

# Reluctant Alliance with Russia, Hope for S-300, Milex-2014 – Belarus Security Digest

Reluctant allies: Moscow has to put up with Minsk's position in the war against Ukraine. However, Putin does not see it necessary to hide his irritation any longer.

The exhibition of arms and military machinery Milex-2014 was a SUCCESS. Helicopters are a luxury for Belarusian border guards.

Belarus hopes that Moscow will finally keep its promise and transfer four battalions of S-300 anti-aircraft missile systems.

**Moscow is unhappy with Minsk; Minsk does not believe Moscow**

On 2 July 2014, Russia's President Vladimir Putin paid a one-day visit to Minsk to attend the festivities on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Belarus from the Nazis.

Initially, Minsk hoped that Vladimir Putin would come on 3 July to attend the festivities and the traditional military parade. According to our sources, it was the reason for moving the parade to the evening. For the daytime, they scheduled a number of events with participation of Putin and Lukashenka, which eventually had to be moved to 2 July.

The Belarusian authorities showed their lack of confidence in Moscow's reliability as an ally during the entire month. On 8 July 2014, during his visit to the 103rd Guards independent mobile brigade of the Special Operation Forces of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenka imparted his apprehensions that "the brothers [i.e. the Russians] would fail to cover our backs and

we would have to fight the war on our own".

On 15 July 2014, while receiving graduates of military schools, Alexander Lukashenka said that the Belarusian army was able to "respond adequately to internal and external threats to the national security".

It should be noted separately that during the reception of graduates of military schools Lieutenant General [Viktar Sheiman](#) was on a par with the current leaders of security agencies. Sheiman may be regarded as an anti-crisis manager. And if Alexander Lukashenka once again has called upon his old proven staff, it means that the crisis is "on the doorstep".

### **Exhibition of arms and military machinery Milex-2014**

The traditional international exhibition of arms and military machinery Milex-2014 took place on 9-12 July. The event was the biggest in its entire history. At the exhibition, Belarusian companies of the military and industrial complex signed about 60 contracts, agreements and letters of intent in the area of armaments and military equipment.

According to officials, the total volume of the contracts amounted to \$60 mln. Besides, further contracts worth over \$1 bln are under discussion.

The visit to Belarus of Pakistan's Minister of Defence Production Tanveer Hussain held in the framework of Milex-2014 is especially noteworthy.

Pakistan presents a special interest to Belarus also because this country is one of China's key partners. In addition, the level of development of Pakistan's defence industry may be of interest to Belarus in a number of areas, including missile and aviation technology.

### **Russia is ready to transfer S-300 to Belarus**

At least, they say so. During the exhibition, the signing by

the Russian party of a contract for a gratuitous transfer of S-300 anti-aircraft missile systems to Belarus was announced. The transfer of the equipment will take place after the Belarusian party signs the document.

The number of the systems to be transferred is not known: will all four battalions promised already in 2011 be transferred or only a part of them? The modification of the anti-aircraft missile systems in question is also unknown.

Earlier, they talked about S-300PMU1 but the transfer of S-300PS systems of earlier modifications (1989 – 1995) appears more likely. The latter are upgradable to versions that are more sophisticated.

Since April 2011, the issue of supply of four battalions of S-300 has been publicly discussed. In the meantime, they have always said that the supply can be expected in the nearest future. The equipment should be transferred "as is" and Belarus will pay for its repair, shipment and modernisation.

It should be noted separately that Moscow has demonstrated far greater quickness in the issue of supply of five battalions of S-300 anti-aircraft missile systems to Kazakhstan. In January this year they signed a respective agreement and the delivery of the equipment should begin later this year already.

Minsk needs S-300 to replace the liquid fuel missile systems S-200.

### **The border guards left without helicopters**

The helicopter unit of the State Border Committee of Belarus was transferred to the Ministry of Emergency Situations. The reason for this was the need to optimise the costs of the border agency.

Belarus plans to replace the helicopters by UAVs, which have much lower operational costs and announced that the border guards would receive the short-range UAVs Berkut-2. The

tactical range of its operation is up to 35 km with altitudes range from 100 to 3,000 metres. However, those are the declared parameters which in practise are likely to be more modest.

### **Belarus continues to develop its own anti-aircraft missile system**

It was announced that there were already 15 procurement requests for the domestic anti-aircraft missile system Halberd. However, most likely the question is not about firm contracts but only letters of intent. The development of the anti-aircraft missile system Halberd is in its final stage; the product is not ready yet.

Further development of the project of the domestic anti-aircraft missile system Halberd bumps into the absence of Belarus' own missiles. The instability in Ukraine restrains cooperation with this country.

Attempts to buy missiles in the West or in Russia are doomed to failure: nobody needs competitors. In this regard, integration of the missiles of the anti-aircraft missile system Buk in Halberd may be of interest.

