



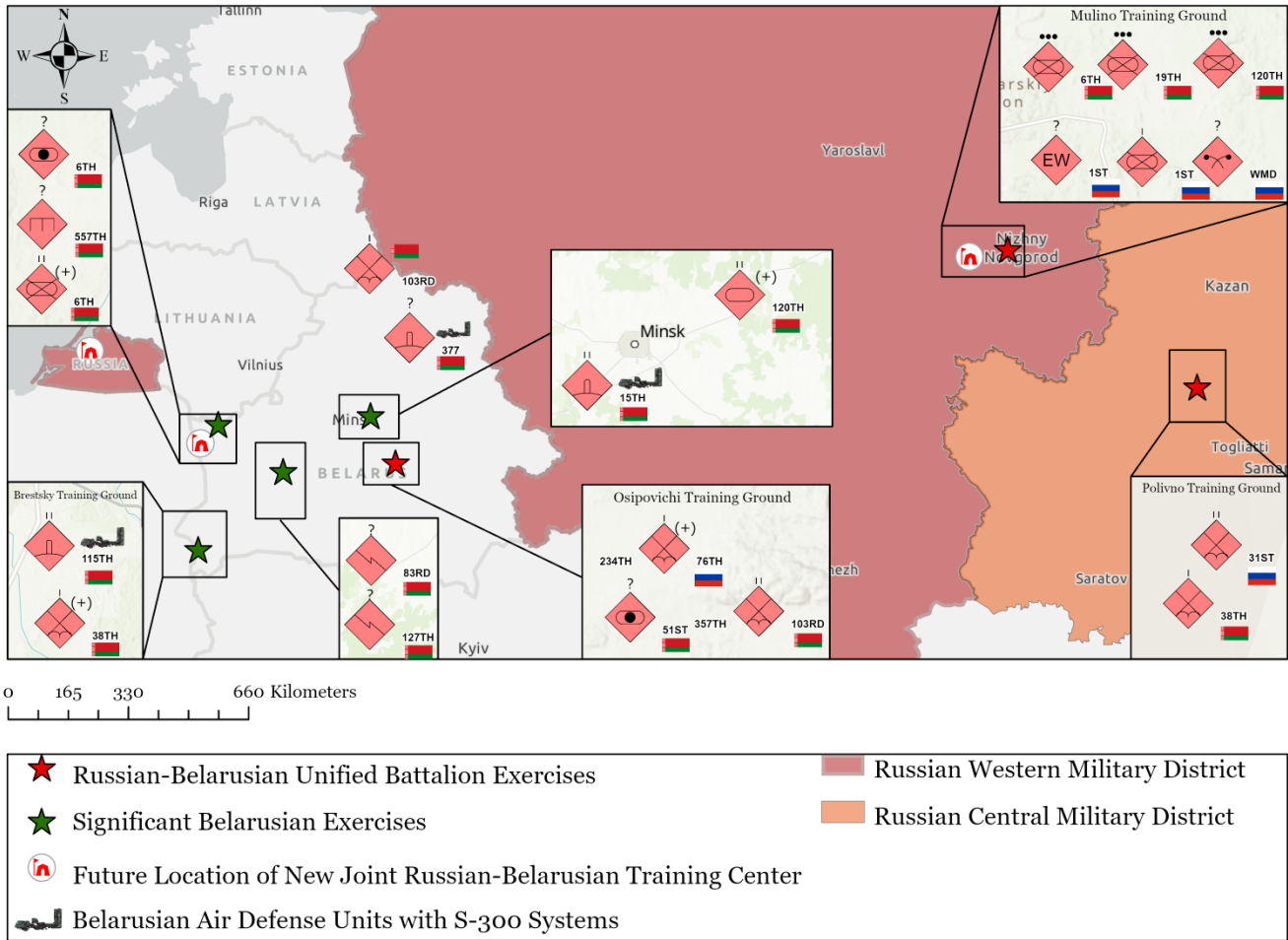
Russia Opens Permanent Training Center in Belarus and Sets Conditions for Permanent Military Basing

