



Belarus Warning Update: Lukashenko Begins Campaign For “Information Sovereignty” to De-escalate Protests in Belarus

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By George Barros

Self-declared Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko announced plans to establish his direct control over the Belarusian information space. Lukashenko said his administration should control major Belarusian media outlets to defend Belarus’ “information sovereignty” and that Belarusian authorities should wage a “more persistent” internet information campaign on October 9.¹ Lukashenko likely seeks to consolidate control over the Belarusian information space to degrade protester will. Lukashenko likely additionally seeks to regain control of the Belarusian information space from the Kremlin as part of his ongoing efforts to resist Russian integration pressure.

Ongoing protests in Kyrgyzstan are likely increasing Russian President Vladimir Putin and Lukashenko’s urgency to end protests in Belarus. Lukashenko said it is inappropriate to draw parallels between the “successful coup” in Kyrgyzstan and the failed color revolution in Belarus on October 9.² Protesters in Kyrgyzstan are significantly more violent than those in Belarus, having occupied government buildings and attempted to assassinate a former Kyrgyz president on October 9.³ Lukashenko likely seeks to suppress the protests in Belarus lest Kyrgyz protesters inspire Belarusian protesters to adopt more radical tactics and to dissuade Belarusian protesters from adopting Kyrgyz tactics.⁴ Lukashenko additionally likely seeks to control any potential escalation in Belarusian protests to mitigate the risk of a Kremlin intervention.⁵ Putin has used information operations to set conditions for a Russian conventional military deployment to Belarus by framing the protests as a NATO-backed color revolution.⁶

The NEXTA Telegram channel is trying to resuscitate the weekly Saturday women’s march. NEXTA released directions on October 8 for mass attendance at the weekly women’s march planned for October 10 and instructed protesters to watch for additional directions on Saturday.⁷ NEXTA did not release directions for the Saturday women’s march last week. Saturday Women’s march participation has steeply declined for the past three weeks, with only a few hundred participants on October 3.⁸ NEXTA will likely continue to attempt to intensify protests against Lukashenko’s efforts to suppress them. NEXTA has explicitly praised the Kyrgyz protests by providing favorable coverage and extolling Kyrgyz protesters’ achievement of “revolution in one day.”⁹

ISW will continue monitoring the situation and providing updates.

¹ <https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-belorusy-golosovali-za-mir-i-porjadok-v-strane-i-my-objazany-vypolnit-etot-nakaz-naroda-410224-2020/>

² <https://www.belta.by/president/view/ne-nado-zdes-provodit-paralleli-lukashenko-vyskazalsja-o-sravnennii-sobytij-v-belarusi-i-kyrgyzstane-410268-2020/>; <https://www.rt.com/russia/498734-belarus-color-revolution-foreign-meddling/>

³ <https://www.reuters.com/article/instant-article/idUSKBN26U1J0>; https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/kyrgyzstan-elections-protests-parliament/2020/10/06/6f49bc9e-07b1-11eb-8719-0df159d14794_story.html

⁴ <http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/10/belarus-warning-update-protests-in.html>

⁵ <http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/10/belarus-warning-update-protests-in.html>

⁶ <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/08/warning-kremlin-information-operations.html>; <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/09/warning-lukashenko-deports-opposition.html>; <https://www.iswresearch.org/2020/08/warning-moscow-sets-conditions-for.html>

⁷ https://t.me/nexta_live/11616

⁸ <http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/10/belarus-warning-update-putin-seeks.html>

⁹ <http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/10/belarus-warning-update-protests-in.html>