Firstly, these missiles have more powerful warheads in comparison with the already used. Secondly, there is a certain stock of these missiles. Thirdly, the domestic air defence system, which, in its turn, is a part of the unified regional air defence system of Belarus and Russia, uses the anti-aircraft missile systems Buk.

### **The number of those wishing to become army officers constantly decreases**

During the second year in a row, the admission campaign to military schools and military departments of civilian universities essentially ends in failure. An additional enrolment has been announced in an expedited manner and the

requirements to the level of training of the prospective students have been dramatically reduced.

Moreover, some schools substantially reduced their recruitment plans already in the beginning of the admission campaign. However, it will not solve the problem.

Thus, the last year's experience shows that many students admitted during the additional recruitment failed to pass the first exams and were dismissed for underperformance.

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## **Analytical Paper: Who Rules Belarus?**

Belarus Digest and the Centre for Transition Studies are launching a series of analytical papers offering in-depth analysis of various aspects of Belarus often overlooked by Western experts and press.

The forthcoming papers will deal with personalities within the Belarusian regime, national identity of Belarusians, the system of education in Belarus, reforms of bureaucracy, business climate and other topics.

The first paper prepared by Siarhei Bohdan analyses the Belarusian political and economic establishment, its features and potential and prospects for change. While the government's authority is concentrated in President Lukashenka, he needs a sophisticated state structures to run the country and has

retained his retinue for years. While Lukashenka as a politician has been analysed quite extensively, his close comrades have scarcely been studied.

The paper annex contains personal portraits of key figures in the Belarusian regime, including Lukashenka's older son Viktor, Prime Minister Mikhail Myasnikovich and Foreign Minister Uladzimir Makey.

Belarusian ruling elites emerged as a result of an effective power-sharing deal between Soviet-era bureaucrats and new supporters of the Belarusian president who have risen from the depths of the provinces to the very top due to their talent and unscrupulous ambitions.

This liaison has proven successful both in terms of its cohesion and performance. There has been just one failed mutiny, occurring in the late 1990s amongst the nomenclature, while the consolidated regime-linked elites have run Belarus rather successfully in terms of its governance and economy.

Politically, Belarusian ruling elites of whatever origin have opted for an original path of development which has contradicted Western ideas about democracy and human rights. However, the opportunistic opposition to the West is not based on any profound ideology. The ruling establishment in Belarus can act as responsible and reasonable partner for the West if offered a pragmatic deal.

While pragmatically working with the ruling elites for the sake of preserving Belarusian independence and working towards an eventual smooth transformation, the West should simultaneously demonstrate to the Belarusian people realistic prospects of cooperation with Europe at the same time placing firm demands on the government.

- [Read Analytical Paper "Who Rules Belarus"](#)

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# Sheiman: The Last Soldier of President Lukashenka

Last month Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenka appointed Viktor Sheiman as head of the President's Property Administration, the biggest state-owned business empire and the financial backbone of Lukashenka's regime. Barely any other officials of the Belarusian regime are demonised by its opponents as much as General Viktor Sheiman.

Most media and oppositional politicians ascribe his involvement in every alleged nasty doing of the ruling clique and call him the grey eminence of the regime. But some opposition activists remember him from early 1990s and cannot grasp that this can be the same person they knew back then.

Like most of Lukashenka's men, he had no hopes of making it very high up in the Soviet system as he was quite ordinary until he joined forces with Lukashenka. And still it has been this very man: a paratrooper from a provincial garrison who together with the Belarusian ruler has created today's Belarus.

## Village Boy

Viktor Sheiman (54) was born in a village in a remote rural district on the border with Lithuania, the only one in Belarus dominated by an ethnic minority – the Voranava. With such a humble background he managed to enter only a military school in the deeply provincial Soviet Far East called Blagoveshchensk Tank Command High School. He graduated in 1979 as Soviet troops began campaign in Afghanistan. Sheiman went to that war as an officer of Soviet Airborne Troops, the most

intensively deployed group of Soviet forces during the conflict.



By 1990, he became a major and luckily got an assignment to a garrison in his native Belarus. Perestroika was already succeeding and Sheiman joined the political struggle. He got elected to the then vibrant parliament of Soviet Belarus and took part in establishing a nationalistic Belarusian Alliance of Soldiers (BZV).

Former colleagues which remain in the opposition remember him as a sincere patriot, openly supportive of the Belarusian language and national symbols abolished later by Lukashenka.

Siarhei Navumchyk of the Christian Conservative Party of Belarusian People's Front recalls Sheiman in positive terms as an open minded and pleasant man. Have the games of power with Lukashenka destroyed him, wondered recently Navumchyk speaking on the Radio of Liberty?