By George Barros
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Key Takeaway: *Joint Russian-Belarusian military exercises in March 2021 demonstrated several new Russian capabilities that could support a permanent Russian force presence in Belarus. Russia's efforts to cement control of Belarusian forces and permanently deploy forces to Belarus increase Russia's capacity to threaten NATO's eastern flank. Russia and Belarus announced plans to open three permanent combined combat training centers in Russia and Belarus. The Kremlin is likely increasing Belarus' military readiness and integration with Russian forces, augmenting the Kremlin's capability to mobilize more units for longer durations and increasing Russia's total force projection capability against NATO. Russian military pilots may begin operating out of Belarusian airbases in 2021. The Kremlin additionally used March 2021 exercises to prepare for Russia's upcoming annual capstone strategic readiness exercise, Zapad 2021, in September, during which Russian units will likely deploy to Belarus on a significantly larger scale than ever before.*

Russian combined military exercises with Belarus in March 2021 established new capabilities to support a permanent Russian military presence in Belarus. Russia and Belarus have held monthly combined military exercises since September 2020.¹ The March 2021 iteration of these exercises demonstrated several new Russian capabilities that advance the Kremlin's campaign to create a permanent force presence in Belarus to threaten NATO's eastern flank.

Combined Russian-Belarusian Military Exercises in March 2021



Map by George Barros
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Russia and Belarus announced plans on March 5 to open three permanent combined combat training centers in Russia and Belarus at an unspecified future date. Russia and Belarus will open a ground forces training center in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, a naval center in Kaliningrad, Russia, and an air force and air defense center in Grodno, Belarus.² Belarus, it should be noted, is landlocked and has no navy. These centers will likely support the Kremlin’s campaign to integrate the Belarusian military into Kremlin-controlled command structures and doctrine. The establishment of a permanent Russian training center in Belarus—which will likely contain a small permanent force as well as regularly rotating combat units from Russia—will enable a near-permanent Russian deployment in Belarus.

Russian military pilots may begin operating out of Belarusian airbases in 2021. Belarusian and Russian Air Force officials conducted a combined training on March 18 to, in part, plan relocating Russian Air Force assets to Belarusian airfields.³ Self-declared Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko previously proposed hosting Russian military aircraft in Belarusian airbases for joint use by Russian and Belarusian airmen—as opposed to opening a new Russian airbase in Belarus, which Lukashenko has previously rejected—on March 2.⁴ Russian pilots’

access to Belarusian airfields, if achieved, would enhance Russian force projection capabilities against NATO's eastern flank and constitute a significant threat to the West.

Russian forces conducted expanded Russian-Belarusian battalion-level unit exercises, advancing the Kremlin's efforts to integrate Belarusian combat units into Russian command structures. The Kremlin continued efforts to integrate Russian and Belarusian units down to the battalion level during their March 2021 military exercises.⁵ Russian and Belarusian forces conducted exercises as a single combined combat battalion for the first time in September 2020.⁶ Russian and Belarusian forces formed three combined battalions in March 2021. The Kremlin's increasing capability to create integrated units with Belarus is likely intended to support a permanent Russian presence in Belarus and will allow the Kremlin to better employ Belarusian forces outside of Belarus in future operations. The Kremlin may also be preparing Russian forces to subsume elements of Belarusian combat units in the event of a Russian intervention against the will of the Belarusian government—an unlikely but dangerous course of action ISW has previously warned of.⁷

The Kremlin is likely prioritizing increasing interoperability between Russian airborne forces—Russia's main rapid reaction force—and partner forces in Belarus and the rest of the former Soviet Union (FSU). Two of the three combined combat battalions Russia and Belarus formed in March 2021 involved airborne units. These battalions marked a significant advance in the Kremlin's effort to develop airborne cooperation with Belarus. Airborne units are Russia's principal rapid reaction force and would likely be among the first units used in the event of a sustained Russian deployment to Belarus or a hybrid operation against NATO's eastern flank.⁸ Moscow's development of airborne forces in Belarus could support other assessed Kremlin efforts to project Russian military force in the FSU, including Belarus.⁹ The Kremlin likely seeks to tie a multinational Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) force to its own command structures to use these forces for its own campaigns.¹⁰ The Kremlin may deploy a Kremlin-controlled multinational CSTO force to Belarus to obfuscate Russian efforts to undermine Belarusian sovereignty, for example.¹¹

