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I. Military exercises

ZAPAD 2025 and mixed signals on Oreshnik missiles

In the run-up to ZAPAD 2025, Russia and Belarus are sending mixed signals on hard and soft security issues. After a closed meeting with Aliaksandr Lukashenka on 13 August, Defence Minister Viktor Khrenin said the drills will include planning for the use of nuclear weapons and working with Russia's Oreshnik ballistic missile capabilities, which are being presented as part of strategic deterrence.ⁱ This nuclear signalling is widely read as political theatre, with analysts arguing that the Kremlin was leveraging ZAPAD to amplify nuclear sabre-rattling and employ reflexive control tactics, with an eye on high-level diplomacy linked to the Alaska summit, to shape Western decision-making.ⁱⁱ

Indeed, after the summit, at the end of August, Belarusian Chief of the General Staff Pavel Muraveyka tried to downplay escalation by denying that the use of tactical nuclear weapons would be practised, while acknowledging that planning aspects would be rehearsed. In parallel, while framing the exercise as open and de-risked, he also pointed to the previous decision to relocate ZAPAD activities deeper inside Belarus while castigating "inadequate" Western reactions and citing large Allied exercises in neighbouring NATO states.ⁱⁱⁱ

Belarus's official messaging generally continues to brand the drills as defensive and routine, despite the escalatory rhetoric around the nuclear component.

Belarus enhances military capabilities ahead of ZAPAD 2025

Belarus is intensifying its Russian-supported military modernisation efforts, emphasising interoperability, command and control, and advanced combat integration. Belarusian signal troops have recently tested an automated command and control (C2) software system, alongside exercises in drone operations and the suppression of communications using electronic warfare (EW) and electronic intelligence (ELINT) assets. According to Major General Vadym Romaniv, all Belarusian communications systems have now been configured to operate seamlessly with Russian forces during the drills.^{iv}

In parallel, Belarus has received additional Su-30SM2 multirole fighters, boosting its air capabilities ahead of the drills.^v Russian forces have also begun to deploy into Belarus, with the first echelons arriving in early August. Their arrival was met with a symbolic ceremony, while Belarusian commanders publicly stressed that the exercise would test "new forms and methods" of unit deployment, drawing on lessons from contemporary conflicts.^{vi} These developments highlight Minsk's intent not only to showcase its joint strength with Russia but also to integrate operational practices observed in Ukraine and other recent conflicts.

Capability development ahead of the drills was focused on reducing decision-making times and tightening the kill chain. Reports indicate that Belarus is integrating unmanned aviation, EW measures, and encrypted communications into its command systems, mirroring the combat dynamics observed in recent wars. These upgrades are

likely to feature prominently in ZAPAD 2025 scenarios, particularly in air defence, counter-unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) operations, and joint strike coordination.^{vii}

All together, these steps underline Minsk's ambition to enhance the readiness and sophistication of its forces while aligning ever more closely with Russian operational standards.

CSTO forces train in Belarus as part of the wider ZAPAD 2025 framework

The Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) has begun a series of military exercises in Belarus that are closely tied to the forthcoming Belarusian-Russian manoeuvres as part of ZAPAD 2025. The main phase, Interaction 2025, runs from 31 August to 6 September at the Losvido and Lepel'sky training grounds in the Vitsyebsk region, alongside the specialised drills Search 2025 (reconnaissance) and Echelon 2025 (logistics). General Andrei Serdzyukou, Chief of the CSTO Joint Staff, stated that over 5,000 personnel and about 1,000 units of equipment are involved in the measures, and that they will enhance the ability of the Collective Rapid Reaction Forces to respond to crisis situations within CSTO member states.^{viii}

Forces from Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have redeployed to Belarus to participate. The Belarusian Army has committed the 103rd Vitsyebsk Guards Airborne Brigade, described by Chief of the General Staff Pavel Muraveyka as "the best in the country".^{ix} According to Minsk's official explanation, the CSTO exercises are intended to "strengthen public security, counter possible external aggression, and practise operations against irregular armed formations and sabotage groups". Muraveyka noted that the drills will incorporate "modern methods" from recent conflicts, suggesting that contemporary battlefield experience shapes operational planning.^x

Although CSTO officials insist the exercises are routine and not aimed at third countries, their integration with ZAPAD 2025, scheduled for 12-16 September, underscores the strategic military coordination between Belarus and Russia.

