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COUNTERING NATO EXPANSION

A Case Study of Belarus-Russia Rapprochement

PETER SZYSZLO

*A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in
partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of*

MASTER OF ARTS

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The undersigned hereby recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research acceptance of this thesis, submitted by PETER SZYSZLO, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

The issue of NATO expansion remains at the centre of Belarus-Russia military relations and is widely seen as one of the most pressing security issues facing both states. This case study investigates the manifestations of Belarus-Russia military rapprochement in the context of the perceived threat generated by NATO's eastward expansion. The objective is to interpret and differentiate between rhetoric and actual substance associated with political and military countermeasures. The thesis focuses on Belarus's place in the emerging European security environment and the unique challenge it represents as a frontline state to an enlarged NATO.

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Dedicated to the memory of my father

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ABM	Anti-Ballistic Missile Defence Treaty
BSSR	Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CFE	Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe
EU	European Union
FSB	Russian Federal Security Service
ICBM	Intercontinental ballistic missile
KGB	Committee for State Security
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NORAD	North American Aerospace Defence Command
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PfP	Partnership for Peace
PVO	Anti-aircraft defence [<i>protivovozdushnaya oborona</i>]
START	Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
UN	United Nations

1 INTRODUCTION

With the accession of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) a *fait accompli* after May 1997, the eastern edge of the Alliance's border now comprises a new line of contiguity with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as well as another political entity within—the Union of Belarus and Russia. Whereas the Visegrad trio¹ finds greater security and regional stability in its new political-military arrangement, NATO's eastward expansion has led Belarus and Russia to reassess their strategic imperatives in their western peripheries, partially stemming from their mutual distrust of the Alliance as a former Cold War adversary. Consequently, security for one is perceived as a threat to the other.

The decision to enlarge NATO eastward triggered a political-military “response” from the two former Soviet states with defence cooperation leading the way. While Belarus's military strategy and doctrine remain defensive, there is a growing tendency of perceiving NATO as a potential enemy, and to view the republic's defensive role as that of protecting the western flank of the Belarus-Russia Union. Moreover, the Belarusian leadership has not concealed its desire to create a new military alliance with Russia in order to retain a strategic balance in Europe. Whereas Russia has been more capable of coming to terms with the reality of NATO expansion and compromise with the Alliance, Belarus has not. While there may not be a threat of a new Cold War on the horizon, there is also little evidence of a consolidated peace.

¹ The Visegrad countries consist of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. However, only the first three were invited to join NATO in May 1997.

1.1 THESIS STATEMENT

This case study endeavours to conduct a comprehensive assessment on both Belarusian rhetoric and anticipated effects of NATO expansion by examining governmental discourse and official proposals associated with political and military “countermeasures,”² by analysing the manifestations of Belarus’s rapprochement with the Russian Federation in the spheres of foreign policy and military doctrine. Although interest in close military cooperation between Minsk and Moscow predate any serious prospects for NATO expansion, evidence indicates that a widening and deepening union between the two was precipitated by the projection of NATO’s common border with Belarus—and the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Security issues surrounding the *post factum* of NATO expansion have received little attention in the West, but remain closely linked to Belarus-Russia relations. Driven in part by the conditions of post-communism, Belarus and Russia have felt the need to define and strengthen their “zone of vital interest,” as well as construct joint defence and foreign policy models that reflect contemporary security challenges. In the highly charged atmosphere that prevails in the Belarusian political arena over NATO expansion, rhetoric has tended to complicate objective developments and analysis. Any attempt at understanding the general direction of security trends between Belarus and Russia is further complicated by the bravado emanating from Minsk. The dearth of reliable data related to joint Belarus-Russia strategic planning makes research more challenging.

² Belarusian and Russian sources commonly use the word *protivodeistviya* [countermeasures] to describe strategic responses to NATO expansion [*rasshirenie*]. For the sake of clarity and consistency, both terminologies will be applied throughout the thesis.

Analysis is hindered further still by the highly charged political atmosphere and lack of governmental transparency that prevails in Belarus which often obstructs lucid analysis. Reality lies somewhere between the rhetorical statements, and the more mundane details of circumstance. Considering the high stakes and the new security challenges the region faces—the manipulation of information is itself a subject worthy of study.

1.2 NATURE OF PROJECT

Within the European security debate surrounding the “Slavic core” much attention has been devoted to NATO-Russia and NATO-Ukraine relations, yet little Western academic literature has dealt directly with NATO-Belarus affairs. Hence, the rationale behind this case study. Too easily dismissed in the West as a *bête noire*, and often taken for granted in the East as an obedient “vassal,” Belarus has fallen between the proverbial cracks of mainstream political discourse. Yet, the republic is critical to the development of surrounding states and to European security as a whole. Furthermore, the ambitious agenda of its president means that Belarus may play an ever-increasing role in the future stability of the entire region. Considering its heightened security importance to the area via its common border with an expanded NATO, Belarus should be studied with increased vigilance and scrutiny.

As the most Russified, Sovietised and militarised Soviet successor state, Belarus has made Russia the focal point of its foreign policy. Relations with the West have waned and show no particular signs of improvement. With this in mind, Belarus and NATO have yet to define their relationship with one another. The country has landed in an

uncertain “grey zone” whereas Ukraine and Russia have explicit agreements with the Alliance, its Western neighbour is a member, and the Baltic states remain future hopefuls. Belarus’s adoption of rigid out-and-out rejection of NATO expansion has left the republic in an ambiguous relationship with Brussels. On the other hand, NATO’s expansion to the western borders of the CIS has given the Kremlin an incentive for “reabsorbing” its western flank. Although Russia is often accused of harbouring imperial ambitions, in the case of Belarus it has been Minsk and not Moscow, that is the main initiator behind integration, or more accurately, reintegration of the two former Soviet republics.³ Considering the tremendous advancements in bilateral cooperation, already undertaken, limitations on full political and economic unification remain. Russia is firmly in control of the Union’s pace, scope and financial underwriting; however, the area with real momentum is defence.

A military alliance against an enlarged NATO offers a validating rationale for the joint protection of the Belarus-Russia Union. Politically, joint security efforts are of considerable importance to the basic concept of the union, since it promotes the idea of a collective defence effort against a mutual threat.⁴ The level of political-military integration that Belarus will undertake with the Russian Federation may ultimately have a significant impact on future strategic relations in Eastern and Central Europe. Since April 1996, Belarus’s air defence forces [PVO] have been operating jointly with their

³ Despite the popular soundbites claiming a “unification” process between the two countries, the more precise term, according to pro-Union Belarusian and Russian academics is “reunification”—i.e. *re-establishing* lost ties following the collapse of the Soviet Union. For the sake of consistency, however, the term “unification” will be used throughout the thesis.

⁴ “Lukashenka’s Sacred Cow: Union Blues for Russia and Belarus” *Jane’s Foreign Report*. 12 August 1999, p. 3.

Russian counterparts.⁵ The former Soviet early warning radar stations in Belarus are an integral part of Russia's western defence system. These facilities fill gaps in Russia's air defence system left by the losses of Soviet military bases in the Baltic States.⁶ Additionally, the Russian Armed Forces have acquired long-term basing rights to Belarusian military infrastructure, including access to newly upgraded early warning radar sites in Belarus's western periphery, listening posts, extensive networks of Soviet-era airfields, roads, communication centres, and storage facilities. A collective weapons procurement programme is also well under way, in addition to a small joint military corps encompassing the Belarusian Army and Russia's Moscow Military District—all under the *de jure* framework of a projected Belarus-Russia military doctrine.

Equally critical to the investigation is the “hawkish” rhetoric emanating from officials in Minsk concerning the formation of an anti-NATO bloc based on the consorted efforts of the CIS collective security agreement—and beyond. Envisaged as the “first strategic echelon of defence” against NATO, is the formation of a 300,000-strong regional military group based in Belarus and backed by units from the Moscow Military District.⁷

Whether close military ties jeopardise Belarus's non-nuclear status remains an extremely sensitive issue. Minsk's sabre rattling has invariably opened up speculation over

⁵ Aleksandr Ivanov, “Sily PVO dvukh stran okhranyayut nebo vmeste” [PVO Forces of Both Countries Defend the Sky Together] *Krasnaya zvezda*. 3 April 1996.

⁶ Vera Rich, “Russia, Belarus Join Forces on Radar Defence” *Jane's Defence Weekly*. 11 August 1999, p. 6.

⁷ Vadim Markushin, “Aleksandr Lukashenko: My budem grud'yu zashchishchat' matushku Rossiyu” [Aleksandr Lukashenko: We Will Defend Mother Russia with our Bare Chests] *Krasnaya zvezda*. 5 May 2000.

“nuclear bluffing.” Early in the NATO expansion debate, Lukashenko threatened to allow redeployment of Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus should any Central European nation join NATO.⁸ The Belarus leader even bemoaned the losses of strategic nuclear missiles, referring to their removal from the republic after the collapse of the Soviet Union as “a crude mistake, if not a crime” ever since his country found itself adjacent to NATO’s eastern border.⁹ Although the Kremlin has revealed no intention of using Belarusian territory for the redeployment or storage of nuclear weapons, Soviet-era missile silos and launch facilities remaining largely intact. The weakened state of both countries’ conventional forces has made Russia’s reliance on a “first strike” option that much greater.¹⁰

Other evidence points to coordinated military activities such as the *Zapad-99* [West-99] military manoeuvres held in European Russia and Belarus. Subsequently dubbed a “response in the event of NATO aggression,” the exercises were the largest of its kind in post-Soviet history.¹¹ Belarus played a tactical role as the forward “wedge” in a simulated counter-offensive to a NATO attack—in addition to its role as the staging ground for simulated retaliatory nuclear and conventional strikes on undisclosed new NATO members.¹²

⁸ Chrystia Freeland, “Belarus Warning Over Arms” *Financial Times*. 19 January 1996.

⁹ “Lukashenka: Withdrawal of Belarus Nuclear Weapons a Mistake” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-98-266, 23 September 1998.

¹⁰ See “Voennaya doktrina Rossiskoi Federatsii” [Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation] *Rossiiskaya gazeta*. 25 April 2000.

¹¹ Yuri Golotyuk, “Dan prikaz yemu na ‘Zapad-99’” [He Has His Orders for ‘West-99’] *Izvestiia*. 22 June 1999.

¹² Yuri Golotyuk, “Voyennye ne priznayutsya, po komu oni nanesli uchebnyi yadernyi udar” [The Military Will Not Admit Who it Hit with a Simulated Nuclear Strike] *Izvestiia*. 29 June 1999.

Russia's reactions to NATO expansion have exerted considerable influence on regional security aspects for the Ukraine and the Baltic states, which find themselves "tangled" in concentric spheres of influence. Gone is the concept of a "buffer zone" or *cordon sanitaire* between NATO and the former republics of the Soviet Union. Whether this frontier becomes one of cooperation and interaction or evolves into a line of confrontation and enmity is yet to be determined. Prospects for a constructive dialogue and cooperation between Brussels and Minsk have been seriously eroded by the Belarusian leadership's rigid anti-NATO and anti-Western rhetoric, which regularly accuses NATO and the United States of harbouring intentions to invade Belarus. Brussels and Washington hesitate to engage in constructive dialogue with an administration that they perceive as being authoritarian, and whose legitimacy they consider dubious at best. NATO hopes for accommodation with Russia, but is unwilling to ameliorate relations with the Lukashenko administration, and instead favours the pursuit of a parallel, albeit ambiguous US policy of "selective engagement."¹³

1.3 HYPOTHESIS

The dual projects of NATO expansion into Central Europe and Belarusian rapprochement with the Russian Federation have fundamentally influenced the contemporary security aspects of the region. The enlargement of NATO and a prospective "Greater Russia" has created regional cleavages and security challenges, and is also a potential source for renewed East-West tensions. My hypothesis suggests that negative Belarusian discourse

¹³ See Robert Legvold, "Belarus in US Foreign Policy" *Belarus at the Crossroads*. Sherman Garnett and Robert Legvold (eds.) Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (1999), pp. 131-172.

directed against NATO and its enlargement into Central Europe has been utilised in order to facilitate political and military countermeasures in the form of tighter rapprochement with Russia in the spheres of foreign policy and military doctrine.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

By employing a combination of structural analysis and an historical approach, the thesis will explore the development of interdependence in both the Belarus-Russia and Belarus-NATO relationships. The proposed methodology is based upon the following components—first, an examination of Belarus-Russia recent historical ties as an overarching framework within which a continuum can be linked to contemporary issues. Second, an investigation into the manifestations of Belarus-Russia military cooperation with analysis of its significance *vis-à-vis* NATO enlargement. While it is impossible to gather every policy statement on this topic, an effort has been made to analyse main arguments and themes relevant to this study.

An evaluation of Belarusian, Russian and Western media sources and scholarly journals will serve as the basis upon which the case study will be built. Since there have been few academic studies on this issue to date, this study will use popular discourse as a departure point. Special attention will be paid to official statements and governmental policies which have shaped Belarus-Russia security doctrine and foreign policy. This systematic methodology will allow for a thorough examination of the issues at hand, as well as provide a template from which to build a sequential analysis.

The interdisciplinary character of the thesis is self-evident, as its continuity comes from the subject's innate geography, history and politics which all play a role in explaining these inter-related phenomena. Because there is no single theory capable of explaining the catalysts of tension in the new geopolitical arena of East-Central Europe, the search here will be primarily for cause and effect as they are illustrated by the passage of time.

1.5 STRUCTURE

The case study will unfold in four distinct, yet highly integrated sections. This structure will follow a systematic format making it easier for the reader to carry out research and compare information. The sections are further broken down into sub-themes, which explore the specifics of each segment in order to give the case study the proper balance and depth. The first segment outlines the mechanics of the thesis by identifying the nature, scope, hypothesis and methodology employed throughout the project. By establishing these parameters, a template is set for further investigation.

Next, a discussion will identify the background and interdependencies surrounding Belarus-Russia relations within a larger geopolitical and historical framework. This section describes Belarus's strategic significance to the region, and traces the historical aspects of Belarus-Russia military cooperation up to the former's incorporation into the Treaty on CIS Collective Security. The analysis will then turn to analysing the details of the Belarus-Russia "counterbalance" to NATO's inclusion of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland into the Western collective security fold. By employing an empirical approach, the hypothesis will be tested against specific cases by investigating

the manifestations of the response *vis-à-vis* the Belarus-Russia Union Treaty, military agreements, and rhetoric comprising part of the retort. The conclusion will present a summary of findings, as well as an overall assessment of the activities and discourse undertaken by Belarus and Russia in response to NATO expansion.

1.6 RESEARCH SOURCES

Western studies on post-Soviet security affairs have begun to emerge, partially because of the need to effectively assess contemporary security issues following NATO enlargement, in addition to accurately evaluate new challenges and their potential for conflict within East-West relations. The facilitation of lucid analysis of regional security and geopolitical issues has become paramount. This study is intended to provide a means for understanding the matrix of the Belarus-Russia “response” to NATO expansion, their joint role in the emerging European security architecture, and the evolving dynamics surrounding events where Central Europe and the Western borderlands of the former Soviet Union converge.

English-language publications on joint Belarus-Russia security matters relating to NATO expansion are by no means exhaustive. Hence, the bulk of the research materials presented in this thesis originate from Russian-language sources; including official government documents, speeches, policy statements reprinted in the Belarusian and Russian press, news agencies, scholarly journals and newspaper articles taken in the appropriate context. Due to the challenging political atmosphere in Belarus, the secrecy surrounding defence issues and lack of governmental transparency made the task of

collecting credible information all the more challenging. Belarusian sources are less objective and more partisan in matters of national security, but they nevertheless offer insight to official policy and rationale.

