

31/10/2014

Russian air base in Belarus: political and regional context

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Will Belarus base for Russia in the event of an escalation of the conflict in Ukraine? - Expert commentary

Belarus does not become a base for a military attack on Russia to Ukraine. Despite the anti-Western rhetoric, Lukashenko will not go broke and would not completely spoil relations with the West, to present a united front with Moscow. Nevertheless, continued for several years the Belarusian leader flirting with Russia and the West, as a rule, requires certain concessions on the part of Minsk, and with which was the decision to place a Russian airbase near Bobruisk.

Thus, the experts interviewed by a reporter, "Voice of America", commented on the statement by Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu to host in 2016 14 Russian fighter jets and helicopters 4 only 140 km from Minsk. Also speaking at the meeting of October 29 joint board of the Ministry of Defense of the two countries in Minsk, Belarus Shoigu called "principal military partner of Russia" and made several invectives against the West, linking the emergence of "allied" base with Ukrainian crisis.

"The US and EU have provoked the removal from power of the legitimate President of Ukraine" and now "blindly support the actions of Kiev on the forced suppression of dissatisfied new government. <...> In fact, the pro-Western forces are trying to form in this country forward line pressure on the federal state, affect the sustainable development of Russia and Belarus ", - quotes Shoigu Belarusian media.

Shoigu said that in these circumstances it is important to have an "effective armed forces" in the region.

According to the independent Belarusian analyst **Vyacheslav Pozniak** , attempts to strengthen military cooperation between the two neighboring states have been observed before, but it is possible that the Ukrainian crisis brings some adjustments to the discussion of the joint defense strategy.

"Apparently, there is a leveling and a more detailed coordination of military ways to respond to the consequences of the situation prevailing in the world, in particular, on the Ukrainian crisis. So in a sense, this visit can be considered a logical "- said Pozniak.

Messages that Belarus may be formed of individual Russian squadron appeared in April of 2013. Even then, this news made fidgety neighboring Baltic republics and Poland. Now, in the light of a direct military confrontation between Russia and Ukraine, some Ukrainian politicians began to fear that Belarus could be another direction from which Kiev is expected to catch.

Fellow of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Alberta **Taras Kuzio** believes that these fears are unfounded.

"Lukashenko, as Nazarbayev, fears the next steps in the Moscow region, primarily due to the fact that there, as in Kazakhstan, there is a large Russian-speaking majority. However, the main threat, in my opinion, for Ukraine today comes not from Belarus and Transnistria and Crimea. It was from there we can see the nomination of Russian troops on Odessa and Mariupol, respectively, in order to create a "land bridge", "- said in an interview Kuzio " Voice of America " .

According to analysts, almost from the first years of his reign Lukashenko preached rhetoric condemning NATO. It was she who convinced Kuzio, and helps him to be necessary for Russia and feel safe:

"In addition, such militancy helps him get access to the latest equipment and training. However, I do not think that behind it a big threat. And Poland and the Baltic republics should not worry that comes from Belarus certain

threat to them. "

Meanwhile, according to a professor of the Higher School of Economics in Moscow , **Andrei Suzdaltsev** , one of the main reasons for transferring Russian fighter jets and helicopters in Belarus was actually catastrophic situation of technical equipment of the Belarusian Air Force and the Army in general.

"One of the pillars of the Lukashenko regime - Belarusian army. And for many years she was proud of Lukashenko, while selflessly doing sellout huge stocks of military equipment and ammunition, army property, which remained on the territory of Belarus within the framework of the Belarusian Military District after the collapse of the Soviet Union. As a result, sold everything, absolutely forgetting most of the Belarusian army, "- said in comments Suzdaltsev" Voice of America ".

According to research by the prestigious Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Belarus is among the twenty largest arms supplier in the world. Institute experts claim that in recent years the Belarusian authorities regularly supplied weapons to the regime of Bashar al-Assad, entering the three largest suppliers of weapons to the Syrian government brutally suppressed the number of anti-government protests and plunged the country into civil war. In addition, also reported sales of arms to Uganda, Libya, Sudan and several other hot spots.

According Suzdaltseva, mass sale of arms by the authorities has led to severe degradation of technical equipment of the Belarusian army, which became noticeable in 2010.

"As a result she is now in a very difficult position. Almost all the equipment was no longer working, do not drive and do not fly. Belarus is now a de facto no modern aviation. Here Lukashenko and darted, "- said the expert.

Suzdaltsev argues that the initiative placing a Russian air base in Belarus Lukashenko came from. The Belarusian leader, according Suzdaltseva have long asked to upgrade the Belarusian army, which, as explained Lukashenko, "defends Russian frontiers of NATO."

"He was caught on the word, but instead of modernizing the Belarusian army began to shift to the territory of Belarus, the Russian military parts for the common defense of the" common threat "- notes Suzdaltsev. - Actually, no common threats and defense interests in Belarus and Russia is not there. The main "defense" Lukashenko interest - hold it's own power. "

According Suzdaltseva in Belarus on stream going to put the production of armored cars rapid response, the main task of which will prompt delivery of special forces to suppress internal dissent performances citizens.

"It's clear that the production of such equipment is not intended for frontal war. This punitive measures for a possible suppression of the Ukrainian scenario of events ", - the expert concludes.

Meanwhile, as some Belarusian political scientist, skillful balancing Lukashenko between the West and Russia in recent months, beginning to yield results. Recognition of the Belarusian leader of the new Ukrainian authorities and the neutral position of Minsk towards the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, according to the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, assist mitigation approaches of the US administration to the current Belarusian regime.

One expert fund **Andrew Melyantsou** in his article "Belarus-US: for under the ice," writes that the classical picture of the "Arctic landscape" American-Belarusian relations in recent months, beginning traced some undercurrent.

The analyst notes that "for the first time in the history of bilateral consultations held on international security, in Minsk on a visit comes Assistant Secretary of State Eric Rubin, are intensive closed-door consultations on the resumption of full-fledged work of embassies."

In addition, the expert reminds, the 2013 Minsk and Washington have decided to cooperate in the framework of the Northern Distribution Network, in which the supply of NATO troops in Afghanistan. Thus, Belarus will participate in the process of withdrawing US troops from Afghanistan.

As is known, the diplomatic mission of the two countries have actually quit normal operation in 2008, when Minsk and Washington mutually expelled ambassadors. By the end of 2010, diplomatic relations between Belarus and the West, and all came to naught. After the violent dispersal of the Belarusian regime peaceful demonstrators protesting against fraud in the presidential elections on 19 December 2010, the Washington and the European Union imposed new sanctions on Lukashenko and his entourage.

In recent months, the geopolitical realities of the region have changed dramatically, forcing the West to go to unforeseen tradeoffs. With regard to the Lukashenko regime, it is obviously trying to win the maximum possible support from Washington and Brussels on the eve of the next presidential elections in Belarus, which will be held

no later than 20 November 2015.

<http://www.golos-ameriki.ru/content/russia-air-base/2503724.html>