II. Trump and Lukashenka

Trump's call to Lukashenka: Preconditions, facts, readings, and consequences

On 15 August 2025, President Trump phoned Aliaksandr Lukashenka while en route to Alaska for a meeting with Vladimir Putin, to the surprise of many. Trump later said on social media that he had a "wonderful" call with the "highly respected" Belarusian leader. He also thanked him for releasing 16 detainees and discussed the possible release of about 1,300 more. Afterward, Trump mentioned the issue of Belarusian political prisoners on social media two more times.

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya framed Trump's call to Lukashenka as a humanitarian gambit to secure prisoner releases and curb repression, with the potential to catalyse systemic

change, but cautioned that Lukashenka is not a credible counterpart and that any judgement should rest on verifiable actions rather than rhetoric.^{xi} Belarusian independent media paid a lot of attention to the language and the fact that Trump did not use the term “political prisoner”.^{xii} Belarusian propaganda, by contrast, framed the call as a “strategic success” and proof of Minsk’s growing international clout, stressing that Lukashenka invited Trump to visit and that Trump accepted the invitation.^{xiii}

In what marked the first-ever call between a US president and Lukashenka, the White House viewed Minsk as a strategic lever in its Russia and Ukraine diplomacy and engaged with Belarus after months of cautious outreach and limited concessions, including the release of political prisoners. While the call represented a breakthrough for Minsk after years of Western isolation, any further progress depends on Lukashenka’s ability to sustain Trump’s interest, avoid excessive concessions, coordinate with Europe, and remain relevant as US-Russia negotiations evolve.^{xiv} In short, the prevailing reading is that Trump’s call opened a channel, not a deal, and the balance between humanitarian gains and political legitimisation remains contested.

III. The human rights situation

August 2025 marks the five-year anniversary of the falsified presidential elections in Belarus, and the human rights situation remains critically dire, with ongoing systematic repression and widespread rights violations. Since the high-profile release of 16 political prisoners mediated by American officials in July 2025, no new releases or pardons of political prisoners have been reported. As of 25 August 2025, at least 1,196 individuals remain behind bars on politically motivated charges, which is 32 more than at the end of July.^{xv}

Transborder repression and persecution

Belarusian authorities continue to carry out transborder repressions and persecutions of Belarusian citizens who reside abroad. On 5 August 2025, Belarusian authorities announced criminal charges against 207 Belarusians identified as participants in opposition rallies abroad in August 2025 and earlier. According to Viasna, this triggered a wave of raids, interrogations, and property seizures inside Belarus, with exiles’ families particularly targeted.^{xvi} These prosecutions reflect a broader strategy to silence dissent beyond Belarus’s borders by criminalising diaspora activism and equating participation in peaceful rallies with extremism.

There have also been new criminal sentences against Belarusian activists *in absentia*. For example, the Homiel Regional Court sentenced seven members of the BYSOL and BY_Help foundations *in absentia* to lengthy prison terms ranging from 8 to 18 years, including BYSOL head Andrei Stryzhak (18 years), BY_Help founder Alexei Liavonchyk

(15 years), and five other activists on charges including creating extremist groups, financing extremist activities, calling for sanctions, and discrediting Belarus.^{xvii}

The Belarusian Canadian Alliance made a public appeal on social media that reported new cases of transborder repression, stating that Belarusian authorities are targeting Canadian citizens and residents of Belarusian origin through property seizures, criminal investigations, pressure on relatives in Belarus, and “extremism” rulings. The Alliance argues that these extraterritorial actions breach Canadian and international human rights standards, and it calls on Canada and its allies to condemn the repression, raise it in international forums, monitor intimidation, sanction responsible officials, and provide legal and consular support to those affected.^{xviii}

Belarusian propaganda targets Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya

In August 2025, Belarusian state television aired a propaganda film showing KGB General Andrei Paulyuchenka (head of the Internal Affairs Committee at the time) handing Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya an envelope containing EUR 15,000.^{xix} The film claimed that Tsikhanouskaya had “asked for” the money and portrayed this as evidence of her collaboration with Belarusian security services.^{xx}

In turn, Tsikhanouskaya responded by acknowledging that she did receive the envelope but denied requesting money, explaining that she was under “tremendous emotional pressure” at the time and didn’t know how to behave in such situations. She said she never opened the envelope until seeing the propaganda report, at which point she discovered it contained EUR 15,000. Tsikhanouskaya stated she kept silent about the envelope for five years because she “was ashamed” and didn’t want to create additional problems, but she emphasised that the money was not given to her on her initiative and that “they needed compromising material on me”.^{xxi}

The case illustrates how the Lukashenka regime weaponises old footage and fabricated kompromat to discredit exiled opposition leaders, signalling an ongoing strategy of information warfare. More broadly, it shows Minsk’s fixation on controlling narratives.