A large portion of the material presented in this case study was compiled over the course of two trips to the region. The first was a posting at the Belarusian State University's Faculty of International Relations via the Atlantic Council of Canada and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (1998-1999). A subsequent research trip was made to the region during the spring and summer of 2000.

2 CONCENTRIC SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

The Republic of Belarus is located on the eastern edge of Central Europe. Its territory is adjacent to four highly dynamic vectors, constituting a vital strategic arena at a crossroads between the northern and southern sub-regions of the eastern continental region, Russia to the East, Ukraine to the South, and an expanded NATO to the West. Belarus's frontiers delineate a perimeter where the post-Soviet space meets an expanding Europe that is increasingly defined by the institutions in which it partakes. Analysts define the republic's significance in its ability to either effectively join or divide these regions, depending on its geopolitical orientation—not because of the republic's size or economic potential.¹⁴

Consequently, Belarus's political orientation also plays a role in establishing balanced relations within the East-West tandem. Given its eastern geopolitical orientation and western geostrategic position, the republic exerts influence on neighbouring states, and on the equilibrium of strategic power in Central and Eastern Europe. For these reasons, the advancement of NATO to Belarus's western border has increasingly turned the republic into an object of military and political interest in neighbouring countries and of key European states. Underscoring these factors are the significant challenges Belarus represents to its immediate neighbours, particularly when confronted with internal issues of deteriorating human rights, reversals of political and market reforms, the entrenchment

¹⁴ Grigory Perepelitsa, "Belorussko-rossiiskaya voenno-politicheskaya integratsia i yee vliyanie na bezopasnost' Ukrainy" [Belarusian-Russian Integration and Its Impact on the Security of Ukraine] *Belorussiya na pereput'e*. [Belarus at the Crossroads] Sherman Garnett and Robert Legvold (eds.) Moscow: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (1998), pp. 87-89.

of authoritarian rule and the geopolitical prospects of reconstituted Russian power in Central Europe. Yet, it is the advancement of military cooperation and the subsequent labelling of those relations as “countermeasures” to NATO expansion that are the primary focus of this study.

Belarus remains enigmatic and even anomalous to the region for several reasons. A quick profile of the republic’s foreign policy reveals it to be strongly supportive of integration with Russia and the CIS, equally vehement in its rejection of integration with the European Union, compliant to Russian interests, increasingly cordial to regimes odious to the West, and unwavering in its opposition to NATO’s eastward expansion. Despite official claims of a balanced, “multi-vectored” foreign policy in which the West comprises one vector and the East the other, the reality is that such principles remain on paper, leaving Belarus’s foreign policy agenda revolving around the East.¹⁵

The political course taken by the Lukashenko administration, which has demonstrated its determination and tenacity at recreating a semblance of the Soviet past, is very worrisome to its immediate neighbours. In so far as the Union of Belarus and Russia is unlikely to become a reincarnation of the USSR (militarily or politically), Russian analysts have labelled the rapprochement as the emergence of a “new geopolitical situation in Europe.”¹⁶ Despite Russia being too weak to play the role of a global superpower,

¹⁵ See Vladimir Senko, “Vneshnyaya politika Respubliki Belarus: osnovnie napravleniya i perspektivy” [Foreign Policy of the Republic of Belarus: Fundamental Directions and Prospects] *Belarus v mire*. Vol. 1, Issue 1, June 1996, pp. 45-46. Vladimir Senko formerly served as the Belarusian Foreign Minister.

¹⁶ Natalia Meden, “Germaniya i rossiisko-belorusskii Soyuz” [Germany and the Russia-Belarus Union] *Rossiisko-belorusskiye otnosheniya: problemy i perspektivy*. Boris Shmelev (ed.) Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences (1998), p. 103.

Belarus, nevertheless remains firmly drawn to Russia's geopolitical "orbit." The republic is a prime example of *Saisonstaaten*; a term Prussian historians used to describe states they believed were not likely to survive without deep integration—in this case, with Russia.¹⁷ Most western analysts overlook the fact that even if given the choice of orientation, Belarus would be unlikely to choose the West over Russia, something that cannot be said for any other former Soviet republic. As the only country in the world willing to maintain an allied relationship with Moscow,¹⁸ Belarus represents unique geostrategic value for the Kremlin, as it meets Russia's security interests in the western periphery of the CIS and bolsters Russian influence beyond its borders.

Upon close examination, the Belarus-Russia union reveals an unprecedented event in the post-Soviet landscape, yet a paradoxical one at that. Nowhere in the CIS has a state taken such lengths at integrating with Russia, while simultaneously asserting its own sovereignty. Considering the violent disintegrational spiral on Russia's southern flank, politicians and analysts from Belarus and Russia alike have admitted that the Kremlin perceives union with its smaller western neighbour as, in part, "compensation" for its bitter national humiliation over Chechnya.¹⁹

¹⁷ Sherman W. Garnett, "Poland: Bulwark or Bridge?" *Foreign Policy*. No. 102, Spring 1996, p. 74.

¹⁸ Vyacheslav Nikonov, "Belorussiya vo vneshney politike Rossii" [Belarus in Russian Foreign Policy] *Belorussiya na pereput'e*. [Belarus at the Crossroads] Sherman Garnett and Robert Legvold (eds.) Moscow: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (1998), p. 62.

¹⁹ See commentary by Zenon Poznyak, leader of the Belarusian Popular Front (BNF) in exile, cited in Paweł Bawolec, "Ręka Moskwy" [Moscow's Hand] *Wprost*. 15 December 1996, p. 83; Konstantin Zatulin, "Ispytanie Belorussiei" [Investigating Belarus] *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. 7 March 1997.

Moreover, the union offers Russians certain psychological consolation for what has been dubbed “divided nation syndrome.”²⁰ Analysts also indicate that the successful merger of Belarus and Russia could serve as the benchmark for looser forms of integration with other former Soviet republics.²¹ In as much as the Union of Belarus and Russia is frequently dismissed as an amorphous institution in the West, the geoeconomic and military aspects maintain significant momentum. Belarus facilitates Russia with crucial transit routes, providing some 70 percent of Russia’s trade with Europe.²² In addition, Belarus provides Russia with a gateway to its non-contiguous enclave of Kaliningrad.

Conversely, Russia supplies Belarus with most of its energy, raw materials and markets. However, closer ties have emerged in the military sphere. Security issues have become a major aggregate bonding the two former Soviet states together. Since the prospect of NATO expansion became imminent in May 1997, circles of the military in both Belarus and Russia view a union between the two states as a “countermeasure” against a political-military bloc advancing menacingly closer to their borders. As a conduit in the western periphery of the CIS, Belarus remains an area of vital geostrategic importance to Russian national security.

²⁰ See Mikhail Myasnikov, “Soyuz Belarusi i Rossii: politicheskie pravovye i ekonomicheskie voprosy sovremennoi integratsii” [Union of Belarus and Russia: Political Jurisdiction and Economic Questions of Contemporary Integration] *Belaruskaya dumka*. No. 9, September 1997, p. 14.

²¹ See Aleksandr Kotikov, “Belorussiya-Rossiya: model’ postsovetskoi integratsii?” [Belarus-Russia: Post-Soviet Model of Integration?] *Etnicheskiye i regionalnyye konflikty v Evrazii: Rossiya, Ukraina i Belorussiya*. [Ethnic and Regional Conflicts in Eurasia: Russia, Ukraine and Belarus] Alexei Zverev, Bruno Coppieters and Dmitry Trenin (eds.) Moscow: Ves’ Mir (1997), pp. 210-222; Aleh Hermanavich Romyantsaw, “Union of Belarus and Russia Will Become Axis of Unification of States in Post-Soviet Area” *Zvyazda*. FBIS-SOV-98-152, 2 June 1998. J.L. Black (ed.), *Russia and Eurasia Documents Annual 1998: CIS and Successor States*. Vol. 2. Gulf Breeze: Academic International Press (1999), pp. 148-149.

²² Aman Tuleyev, “Proryv k soyuzu” [Break Towards Union] *Sovetskaya Rossiya*. 10 April 1997.

The republic provides vital tactical leverage within the Eastern European sub-region by providing Russia with a forward “wedge” for manoeuvre on its western flank, as well as a channel to project Russian influence over a region which is increasingly looking towards NATO for its security. For these reasons, Belarus maintains a high profile in Russian strategic planning, particularly if NATO expands further eastward accepts any or all of the Baltic States under its security “umbrella,” or should Ukraine step up its existing military cooperation with Brussels.²³ Depending on the extent the Belarus-Russia military “response” proceeds, additional stresses may be put on NATO’s eastern border—putting significant pressures on the Baltic States and Ukraine to define their security orientation, while increasing geopolitical polarisation and tension in the region.

Although interest in close defence cooperation between Minsk and Moscow predate any serious prospects for NATO’s plans to open its membership to countries of the former Warsaw Pact, the “ripple effects” of expansion have made the two former Soviet states reassess their strategic imperatives in their respective western approaches. Invariably, NATO expansion has legitimised and accelerated military cooperation between the two states. Yet, as Professor J.L. Black notes: “Whether it was used as a real reason or an excuse, there can be no doubt that NATO expansion hastened, indeed ensured, the Russian-Belarus Union...Of all the regions in the world where NATO activity shaped Russian political and strategic planning, the Belarus case is the clearest.”²⁴

²³ See declassified report “Rossiisko-belorusskii Soyuz: vygody fundamental’ny, negativnye posledstvia minimal’ny” [Russian-Belarusian Union: Fundamental Advantages, Negative Consequences Minimal] *Nezavisimaya gazeta. (NG-Ssenarii)* No. 5, 29 April 1997.

²⁴ J.L. Black, *Russia Faces NATO Expansion: Bearing Gifts or Bearing Arms?* Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers (2000), p. 119.

As a military stronghold in the western periphery of the USSR, [Soviet] Byelorussia²⁵ played an integral role as the Soviet Union's western defence shield—a function that the Belarus president has repeatedly aspired to recast as a “first line of defence” between NATO and Russia.²⁶ Official government statements emanating from Minsk have rhetorically characterised the Slav union as providing the basis for an ambitious set of “countermeasures” to NATO expansion and a US-led “unipolar” world. Among other proposals, scenarios include redeployment of Russian conventional forces, strategic bombers and nuclear weapons on Belarusian soil—to a more grandiose strategy that envisages the establishment of a Minsk-Moscow-Beijing axis to counterbalance NATO.²⁷

Western strategic experts conclude that a new military confrontation is unlikely, since it would take Russia a decade or longer to reconsolidate even a semblance of the Soviet military structure that existed in the former German Democratic Republic.²⁸ Inasmuch as Belarus-Russia conventional forces appear ominously large on paper, they are simply not configured for offensive action.²⁹ The military factor has become a source of tension for

²⁵ For the sake of clarity and consistency, “Byelorussia” is used throughout the thesis in reference to the republic during the Tsarist and Soviet eras. However, most Russian speakers still use the former term when referring to post-Soviet Belarus.

²⁶ See interview with President Lukashenko in Vadim Markushin, “Aleksandr Lukashenko: My budem grud’yu zashchishchat’ matushku Rossiyu” [Aleksandr Lukashenko: We Will Protect Mother Russia with our Bare Chests] *Krasnaya zvezda*. 5 May 2000.

²⁷ See speech by Aleksandr Lukashenko to the Third Union of Belarus and Russia Parliamentary Session in Marina Volkova and Yuras Karmanov, “Belorusskii lider predlozhl v tselyakh protivodeistviya rasshireniyu NATO sozdat’ os’ ‘Minsk-Moskva-Pekin’” [Belarus Leader Proposed Creating a Minsk-Moscow-Beijing Axis with the Aim of Countering NATO Expansion] *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. 13 March 1997.

²⁸ Sherman W. Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch: Ukraine in the Emerging Security Environment of Central and Eastern Europe*. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (1997), p. 110.

²⁹ For conventional weapons holdings, see Table. 1: Current Holdings and CFE National Ceilings. On offensive configurations, see Sherman W. Garnett, “Poland: Bulwark or Bridge?” *Foreign Policy*. No. 102, Spring 1996, p. 68.

the entire region, particularly if NATO's eastern border with Belarus is perceived as a "line of contact" rather than a "line of cooperation." Nevertheless, given current trends, Belarus-NATO relations are likely to continue to be characterised, according to the Minsk-based *Strategiya* Foundation, as "cold, tense and in part, even hostile."³⁰ In light of these observations, the strategic "response" from Belarus and Russia to NATO expansion represents a unique challenge to long-term peace and stability in Eastern Europe. Insofar as it seems unlikely that Minsk and Moscow are working towards the resurrection of a contemporary Warsaw Pact, there is no denying an unmistakable bipolar continuum in this traditionally divisive part of East-Central Europe.

2.1 BELARUS-RUSSIA RELATIONS: THE ROLE OF HISTORY

The discussion of current security issues cannot be separated from the events of history. While Belarus does have a long tradition of evolving closely alongside Russia, it would be an oversimplification to simply accept official assertions of "historical interest" as the sole legitimising factor in Belarus-Russia rapprochement. The legacy of Belarus-Russia relations has not always been defined by their "brotherly friendship" and "predestined fate."³¹ On the contrary, Belarusian history has been graphically illustrated by violent incorporation into the Russian Empire during the late eighteenth century, its territorial divisions, and forceful assimilation of the Russian language and culture throughout Tsarist and Soviet times. Throughout its history, the Belarus leadership has been co-opted

³⁰ *Strategy for Belarus: Concept of National Development*. Minsk: Strategiya Foundation (2000), p. 37.

³¹ Various reprinted presidential speeches and pro-union articles found in the state-controlled Belarusian press voice a "common history" as one of the main aggregates binding Belarus and Russia together. Many are bold-titled with such popular sound-bites as "The Border of Belarus and Russia Runs Through Our Hearts" and "Belarus-Russia: We Cannot Live Without One Another."

into ruling the area through being Russified, Polonized, Sovietized or shaped by the influence of *Kievan Rus'*.

In fact, Belarus never experienced true independence or autonomy—except for a brief nine-month period from March to December 1918, when the Byelorussian Democratic Republic emerged under German tutelage. That brief moment of independence was abruptly extinguished by the creation of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) on 1 January 1919. The conclusion of the Polish-Soviet War at the Treaty of Riga in 1921 witnessed the republic's eastern territories incorporated into the Soviet bulwark, while simultaneously “losing” its western flank to Poland.³² In 1921, the republic concluded an alliance with the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) and on 30 December 1922 eastern Byelorussia was consolidated into the framework of the Soviet Union. The BSSR was enlarged twice by the addition of eastern territories from the Russian Federation on 3 March 1924 and 6 December 1926, respectfully.³³ Subsequently, the dual processes of Russification (as in the Tsarist era earlier) and Sovietization took over.³⁴

The BSSR became a model of “successful” assimilation into the Soviet cultural melting pot, in which a collective soul was forged and the Russian language served as the benchmark—an inference drawn to the national anthem, which opens with “We

³² Norman Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star: The Polish-Soviet War, 1919-1920*. London: Macdonald and Company Publishers (1972), pp. 261-263.

³³ Jan Zaprudnik, *Belarus: At a Crossroads in History*. Boulder: Westview Press (1993), p. 71.

³⁴ For helpful background information, see Nicholas P. Vakar, *Belorussia: The Making of a Nation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press (1956).