The Kremlin is likely increasing Belarus' military capability to mobilize more units for longer durations. Belarusian units exercised more intensively and for longer durations in March 2021 than they did in similar monthly exercises in fall 2020.¹² Five of Belarus' six principal maneuver units exercised simultaneously in Russia and Belarus in March 2021; Belarus has not previously exercised elements of that many brigades in both Russia and Belarus simultaneously.¹³ Belarusian logistical tasks' complexity increased in March 2021 to support longer exercise deployments.¹⁴ The Kremlin likely seeks to leverage an enhanced Belarusian capability to simultaneously mobilize multiple brigades—and multiple elements of the same brigade—for longer periods of time to augment the Kremlin's total force projection capability against NATO's eastern flank.

The Kremlin used units based far from Belarus' borders in exercises for the first time, indicating a likely priority to distribute interoperability experience throughout the Russian military. Belarusian forces conducted combined training with Central Military District and Southern Military District elements for the first time since ISW began closely watching the Belarus crisis as it began in August 2020.¹⁵ Russian units outside the Western Military District (WMD) have not participated in previous combined Russian-Belarusian exercises in this period.¹⁶

The Kremlin publicly leveraged military learning from Nagorno Karabakh for the first time. The Belarusian Ministry of Defense stated that combined air-defense training in March 2021 leveraged military learning from the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war.¹⁷ The Kremlin will likely increasingly prioritize electronic warfare, air defense, and UAV/counter-UAV operations from lessons learned in Nagorno Karabakh.

The Kremlin additionally used the March 2021 exercises to prepare for Russia's upcoming annual capstone strategic readiness exercise, Zapad 2021. Belarusian forces conducted intensified joint communications and air defense exercises with the expressed goal of increasing Russian-Belarusian interoperability to prepare for Zapad 2021. Conventional Russian forces will likely deploy to Belarus in September 2021 for Zapad 2021 on a significantly larger scale than they did for the last annual Russian strategic readiness exercise in Belarus, Zapad 2017.¹⁸ The

Kremlin may not return Russian units to Russia after Zapad 2021 officially ends, opting instead to keep them in Belarus and postured against NATO.¹⁹

The following is a list of exercises and joint activities that Russian and Belarusian forces conducted in March 2021. This list includes nominally independent Belarusian activity that likely advanced Russian objectives given their consistency with previously observed patterns of joint Russian-Belarusian activity. Exercises are grouped by type, day, and location, as applicable.

Russian-Belarusian airborne (VDV) exercises at the Polivno Training Ground in Ulyanovsk, Russia (March 9-20)

March 9

- **A battalion-sized element of the Russian 31st Airborne Brigade based in Ulyanovsk and an unspecified company of the Belarusian 38th Airborne Brigade formed a combined Russian-Belarusian reinforced airborne battalion and began exercises emphasizing airborne and peacekeeping operations.**²⁰

March 11

- **An airborne infantry element of the Belarusian 38th Airborne Brigade conducted small arms live-fire exercises.**²¹

March 15

- **Russian and Belarusian airborne elements conducted exercises and deployed a mobile reserve with army aviation helicopters.**²²

March 18

- **A Russian-Belarusian “consolidated peacekeeping unit” of the combined reinforced battalion conducted peacekeeping exercises to practice managing observation posts and checkpoints, escorting humanitarian convoys, patrolling designated areas with ground and air vehicles, facility protection, demining, defense operations, and maintaining peace between two warring parties.**²³ This exercise could support a potential Belarusian deployment to Syria or Ukraine.²⁴

March 20

- **The company of the Belarusian 38th Airborne Brigade returned to Belarus.**²⁵

Russian-Belarusian airborne exercises at the Osipovichsky training Ground in Mogilev, Belarus (March 15-27)