One more disappearance of a Belarusian activist residing abroad

Belarusian activist and former diplomat Anatol Kotau, who recently worked at the Belarusian Sports Solidarity Fund and previously was an employee of National Anti-Crisis Management, disappeared on 21 August 2025 after flying from Warsaw to Istanbul. According to Turkish media leaks, he landed in Istanbul that afternoon, then travelled to Trabzon and allegedly left for Sochi by private yacht, though this has not been officially confirmed. His wife, Anastasia Pilipchyk, raised the alarm the following day when he stopped responding to messages, and she later contacted Polish and Turkish authorities. On 25 August, she filed a missing person report with Istanbul police, and two days later she submitted a complaint to the Polish prosecutor’s office, while also hiring lawyers in Türkiye to assist in the search. The Belarusian Sports Solidarity Foundation confirmed his disappearance and appealed to international human rights and sports organisations. Kotau, who resigned from the Lukashenka regime in protest

after the 2020 election and has since lived in exile, was sentenced *in absentia* in 2024 to 12 years in prison on politically motivated charges.^{xxii}

This disappearance case has raised serious discussions and concerns regarding transnational repression and the activities of Belarusian secret services abroad. This is the second high-profile Belarusian activist residing abroad to disappear in 2025, after Anzhalika Melnikava, chair of the Belarusian Coordination Council.^{xxiii}

IV. The Democratic Forces and diaspora

The New Belarus Conference and March of Freedom in Warsaw, and the regime's reaction

The New Belarus Conference, held in Warsaw from 8-10 August, gathered opposition leaders, civil society actors and international partners to coordinate strategy and reaffirm support for democratic change. A highlight was the March of Freedom on 9 August at Józef Piłsudski Square, accompanied by the illumination of Warsaw's Palace of Culture in the colours of the Belarusian flag, a symbolic gesture of solidarity. The visibility of these events underscored both the resilience of the Belarusian democratic movement in exile and the continued backing it receives from its European partners. Minsk's response was sharply negative, with the Belarusian Foreign Ministry condemning the conference, summoning the Polish Chargé d'Affaires and threatening "countermeasures" against what it called "destructive and provocative activities". This reaction reflects the regime's sensitivity to diaspora mobilisation abroad and its attempts to portray such initiatives as externally orchestrated threats to national stability.^{xxiv}

During the conference, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya also announced appointments to the United Transitional Cabinet, including the promotion of Sviatlana Shatilina as head of the democratic mission in Ukraine and the appointment of economist Alisa Ryzhychenka as representative for economy and finance.^{xxv}

Belarusians in Georgia

In August 2025, Belarusian human rights defender Raman Kisliak, who lost his final appeal against Georgia's refusal to grant him asylum, filed a complaint to the UN Human Rights Committee alleging discrimination and a violation of his rights. The UN registered the case, requested interim measures preventing his deportation to Belarus, and set a deadline for the Georgian government to submit its response.^{xxvi} It is one of the first documented cases of successful UN intervention against Georgia's policy of systematically denying asylum to Belarusian refugees.

V. Economy

Belarus's GDP slowdown: Latest indicators and forecasts

Economic growth in Belarus has slowed sharply. In January-July 2025, the GDP grew by 1.3%, compared to 2.1% a month earlier. GDP growth has been slowing for several months in a row. For example, in January-May, GDP growth in annual terms was 2.5%; in January-April it was 2.8%; and in January-March it was 3.1%. Previously, the Belarusian Ministry of Economy stated that the slowdown in GDP growth is due to a decline in production in a number of industries against the backdrop of a general slowdown in global economic growth. In addition, the Ministry of Economy cited poor weather conditions as one of the factors that negatively affected economic growth.^{xxvii} Commenting on the July GDP data, the National Statistics Committee also stated that later harvest and fodder preparation dates are having an impact.^{xxviii}

BEROC experts note that without the contribution of agriculture, GDP growth in July 2025 amounted to only about 0.1%.^{xxix} They point out that there was no growth in output in key export-oriented sectors of the economy, including industry, wholesale trade, freight transport and IT. Experts at the Eurasian Development Bank also argue that GDP growth was negatively affected by a 0.3% year-on-year decline in industrial output in January-July, driven by falling exports and rising inventories of finished products.^{xxx} Meanwhile, the official forecast still projects GDP growth of 4.1% by the end of 2025.^{xxxi}

The sharp contrast between expert assessments and the official forecast highlights the government's overly optimistic projections and suggests that Belarus is unlikely to achieve its 2025 growth target without a significant rebound in exports or industrial output.