Byelorussians, united with Russia...”³⁵ Analysts suggest that despite the Soviet system’s adherent weakening of the population’s [ethnic] national consciousness, it also fostered state building through dual loyalties to both the USSR and the [Byelorussian] Soviet republic.³⁶

It is no coincidence that during a 1962 visit to Minsk, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev proclaimed “Belarusians, will be the first to attain Communism!”—when asked why, Khrushchev replied: “No one I met in Minsk could speak Byelorussian.”³⁷ Having been used as the “test bed” for the long-term Soviet policy of *sliyanie* (the fusing of ethnic groups and peoples of the USSR into a homogeneous Russophone Soviet nation), the republic was reluctant to sever ties that bound it to the Soviet system. Arguably, Byelorussia had the least sense of a separate identity of the 15 constituent republics of the USSR. Relatively speaking, the BSSR was prosperous in comparison to other Soviet republics. This simple rationale led many to argue that Soviet socialism was ideally suited to Belarusian needs.³⁸

Coupled with the nation’s strong attraction to Russia, its [equally] weak European orientation and unpreparedness for independence from the Soviet Union, the republic’s

³⁵ *We Are Soviet*. Minsk: Izdatel’svo Belarus (1986), p. 3. The national anthem of the BSSR was subsequently reinstated in 1994. Yet, unlike its Russian counterpart, the lyrics remain unchanged.

³⁶ Similar policies were implemented in the Ukraine; however, the Byelorussian national consciousness was permeated more deeply by Soviet ideals. For a comparison of Belarus and Ukraine on the issues of national independence and identity, see Stephen R. Burant, “Foreign Policy and National Identity: A Comparison of Ukraine and Belarus” *Europe-Asia Studies*. Vol. 47, No. 7, November 1995, pp. 1125-1144.

³⁷ Cited in Dmitry Alexandrov, “Belarus: To Be or Not to Be a Nation” *The Russia Journal*. Vol. 2. No. 25, 17 July 1999.

³⁸ Kathleen Mihalisko, “Tug-of-War Between the Ruling Party and Its Challengers” *Report On the USSR*. Vol. 3, No. 1, 4 January 1991, p. 20.

push for autonomy was rather unsubstantial, and only came to the fore as late as 1990-1991.³⁹ While neighbouring republics hurdled towards independence and a return to a “common European house,” post-Soviet Belarus failed to establish a clear sense of direction, national identity and sovereign existence, independent of the Soviet Union. “Orphaned” by the collapse of the USSR—Belarus emerged onto the European map as a virtual *terra incognita*—set adrift in Russia’s orbit.

2.2 MILITARY HISTORY

The Baltic-Black Sea axis has acted as Russia’s first line of defence against the collective might of the European powers from the early eighteenth century to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Since the Northern War of 1700-1721 conducted by Tsarist forces against Sweden, the territory constituting present-day Belarus has acted as Russia’s “western geostrategic outpost.”⁴⁰ As part of both the Russian Empire and the USSR, Belarusian territory has repeatedly served the dual roles of bulwark for repelling or slowing foreign invaders attempting to conquer Russia throughout history—and vice versa—as Moscow’s strategic “window” to Europe.

Providing reliable protection for Russian centres from the European powers, the area became a forward garrison for the Tsarist Empire, and later, the Soviet Union. Conversely, tradition and myth have also played a significant role in projecting Russia’s

³⁹ For helpful overview, see Kathleen Mihalisko, “Prospects for ‘the Last Bulwark of Bolshevism in Eastern Europe’” *Report on the USSR*. Vol. 3, No. 32, pp. 15-18.

⁴⁰ Vladimir Snapkovsky, “Belorussko-rossiiskie otnosheniya: opyt istorii i sovremennye problemy” [Belarusian-Russian Relations: Historic Experience and Modern Challenges] *Belarus v mire*. Vol. 2, Issue 2, July 1997, p. 54.

image as the vanguard of Orthodox Christianity and defender of *Belaya Rus'*.⁴¹ It is no coincidence that in light of NATO's eastward expansion, similar perceptions have been recast with a contemporary spin.

While this regional core is not only vulnerable due to its lack of topographic features allowing for effective defence, by accident of geography it also became the historic arena for East-West rivalries. Belarus is landlocked and geographically situated directly between the Berlin-Moscow axis. Its territory provides the shortest western access route to and from Russia—a precarious corridor that cuts directly through the Belarusian heartland. More often than not, repeated invasions and counter-offensives throughout history reduced the country into a battlefield by providing a passageway for advancing armies to and from Russia. Consequently, the area comprising contemporary Belarus had become the theatre of some of the bloodiest military operations of any district under Tsarist or Soviet tutelage.

At the conclusion of World War II, Byelorussia found itself in a radically different geopolitical situation than in 1939.⁴² While no longer a “front-line state,” the BSSR's strategic role was augmented considerably as the “western shield” of the Soviet Union. Consequently, the republic became one of the most militarised areas in the world and a

⁴¹ For helpful overview, see Alexei Kavko, “Istoriko-kul'turnye predposylki rossiisko-belorusskikh otnoshenii” [Historical and Cultural Preconditions of Russia-Belarus Relations] *Rossiisko-Belorusskiye otnosheniya: problemy i perspektivy*. Boris Shmelev (ed.) Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences (1998), pp. 94-100.

⁴² For an extensive documented narrative of the BSSR's role in World War II, see A.T. Kuzmin, *Vsenarodnaya borba v Belorussii protiv nemetsko-fashistskikh zakhvatchikov v gody Velikoi Otchestvennoi voiny*. [International Struggle in Byelorussia Against the Fascist German Invaders During the Years of the Great Patriotic War] Vols. 1-3. Minsk: Izdatel'stvo Belarus (1983-1985).

strategic glacis to the overall defence capability of the USSR for the duration of the titanic East-West ideological stand-off, defined as the Cold War. As the Cold War began to crystallise, the Western powers⁴³ came together with the vision of attaining territorial security by forming the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation—a collective security arrangement designed, as its original *raison d'être*, to defend the West against the Soviet Union.

NATO's collective political-military efforts would thus be able to both propagate Western values within member states, while militarily deterring—and if necessary—countering any potential aggression from the USSR.⁴⁴ Yet, it was the decision to expand NATO eastward to include the Federal Republic of Germany in 1955, and not the initial Washington Treaty of 1949 that triggered the Soviets to respond with the Warsaw Treaty Organisation.⁴⁵ The eastward enlargement of NATO was perceived as an advancement of a hostile coalition that could only be deterred from launching an attack on the USSR by Soviet military strength.⁴⁶ This perception of threat validated the Warsaw Pact while legitimising the heavy Soviet military presence in the “satellite states” of Central and Eastern Europe.

⁴³ The founding countries of NATO are Belgium, Canada, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States.

⁴⁴ For details on the collective security arrangement itself, see “The North Atlantic Treaty” *The NATO Handbook*. Brussels: NATO Office of Information and Press (1999), pp. 395-399.

⁴⁵ *The Warsaw Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance* (14 May 1955-1 July 1991), composed originally of the Soviet Union, Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Romania.

⁴⁶ Christopher Donnelly, *Red Banner: The Soviet Military System in Peace and War*. Coudsdon: Jane's Information Group (1988), pp. 172-173.

Providing a unified military command over the Soviet bloc, the Treaty also served as leverage to enhance the bargaining position of the USSR in international diplomacy. An inference drawn to the preamble, which gave the reason for the Warsaw Treaty Organisation's existence as "the result of ratification of the Paris agreements, which provide for the formation of a new military grouping in the shape of the 'Western European Union' together with a remilitarized Western Germany and its integration within the North Atlantic bloc, which increases the danger of another war and creates a threat to the national security of peace-loving states."⁴⁷ As well as the concluding article that stipulates the conditional dissolution of the Warsaw Pact once a common East-West security model should come into force.⁴⁸

The Soviet Union proceeded to fortify its western borderlands as a means of strategic defence in order to protect itself from a perceived threat of NATO attack. As a result, almost three-quarters of all Soviet military firepower was concentrated in the borderland area of the USSR.⁴⁹ The Byelorussian SSR became home to the second strategic echelon forces of the Warsaw Pact—behind the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia and Poland. The Byelorussian Military District hosted the most powerful grouping of the Warsaw Pact.⁵⁰ Its Cold War defences were comprised of ten Red Army divisions—a 250,000-member force outfitted with the most efficient and best equipped soldiers that

⁴⁷ "Dogovor o druzhbe, sotrudnichestve i vzaimnoi pomoshchi" [Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance] *Izvestiia*. 15 May 1955.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Richard Woff, *The Armed Forces of the Former Soviet Union*. Vol. 2. Hampshire: Carmichael and Sweet (1996), p. E2-1.

⁵⁰ Yuri Portnov, "Voennoe sotrudnichestvo Belarus-Rossiya" [Belarus-Russia Military Cooperation] *Belarus v mire*. Vol. 1, Issue 2, October 1996, p. 65.

the USSR had to offer, including state-of the-art conventional weaponry, elaborate air defence networks, a modern air force, tactical nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).⁵¹

In the event of armed hostilities with the West, the Byelorussian Army Group was tasked to deliver a combination of deep tactical nuclear strikes against NATO forces, as well as partake in the multi-echeloned “iron-fisted punch” into Western Europe with heavy Soviet armour.⁵² The Byelorussian Military District was buttressed by 12 tank divisions—comprised of late generation main battle tanks,⁵³ totalling 4,411 units—roughly equal to NATO’s 4,425 in France, Great Britain, Italy and Spain combined.⁵⁴ Accordingly, more than 200 military bases were spread out over the republic’s 200,000 square kilometres.⁵⁵

By the early 1990s, the BSSR had become the most militarised region of the Soviet Union and of Europe. The republic acquired the world’s sixth largest nuclear arsenal.⁵⁶ Correspondingly, troop concentrations reached one soldier per 43 civilians—the highest of any Soviet republic—including Russia (1:634), Ukraine (1:98) and Kazakhstan

⁵¹ Vladimir Snapkovsky, “Geopalitychnaye stanovishcha Belarusi: ychora i sennya” [The Geopolitical Status of Belarus: Yesterday and Today] *Belaruskaya minushchyna*. No. 3, 1994, p. 37.

⁵² For a helpful overview on Soviet military tactics during the Cold War, see William E. Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military*. New Haven: Yale University Press (1998), pp. 73-80.

⁵³ Richard Woff, *The Armed Forces of the Former Soviet Union*. Vol. 2. Hampshire: Carmichael and Sweet (1996), p. E2-18.

⁵⁴ Yuri Portnov, “Voennoe sotrudnichestvo Belarus-Rossiya” [Belarus-Russia Military Cooperation] *Belarus v mire*. Vol. 1, Issue 2, October 1996, p. 65.

⁵⁵ Michel Fromont, “A New Lease for the Belarus Military” *World of Work*. No. 14, December 1995, pp. 24.

⁵⁶ See Kathleen Mihalisko, “Belarus: Retreat to Authoritarianism” *Democratic Changes and Authoritarian Reactions in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova*. Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (eds.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1996), p. 225.

(1:118).⁵⁷ The Byelorussian Military District was the training ground for new weaponry and experimental field tactics, including such large-scale exercises as *Dnepr* (1967), *Dvina* (1970), *Berezina* (1978) and *Zapad-81* (1981).⁵⁸ The BSSR earned the reputation as a proving area for the Soviet Army, as well as units from the Warsaw Pact. In February 1968, in recognition of its “major contribution to strengthening the defensive might of the Soviet State and its military defence,” the Military District was awarded the Order of the Red Banner—the highest military honour of the Soviet Union.⁵⁹

An equally important feature of the Byelorussian SSR’s overall military capability was its prominent role in the Soviet military-industrial complex as the “assembly plant” of the USSR and “shop window of developed socialism.” In the grand scheme of *Gosplan* (state planning) Soviet republics were designed to function as part of a greater whole. In Byelorussia’s case, as the final element in an elaborate manufacturing chain in which defence procurement encompassed approximately 70 percent of the republic’s total industrial output and over half of the state’s budget.⁶⁰ The BSSR’s military-industrial complex was both one of the most effective and specialised sectors of the entire Soviet military apparatus.

⁵⁷ Stanislav Shushkevich, “Television Interview on the Minsk Summit” FBIS-SOV-032, 18 February 1992. J.L. Black (ed.), *Russia and Eurasia Documents Annual 1992: CIS and Successor States*. Vol. 2. Gulf Breeze: Academic International Press (1994), p. 379.

⁵⁸ Stephen Main, *Belarus-Russian Military Relations (1991-1998)*. Camberley: Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (1998), p. 2.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Aleksandr Kotikov, “Belorussiya-Rossiya: model’ postsovetsskoi integratsii?” [Belarus-Russia: Post-Soviet Model of Integration?] *Etnicheskiye i regionalnyye konflikty v Evrazii: Rossiya, Ukraina i Belorussiya*. [Ethnic and Regional Conflicts in Eurasia: Russia, Ukraine and Belarus] Alexei Zverev, Bruno Coppieters and Dmitry Trenin (eds.) Moscow: Ves’ Mir (1997), p. 214; George Sanford, “Belarus on the Road to Nationhood” *Survival*. Vol. 38, No. 1, Spring 1996, p. 140.

An estimated one million people were employed throughout the Byelorussian Military District, including workers throughout the military-industrial complex and support staff within the defence establishment.⁶¹ Production for defence purposes was very high, so too was the influence of the KGB and State *apparatus* that drove defence production. In the hierarchy of Soviet society, the military was lavished with resources and occupied a prestigious position—second only to the Communist Party. Correspondingly, the USSR possessed both the manufacturing capability and the ideological legitimacy to justify its over-militarised status. The military was lavished with resources of the highest quality right up to the collapse of the Soviet Union, almost without regard to cost.

Not long before the collapse of the USSR, the Soviet Armed Forces launched a comprehensive programme of upgrading its military equipment. The most sophisticated of which, had been supplied to the Warsaw Pact countries and the “second echelon” Soviet republics of Byelorussia, Moldova and Ukraine. Subsequently, the modernisation came at a time when stockpiles of sophisticated military equipment and ordinance withdrawn from the German Democratic Republic in the late 1980s were stored in the BSSR, augmenting newly independent Belarus’s arsenal considerably.⁶² The Cold War military build-up had left independent the republic with an inventory of conventional weaponry which to date still surpasses those of most European states.

⁶¹ Aleksandr Gordeichik, “Voenno-politicheskie aspekty otnoshenii Belarus-Rossia” [Military-Political Aspects of Belarus-Russia Relations] *Belorussko-rossiiskie otnoshenia: problemy i perspektivy*. Vladimir Snapkovsky and Aleksandr Sharapo (eds.) Minsk: Belarusian State University (2000), p. 108.

⁶² Alexander Panov, “Belarusian Army: Scarecrow for Europe?” *Belarus Now*. 6 April 1999.

As a traditional military stronghold, Belarus inherited much of its military hardware after the USSR collapsed. Along with well-trained soldiers, a vast arsenal of conventional and nuclear weapons, and a massive military-industrial complex, Belarus became (and to a large extent still remains) a well armed country, and a western gateway to the Eurasian geopolitical formation known as the CIS.

2.3 CONTEMPORARY ISSUES AND ENDURING INTERESTS

On 27 July 1990, the Supreme Council of the BSSR officially declared itself autonomous from the Soviet Union by formally adopting the Declaration of State Sovereignty. As the cornerstone of independent statehood, the declaration proclaimed the republic's intention to take control of its domestic, economic and foreign affairs; as well as adopt the norms and practices of sovereign statehood—including the right “to ban the stationing of nuclear weapons on its territory, create its own army and become a neutral, non-aligned state.”⁶³ Facing the imminent mortality of the Soviet Union after the failed August putsch in Moscow, the Supreme Soviet of the BSSR declared sovereignty on 26 August 1991. It subsequently abandoned the name “Byelorussian SSR” in favour of the “Republic of Belarus” while simultaneously omitting all “Soviet” and “socialist” references from the constitution on 19 September 1991.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the traditional Belarusian flag and emblem were readopted as the state's official symbols after being confined to obscure history books for the better part of the twentieth century.⁶⁵

⁶³ Kathleen Mihalisko, “Tug-of-War Between the Ruling Party and Its Challengers” *Report On the USSR*. Vol. 3, No. 1, 4 January 1991, p. 20.