March 14

- **A reinforced company of the Russian 234th Airborne Regiment of the Guards 76th Airborne Division based in Pskov and the Belarusian 357th Battalion of the 103rd Airborne Brigade formed a combined Russian-Belarusian reinforced airborne battalion at the Osipovichsky training ground in Mogilev, Belarus.**²⁶

March 15 – 27

- **The combined Russian-Belarusian reinforced battalion conducted parachute exercises, maneuvers, and ambush tactics to relieve an encircled friendly force.**²⁷
- **The combined Russian-Belarusian reinforced battalion conducted force protection exercises emphasizing convoy escorts and anti-ambush actions.**²⁸
- **Belarusian engineers deployed a bridge to cross a water obstacle.**²⁹
- **A combined Belarusian-Russian company-sized element of the combined reinforced battalion performed a parachute exercise; the company departed from the Machulishchi airfield and parachuted into the Osipovichsky Training Ground**³⁰

March 26

- The combined Russian-Belarusian reinforced battalion conducted combat exercises emphasizing holding a line, routing an enemy force into a prepared ambush, and destroying an enemy force with an airborne vertical envelopment.³¹

March 28

- The reinforced company of the Russian 234th airborne regiment returned to Russia.³²

Russian-Belarusian mechanized battalion exercises at the Mulino Training Ground in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia (March 10-April 2)

March 9

- **A company-sized element drawn from the Belarusian 6th, 19th, and 120th mechanized brigades and a company-sized element of the Russian 1st Tank Army based near Moscow formed a combined reinforced mechanized battalion at the Mulino Training Ground in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia.**³³

March 15-18

- The combined Russian-Belarusian reinforced mechanized battalion conducted exercises using drones to identify and destroy enemy firing positions with indirect fire.³⁴
- The combined Russian-Belarusian reinforced mechanized battalion used drones to identify and destroy enemy firing positions with indirect fire and conducted an armored counterattack.³⁵
- Likely Russian electronic weapons specialists of the 1st Tank Army interfered with a simulated enemy force's communications, and tank elements of the combined Russian-Belarusian reinforced mechanized battalion conducted live-fire exercises.³⁶
- **Russian and Belarusian motorized rifle and tank elements of the combined Russian-Belarusian reinforced mechanized battalion conducted exercises to practice an armored offensive under simulated enemy electronic weapons suppression and to practice countering an enemy air attack and enemy combat UAVs.**³⁷

March 22

- Belarus rotated its forces at the Mulino Training Ground, roughly doubling Russian and Belarusian participation in the exercise.³⁸
- Scouts of the Russian 1st Tank Army conducted exercises on psychological operations aimed to demoralize an enemy force and convince them to surrender with targeted text messages and propaganda leaflets.³⁹

March 25

- A reinforced battalion-sized force with artillery, scouts, and signals elements of the Russian 1st Tank Army practiced destroying ground targets with 120mm and rocket artillery using UAV reconnaissance.⁴⁰

March 26

- The WMD transferred 20 Russian armored vehicles to Belarusian forces for combined battalion exercises.⁴¹

March 29 – April 2

- The combined Russian-Belarusian reinforced mechanized battalion conducted armor exercises emphasizing cordoning a settlement and urban combat tactics.⁴²
- A Russian chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear defense (CBRN) element, likely of the WMD, conducted exercises to protect Russian and Belarusian armored vehicles.⁴³
- Tank and motorized rifle elements of the combined Russian-Belarusian reinforced battalion conducted exercises using drones to identify and destroy enemy firing positions with tank fire.⁴⁴

Belarusian airborne exercises at the Brestsky Training Ground in Brest, Belarus

March 3

- An element of the Belarusian 38th Airborne Brigade conducted parachute exercises.⁴⁵

March 10

- A reinforced company of the Belarusian 38th Airborne Brigade conducted live-fire exercises to neutralize an enemy force planning to conduct raids on critical infrastructure to destabilize Brest.⁴⁶

March 18

- Elements, likely of the Belarusian 38th Airborne Brigade, conducted live-fire exercises with 120mm artillery.⁴⁷

