 5 December 2014, Alexander Lukashenko received [Leaid Maltsau](#), Chairman of the State Border Committee. They discussed optimising the agency's operational structure and the border infrastructure's general layout. They also focused on the border with Ukraine. Leaid Maltsau said that the state of the country's border security was stable, but the State Border Committee was prepared to face any changes should they arise.

The optimisation of the operational structure of the State Border Committee allowed strengthening the national border's security, including with Ukraine, and deploying additional forces (two border guard outposts near a nuclear power plant under construction and a new border guard detachment in Mazyr). The head of the State Border Committee reported the introduction, in addition to UAVs, of rapidly deployable alarm

systems and other equipment, "which would permit for the protection of the state border... with smaller forces but more reliably".

**The level of interaction within CSTO is low.** The situation on the CIS' southern border remained in the spotlight of the latest CSTO summit. The statement by the President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon deserves special attention. He said that his country looked forward to the full implementation in 2015 of the decision by the CSTO's Collective Security Council "On providing assistance to the Republic of Tajikistan in reinforcing the Tajik-Afghan border" adopted on 23 September 2013.

Moreover, the need for this kind of assistance has increased in light of the situation in neighbouring regions. Emomali Rahmon pointed out that Tajikistan acted as a buffer for the entire post-Soviet space from the threats of terrorism, arms and drugs smuggling. Thus, it is entitled to effective assistance from its CSTO partners.

Judging by the fact that the CSTO countries failed to implement their decision on assistance to Tajikistan in protecting the border with Afghanistan for over more than a year since its adoption, as well as taking into account Emomali Rahmon's pleas, cooperation between CSTO countries leaves much to be desired. There are doubts that the assistance to Tajikistan will be rendered on time and in full. In general, the lack of commitment in implementing agreements is a characteristic feature of all post-Soviet alliances.

**Aircraft manufacturers from Belarus and Russia are making joint plans for the future.** The Concept of Development of the 558<sup>th</sup> Aircraft Repair Plant with the United Aircraft Corporation (Moscow) until 2025 was recently approved. The purpose of the document is to preserve the standing of the Belarusian enterprise in the market for repairing and modernising aircraft as well as its integration into the

international aircraft complex of aircraft manufacturers.

The integration with the United Aircraft Corporation will allow the 558<sup>th</sup> Aircraft Repair Plant to take part in the manufacturing programmes of the corporation, to get access to modern technologies of aircraft engineering and to set up the integrated system of production to ensure the maximum economic benefit.

The fundamental issue is whether or not the United Aircraft Corporation will acquire a share of the 558th Aircraft Repair Plant, and if yes, how big of a chunk it will be. Earlier, the Russian party expressed interest in purchasing shares of the Belarusian manufacturer. Taking into account the war of sanctions between Russia and the West, an agreement of this sort may be crucial for the Belarusian aircraft manufacturer.

**Budget-2015: no money for the silovikis.** Analysis of the expenditures for the 2015 budget show that no fundamental changes in funding for law-enforcement agencies took place compared to last year. Meanwhile, this might have been expected taking into account the security situation in the region, the forthcoming presidential election and Lukashenka's bellicose statements during 2014. Moreover, it is doubtful that even the existing figures will be implemented because of the financial crisis. A high probability remains that the 2015 budget will be revised by the autumn.

**New plan for state defence approved.** In this regard, one should pay attention to a meeting of the Security Council of Belarus held on 16 December 2014. During this event, Alexander Lukashenka approved the plan of state defence for the next 5 years. The plan of state defence is a classified document.

As stated, the plan of defence has been developed under the direct supervision of Alexander Lukashenka "taking into account an in-depth analysis of the situation... in the world... and specific aspects of wars and military conflicts in recent

years".

Lukashenka's emotional statements about the policies of Russia and the West accompanied the Security Council meeting. He emphasised "strengthening intelligence activities and the deployment of military facilities in Poland and the Baltic States" of the NATO alliance.

All of this confirmed that Belarus, according to Lukashenka, needed to develop and strengthen its defensive capabilities. However, "today's behaviour by our eastern brother cannot but cause alarm. Nevertheless, we refrain from drawing any conclusions from it... before speaking to the President of Russia". He said that the main threats were in the economy.

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