⁶⁴ Kathleen Mihalisko, “Belorussia: Setting Sail Without a Compass” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 1, No. 1, 3 January 1992, pp. 40-41.

⁶⁵ The pre-Soviet Belarusian flag consists of three equal-sized horizontal stripes (white-red-white). The *Pogonia* was adopted as the national emblem (a crest in the form of a knight on a galloping horse used by

Belarus-Russia relations had been shaped early on by two major factors—Moscow’s strategic interests and Belarus’s economic dependence—a symbiotic relationship that continues largely unchanged to this day. The earliest evidence of Russian efforts to preserve military ties with Belarus dates back to just after the August 1991 coup attempt, when the Soviet Union was in its final death throws. According to historian Jan Zaprudnik, the Kremlin had proposed an exclusive security arrangement with Minsk concerning mutual defence. Zaprudnik notes that a defence clause with Belarus was “notably absent” from similar Russian arrangements with Ukraine and Kazakhstan.⁶⁶

On 8 December 1991, Belarus, Russia and Ukraine formed the Commonwealth of Independent States—Minsk was designated its capital. The Belarus leadership at the time regarded the CIS not as an end in itself, but rather, as a temporary vehicle to facilitate a “civilised divorce” from the Soviet Union.⁶⁷ As for the thorny question of orientation, Parliamentary Chairman Stanislav Shushkevich had made it clear that Belarus’s interests lay within a “common European house” by repeatedly reaffirming Minsk’s position on maintaining a thoroughly European vision of itself and its future as a nation.⁶⁸ Piotr Kravchenko, then Belarus Foreign Minister over enthusiastically described Minsk as the “Brussels of the East” and summarised his ideal vision of Belarus as:

A non-nuclear belt in the centre of Europe, encompassing the Scandinavian countries of Northern Europe, the Baltic area, as well as the

the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the fourteenth century). The Republic of Lithuania presently uses a similar coat of arms.

⁶⁶ Jan Zaprudnik, *Belarus: At a Crossroads*. Boulder: Westview Press (1993), p. 213.

⁶⁷ Cited in Kathleen Mihalisko, “The Outlook for Independent Belarus” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 1, No. 24, 12 June 1992, p. 7.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

states of Eastern and Central Europe. Our ideal is economic and political integration into the European community while upholding and strengthening, for a transitional period, the Commonwealth of Independent States.⁶⁹

Given the country's geopolitical location, and its ill-preparedness for independence, Belarus sought to establish balanced relations with all its neighbours, while at the same time maintaining traditionally close ties with Russia. Although it could claim access to nuclear weapons in 1991-1992, the republic was in no position to defend itself militarily—thus, evoking the need for balanced relations with all adjoining states.⁷⁰

Traumatized by the collapse of the Soviet Union, Belarus had emerged with an ingrained history of evolving hand-in-hand with Russia and the USSR. Its complex past and poorly defined national identity had obscured the emergent republic from view of the Western world for the better part of its existence, despite holding a permanent seat in the United Nations since 1945.⁷¹ Post-Soviet independence suddenly compelled the Belarusian *nomenklatura* to confront the complex issues of its existence outside of the Soviet Union, and define its place in Europe. Despite the incumbent authorities' posturing, verbiage and official declarations of independence, they proved incapable of building consensus, formulating national interests, or define a clear idea on the nature and significance of national sovereignty to ordinary citizens. For the most part, Belarus remained hostage to the past.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ For extensive discussion, see Ustina Markus, "Belarus a 'Weak Link' in Eastern Europe?" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 2, No. 49, 10 December 1993, p. 22.

⁷¹ For helpful overview, see Vladimir Snapkovsky, *Belorusskaya SSR v OON*. [The Byelorussian SSR in the UN] Minsk: Nauka i tekhnika (1985).

2.4 INDEPENDENCE AND THE SOVIET MILITARY LEGACY

Across the former Soviet Union, the struggle for sovereignty ultimately assumed a military component. Belarus, like the remainder of newly independent states of the former USSR, faced the monolithic tasks of delineating and safeguarding state borders, dividing Soviet military assets, building a national Army and defining its security policy. Unscathed by the destructive civil strife and ethnic conflict that ravaged a number of other former Soviet republics following the downfall of the USSR, Belarus was able to make a peaceful, if unfocused transition to independence.⁷²

On 20 March 1992, the Byelorussian Supreme Soviet ratified a decree to create a national Armed Force.⁷³ Belarus established its military on the basis of the Byelorussian Military District by using former Soviet army units deployed in the republic.⁷⁴ Considering that the Soviet military used a forward deployment strategy of its best forces in the borderland military districts; these mainly Russian units found themselves under the jurisdiction of newly independent states at the conclusion of the Soviet Union.⁷⁵ Subsequently, Belarus acquired a sizeable piece of the Soviet military arsenal. The republic's interim leadership abandoned the previous Soviet security structure and began to stake out a position as a neutral, non-nuclear power. In the face of Russian grumblings over the creation of a national Army, acting Defence Minister Lieutenant-General Piotr Chaus, the former

⁷² Belarus joined the ranks of a number of key international organisations in 1992, including the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (formerly CSCE).

⁷³ Richard Woff, *The Armed Forces of the Former Soviet Union*. Vol. 2. Hampshire: Carmichael and Sweet (1996), p. E2-39.

⁷⁴ Ustina Markus, "Belarus Debates Security Pacts as a Cure for Military Woes" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 2, No. 25, 18 June 1993, p. 68.

⁷⁵ Douglas L. Clarke, "The Russian Military and the CFE Treaty" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 2, No. 42, 22 October 1993, p. 40.

[Soviet] Baltic Military District Commander, declared the probability of any military conflict between Belarus and Russia as impossible.⁷⁶ To ease Russian fears, Chairman Shushkevich underscored that regardless of political events in Moscow, Belarus would continue to maintain good relations with Russia.⁷⁷ The largest task facing the Belarusian government in the security sphere was the disassembly of the former Soviet military structure and nuclear arsenal. First, Belarus was to replace its existing heavy armoured divisions with highly mobile mechanised brigades of a defensive character.⁷⁸

The Belarusian Armed Forces would be comprised of three branches—Ground Defence Forces, Air Force, and Air Defence. The Ground Defence Forces constitute the primary arm of service and consist of three army corps and ten brigades.⁷⁹ Second, the republic's extensive Air Defence and Air Force units were to be consolidated into a unified group.⁸⁰ Third, a peacetime cap limited the maximum amount of servicemen in the Belarusian armed forces to 100,000—or one percent of the country's total population.⁸¹ Fourth, a ban was put on military service for Belarusian servicemen on foreign soil, in addition to an immediate order repatriating Belarusian troops serving in conflict zones of the former Soviet Union.⁸² Fifth, Belarus adopted a new military oath of allegiance, though it was

⁷⁶ Ustina Markus, "Belarus a 'Weak Link' in Eastern Europe?" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 2, No. 49, 10 December 1993, p. 27.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Stephen Foye and Douglas L. Clarke (eds.), "Military and Security Notes: Belarusian Military Reform" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 1, No. 24, 12 June 1992, p. 46.

⁷⁹ Richard Woff, *The Armed Forces of the Former Soviet Union*. Vol. 2. Hampshire: Carmichael and Sweet (1996), p. E2-18.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Aleksandr Chumakov, "Belorusskaya armiya: problemy i perspektivy" [The Belarusian Army: Problems and Perspectives] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*. 22 February 1997.

⁸² Douglas L. Clarke (ed.), "Military and Security Notes: Belarus Wants Its Soldiers Out of Hot Spots" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 1, No. 13, 27 March 1992, p. 52.

not put into practice until the end of 1993.⁸³ Unlike the Ukrainian variant, it did not stipulate that a soldier had to hold Belarusian citizenship.⁸⁴ Lastly, a military doctrine was enacted on 16 December 1992, tying all the above factors together in an overarching framework.

In the international arena, Belarus joined the ranks of a number of key international institutions, including the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (formerly CSCE).⁸⁵ Moreover, Minsk affirmed its commitment to the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE),⁸⁶ which placed numerical limits on a comprehensive array of offensive conventional weapons; including troops (100,000), battle tanks (1,800), armoured personnel carriers (2,600), artillery (1,615), combat aircraft (260) and attack helicopters (80).⁸⁷ To conceptualise the scale of conventional arms reductions, Belarus's holdings alone accounted for 10 percent of the armoured personnel carriers reduced by 30 signatory countries under the CFE Treaty.⁸⁸

Belarus also became a signatory to the Nunn-Lugar Programme, a US backed initiative which financed and oversaw the de-militarisation and conversion of Soviet military

⁸³ Stephen Foye (ed.), "Military and Security Notes: Belarusian Military to Take Oath" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 1, No. 33, 21 August 1992, p. 59.

⁸⁴ Ustina Markus, "Belarus Debates Security Pacts as a Cure for Military Woes" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 2, No. 25, 18 June 1993, p. 68.

⁸⁵ For a complete listing of agreements signed by Belarus within the CSCE/OSCE framework, see *OSCE Handbook*. Vienna: Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (2000), pp. 169-176.

⁸⁶ The CFE was originally signed by members of NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organisation on 19 November 1990. For detailed analysis, see Douglas L. Clarke, "The Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty: Limits and Zones" *Report on Eastern Europe*. 11 January 1991, pp. 34-39.

⁸⁷ "Manpower and Treaty Limited Equipment: Current Holdings and CFE Limits on the Forces of the Treaty Members" *The Military Balance 1992-1993*. London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies (1992), p. 244.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

industries within key weapons-producing republics of the former Soviet Union.⁸⁹ In addition to conventional weapons reductions, Belarus complied with the START-1 nuclear disarmament treaty the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and, later, the Lisbon Protocol.⁹⁰ Battlefield chemical weapons were reportedly withdrawn to Russia in 1991.⁹¹

In contrast to Ukraine, Belarus placed priority on disposing its nuclear arsenal. Minsk committed itself to an accelerated schedule, despite originally agreeing to remove all nuclear weapons from its soil within a seven-year period.⁹² The republic inherited an estimated several hundred to a thousand tactical nuclear weapons spread over 23 bases, in addition to 81 SS-25 single-warhead ICBMs.⁹³ Belarus was formerly the location of approximately 25 percent of the Soviet Union's land-mobile SS-25 ICBMs, 54 of which were based at Mozyr and Lida before negotiations were completed for their return to Russia.⁹⁴ Ironically, the Belarusian Armed Forces were never able to actually use the weapons, since the missiles remained under Russian control and the launch codes remained in Moscow.⁹⁵ While it is difficult to find consensus among various sources as

⁸⁹ Signatories include Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine. The programme covers the elimination of nuclear and chemical weapons, launchers and silos, in addition to the conversion of military industries to civilian use. Cited in "Program Nunn-Lugar" [The Nunn-Lugar Programme] *Polityka*. No. 10, 6 March 1999, p. 35.

⁹⁰ John Leppingwell, "Belarus Ratifies START-1 Treaty" *RFE/RL News Briefs*. 1-5 February 1993, p. 18.

⁹¹ *Jane's Sentinel: Russia and the CIS*. Coulsdon: Jane's Information Group (January-June 2000), p. 137.

⁹² John Leppingwell and Alfred A. Reisch, "Military and Security Notes: Belarus to Speed Up Nuclear Weapons Removal?" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 1, No. 40, 9 October 1992, p. 51.

⁹³ John Leppingwell, "Belarus Requests Compensation for Nuclear Weapons" *RFE/RL News Briefs*. 10-21 January 1994, p. 2; Martha Brill Olcott, Anders Åslund, and Sherman W. Garnett, (eds.), *Getting it Wrong: Regional Cooperation and the Commonwealth of Independent States*. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (1999), p. 99.

⁹⁴ *Jane's Sentinel: Russia and the CIS*. Coulsdon: Jane's Information Group (January-June 2000), p. 136.

⁹⁵ Vyacheslav Zenkovich, "Interview with Defense Minister Pavel Kozlovskii" *Interfax*. 20 August 1992. J.L. Black (ed.), *Russia and Eurasia Documents Annual 1992: CIS and Successor States*. Vol. 2. Gulf Breeze: Academic International Press (1994), p. 401.

to the exact number of troops in Belarus at the time of the Soviet collapse, the most commonly cited figure is 160,000.⁹⁶ The Supreme Soviet's first task in relation to the military was to subordinate all former Soviet personnel on its territory to the new government (with the exception of Russian strategic forces).⁹⁷

Chairman Shushkevich stressed the need for military reductions, since Minsk could neither sustain nor justify what he believed to be the highest concentration of troops to civilians (1:43) in the world.⁹⁸ He hoped to do away with the [Soviet] Byelorussian military role and transform it into an 80,000-member force for Belarus's own defence.⁹⁹ Compounding this dilemma was the issue of an estimated 40,000 Russian troops stationed in Belarus which were not immediately sent back to Russia for lack of housing.¹⁰⁰ In addition to the large numbers already on Belarusian soil, many more troops withdrawn from Central and Eastern Europe refused for the same reason to leave Belarus while in transit.¹⁰¹ Unlike the remainder of the western republics of the former USSR, the Belarusian Supreme Soviet agreed to allow 30,000 Russian troops (mainly

⁹⁶ Cited in Kathleen Mihalisko, "Belarus Moves to Assert Its Own Military Policy" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 1, No. 11, 13 March 1992, p. 48. Conflicting reports have placed this figure as high as 240,000. For details, see Jan Zaprudnik, *Belarus: At a Crossroads in History*. Boulder: Westview Press (1993), p. 206.

⁹⁷ Stephen Foye and Douglas L. Clarke (eds.), "Military and Security Notes: Belarus Takes Charge of Forces" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 1, No. 4, 24 January 1992, p. 60.

⁹⁸ Stanislav Shushkevich, "Television Interview on the Minsk Summit" FBIS-SOV-032, 18 February 1992. J.L. Black (ed). *Russia and Eurasia Documents Annual 1992: CIS and Successor States*. Vol. 2. Gulf Breeze: Academic International Press (1994), p. 379.

⁹⁹ Kathleen Mihalisko, "Belarus Moves to Assert Its Own Military Policy" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 1, No. 11, 13 March 1992, p. 48.

¹⁰⁰ Ustina Markus, "Belarus a 'Weak Link' in Eastern Europe?" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 2, No. 49, 10 December 1993, p. 24.

¹⁰¹ Ustina Markus, "Belarus Debates Security Pacts as a Cure for Military Woes" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 2, No. 25, 18 June 1993, p. 72.

strategic forces units) to be stationed in the republic for seven years.¹⁰² By virtue of a special military accord, these units remained subordinate to Moscow; however, Belarusian security officials made it clear that the agreement should not be viewed as a military union, since the possibility of conducting joint operations was not touched upon.¹⁰³

On account of Belarus's geopolitical position, neutrality was seen as key to strengthening the new republic's sovereignty and foreign policy. This position was upheld by Belarusian Defence Minister Colonel-General Pavel Kozlovsky,¹⁰⁴ who passionately argued that no other European state had experienced as much destruction and grief due to war throughout its history as Belarus.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, he maintained that the Belarusian people had earned the right to neutrality and that his country had no intention of attacking anyone.¹⁰⁶ However, Kozlovsky acknowledged that neutrality could not be implemented before the strategic nuclear arms were withdrawn from Belarusian territory.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Stephen Foye (ed.), "Military and Security Notes: Russian Troops to Stay in Belarus for Seven Years" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 1, No. 32, 14 August 1992, p. 45.

