



## Belarusian Security Forces Escalate Violence against Protesters but Large Protests Continue

September 6, 2020, 5:00 pm EDT Belarus Update

By Mason Clark

**Belarusian Interior Ministry personnel without insignia, possibly including Russians, seriously beat and detained protesters in Minsk on September 6.** Around 15 men in civilian clothes carrying batons and body armor beat and detained protesters in Minsk at approximately 7:00 pm local time, after most protesters had begun to disperse.<sup>1</sup> The men, who bore no insignia, pursued protesters into a nearby café, later bringing the detained protesters to liveried police vehicles.<sup>2</sup> The men used significantly more violence than Belarusian security forces have since the first week of the protests, continuing to beat already unconscious protesters.

Belarusian media identified the leader of the group as Police Colonel Nikolai Karpenkov, the head of the Belarusian Interior Ministry's office for Combating Organized Crime.<sup>3</sup> Belarusian media additionally identified one of the men as Andrey Karpov, who listed his home city as Saint Petersburg on Russian social media platform VK but resides in Vitebsk, Belarus.<sup>4</sup> Karpov's VK account was deleted as of 9:30 pm Belarus time. The NEXTA Telegram channel published the Belarusian address and personal information of Karpenkov and Karpov.<sup>5</sup> ISW cannot independently verify the identities of the rest of the men and the scale of Russian involvement in this group. The evidence so far presented is too tenuous to support the assessment that Russian security personnel are taking direct part in violence against protesters.

**Belarusian security forces in Minsk escalated their use of force against protesters compared with previous Sunday protests.** Uniformed Belarusian security forces additionally dispersed and detained isolated groups of protesters throughout the day.<sup>6</sup> OMON riot police repeatedly pepper sprayed protesters who attempted to approach the security cordon around the Presidential Palace in Minsk for the first time since protesters began focusing on the Presidential Palace on August 16<sup>th</sup>.<sup>7</sup> Security forces in Minsk did not directly confront large groups of protesters. The Belarusian interior ministry announced it detained "hundreds of protesters," and independent organizations estimated security forces detained around 200 protesters on September 6.<sup>8</sup> Belarusian security forces have yet to equal the scale of violent force used against protesters in the first week after the August 9 Presidential election, however.

**Tens of thousands of protesters marched in Minsk and around the country amid increased intimidation by security forces.** The Belarusian Interior Ministry warned protesters "the number of squads and servicemen has been increased" and "special equipment" would be used to suppress protests the morning of September 6.<sup>9</sup> Belarusian police and interior ministry troops, using armored military vehicles for the second week in a row, deployed around Minsk's Independence Square, Victory Park, and Presidential Palace – previous destinations of Sunday protests.<sup>10</sup> Belarusian authorities closed several metro stations in Minsk for the first time in a likely attempt to channel protester movement.<sup>11</sup> Protesters marched in several directions and did not concentrate in a single location en masse – though tens of thousands approached the Presidential Palace in the late afternoon.<sup>12</sup> Protests continued in every region of Belarus despite the increased security presence.<sup>13</sup>

**Belarusian security forces continue to use escalated levels of force against protests in the strategic western city of Grodno.** Belarusian security forces dispersed thousands of protesters in Grodno on September 6.<sup>14</sup> Belarusian security forces used more force, and challenged larger groups of protesters, in Grodno compared to the rest of the country on September 6.<sup>15</sup> Belarusian security forces and military deployments have focused on Grodno since mid-August. Grodno borders Lithuania and Poland, and was the site of the only major defection among local authorities to support protesters to date.<sup>16</sup> Lukashenko and the Kremlin likely prioritize maintaining security over Grodno due to its strategic location on the border of Poland and Lithuania – which Lukashenko and the Kremlin continue to claim are behind the protest movement. The Kremlin and Lukashenko will likely use Grodno as one of the coordinating points for any potential hybrid actions against Poland and Lithuania, and the deployment of Russian forces to Grodno would pose a major threat to NATO’s ability to defend the Baltic States.

**Direct Russian intervention in Belarus is turning protesters against the Kremlin.** Protesters in at least Minsk and Grodno displayed anti-Russian sentiment and signs on September 6.<sup>17</sup> Independent Belarusian media widely reported example signs, including “no Kremlin absorption of Belarus,” “the Kremlin betrayed Belarus,” and “down with Putashenko,” an amalgamation of Putin and Lukashenko’s names. The protests remain overwhelmingly focused on Lukashenko but are likely to increasingly focus on Russia as Kremlin involvement increases. ISW previously forecasted increasing Russian involvement in Belarus risked refocusing the protests on the Kremlin and disrupting the Kremlin’s efforts to consolidate control over Belarus.<sup>18</sup> Belarusian protests showed no anti-Russian sentiment until the Kremlin overtly pressured Lukashenko to integrate Belarus under Russian structures on September 3.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://news.tut.by/economics/699444.html>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZGgW6Oaepk&feature=youtu.be>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://news.tut.by/society/699459.html>.

<sup>4</sup> [https://t.me/nexta\\_live/10941](https://t.me/nexta_live/10941).

<sup>5</sup> [https://t.me/nexta\\_live/10946](https://t.me/nexta_live/10946); [https://t.me/nexta\\_live/10941](https://t.me/nexta_live/10941).

<sup>6</sup> <https://news.tut.by/economics/699444.html>.

<sup>7</sup> <https://news.tut.by/economics/699444.html>.

<sup>8</sup> <https://news.tut.by/society/699457.html>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://news.tut.by/economics/699444.html>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://news.tut.by/economics/699444.html>.

<sup>11</sup> <https://news.tut.by/economics/699444.html>.

<sup>12</sup> <https://news.tut.by/economics/699444.html>.

<sup>13</sup> <https://news.tut.by/economics/699444.html>; <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/9383941>.

<sup>14</sup> <https://news.tut.by/economics/699444.html>.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FERKhdAmrY&feature=youtu.be>; <https://news.tut.by/economics/699444.html>.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/warning-kremlin-begins-security-forces-support-lukashenko-following-regional-security>.

<sup>17</sup> <https://news.tut.by/economics/699444.html>; <https://twitter.com/franakviacorka/status/1302578919476989952?s=20>.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/warning-moscow-claims-poland-lead-sponsor-belarusian-protests-minsk-calls-protests->

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/warning-belarusian-opposition-begins-first-anti-kremlin-shift-after-lukashenko-promises>.