March 25 – April 5

- Elements of the Belarusian 38th Airborne Brigade conducted exercises emphasizing maneuvers, overcoming a water obstacle, and airborne parachute drops in multiple training grounds in Brest.⁴⁸

Belarusian Signals Activity

March 11

- Elements of the Belarusian 85th Communications Brigade deployed to unspecified areas in Belarus to perform coordinated signals exercises, likely in coordination with other Belarusian signals units.⁴⁹

March 15-19

- **Elements of the Belarusian 127th Communications Brigade conducted signals training at the Obuz-Lesnovsky and Domanovo Training Grounds in Brest, Belarus.** ⁵⁰ **This exercise’s stated objective is to test Belarusian military communications readiness to support the Russian-Belarusian Regional Grouping of Forces (RGV)—a strategic formation of Russian and Belarusian units tasked with defending the Union State—and check the technical feasibility of transmitting communications from Belarus to Russia in preparation for Zapad 2021.**⁵¹
- Elements of the Belarusian 83rd Radiocommunications Center conducted exercises emphasizing deploying and camouflaging mobile communications equipment at the Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground in Brest, Belarus.⁵²
- Elements of the Belarusian 742nd Field Communications Center conducted exercises emphasizing deploying and camouflaging communications equipment to support the Belarusian 38th Airborne Brigade and prepare for Zapad 2021.⁵³
- **Unspecified Russian signals “representatives” visited Belarus on March 16-18 to discuss coordinating field communication between Russian and Belarusian units, prepare for Zapad 2021, and attend the ongoing Belarusian signals exercises at the Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground.**⁵⁴
- Communications elements of the Belarusian 85th Communications Brigade completed training exercises in unspecified training grounds near Brest, Minsk, and Grodno on March 19. The stated objective of these exercises is to test a communication system similar to the one that will be deployed during Zapad 2021.⁵⁵
- Communications elements of the Belarusian 86th Communications Brigade deployed to unspecified areas in Belarus to conduct exercises with the stated objective to prepare for Zapad 2021 on March 19.⁵⁶

March 24

- **A Belarusian military communications delegation met with their Russian counterparts in an unspecified location in Russia to discuss developing field communications systems between Russian and Belarusian forces and improving the RGV’s integrated communication system.**⁵⁷

Belarusian Air Defense Activity

March 10

- Elements of the Belarusian 377th Anti-Aircraft Missile Regiment conducted exercises to practice deploying the unit to a new position and increasing unit cohesion in simulated combat conditions.⁵⁸

March 18

- **Unspecified Russian officials—likely senior officers—from Russia’s 6th, 4th, and 14th Air Force and Air Defense (VVS-PVO) Armies completed a joint staff headquarters training with Belarusian air-defense forces that emphasized planning operations with the RGV, planning deployments of Russian Air Force assets to Belarusian airfields, and controlling subordinate units of Russia and Belarus’ unified regional air defense system.⁵⁹ The Belarusian Ministry of Defense stated that combat in Nagorno Karabakh and Syria informed this training. Belarus has troops in neither Syria nor Nagorno Karabakh.**
- A Belarusian anti-aircraft missile battalion of the Minsk-based 15th Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade conducted exercises emphasizing mobilizing and deploying equipment from stored positions.⁶⁰

March 29

- An element, likely a battalion, of the Belarusian 115th Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade completed air-defense exercises at the Brestsky Training Ground to prepare for Zapad 2021.⁶¹
- **A Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS) delegation visited Belarus on March 29-April 2 to examine the Belarusian territories where Zapad 2021 will occur and discuss the formation of the joint Russian-Belarusian Air Force and Air Defense Forces training center in Grodno.**⁶²

Belarusian Logistics Exercises

March 9

- A brigade-sized Belarusian element conducted readiness exercises emphasizing mobilizing equipment from storage bases in unspecified locations in Belarus.⁶³

March 10-11

- Elements of the Belarusian 36th Road and Bridge Brigade conducted exercises emphasizing countering enemy sabotage and reconnaissance and practiced deploying a field camp.⁶⁴