¹⁰³ Stephen Foye and Alfred A. Reisch, (eds.), "Military and Security Notes: Minsk and Moscow Move Toward Cooperation" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 1, No. 31, 31 July 1992, p. 60.

¹⁰⁴ Lieutenant-General Chaus was replaced by Colonel-General Pavel Kozlovsky on 22 April 1992.

¹⁰⁵ Mikhail Shimansky, "Pervoe interv'yu pervogo ministra oborony Belarusi" [First Interview with Belarus's First Minister of Defence] *Izvestiia*. 23 April 1992.

¹⁰⁶ Vyacheslav Zenkovich, "Interview with Defense Minister Pavel Kozlovskii" *Interfax*. 20 August 1992. J.L. Black (ed.), *Russia and Eurasia Documents Annual 1992: CIS and Successor States*. Vol. 2. Gulf Breeze: Academic International Press (1994), pp. 401.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

The defence minister admitted that neutrality would be a difficult goal to achieve, even referring to it as a “beautiful dream”¹⁰⁸ since crucial international communication lines connecting Russia with the West cross Belarusian territory.¹⁰⁹ Structurally, 80 percent of the Belarusian officer corps was believed to be comprised of ethnic Russians¹¹⁰—whose allegiances to Minsk were questionable at best. All told, the national Army was considered to be “Belarusian in name only.”¹¹¹ Moreover, Russia stopped offering special economic treatment to former Soviet republics outside of the CIS military command structure, and began demanding hard currency for fuel, equipment and military training.¹¹²

Making matters worse was the fact that Belarus’s national budget only provided for half of the military’s needs—\$6.5 billion rubles, or 6.3 percent of the total budget.¹¹³ The financial shortfalls and disruptions had manifested themselves very quickly and took a drastic toll on Belarus’s highly dependent economy. The strongest backlash against neutrality came from the Belarusian military-industrial complex, which at one point, even

¹⁰⁸ Cited in George Sanford, “Belarus on the Road to Nationhood” *Survival*. Vol. 38, No. 1, Spring 1996, p. 140.

¹⁰⁹ Vyacheslav Zenkovich, “Interview with Defense Minister Pavel Kozlovskii” *Interfax*. 20 August 1992. J.L. Black (ed.), *Russia and Eurasia Documents Annual 1992: CIS and Successor States*. Vol. 2. Gulf Breeze: Academic International Press (1994), p. 400.

¹¹⁰ Richard Woff, *The Armed Forces of the Former Soviet Union*. Vol. 2. Hampshire: Carmichael and Sweet (1996), p. E2-17.

¹¹¹ Ustina Markus, “Belarus a ‘Weak Link’ in Eastern Europe?” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 2, No. 49, 10 December 1993, p. 24.

¹¹² After Minsk refused to sign the Treaty of Tashkent, Moscow abandoned its previous policy of accepting barter trade. Subsequently, Russia demanded hard currency for supplies and military instruction—\$5,000 per officer, and \$50,000 per pilot. See Alexei Yeroshenko, “Oborotnaya storona suvrenizatsii” [The Other Side of Sovereignty] *Rossiiskaya gazeta*. 1 July 1993.

¹¹³ Stephen Foye, “Belarus to Cut Defense Spending” *RFE/RL News Briefs*. Vol. 2, No. 10, 22-26 February 1993, p. 20.

called for a reassessment of its status.¹¹⁴ With over 100 defence-related enterprises located in Belarus alone, the conversion of military industries to civilian use had been slow and riddled with problems.¹¹⁵ Anxious Belarusian defence enterprise directors aggravated the dilemma by demanding that Minsk sign on to the CIS collective security arrangement.¹¹⁶ Yet, their demands were related more to production disruptions that resulted with the break-up of the USSR, rather than a perception of threat. By March 1993, the Belarusian military-industrial complex still encompassed approximately half of the republic's total industrial output.¹¹⁷ Belarus produced relatively high quality, advanced military equipment, but nearly all production depended on major infrastructural links to key industries outside the country, mostly now located in Russia.

Moreover, Belarus's near total dependence on its eastern neighbour for subsidised fuel and raw materials—crucial elements in the republic's own national reconstruction—became substantially more expensive once Moscow began demanding hard currency and restricted barter trade. The potential loss of military procurement contracts threatened the positions of some 250,000 to 300,000 specialists working in the defence sector alone, a formidable number for a republic of ten million.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Ustina Markus, "Belarus Debates Security Pacts as a Cure for Military Woes" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 2, No. 25, 18 June 1993, p. 68.

¹¹⁵ See Peter Almquist, "Arms Producers Struggle to Survive as Defense Orders Shrink" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 2, No. 25, 18 June 1993, p. 39-40.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Kathleen Mihalisko, "Belarus: Neutrality Gives Way to 'Collective Security'" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 2, No. 17, 23 April 1993, p. 30.

¹¹⁸ Conflicting reports place this figure as high as 600,000. See Peter Almquist, "Arms Producers Struggle to Survive as Defense Orders Shrink" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 2, No. 25, 18 June 1993, p. 40; Ustina Markus, "Belarus Debates Security Pacts as a Cure for Military Woes" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 2, No. 25, 18 June 1993, p. 69.

2.5 FROM NEUTRALITY TO COLLECTIVE SECURITY

On 20 July 1992, Belarus entered into a series of agreements, which are commonly regarded as its first stage towards military integration, or more accurately, reintegration with the Russian Federation. A package of 19 economic and five military protocols were signed. These agreements dealt with the Soviet legacy of Belarus's massive Soviet military build-up, since its territory had been used right up to the collapse of the USSR as a primary training base for both the Red and Soviet Armies. The accords defined and coordinated bilateral activities in the military sphere, settled the basic questions over the temporary stationing of Russian strategic forces on Belarusian soil, as well as supplying mutual technical and economic assistance to both forces.¹¹⁹ All military accords covered a period of five years, with the option, where necessary, of renewal for a further 12 months.

Despite an agreement bringing both states into a "single strategic area," Defence Minister Kozlovsky categorically underscored that the accords should neither be interpreted as a military union, nor should its outcome be perceived as a manifestation directed against a third state—instead, Belarus wanted to establish equal footing with Russia in the military sphere, and "was not in search of an adversary."¹²⁰ Although Shushkevich and

¹¹⁹ Vladimir Yermolin, "Rossiya i Belarus: zametnoe sblizhenie pozitsii. V tom chisle v voennoi oblasti" [Russia and Belarus: A Notable Rapprochement in Positions. Particularly in the Military Sphere] *Krasnaya zvezda*. 22 July 1992.

¹²⁰ The Treaty on Coordination of Activities in the Defence Area brought Belarus into a "single strategic area" with the Russian Federation for a transitional period of five years, until Belarus established its own Armed Forces. Cited in Yuri Portnov, "Voennoe sotrudnichestvo Belarus-Rossiya" [Belarus-Russia Military Cooperation] *Belarus v mire*. Vol. 1, Issue 2, October 1996, p. 65; For comments by Defence Minister Kozlovsky, see "Tsel'—ravnopravnye otnosheniya" [The Goal—Equal Relations] *Vo slavu Rodiny*. 24 July 1992.

Kozlovsky took a more pragmatic stance, conservative Premier Vyacheslav Kebich considered the agreements on military matters to be the most significant.¹²¹

The Russian government's abolition of the [Soviet] Byelorussian Military District on 6 May 1992 marked the end of the republic's largely unbroken 200-year tradition of military history and service to the Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union.¹²² Yet, before the military district had time to fade out of sight, let alone out of mind, a CIS summit meeting at Tashkent on 16 May 1992 reminded Belarusian leaders once again of just how vital Russian interests remained in the "near abroad."¹²³ In an attempt to alleviate the age-old fear of encirclement and retain a military presence beyond its borders, Russia sought to implement the CIS Treaty on Collective Security (Treaty of Tashkent) as an institution for maintaining a common security space over the former Soviet Union.¹²⁴

Originally designed to follow along similar lines of the Warsaw Treaty model, the Treaty of Tashkent's main goals were to deter and counter potential aggression, as well as act as a vehicle for preserving Russian interests in the "near abroad"—thus preventing the use of those areas as platforms for threat to its security. Russia proposed a joint collective security arrangement whereby signatories would abide by "NATO-type" obligations—

¹²¹ "Ye. Gaidar i V. Kebich dovol'ny peregovorami" [Ye. Gaidar and V. Kebich Satisfied with Talks] *Izvestiia*. 21 July 1992.

¹²² Stephen Foye and Douglas L. Clarke (eds.), "Military and Security Notes: Belarusian Military District Abolished" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 1, No. 21, 22 May 1992, p. 39.

¹²³ For analysis on Russia's policies with Soviet successor states, see John Lough, "The Place of the 'Near Abroad' in Russian Foreign Policy" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 2, No. 11, 12 March 1993, pp. 21-29.

¹²⁴ For helpful overview, see Stephen Foye, "End of CIS Command Heralds New Russian Defense Policy?" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 2, No. 27, 2 July 1993, pp. 45-49.

viewing any act of aggression against a signatory of the agreement as aggression against all other participating states—thereby committing the parties to take collective military action.¹²⁵ The security pact was signed by six CIS states, including the Russian Federation. Belarus, Ukraine and two other republics did not affix their signatures to the treaty.

Chairman Shushkevich refused to sign the agreement, citing conflict with Belarus's neutrality policy.¹²⁶ He maintained the position that, given Belarus's geopolitical situation, Minsk required autonomous decision-making in its military sphere. Siding with caution, Shushkevich asserted that military union with Russia "could only hurt the country's interests and lead even a stronger country up a blind alley."¹²⁷ Piotr Kravchenko, then Belarus's Foreign Minister, had stronger words. He summed up the situation by stating that "Belarus has a very difficult and unique place in the CIS—on one hand, as the coordinator of the Commonwealth we are obliged to cement it—on the other, there is the danger of falling under the *diktat* of Russia."¹²⁸

In an interview with *Izvestiia* shortly after the Tashkent summit, Russian Defence Minister General Pavel Grachev argued vehemently that the dismemberment of the Soviet Union had thrust Russia's Soviet-era rear echelon divisions into a front-line role.

¹²⁵ See "Treaty on CIS Collective Security" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 2, No. 25, 18 June 1993, pp. 5-6.

¹²⁶ Vladimir Glod, "Tashkentskiye ozhidaniya" [Tashkent Expectations] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*. 16 May 1992.

¹²⁷ Cited in Kathleen Mihalisko, "Belarus Neutrality Gives Way to 'Collective Security'" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 2, No. 17, 23 April 1993, p. 68.

¹²⁸ Vladimir Glod, "Tashkentskiye ozhidaniya" [Tashkent Expectations] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*. 16 May 1992.

Arguing that the Moscow Military District, in his view, had become a “front-line” location in Russia’s western periphery, Grachev proposed the creation of a new “Smolensk” Military District (bordering on Northeastern Belarus) which, when combined with the Leningrad and North Caucasus Military Districts, would form the first echelon of a future Russian Army.¹²⁹

Grachev offered to extend Russia’s “nuclear umbrella” to any CIS signatory to the Tashkent Treaty on Collective Security.¹³⁰ This option had certain appeal to more nostalgic members of Belarus’s Supreme Soviet, who argued that the forfeiture of the republic’s “nuclear shield” would also translate into a loss of Belarus’s international prestige and respect.¹³¹ These views were also reflected in an article written by then Russian Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozyrev who advised against the admission of former Warsaw Pact countries into NATO, while subsequently claiming the entire geographic area of the former USSR as Russia’s “sphere of vital interest” (read sphere of influence).¹³²

There can be little doubt that Kozyrev’s comments were reflections of the Kremlin’s more assertive foreign policy, which called for a pro-active role in the “near abroad” and

¹²⁹ Nikolai Burbyga and Albert Putnik, “Pavel Grachev: Rossiiskuyu armiyu, po suti, nado sozdavat’ s nulya” [Pavel Grachev: The Russian Army, in Essence, Must be Created from Scratch] *Izvestia*. 1 June 1992.

¹³⁰ Stephen Foye and Douglas L. Clarke (eds.), “Military and Security Notes: Grachev on ‘Nuclear Umbrella’ and Other Topics” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 1, No. 25, 19 June 1992, p. 70.

¹³¹ “Foreign Policy ‘Important’ to Clinton” *Belinform*. FBIS-SOV-93-027, 11 February 1993, p. 40.

¹³² Andrei Kozyrev, “The New Russia and the Atlantic Alliance” *NATO Review*. Vol. 41, No. 1, February 1993, pp. 3-6.

a more aggressive stance towards maintaining Moscow's interests beyond its borders.¹³³ By early 1993, Belarus began to move away from its policy of neutrality and edged towards re-establishing military ties with its eastern neighbour. Indeed, the deliberations leading up to this decision was the subject of much heated debate both in public and behind closed doors. The conservative-dominated Supreme Soviet preferred to see the Belarusian military evolve within a CIS security framework—in part, for a smooth transition from a Soviet to a national defence structure—and conversely, since it did not believe that Belarus could finance or support its own armed forces.¹³⁴

Chairman Shushkevich strongly opposed collective security, as well as any proposals by Prime Minister Kebich to form an economic and military union with Russia.¹³⁵ He opted instead for Belarus to join efforts with its neighbours to create a Baltic-Black Sea regional cooperation and security arrangement for the purpose of fostering a “belt of neutral states” in Europe—in effect, a *cordon sanitaire* separating NATO and Russia.¹³⁶ His proposal for the most part fell on deaf ears, since Poland and the Baltics would not accept such an arrangement, since it ran contrary to their bid for NATO membership. So too did Shushkevich's motion for a nation-wide referendum on collective security, whereby he threatened to resign should the proposition go through.¹³⁷

¹³³ For analysis see Suzanne Crow, “Strategic Agenda Asserted” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Bulletin*. Vol. XI, No. 1, January 1994, pp. 1-3.

¹³⁴ Ustina Markus, “Belarus Debates Security Pacts as a Cure for Military Woes” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 2, No. 25, 18 June 1993, p. 68.

¹³⁵ Bohdan Nahaylo, “Belarusian Leader Proposed Union with Russia” *RFE/RL News Briefs*. Vol. 2, No. 15, 29 March-2 April 1993, p. 11.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Alexei Yeroshenko, “Oborotnaya storona suverenizatsii” [The Other Side of Sovereignty] *Rossiiskaya gazeta*. 1 July 1993.

In the end, Premier Kebich and the chief of the Belarusian KGB, Lieutenant-General Eduard Shirkovsky gave the Supreme Soviet a stern ultimatum on the future of Belarus's security orientation—NATO or Russia.¹³⁸ On 9 April 1993, the Supreme Soviet voted 188 to 34 in favour of signing the CIS collective security agreement. The official reasons given for the shift in policy were cited as follows:

- ❑ The realignment of spheres of influence in the world as a result of the collapse of the USSR leaves Belarus with no guarantees that its society will develop along normal, stable lines;
- ❑ Belarus has enjoyed a reliable security system for the past 70 years and its destruction now would be senseless;
- ❑ The former Soviet military-industrial complex was a unified whole that supplied state-of-the-art technology and arms as well as spare parts to all countries party to the Tashkent agreement;
- ❑ Belarus cannot develop the military sciences on its own; and
- ❑ Belarus's two military academies cannot meet the country's training needs."¹³⁹

The culmination of internal political division and the crushing weight of Belarus's complex economic dilemmas forced the Supreme Soviet to make the controversial decision of abandoning Belarus's short-lived attempt at neutrality. In the final analysis, Belarus had little choice but to sign on to the Treaty of Tashkent, owing to its economic dependence on Russia and strong internal pressures from the Belarusian military, the military-industrial complex, and conservative political elements.