Inflation in Belarus

Against the backdrop of slowing economic growth, inflation in Belarus remains high. In July, the annual rate of price growth was 7.4%. A month earlier, the same indicator was 7.3%. Inflation has been accelerating every month since January 2025, when the indicator was 5.2%.^{xxxii} The National Statistical Committee noted that in July 2025, food products rose in price by 10.6% in annual terms, non-food products by 3.0%, and services by 7.6%.^{xxxiii} According to the official forecast for the socio-economic development of Belarus, inflation at the end of 2025 should not exceed 5%.^{xxxiv}

In June 2025, amid accelerating inflation, the National Bank of Belarus raised its refinancing rate by 25 basis points to 9.75% per annum. On 12 August, Raman Halouchanka, Chairman of the National Bank, stated that the refinancing rate is currently appropriate and there is no reason to raise it further. "Perhaps there will be a decrease. But the National Bank is closely monitoring the situation and will take measures, if necessary," Halouchanka said.^{xxxv}

The persistent rise in inflation well above the official target underscores the limitations of monetary policy in the current environment and raises doubts about the government's ability to contain price growth by the end of 2025.

Bank profits redirected to state financing

The Belarusian government has decided to withdraw a portion of banks' profits and use them to finance the economy. The topic was discussed during Lukashenka's meeting with Raman Halouchanka, Chairman of the National Bank, on 12 August.^{xxxvi} Lukashenka mentioned the growth in profits in the banking sector and noted his concern about banks withdrawing money from the economy. Halouchanka stated: "The government has begun to withdraw profits from banks and direct them to finance the economy". Lukashenka responded by emphasising that "there should be no extra money in banks". At the end of 2024, Belarusian banks made a record profit of 3.599 billion BYN (about 1 billion EUR), a 22.4% increase compared to 2023. The dynamics in 2025 suggest that by the end of the year, bank profits may exceed the 2024 figure.^{xxxvii}

This decision signals the regime's increasing reliance on redistributive measures to plug gaps in state financing, which may undermine banking sector stability and discourage investment while highlighting the lack of sustainable sources of economic growth.

Belarus will save Russia from petrol shortages

Belarus is positioning itself as a "firefighter" for the Russian fuel market. The Belarusian State Concern for Oil and Chemistry has reported a surge in demand from Russia for Belarusian petroleum products and is increasing shipments through exchange platforms with a focus on economic efficiency. In early August, Russian media reported that the country could face a petrol shortage in the coming months, as fuel prices continue to rise despite the export ban.^{xxxviii} Moreover, on 14 August, Reuters reported that Ukraine had attacked the largest oil refinery in southern Russia, marking at least the fourth such strike since the beginning of the month.^{xxxix}

Belarus's readiness to boost fuel supplies underscores its growing role as a buffer for Russia's sanctions-hit economy, deepening Minsk's economic dependence on Moscow and providing short-term financial gains at the cost of further alignment with Russia's wartime needs.

There will be plenty of potatoes, but few apples

From 1 September, Belarus will introduce a six-month licensing system for apple exports, with shipments permitted only under one-off licences issued by executive authorities. The government explained that this measure was adopted "to fully supply the domestic market with apples during the off-season".^{xl} Earlier, Piotr Parkhomchyk, chairman of the Brest Regional Executive Committee, noted that orchards had been severely damaged by three waves of spring frosts, leaving the 2025 apple harvest about three times smaller than in 2024.^{xli}

By contrast, potato yields in 2025 increased by 1,770 kilograms per hectare compared to 2024.^{xlii} In spring 2024, many Belarusians complained of a potato shortage, which

officials attributed to the poor harvest and to increased exports driven by more favourable foreign prices. In July 2025, a law was signed introducing administrative liability for sellers who fail to meet their obligations to supply fruit and vegetables, and the administrative regulation of potato prices remains in force.

Several organisations have already been fined for violating potato pricing rules, including the Ramanenka Andrei Uladzimiravich farm, which faces a penalty of up to 16,000 BYN (around 4,000 EUR) for retail price increases ranging from 3% to 286%, far above the permitted monthly cap of 0.3%.^{xliii}

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^{xlii} Ministry of Agriculture and Food, “Summary“, August 2025, <https://t.me/mshpbelarus/19739>

^{xliii} Ministry of Antimonopoly Regulation and Trade of the Republic of Belarus, “The consequences of ‘playing’ with potatoes continue!“, August 2025, <https://www.mart.gov.by/news/novost/narushil-plati/>