### **Throwing in his Lot with Lukashenka**

In post-Soviet Belarus, however, the military was clearly a bad place to make a career. For a while, Sheiman worked in parliament where he befriended many current opponents of Lukashenka and was elected as the secretary of the parliamentary Commission on National Security, Defence and Crime Control. In addition to this he studied law. His time came in 1994. That year he joined the ambitious team of the



future Belarusian president.

A young decorated veteran with political experience was a valuable asset to Lukashenka who built his election campaign by fiercely attacking ruling Soviet nomenclatura elites. A director of a collective farm, Lukashenka was despised by most professionals, and as a result, he initially had few qualified people in his team. In August 1994, as soon as Lukashenka won the presidential election, he appointed Sheiman to a top position: State Secretary of the newly formed Security Council of Belarus.

Many members of Lukashenka's team very soon fell out with him. But not Sheiman. He firmly stood behind the boss. In December 1995, as Lukashenka embarked on his struggle to weaken and dissolve the parliament and ultimately establish an authoritarian regime, he appointed Sheiman to lead the key Ministry of the Interior.



They won the fight together by crushing street protests, organising a constitutional coup d'etat and destroying any meaningful opposition in the late 1990s. The stern-looking former paratrooper Sheiman, who never gave interviews, did his best to create the sterile political landscape of today's Belarus.

On the other hand, Lukashenka's men in these years successfully struggled not only with political opponents but also with criminality. Contrary to Russia with her terrible criminal chaos of 1990s, in Belarus criminal activity was reined in very quickly.

Working under the unscrupulous president, Sheiman helped to revive again all security agencies – police, special services and the military – severely battered and effectively paralysed after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

In November 2000, Lukashenka moved him to the office of Prosecutor General where Sheiman worked for the next four years. Those were the fat years of the regime which already had given up the plans of conquering Kremlin but still had generous Russian subsidies. In 2004-2006, Sheiman held another key office – Head of the Administration of the President – probably the most important power centre of the Belarusian regime.

### **Retirement Impossible**

He then apparently left the political frontline and is said to have switched to conducting murky deals. In 2006, he was again appointed the secretary of the Security Council only to be sacked after being accused of negligence after the July 2008 bombings in Minsk.

Yet Sheiman was too useful to be forgotten and in January 2009 he was appointed assistant to the President for Special Tasks. That was a very uncertain job – but it was not just honorary retirement, it was apparently an office to carry out tasks too sensitive to sort out through normal government channels. The general's comeback as a head of the President's Property Administration confirms his unfading relevance.

Sheiman has sacrificed for Lukashenka much more than most of other in president's retinue. It is Sheiman who was accused of involvement in the disappearance of three political opponents in 1999-2000. Since 2004, he has been banned from travelling to the US and EU – one of the first Belarusian officials to land on the list. He was one of the very few who were not even temporarily removed from it at the time of the warming up in relations between Belarus and the EU.



Furthermore, Sheiman has worked for the Belarusian regime in developing countries since the mid-1990s, for example going to Sudan as early as 1996 or 1997. He has been a very important figure in Belarusian relations with Venezuela from the late 2000s.

Because of his frequent visits to the third world, Sheiman is regularly accused of involvement in arms deals. A real scandal broke out around him in 2008 when the Spanish newspaper *El Pais* accused him of complicity in Venezuelan attempts to help Colombian guerrillas. The documents published, however, were too ambiguous to corroborate the charges and did not name Sheiman directly.

The Belarusian leader appreciates the faithfulness of his soldier. Lukashenka gave the Soviet-era major the highest military rank existing in Belarus: colonel general. Sheiman seems to enjoy such distinctions.

Recently he appeared publicly with an immense number of medals. Having a couple of real ones which he received in the Afghanistan war and from known special occasions (e.g. from the Venezuelan government), the general could have resisted adding to them dozens and dozens of doubtful decorations – affordable for everyone with some money.

### **Is He Really So Powerful?**

Sheiman's career shows the new social mobility Lukashenka created to bring to the top people like himself. They are shrewd and not without talents but quite unscrupulous and sometimes narrow-minded. The general epitomises this group and to a certain extent the regime itself, alongside such regime officials as foreign minister [Makey](#) or head of Presidential administration [Kabiakou](#).

On the other hand, many other top bureaucrats only serve the regime yet, very likely, they do not consider it as their own. Prime Minister [Myasnikovich](#) seems to represent this group.

Lukashenka needs them all. He is as opportunist in domestic as he is in foreign policy. He has never stuck to any political line and has never given all the power to any single group, and Sheiman is an example of the uncertain fate of courtier-like Belarusian officials.

Presumably the powerful Sheiman had to accept a political setback and, of course, cannot be the grey eminence of the regime. Rather than being an independent politician, he is just one of the last soldiers remaining in Lukashenka's guard – a man to be deployed when and where necessary.