Yet, it was the Supreme Soviet's willingness to place economic considerations before Belarus's own national security interests that compelled the nascent republic to conform

¹³⁸ Kathleen Mihalisko, "Belarus: Neutrality Gives Way to 'Collective Security'" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 2, No. 17, 23 April 1993, p. 31.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

its evolving military doctrine to Russian security interests and choose a path of least resistance. In the end, security choices had been made by default, demonstrating Belarus's willingness to make deep political concessions for economic benefit, rather than by perceived or otherwise real military threat.

3 FROM CORDON SANITAIRE TO STRATEGIC CORRIDOR

One of the greatest strategic impediments facing the new Russia following the collapse of the Soviet Union was the disappearance of the defensive shield built up by the USSR in its western periphery to protect the Russian heartland from the Western powers. NATO expansion caused Russia to reassess strategic imperatives and rethink security alliances in areas of traditional interest. Belarus was central to that reassessment, both states regarding close military cooperation as a major element of their national security. As the contemporary European security architecture took shape, a new battle began to brew between an expanding NATO and a Russia increasingly concerned over the compression of its western security space—an area which it has held long-standing hegemony. While the analysis thus far has examined the evolution and interdependencies of Belarus-Russia defence and security relations, the focus will now turn to examining reactions to NATO expansion by testing the hypothesis against empirical evidence.

Not only did 1994 represent a significant milestone for Belarus in light of its new constitution and first democratically elected president,¹⁴⁰ but also for the subsequent reorganisation of its defence and foreign policies from the time it renounced neutrality in 1993.¹⁴¹ Insofar as the initial post-Soviet years witnessed a debate on the parameters of the republic's neutrality, 1994 became a turning point for deepening Belarus-Russia security cooperation, which ultimately opened up prospects for a military alliance.

¹⁴⁰ Belarus was the last of the former Soviet republics to hold presidential elections.

¹⁴¹ For analysis, see Ural Latypov, *Belorussian Neutrality as a Factor of National and European Security*. Camberley: Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (1994). Latypov argues Belarus's consistency with neutrality despite its adherence to the CIS Treaty on Collective Security. Dr Latypov served as Belarus Foreign Minister and assisted in the development of Belarus's policy of neutrality; he is presently head of the Belarusian Security Council.

On 26 January 1994, the reform-minded premier, Stanislav Shushkevich was ousted from office amid charges of embezzlement from pro-Russian forces in the Supreme Soviet. His defence of the republic's neutrality and incessant stonewalling of the CIS Treaty on Collective Security had become extremely unpopular with the Belarusian Armed Forces, the security *apparat*, the military-industrial complex, and especially the Kremlin. Though officially he was dismissed on grounds of "corruption," it is more likely that Shushkevich was ousted for his staunch opposition to collective security.¹⁴² The fraud charges were afterwards shown to be false, however, the damage was done.

The conservative Vyacheslav Kebich was installed as the republic's *de facto* leader. Kebich considered integration with Russia as the "only salvation" for Belarus, and thus focussed his policies on the pursuit of restoring severed ties with Moscow as a surrogate to Western-backed economic reform.¹⁴³ Chairman Kebich's motivation behind union was mainly driven by the lack of a coherent reform plan and the republic's need for external assistance—a factor that has remained the primary motivator for integration with Russia to date.¹⁴⁴ However, his course went beyond the traditional close ties that bound Belarus to its eastern neighbour.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² For an expanded discussion, see Ustina Markus, "Conservatives Remove Belarusian Leader" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 2, No. 25, 25 February 1994, pp. 13-18.

¹⁴³ Oleg Stepaneko, "Vyacheslav Kebich: The Way out of the Crisis Lies in Union with Russia" *Pravda*. 29 April 1994. *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*. Vol. XLVI, No. 17, 25 May 1994, p. 18; Kathleen Mihalisko, "Belarus: Retreat to Authoritarianism" *Democratic Changes and Authoritarian Reactions in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova*. Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (eds.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1996), pp. 250-251.

¹⁴⁴ Martha Brill Olcott, Anders Åslund, and Sherman W. Garnett (eds.), *Getting it Wrong: Regional Cooperation and the Commonwealth of Independent States*. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (1999), p. 173.

¹⁴⁵ Among other concessions, Belarus was willing to adopt the Russian ruble and give up its right to emit its national currency—dubbed the *zaichik* [bunny]—partially because of the images of native fauna printed on the banknotes, but primarily for its tendency to 'run' with inflation. Economic integration with Belarus and

Yet, Belarus-Russia rapprochement was driven by tangible interests of both states. On one hand, Moscow's goals were primarily geopolitical—on the other, Minsk's were economic.

The 'quid pro quos' began on 11 March 1994, when Belarus and Russia concluded a set of comprehensive military agreements. They included provisions for joint border protection and training of military cadres, preservation of ties in the spheres of defence procurement, exchange of military data and technological development, as well as a provision for consultations in case of military aggression against either state.¹⁴⁶ A month later Minsk and Moscow negotiated a protocol bringing both states into a projected, but for the most part, unimplemented "ruble zone."¹⁴⁷ Under its terms, Russia cancelled Belarus's 1992-1993 debt, tantamount to 1.08 trillion rubles.¹⁴⁸ The Kremlin acquired free transit through Belarusian territory—a reported savings of \$200 million for 1994 alone; as well as a provision for stationing Russian troops at Belarusian bases free of charge—a 6.2 trillion ruble savings.¹⁴⁹

Financial benefits to Minsk were paralleled by rigid obligations in the spheres of defence and foreign policy, in effect reducing Belarus to a "guns and butter" relationship with

other CIS states became a major factor in former Russian Premier Yegor Gaidar's resignation in January 1994. For concise overview, see Mikhail Berger, "Gaidar ne vidit uslovii, pri kotorykh on otozval by svoe zayavlenie ob ostavke" [Gaidar Cannot See Conditions Under Which He Would Revoke His Resignation] *Izvestiia*. 18 January 1994.

¹⁴⁶ "Military Coordination Treaty with Russia Signed" *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-94-049, 14 March 1994.

¹⁴⁷ Mikhail Berger, "Belorussiia obmenyala chast' svoego suvereniteta na rossiiskie rubli" [Belarus Exchanges Part of Its Sovereignty for Russian Rubles] *Izvestiia*. 14 April 1994.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Grigory Selyaninov and Konstantin Smirnov, "Russia Pays the Maximum for Geopolitics" *Kommersant*. 15 April 1994. *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*. Vol. XLVI, No. 15, 11 May 1994, pp. 2.

Moscow. One Western defence analyst noted that the accords reduced the Belarusian military to the status of a Warsaw Pact army during the Soviet era.¹⁵⁰ Interestingly enough, military cooperation had little to do with monetary union.¹⁵¹ The accord only indicated that access to Belarusian bases was of “important strategic interest” to Russia—and consequentially, one of the few incentives Minsk had to offer Moscow.¹⁵² Despite the overt risk of destabilising Russia’s fragile domestic economic reform programme and the added pressures on the Kremlin to move towards similar types of integration with other former Soviet republics, only the military and transit agreements proceeded as planned. 1994 also marked a period of significant harmonisation in Belarus-Russia foreign policy. One of the earliest manifestations surfaced on 19-20 April at NATO Headquarters in Brussels, when the Belarus delegation decided to follow Russia’s lead on postponing its membership to the Partnership for Peace Programme (PfP).¹⁵³ As the last former Soviet republic to join the PfP,¹⁵⁴ Minsk chose to remain a reluctant participant, preferring to limit its participation to an “exclusively informative aspect.”¹⁵⁵ It was later revealed that Belarus was awaiting the Kremlin’s own reaction to the programme before committing itself.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁰ Albert M. Zaccor, “Belarus” *Instabilities in Post-Communist Europe*. Camberley: Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (1994), p. 3.

¹⁵¹ For useful overview, see Ustina Markus, “The Russian-Belarusian Monetary Union” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 3, No. 20, 20 May 1994, pp. 28-32.

¹⁵² See Ustina Markus, “Russia and Belarus: Elusive Integration” *Problems of Post-Communism*. Vol. 44, No. 5, September/October 1997, p. 56.

¹⁵³ Vladimir Zhdanko, “Belorussia: Signing of NATO Program Postponed: Minsk Follows Moscow’s Example Once Again” *Segodnya*. 21 April 1994. *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*. Vol. XLVI, No. 16, 18 May 1994, p. 25. For an overview of the Partnership for Peace Programme, see *The NATO Handbook*. Brussels: NATO Office of Information and Press (1999), pp. 86-97.

¹⁵⁴ “Minsk to Join NATO Partnership for Peace Program” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-95-005, 9 January 1995. Belarus became a signatory to the PfP on 11 January 1995, while Russia signed on 22 June 1994.

¹⁵⁵ “Lukashenka Addresses Veterans, Outlines Policy” *BTK Network*. FBIS-SOV-95-040, 1 March 1995.

¹⁵⁶ See Marc Nordberg, “Limiting a Larger NATO: Diverging Views from Russia and Belarus” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*. Vol. 9, No. 8, August 1997, p. 343.

Aleksandr Lukashenko's landslide victory in Belarus's first democratically held presidential election inaugurated a radical shift from Shushkevich's pragmatic, even cautious approach to Belarus-Russia relations and national security. Campaigning on a platform of restoring lost ties with Moscow while simultaneously upholding Belarusian sovereignty, Lukashenko bemoaned the loss of the Soviet Union and prided himself as the only political leader in the Belarusian Supreme Soviet who voted against the CIS accords terminating the USSR.¹⁵⁷ Lukashenko's pro-Russian, pan-Slavic rhetoric and blunt yet charismatic appeal swept him into office with over 80 percent of the country's popular vote.¹⁵⁸

As the CIS leader most consistent in support of Russia's position on NATO expansion, Lukashenko strove to re-establish military ties with Russia and not to vie for NATO membership.¹⁵⁹ It was no surprise that Lukashenko's first trip abroad as president was to Moscow in August 1994. Dissatisfied with the economic and defence agreements entered into on behalf of the Kebich administration, Lukashenko met with Boris Yeltsin to discuss an alternative framework for Belarus-Russia cooperation—including provisions for joint defence.

¹⁵⁷ Michael Specter, "Belarus Voters Pick Populist in Protest at the Quality of Life" *The New York Times*. 25 June 1994. Prior to Lukashenko's election to the Supreme Soviet, he briefly served as an ideology officer in the KGB-run Border Guard before becoming collective farm manager.

¹⁵⁸ For helpful overview, see Ustina Markus, "Belarus Elects Its First President" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report*. Vol. 3, No. 30, 29 July 1994, pp. 1-7.

¹⁵⁹ For background analysis on Aleksandr Lukashenko's personality, perceptions and motives, see Aleksandr Feduta, "Mir kak volya i predstavlenie" [The World as Will and Perception] *Belorussiya i Rossiya: obshchestva i gosudarstva*. [Belarus and Russia: Societies and States] Dmitry Furman (ed.) Moscow: Prava cheloveka (1998), pp. 259-275.

Despite Yeltsin's claims to have "developed an allergy" to his Belarusian counterpart, and Lukashenko's personal disdain for Yeltsin's democratic reforms, a comprehensive set of documents was negotiated and put on the table early the following year.¹⁶⁰ In an interview with *Rossiiskaya gazeta* the same month, the Belarus leader offered the following rationale for deepening military ties with its eastern neighbour:

If anyone thinks that the problem of Belarus's security has been resolved, to put it mildly I do not agree. Then the question arises: With whom are we to ensure our security? I reply—with Russia. Just like the economy, our Army is connected with Russia in the closest possible way. Many Belarusian enterprises are military-industrial complex enterprises, which are also "tied" to Russia. There actually exists a dual bond between our Armed Forces and Russia's: The Belarusian Army cannot be supplied with everything it needs without close economic ties with Russia; moreover, there are purely military aspects. I do not intend to spoil the good relations between our Armies.¹⁶¹

1995 marked what Western strategic analysts have labelled as the "second stage" in establishing closer Belarus-Russia military ties.¹⁶² On 6 January 1995, Belarus and Russia signed a series of accords governing a customs union and basing rights granting the Russian Ministry of Defence access to two key strategic facilities at Baranovichi and Vileika for a period of 25 years.¹⁶³ Both military bases had been integral components in the USSR's western defences.¹⁶⁴ The Baranovichi site was designed to provide long-

¹⁶⁰ On Yeltsin's "allergy" to Lukashenko, see Yuras' Karmanov, "Moskva prinyala Lukashenko" [Moscow Greets Lukashenko] *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. 9 August 1994. Conversely, Lukashenko had strong ties to the anti-Yeltsin camp as a "red crusader" in the Belarusian Supreme Soviet prior to taking the post of president. Despite his strong pro-Russian stance, Lukashenko was looked upon with contempt by the Kremlin establishment. For its part, Moscow endorsed the more predictable and sedate Kebich.

¹⁶¹ Yakov Alekseichik, "Aleksandr Lukashenko: My prishli rabotat' a ne kupat' vo vlasti" [Aleksandr Lukashenko: We Came to Work, Not to Bask in Office] *Rossiiskaya gazeta*. 13 August 1994.

¹⁶² Richard Woff, *The Armed Forces of the Former Soviet Union*. Vol. 2. Hampshire: Carmichael and Sweet (1996), p. E2-38.

¹⁶³ Anna Baneva and Svetlana Sukhova, "Moskve—bazy, Minsku—sodeistvie" [Moscow—Bases, Minsk—Assistance] *Kommersant-Daily*. 12 January 1995.

¹⁶⁴ The Baranovichi site falls under the jurisdiction of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Defence Treaty (ABM) signed between the Soviet Union and the United States on 26 May 1972.

range early-warning air defence [PVO] in the western approaches of the Soviet Union, while the low-frequency communications facility at Vileika is one of the primary control centres for the Russian nuclear submarine fleet in the Baltic Sea and the North Atlantic.¹⁶⁵

According to Russian military analysts, the construction of similar facilities in western Russia would take five to six years to complete at an estimated cost of ten and seven trillion rubles, respectfully.¹⁶⁶ In addition to basing rights, the Memorandum on Expanding and Deepening Belarus-Russia Cooperation was signed. The document outlined the need for both states to coordinate military efforts within a mutual security framework, establish a joint strategic space, devise a collective military supply programme, coordinate defence manufacturing, facilitate weapons standardisation, and grant both Armies access to bases and training facilities in either state.

On 23 January 1995, then Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev paid an official visit to Minsk to discuss expanding contacts, consultations and other ways of coordinating Belarus-Russia foreign activities.¹⁶⁷ The meeting concluded with both sides agreeing to increase coordination in the international arena. No doubt, amongst the topics up for discussion would have been their planned joint response to NATO's plans to expand eastward. In terms of strategic considerations, NATO activity made the Belarus-Russia

¹⁶⁵ "Russia's Bolshakov Arrives to Prepare for Economic Union" *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-95-005, 9 January 1995.

¹⁶⁶ Aleksandr Koretsky, "Lukashenko mozhet oboitis' Moskve namnogo dorozhe Kebicha" [Lukashenko can Circumvent Moscow at a Greater Cost Than Kebich] *Kommersant-Daily*. 26 August 1994.