March 16

- A battalion-sized Belarusian mechanized element practiced transferring ammunition and equipment from rear storage bases in an unspecified location in Belarus.⁶⁵

March 19

- Elements of the Belarusian Vitebsk-based 19th and Slonim-based 11th Mechanized Brigades conducted combat readiness exercises to practice resupplying Belarusian units that conducted live fires in unspecified locations in Belarus.⁶⁶

Miscellaneous Belarusian Exercises and Activity that Support Russian Lines of Effort

March 16

- **A company of the Belarusian 103rd Airborne Brigade held an exercise with Belarusian border guards at the Belarusian-Latvian border in Polotsk, Belarus.**⁶⁷ This exercise’s stated objective is to foster interoperability between Belarusian airborne and border guard forces “in the event of the need to perform special operation forces tasks in border areas.”⁶⁸

March 17

- **The Belarusian Army activated approximately 1,000 reservists across Belarus and conducted mechanized brigade reserve officer training in Pechi, Minsk Oblast, Belarus, and likely other locations in Belarus.**⁶⁹
- Tank and artillery elements, likely of the Belarusian 6th Mechanized Brigade, conducted live-fire exercises at the Gozhsky Training Ground in Grodno, Belarus.⁷⁰ The Belarusian 6th Mechanized Brigade continued exercising in Grodno until at least March 31.⁷¹

March 19

- Reserve officers of the Belarusian 19th Mechanized Brigade received “special ideological, fire, and tactical” training.⁷²

March 22

- The Belarusian North Western Operational Command (a Belarusian command structure roughly equivalent to a Russian military district) conducted operational planning staff training emphasizing the use of forces based on “an analysis of the results of modern wars and conflicts.”⁷³ This training’s stated goal is to prepare Belarusian forces for Zapad 2021.
- A reinforced battalion of the Belarusian 120th Mechanized Brigade conducted live-fire and maneuver exercises at the 227th combined arms training ground in Borisov, Belarus.⁷⁴

March 29

- Elements of the Belarusian 51st Artillery Brigade conducted artillery live-fire exercises at the Osipovichi Training Ground in Mogilev, Belarus.⁷⁵

March 30-31

- A reinforced battalion of the Belarusian 6th Mechanized Brigade and elements of the Belarusian 557th Engineering Brigade conducted mechanized combat exercises to practice defensive operations, launching counterattacks, repelling air attacks, and overcoming water obstacles at the Gozhsky Training Ground in Grodno, Belarus on March 30.⁷⁶
- **Chief of the Russian General Staff Valery Gerasimov and Chief of the Belarusian General Staff Major General Viktor Gulevich discussed military cooperation on the RGV, Zapad 2021, CSTO, and the terms of the three new combined combat training centers in Moscow, Russia on March 30-31.**⁷⁷
- A battalion-sized reservist element of the Belarusian 19th Mechanized Brigade conducted basic combat training exercises in Zaslonovo, Belarus, on March 31.⁷⁸
- A reinforced battalion of the Belarusian 120th Mechanized Brigade began battalion tactical exercises at the 227th Combined Arms Training Ground in Borisov, Belarus on March 31.⁷⁹

¹ Mason Clark, “Belarus Warning Update: Lukashenko Softens His Opposition to Protests, Seeking Leverage Against Increased Russian Pressure,” *Institute for the Study of War*, September 14, 2020, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/belarus-warning-update-lukashenko-softens-his-opposition-protests-seeking-leverage>.

² [“Results of Talks Between the Ministers of Defense of Belarus and Russia,”] *Belarusian Ministry of Defense*, March 16, 2021, <https://www.mil.by/ru/news/111189/>; [“Talks Between the Heads of the Defense Ministries of Belarus and Russia,”] *Belarusian Ministry of Defense*, March 5, 2021, <https://www.mil.by/ru/news/110984/>; “Defence Ministers of Russia and Belarus Discussed Joint Activities for 2021,” *Russian Ministry of Defense*, March 5, 2021, https://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12347433@egNews; Belarusian Ministry of Defense, *Telegram*, March 16, 2021, <https://t.me/modmilby/3992>.