¹⁶⁷ "Belarus, Russia Agree to Establish Closer Ties" *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-95-015, 23 January 1995.

relationship more important than it had been previously—or at least it gave the ‘hawks’ a position to stand on. This approach was taken in an address to a division of Belarusian servicemen during a visit to a motorised infantry brigade on 17 February 1995, when President Lukashenko ordered an immediate halt to the dismantling of Belarus’s superfluous military hardware under the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE).¹⁶⁸

In regard to maintaining military preparedness and strong alliances, Lukashenko opted to pursue greater rapprochement with Russia so as “not to upset the political balance of power in Europe.”¹⁶⁹ Citing his intention not to “destroy” the republic’s Armed Forces under the guise of military reform, and referring directly to the desire of former socialist-bloc countries to join NATO, Lukashenko voiced his strong objection to the prospect of NATO forces advancing to the borders of Belarus and Russia. By the same token, Lukashenko promised military cooperation with Russia on the condition that no Belarusian troops serve on the territory of other states or in “hot spots” such as Chechnya or Tajikistan.¹⁷⁰

During the course of his speech, Lukashenko revealed—perhaps prematurely—the areas in which rapprochement would take place: namely, joint air defence and border protection. The Belarus leader announced that Russia had already supplied all the

¹⁶⁸ “Lukashenka Order Halt to Destruction” *Interfax*. JPRS-TAC-95-006-L, 17 February 1995.

¹⁶⁹ “Lukashenka Concerned Over NATO’s Possible Expansion” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-95-034, 20 February 1995.

¹⁷⁰ Sending Belarusian servicemen to fight in Russia’s peripheral ‘hot spots’ had become very unpopular with the general public, since the BSSR suffered the highest per capita fatalities in both World War II and Afghanistan.

technical equipment for Belarusian border troops, and boasted that “Russian orders kept Belarus’s military-industrial complex working at full capacity.”¹⁷¹

On 21 February 1995, Boris Yeltsin paid a return visit to Minsk to sign a series of accords; including the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Good Neighbourliness and the Agreement on Mutual Efforts to Protect the State Borders of Belarus.¹⁷² It was on this occasion that Lukashenko pledged his country’s allegiance to Moscow by stating that Belarus would stay “in Russia’s political sphere of influence.”¹⁷³ Yeltsin reciprocated by acknowledging Belarus’s “worthiness” of becoming the first CIS state to integrate with Russia, while underscoring that the borders of the CIS were, “after all—also Russia’s.”¹⁷⁴ Platitudes notwithstanding, these comments can quintessentially be interpreted as a *de facto* westward movement of Russia’s borders. Both documents entail tangible security significance for the entire Eastern European sub-region. Not unlike NATO’s own fifth provision,¹⁷⁵

Article 5 of the Friendship Treaty provides exclusive collective security guarantees for both Belarus and Russia in the event of armed attack on either state. Both countries concluded that any act of aggression on the either party would result in coordinated

¹⁷¹ “Lukashenka Concerned Over NATO’s Possible Expansion” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-95-034, 20 February 1995.

¹⁷² The Friendship Treaty was ratified by the Belarusian Supreme Soviet on 12 April 1995 and in the Russian State Duma on 24 May 1995.

¹⁷³ Anna Baneva, Veronika Kutsyllo, “V ‘sfere politicheskogo vliyaniya’ vse kak doma” [In the ‘Sphere of Political Influence’ Everyone Feels at Home] *Kommersant-Daily*. 22 February 1995.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ Article 5 of the Washington Treaty stipulates that an armed attack against one or more NATO members constitutes an attack against them all. See “The North Atlantic Treaty” *The NATO Handbook*. Brussels: NATO Office of Information and Press (1999), pp. 396.

actions in accordance with their commitments under the CIS Treaty on Collective Security, together with (undisclosed) “other agreements.”¹⁷⁶

Moreover, Minsk and Moscow pledged not to participate in or support any military actions directed against the other, as well as conclude any treaties or permit its territory to be used to the security detriment of the other.¹⁷⁷ The agreement on mutual border protection offers significant geostrategic leverage for the Kremlin, since it allows Russian border troops access to the “external frontier” of the CIS—namely the Belarus’s border with Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.¹⁷⁸ Under the accord, Moscow provides training and equipment for Belarusian border troops, in addition to maintaining a joint contingency group based in Minsk for technical and training support.¹⁷⁹

Notably, the border agreement eliminated the need for Belarus and Russia to construct border demarcations on their mutual frontier—a reported saving of two billion rubles per kilometre.¹⁸⁰ A subsequent security agreement was reached on 27 November 1995

¹⁷⁶ “Dogovor o druzhbe, dobrososedstve i sotrudnichestve mezhdru Rossiiskoi Federatsiei i Respublikoi Belarus” [Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Good Neighbourliness between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus] *Rossiiskaya gazeta*. 5 May 1995.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Belarus signed a subsequent treaty with the Russian Federation on border protection between CIS and non-CIS states in July 1995. The treaty defines borders as the state frontier of participants in the Commonwealth of Independent States with states that are not members. See Sherman W. Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch: Ukraine in the Emerging Security Environment of Central and Eastern Europe*. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (1997), p. 116.

¹⁷⁹ Martha Brill Olcott, Anders Åslund, and Sherman W. Garnett (eds.), *Getting it Wrong: Regional Cooperation and the Commonwealth of Independent States*. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (1999), p. 89.

¹⁸⁰ Valery Kovalev and Vladimir Berezko, “Vizit Borisa Yeltsina v Belorussiyu zavershen” [Boris Yeltsin Concludes Visit to Belarus] *Krasnaya zvezda*. 23 February 1995. Two years later, in 1997, the total cost of constructing border fortifications on Russia’s frontier with Belarus was recalculated at 21 billion roubles—the equivalent to the expenditures for education and culture in that year’s Russian Federation budget. See Lev Rokhlin, “Rossiya utrachivaet svoe vliianie v stranakh SNG” [Russia is Losing Its Influence in the CIS Countries] *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. 4 March 1997.

between the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) and the Belarusian KGB.¹⁸¹ The agreements provide security for Russian military formations deployed in Belarus, military transportation, additional protection to Belarus's state border, and joint cooperation in opposing secret services of third countries.¹⁸²

On 23 February 1995, commemorative ceremonies marking Belarus's dual Soviet and republican military holidays acted as the backdrop for the unveiling of Lukashenko's foreign and military policies. His speech honoured war veterans for their faithful service to the Fatherland and accentuated the "mutual interests" of the "fraternal Russian and Belarusian peoples," including their desire for security against "common enemies."¹⁸³ The underlying message could hardly be mistaken. Singling out defence as one of the primary components in Belarus's post-Soviet nation building, Lukashenko attributed the process of deepening Belarus-Russia military cooperation directly to NATO expansion.

Referring to the possibility of becoming a "zone of contact" between coalitions of states with conflicting political orientations, Lukashenko warned of Belarus's precarious

¹⁸¹ To date, the Belarusian KGB remains unreformed and unrenamed.

¹⁸² "Russia, Belarus Sign Accord on Security Cooperation" *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-95-28, 27 November 1995.

¹⁸³ Leonid Tratsevskii, "S prazdnikom, zashchitniki Otechestva!" [Happy Holidays, Defenders of the Fatherland!] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*. 24 February 1995. Contempt for NATO expansion had become a regular fixture at military holidays; however, the rhetoric expressed by President Lukashenko on the eve of Victory Day celebrations in May 1996 was particularly alarming. Denouncing both the Alliance and Russian opponents of the Union Treaty in xenophobic rhetoric, Lukashenko conjured a chilling analogy to NATO expansion and the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in World War II: "We, as in 1941, find ourselves encircled by enemies. Enemies populate the leadership of the neighbouring state with which we signed the Community Treaty not long ago... We cannot calmly watch as that horrible monster—NATO—encroaches upon the borders of our blue-eyed Belarus... We will return the united Motherland [which] you defended." Cited in Yuri Drakokhrust and Dmitry Furman, "Peripetii integratsii" [Crossroads of Integration] *Belorussiya i Rossiya: obshchestva i gosudarstva*. [Belarus and Russia: Societies and States] Dmitry Furman (ed.) Moscow: Prava cheloveka (1998), p. 347.

position within the centre of “intersecting spheres of influence.”¹⁸⁴ Citing possible upset in the East-West military balance that could result if NATO was to accept members of the former Warsaw Pact, Lukashenko expressed strong reservations about the Belarusian military’s ability to “shield” the republic’s sovereignty on its own. He then repeated his order for non-compliance with the CFE and referred to close cooperation with Russia as a “vital necessity.” At the time of the announcement, Belarus still possessed a formidable arsenal, including an estimated 2,500 tanks, 3,000 armoured vehicles, 340 combat aircraft, 90,000 soldiers—and roughly 40 ICBMs armed with nuclear warheads.¹⁸⁵

The following day, Belarus Deputy Foreign Minister, Mikhail Khvostov defended Lukashenko’s decision on CFE non-compliance, citing both the possible threat of disruption to the balance of forces in Europe and a lack of required funds.¹⁸⁶ Khvostov made it clear, however, that non-compliance was prompted more by Belarus’s financial shortfalls than by claims made earlier that NATO was encroaching on its borders. Belarus faced more rudimentary problems in meeting its CFE quotas. As early as August 1994, reports from the Borisov tank repair factory—contracted to destroy armoured vehicles under the CFE—claimed that it had been overstocked with several hundred thousand tonnes of scrap metal.¹⁸⁷ The plant had already decommissioned more than 1,900 tanks and armoured vehicles out of the 3,605 units slated for destruction; however, Belarusian steel mills could no longer accept armour plating scrap due to the absence of

¹⁸⁴ “Lukashenka Addresses Veterans, Outlines Policy” *BTK Network*. FBIS-SOV-95-040, 1 March 1995.

¹⁸⁵ “Khvostov on Halt to Arms Destruction” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-95-038, 24 February 1995.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ “Tank Destruction Program Continues” *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-94-153, 8 August 1994.

base components to melt reinforced steel. Moreover, sheer numbers hampered liquidation efforts, since Belarus's tank elimination quota alone was four times greater than the totals for France, Great Britain and the United States combined. An official report dealing with Belarus's CFE obligations released by the Belarusian Security Council quoted the cost of decommissioning a single tank at \$2,500, an armoured personnel carrier at \$1,500 and a fighter plane at between \$5,000 to \$7,000.¹⁸⁸ In the final analysis, the report calculated the total cost of meeting Belarus's CFE obligations would reach \$2.5 million.¹⁸⁹ Eventually, an extension in the reduction deadline was negotiated from 16 November 1995 to 26 April 1996.¹⁹⁰

The Russian nationalist press commended Lukashenko for standing up to the West instead of acquiescing under pressure. One such article noted that President Lukashenko's resolute protest against NATO's planned expansion and his calls for the retention of overall strategic parity with the Alliance gave the West a pretext for punishing Belarus.¹⁹¹ Shortly after Lukashenko's controversial announcement, he paid an official visit to Brussels to sign a ten-year cooperation and partnership agreement with the European Union.¹⁹² Though less confrontational in Brussels, he defended his decision to suspend weapons decommissioning under the CFE.

¹⁸⁸ "Suspension of Conventional Arms Confirmed" *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-95-039, 27 February 1995.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Jane's Sentinel: Russia and the CIS*. Coudsdon: Jane's Information Group (January-June 2000), p. 135.

¹⁹¹ See, Mikhail Shchipanov "Prezident Lukashenko atakuyut s Zapada. Tekhnicheskaya priostanovka unichtozheniya voennoi tekhniki porodila 'strategicheskie vygody'" [President Lukashenko Under Attack from the West. Technical Suspension of Destruction of Military Equipment Prompts 'Strategic Advantages'] *Rossiiskaya gazeta*. 4 March 1995.

¹⁹² Despite appearances, President Lukashenko made it clear that his visit was only for the economic benefits the agreements entailed, and not as a step on the road to Belarus's integration with Europe. See "Lukashenka: 'Purely Economic' Goal" *BTK Network*. FBIS-SOV-95-044, 7 March 1995.

Referring to Minsk's dual burdens of disposing its massive arsenal and the added financial drain associated with the Chernobyl nuclear disaster—Lukashenko chastised the West for failing to assist Belarus destroy thousands of superfluous conventional weapons listed under the CFE Treaty.¹⁹³ Lukashenko argued that if the West wanted Belarus to continue its mandated schedule, it should pay for weapons disposal, since in his opinion, the high concentration of weaponry in Belarus was the fault of the US and NATO which had 'forced' the USSR to participate in the arms race. Nevertheless, Lukashenko softened his previous stance on CFE non-compliance by repeating Khvostov's argument that economic factors were to blame—not NATO expansion.

When pressed on the question of why he opposed opening NATO membership to countries of the former Warsaw Pact, Lukashenko drew a hypothetical analogy to Britain's reaction to the deployment of Russian tanks in France along the Channel coast, while underscoring that in his case NATO armour would be stationed "only a few meters away" from Belarus.¹⁹⁴ In a later interview, Lukashenko rhetorically asked what Western reactions might be to the appearance of Soviet tanks in West Germany—by the same token, he underscored that NATO was advancing to the Belarus border—not Russia's.¹⁹⁵

By early April 1995, Lukashenko again expressed concern over the security of Belarus's western approaches by drawing attention to the fact that its neighbours were increasingly

¹⁹³ "Premier Concerned About NATO Eastward Expansion" *The European*. FBIS-SOV-95-046, 9 March 1995.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ Alyaksandr Lukashenko, "Belarus, Russia and the World" *Le Soir*. 15 March 1995. J.L. Black (ed.), *Russia and Eurasia Documents Annual 1995: Central Eurasian States*. Vol. 2. Gulf Breeze: Academic International Press (1996), p. 181.

linking their interests with NATO, and that it would be difficult for Belarus to maintain security on its western border without Russia's assistance.¹⁹⁶ He underscored that the republic might soon find itself in "a dangerous frontier neighbourhood with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation" and pledged that "Belarus will unfailingly strive for rapprochement with Russia not only in the economic field but also in the sphere of defence and protection of its state border."¹⁹⁷

The following day, similar calls were echoed by then Parliamentary Chairman Mechislav Grib, who argued that Poland's accession to NATO had a "direct bearing" on Belarus. Grib emphasised that the republic may become "a frontline of confrontation between two systems," reflecting Belarusian fears of becoming the new dividing line between East and West. However, Grib added the caveat, "if NATO expands it may prod Eastern countries to establish a similar military and political bloc."¹⁹⁸ A comparable message came from then Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev, who cited a host of possible countermeasures in the event of NATO's eastward expansion, including Russia's non-observation of the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe, and increased military cooperation with other CIS states.¹⁹⁹ Grachev's tacit inference to Belarus can hardly be mistaken, considering its strategic location between Russia and NATO—together with a significant body of military agreements, which reached beyond the rudimentary stages of cooperation.

¹⁹⁶ "Lukashenka Seeks Stronger Border Against NATO" *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-95-065, 4 April 1995.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ "Minsk Criticizes Poland's Plan to Join NATO" *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-95-066, 5 April 1995.

¹⁹⁹ "Russia's Opposition to NATO Expansion Seen" *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. FBIS-WEU-95-066, 5 April 1995.

An uncanny link can be drawn to these cumulative statements and President Lukashenko's May 1995 referendum victory which led to a rapid acceleration in Belarus-Russia relations.²⁰⁰ The areas of coordination were many; however, they need not detract attention from the greater geostrategic shift it presented to the region. On 26 May 1995, Aleksandr Lukashenko and then Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin removed the border post separating their states at the village of Rechka on the Vitebsk-Smolensk *oblast* border-crossing checkpoint and planted a birch tree in its place.²⁰¹ Since then, Lukashenko has made repeated reference to the "extension" of Russia's border to Poland and has proposed a corridor to Russia's non-contiguous enclave of Kaliningrad.²⁰²

Yet, Boris Yeltsin's declaration that the border between Belarus and Russia was no longer in existence had a swift and ostensibly unforeseen impact in Minsk.²⁰³ Shortly thereafter, President Lukashenko ordered a halt to Belarus's nuclear weapons withdrawal on the grounds that returning the missiles to Russia was unwise and unnecessary because the two former Soviet republics might soon unite.²⁰⁴ Out of the 81 ICBMs left in the republic after the Soviet collapse, 63 had been returned to Russia.