³ [“Joint Headquarters Training Completed in the Air Force and Air Defense Forces,”] *Belarusian Ministry of Defense*, March 18, 2021, <https://www.mil.by/ru/news/111272/>.

⁴ [“Lukashenko Spoke About the Details of Negotiations with Putin and Reacted to Speculation,”] *Belta*, March 2, 2021, <https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-rasskazal-o-podrobnostyah-peregovorov-s-putinyim-i-otreagiroval-na-domysly-430898-2021/>; Maria Leyva, [“Lukashenko Refused to Create a Russian Military Base in Belarus,”] *RBK*, October 6, 2015, <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/06/10/2015/5613ebe59a794769839c9e3f>.

⁵ Elements of the Russian 234th airborne regiment formed a brigade-sized unified combat formation with Belarusian forces in March 2021 similarly to how a 234th Brigade Tactical Group (BTG) did with Belarusian airborne units in September 2020. George Barros, “Belarus Warning Update: NEXTA Actively Encourages Belarusian Security Service Defections,” *Institute for the Study of War*, September 20, 2020, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/belarus-warning-update-nexta-actively-encourages-belarusian-security-service-defections>.

⁶ George Barros, “Belarus Warning Update: NEXTA Actively Encourages Belarusian Security Service Defections,” *Institute for the Study of War*, September 20, 2020, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/belarus-warning-update-nexta-actively-encourages-belarusian-security-service-defections>.

⁷ George Barros, “Belarus Warning Update: NEXTA Actively Encourages Belarusian Security Service Defections,” *Institute for the Study of War*, September 20, 2020, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/belarus-warning-update-nexta-actively-encourages-belarusian-security-service-defections>.

⁸ The majority of Russian units that have deployed to Belarus since the crisis began have overwhelmingly been airborne units. George Barros, “Belarus Warning Update: Upcoming CSTO Exercise Could Support Russian Military Deployment to Belarus,” *Institute for the Study of War*, November 6, 2020, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/belarus-warning-update-upcoming-csto-exercise-could-support-russian-military-deployment>.

⁹ The Kremlin likely seeks to leverage Russian airborne units to create a new capability to rapidly deploy Russian-controlled Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) forces in the FSU. Russian and Belarusian forces conducted joint exercises in November 2020 testing the use of a Russian airborne command post as the command and control basis of the CSTO’s Rapid Reaction Force – a strategic force of approximately 18,000 personnel designed to rapidly respond to military crises in the FSU. Joint Russian-Belarusian airborne capabilities development could support this effort. George Barros, “Belarus Warning Update: Upcoming CSTO Exercise Could Support Russian Military Deployment to Belarus,” *Institute for the Study of War*, November 6, 2020, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/belarus-warning-update-upcoming-csto-exercise-could-support-russian-military-deployment>.

¹⁰ George Barros, “Belarus Warning Update: Upcoming CSTO Exercise Could Support Russian Military Deployment to Belarus,” *Institute for the Study of War*, November 6, 2020, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/belarus-warning-update-upcoming-csto-exercise-could-support-russian-military-deployment>.

¹¹ George Barros, “Russia in Review: Putin’s ‘Peacekeepers’ Will Support Russian Wars,” *Institute for the Study of War*, November 16, 2020, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russia-review-putins-%E2%80%9Cpeacekeepers%E2%80%9D-will-support-russian-wars>; George Barros and Mason Clark, “Belarus Warning Update,” *Institute for the Study of War*, October 8, 2020, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/belarus-warning-update-kremlin-will-likely-use-october-military-exercises-advance-its>.

¹² George Barros, “Belarus Warning Update: Russia Deploys a Third Battalion Tactical Group to Belarus,” *Institute for the Study of War*, September 22, 2020, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/belarus-warning-update-russia-deploys-third-battalion-tactical-group-belarus>; George Barros, “Warning: The Kremlin Deploys a Brigade-Sized Force to Belarus Near Polish Border,” *Institute for the Study of War*, September 21, 2020, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/warning-kremlin-deploys-brigade-sized-force-belarus-near-polish-border>; George Barros, “Belarus Warning Update: Multiple Russian Military Exercises Occurring in the Western Military District, Belarus, and Moldova,” *Institute for the Study of War*, September 19, 2020, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/belarus-warning-update-multiple-russian-military-exercises-occurring-western-military>; George Barros, “Belarus Warning Update: Upcoming CSTO Exercise Could Support Russian Military Deployment to Belarus,” *Institute for the Study of War*, November 6, 2020, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/belarus-warning-update-upcoming-csto-exercise-could-support-russian-military-deployment>; George Barros and Mason Clark, “Belarus Warning Update: The Kremlin Will Likely Use October Military Exercises to Advance its Hybrid War in Belarus,” *Institute for the Study of War*, October 8, 2020, <http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/10/belarus-warning-update-kremlin-will.html>.

¹³ Elements of the Belarusian 6th, 19th, and 120th, mechanized brigades and the 38th and 103rd VDV brigades, exercised in both Russia and Belarus in March 2021.

¹⁴ Belarus rotated forces for a month-long exercise – a logistical task more sophisticated than what Belarusian forces have done before in monthly exercises – for the first time since the crisis in Belarus began in August 2020. [“Goodbye, Mulino!”] *Belarusian Ministry of Defense*, March 22, 2021, <https://www.mil dot by/ru/news/III361/>; [“Servicemen of the Republic of Belarus Arrived in the Nizhny Novgorod Region to Participate in a Joint Exercise with Servicemen of the Western Military District,”] *Russian Ministry of Defense*, March 23, 2021, https://function.mil dot ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=I2350389@egNews; [“Joint Battalion Tactical Exercises with Units of the Ground Forces of the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation,”] *Belarusian Ministry of Defense*, March 23, 2021, <https://www.mil dot by/ru/news/III420/>.

¹⁵ The 31st airborne brigade and 14th Air Force and Air Defense (VVS-PVO) Army are subordinate to the Central Military District. The 4th VVS-PVO Army is subordinate to the Southern Military District. George Barros, “Belarus Warning Update: The Kremlin May Have Used Kavkaz 2020 Exercises in Part to Prepare for a Conventional Russian Military Deployment to Belarus,” *Institute for the Study of War*, September 26, 2020, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/belarus-warning-update-kremlin-may-have-used-kavkaz-2020-exercises-part-prepare>; Mason Clark and George Barros, “Russia’s Unprecedentedly Expansive Military Exercises in Fall 2020 Seek to Recreate Soviet-Style Multinational Army,” *Institute for the Study of War*, October 20, 2020, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russia%E2%80%99s-unprecedentedly-expansive-military-exercises-fall-2020-seek-recreate-soviet>.

¹⁶ Russian Southern Military District and Belarusian units exercised together in the Kavkaz 2020 exercises in September 2020. However, Kavkaz 2020 – Russia’s annual strategic readiness capstone exercise for 2020 – included many international partners and was not part of the new monthly Russian-Belarusian exercises that began in Fall 2020. Mason Clark and George Barros, “Russia’s Unprecedentedly Expansive Military Exercises in Fall 2020 Seek to Recreate Soviet-Style Multinational Army,” *Institute for the Study of War*, October 20, 2020, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russia%E2%80%99s-unprecedentedly-expansive-military-exercises-fall-2020-seek-recreate-soviet>.

¹⁷ [“Joint Headquarters Training Completed in the Air Force and Air Defense Forces,”] *Belarusian Ministry of Defense*, March 18, 2021, <https://www.mil dot by/ru/news/III272/>; Belarusian Ministry of Defense, *Telegram*, March 18, 2021, <https://t dot me/modmilby/4023>; [“From March 16 to 18, the Air Force and Air Defense Forces Will Host a Joint Staff Training,”] *Belarusian Ministry of Defense*, March 15, 2021, <https://www.mil dot by/ru/news/III153/>.

¹⁸ George Barros, “Belarus Warning Update: Putin Intensifies Russian-Belarusian Military Integration,” *Institute for the Study of War*, October 27, 2020, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/belarus-warning-update-putin-intensifies-russian-belarusian-military-integration>.

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