²⁰⁰ The referendum of 15 May 1995 approved all four proposals tabled by President Lukashenko, including: granting Russian equal status with Belarusian as an official state language; economic integration with Russia; the return of Belarus's Soviet-era flag and state emblem (albeit minus the hammer and sickle), and granting the president the authority to dissolve the Supreme Soviet.

²⁰¹ Olga Sidorovich, "Krasavitsa-berezka vmesto shlagbauma. Druzhba vmesto razobshchennosti" [A Beautiful Birch Instead of a Barrier. Friendship Instead of Division] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*. 30 May 1995.

²⁰² Kathleen Mihalisko, "Belarus: Retreat to Authoritarianism" *Democratic Changes and Authoritarian Reactions in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova*. Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (eds.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1996), p. 273; Paweł Bawolec, "Ręka Moskwy" [Moscow's Hand] *Wprost*. 15 December 1996, p. 83

²⁰³ "Russia, Belarus Border No Longer Exists" *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-95-104, 26 May 1995.

²⁰⁴ Viktor Litovkin, "Prezident Lukashenko priostanovil vyvod rossiiskikh strategicheskikh sil iz Belorussii" [President Lukashenko Halts Pullout of Russian Strategic Forces from Belarus] *Izvestiia*. 6 July 1995.

The remaining 18 were scheduled to leave for Russia that same month. The missile withdrawal only resumed after a series of high-level military protocols were signed in December of the same year.²⁰⁵ The militarisation and nuclearisation debate surrounding NATO expansion began to heat up by August 1995, when then Polish Minister of Defence Zbigniew Okoński announced Poland was prepared, if it became a NATO member, to support the stationing of foreign troops and nuclear weapons on Polish soil.²⁰⁶ By September of the same year, a series of reported leaks—allegedly authorised by Defence Minister Pavel Grachev himself—discussed possible Russian retaliatory nuclear countermeasures to NATO expansion, including deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in western Russia, Belarus and aboard ships in the Baltic Fleet.²⁰⁷

The war of words over conventional and nuclear deployments escalated by early October 1995, when *Nezavisimaya gazeta* published a crudely-drawn map—allegedly originating from the Russian Ministry of Defence—depicting a combined Belarus-Russia conventional and nuclear strike on new NATO states possessing nuclear weapons, as well as a simultaneous conventional offensive on the Baltic States. The accompanying article quoted sources from the Main Operations Directorate of the Russian General Staff proposed the creation of a Belarus-Russia political-military bloc.

²⁰⁵ “Russian Defense Minister Grachev Pays Visit—Agreement Signed on Missile Withdrawal” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-95-237, 9 December 1995.

²⁰⁶ Cited in Sherman W. Garnett, “Poland: Bulwark or Bridge?” *Foreign Policy*. No. 102. Spring 1996, p. 71.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

Map 1: Combined Counteraction Scenario to NATO Expansion*

The blueprint envisaged a coalition that would act as the foundation upon which a strong conventional force could be mobilised in Belarus and concentrated on the Polish and Lithuanian borders. The joint military group would then be coordinated with Russian forces in Kaliningrad and unified under a single command structure. This sobering map clearly illustrates the influence of NATO expansion on Russian strategic planning and the potential role for Belarus in a hypothetical conflict scenario.

* Source: Igor Korotchenko and Mikhail Karpov, "Rossiiskie yadernye rakety budut perenatseleny na Chekhiyu i Pol'shu" [Russian Nuclear Missiles will be Retargeted on the Czech Republic and Poland] *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. 7 October 1995. This map accompanied an article quoting sources in the Main Operations Directorate of the Russian General Staff as saying that, in the event of NATO expansion to the Czech Republic and Poland and the subsequent deployment of nuclear weapons to those states, Russia would have to target them with nuclear weapons and redeploy strong conventional forces to Belarus.

Insofar as the risk of armed conflict between NATO and the Russian Federation should not be exaggerated, the return of large-scale conventional (or nuclear) forces to Belarus is no small matter. Forward concentrations could create a long “line of contact” between Russian and NATO forces with a much greater military capacity than that of the isolated enclave of Kaliningrad, and thus potentially mark a partial return to the East-West security divide characteristic of the Cold War. By the end of 1995, a strategic corridor had finally been struck. Belarus and Russia had drawn closer militarily and NATO had been their excuse.

3.1 STRATEGIC ALLIANCES AND CONTEMPORARY GEOPOLITICS

The emergent European security environment and the pursuit of like-minded allies to counter NATO’s eastward expansion were the themes of a press conference held by Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev on 15 November 1995. Throughout his tenure as Minister of Defence, General Grachev took an extremely negative position on expansion and made several suggestions on what countermeasures should be taken; including CFE non-compliance, retargeting nuclear weapons on potential NATO member states, and supporting military union with Belarus. The defence minister consistently argued that the admittance of Eastern and Central European countries to NATO posed a direct threat to Russian security, and would considerably undermine Moscow’s political, military and economic interests.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ See Leonid Velekhov, “Russian Defense Minister Promises ‘Appropriate Measures’ in Response to NATO Expansion” *Segodnya*. 16 November 1995. *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*. Vol. XLVII, No. 46, 13 December 1995, p. 16; “Russia to Seek Eastern Partners if NATO Expands” *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-95-221, 15 November 1995.

Grachev asserted that an enlarged NATO would require Moscow to “take appropriate measures” to protect itself by forming a political-military bloc of its own, comprised primarily of “interested parties” among former Warsaw Treaty member-countries, CIS states and “strong allies” in the East.²⁰⁹ Chastising NATO for seeking to expand its “zone of influence” instead of transforming itself into an instrument of pan-European collective security, Grachev lamented over Russia’s strategic concerns. Then, taking direct aim at the CFE, he argued that Moscow never ratified the treaty—since it was signed during the Soviet era in 1990, and in his view “totally disrupted Russia’s security system.”²¹⁰

Only weeks after these statements were made, a programme of widening military cooperation between Belarus and Russia was revealed, when General Grachev arrived in Minsk to hold talks with his Belarusian counterpart, Lieutenant-General Leonid Maltsev. They stressed the importance of strengthening security relations, while conveying renewed impetus to bilateral military cooperation in the interest of mutual security.²¹¹ The high level of representation on this occasion reflected both states’ motivation to sign a comprehensive package of 18 military accords determining the parameters of bilateral military and technical cooperation, including a schedule for the withdrawal of nuclear weapons, joint planning of regional security both on a bilateral basis and within the

²⁰⁹ “Russia to Seek Eastern Partners if NATO Expands” *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-95-221, 15 November 1995.

²¹⁰ Leonid Velekhov, “Russian Defense Minister Promises ‘Appropriate Measures’ in Response to NATO Expansion” *Segodnya*. 16 November 1995. *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*. Vol. XLVII, No. 46, 13 December 1995, p. 16.

²¹¹ Stephen Main, *Belarus-Russian Military Relations (1991-1998)*. Camberley: Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (1998), p. 4.

framework of the Treaty of Tashkent, research and development, planned joint air defence, training of military personnel, standardisation of defence procurement, as well as disposal of old ammunition and scrapping of obsolete military hardware.²¹²

At the conclusion of his visit, Grachev remarked on the common ground that both Belarus and Russia shared on security issues, affirming that the talks were “held in an atmosphere of fraternity and spiritual closeness” and that Belarus “confirmed its policy of rapprochement with Russia.”²¹³ Not surprisingly, the occasion was also used for top ranking officials to reiterate their unwavering opposition to NATO’s planned expansion eastward. Viktor Sheiman, then head of the Belarusian KGB and National Security Council, added his voice to the protest and insisted that Belarus’s national security priority was to uphold Russia’s interests—adding, “one may disagree, however, if Russia does not accept NATO expansion, then it should not proceed.”²¹⁴

What seemed like frivolous rhetoric only months before, began to take on a more defined shape in the form of a cohesive “front” against the advancement of a perceived enemy. General Grachev reiterated Moscow’s right to initiate an alternate political-military bloc, refrain from complying with the CFE, START-I, START-II and revise flank restrictions.²¹⁵ He stressed that Russia placed “special weight” on the bilateral accords

²¹² Ibid. Belarus is the only republic in the former Soviet Union which has a facility for crushing old tanks.

²¹³ “Grachev Reiterates Opposition to Eastward Expansion of NATO” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-95-237, 9 December 1995.

²¹⁴ For full interview with Viktor Sheiman, see Yevgeny Rostikov, “Viktor Sheiman: U nas khvatit vyderzhki i blagorazumya” [Viktor Sheiman: We Have Sufficient Endurance and Prudence] *Respublika*. 9 December 1995.

²¹⁵ “Grachev Reiterates Opposition to Eastward Expansion of NATO” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-95-237, 9 December 1995.

with Belarus and the CIS collective security pact, and emphasised the need to commence “very serious cooperation” regarding collective security.²¹⁶

The threat posed by NATO expansion, even if regarded by some as merely symbolic added a legitimising stimulus to Belarus-Russia military cooperation. An indicator of where military cooperation was to commence was revealed in a statement made by Commander-in-Chief of Russian Air Defence, Colonel-General Viktor Prudnikov, who announced that Russian and Belarusian air defence troops would begin joint patrols by April 1996.²¹⁷ Referring to the Belarus air defence system as “one of the best of its kind” in the former USSR, the general explained that joint patrol duty would be carried out to “ensure the security of both states.”²¹⁸ Only a few days prior to the signing of the aforementioned military accords, Lukashenko stated that Belarus had long since chosen its strategic ally—Russia—adding that the two former Soviet states had no need to debate military partnership because their alliance remained intact following the collapse of the USSR.²¹⁹ Considering Belarus’s pronounced hostility towards both NATO and the West, a strategic alliance with Russia was the only security option left, save neutrality.

²¹⁶ “Russian Defense Minister Grachev Pays Visit—Lukashenko: 8 Percent of Missiles Remain” *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-95-237, 9 December 1995.

²¹⁷ “Russian Defense Minister Grachev Pays Visit—Air Defense Troops to Patrol Jointly” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-95-237, 9 December 1995.

²¹⁸ Belarus-Russia air defence was already highly integrated prior to these official agreements. In September 1995, a hot-air balloon competing in an international competition accidentally drifted into Belarusian air space and was subsequently shot down by Belarusian air defence forces, killing its two American pilots. Western analysts concluded that Belarusian air defences were already under Moscow’s command, and that the orders to shoot down the balloon did not originate in Minsk. See Kathleen Mihalisko, “Belarus: Retreat to Authoritarianism” *Democratic Changes and Authoritarian Reactions in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova*. Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (eds.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1996), p. 273.

²¹⁹ “President Announces New ‘Unique’ Air Defense System” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-95-233, 4 December 1995.

3.2 RHETORIC VERSUS PRACTICE

President Lukashenko's rhetoric was tempered by accommodating practice. For example, assuming that Belarus possessed one of the most powerful armies in Europe, he insisted that the republic maintained a peaceful foreign policy and harboured no intention of using its military capacity for offensive purposes.²²⁰ More to the point, the barrage of "hawkish" rhetoric and threats to counter an advancing NATO did not prevent Belarus from honouring its weapons reduction commitments under the CFE only days after hosting high-level military talks with Russia.²²¹ Foreign Minister Senko noted that Minsk could not gain economic or military advantages by suspending compliance with the treaty, though Belarus was willing to follow Moscow's lead had the Russian Defence Ministry proceeded with non-compliance.²²² Lukashenko's government had passed the buck neatly, Belarus met its ceiling quotas of combat aircraft and armoured vehicles by 28 March and 3 October 1996 respectively, eliminating a total of 133 warplanes, 1,873 tanks and 1,441 armoured personnel carriers.²²³ Despite these large-scale cuts, Belarus maintains a formidable conventional force, relative to its size and population.²²⁴

²²⁰ "Russian Defense Minister Grachev Pays Visit—Air Defense Troops to Patrol Jointly" *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-95-237, 9 December 1995. Belarus-Russia air defence was already highly integrated prior to these official agreements. In September 1995, a hot-air balloon competing in an international competition accidentally drifted into Belarusian air space and was subsequently shot down by Belarusian air defence forces, killing its two American pilots. Western analysts concluded that Belarusian air defences were already under Moscow's command, and that the orders to shoot down the balloon did not originate in Minsk. See Kathleen Mihalisko, "Belarus: Retreat to Authoritarianism" *Democratic Changes and Authoritarian Reactions in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova*. Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (eds.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1996), p. 273.

²²¹ "Minsk to Honour All Obligations Under CFE Treaty" *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-95-241, 14 December 1995.

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ "Belarus Combat Aircraft Under the CFE" *Interfax*. FBIS-TAC-96-006, 28 March 1996; "Arms Under CFE Treaty Fulfilled" *Interfax*. FBIS-TAC-96-193, 3 October 1996. To reduce its armour limits, Belarus was allowed to sell 100 T-72 tanks to Hungary in March 1996, in return, Hungary committed itself to destroy the same amount of early-model tanks.

²²⁴ For a comparison of conventional weapons holdings, see Table 1: Current Holdings and CFE National Ceilings.

After being paid scant notice by the international community in its first few years of independence, Belarus quickly became the focus of much attention in 1996. Four years after proclaiming itself as a neutral state, the republic moved rapidly towards greater political and military integration with Russia. By January 1996, the Belarusian leader began to voice strong initiatives on countering NATO expansion. Speaking to a group of academics at the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, President Lukashenko threatened to redeploy Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus should any Central European nation join NATO.²²⁵ Although an idle threat at best, Moscow would not have agreed to do so, despite Lukashenko's proclaimed readiness to defend the interests of both Russia in Belarus's western approaches: "We are prepared to protect our interests on the western borders. By doing so we will also protect Russia's interests there...Russia has a friendly Belarusian army in the west," Lukashenko said, "in the east you are capable of protecting yourselves on your own."²²⁶ However, General Igor Sergeyev, then Commander-in-Chief of Russian Strategic Forces, negated Lukashenko's claims by confirming that all nuclear missiles would be returned to Russia by the end of 1996—leaving Lukashenko's threat hollow.²²⁷

Further damage control was undertaken by former Belarus Foreign Minister Piotr Kravchenko, head of the Parliamentary Commission for International Affairs, who ascertained that Lukashenko's comments should be not be interpreted as an order, but

²²⁵ Chrystia Freeland, "Belarus Warning Over Arms" *Financial Times*. 19 January 1996.

²²⁶ "Minsk May Redeploy Nuclear Weapons" *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-96-013, 18 January 1996.

²²⁷ "Belarus Threatens to Deploy Nuclear Weapons..." *Jamestown Monitor*. Vol. 2, Issue 13, 19 January 1996.

rather “as a statement from a single person, independent from his post.”²²⁸ Given the authoritarianism of the Belarus government, this was quite remarkable, and obviously an orchestrated disavowal.

As January drew to a close, Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov travelled to Minsk for a two-day working visit. At issue was CIS security in light of NATO expansion, a factor openly expressed by Primakov himself, who stated “the geopolitical situation is getting worse for us. That is why we want to find a solution.”²²⁹ A helpful clue as to where that “solution” would lie was expressed by Primakov’s interest in deepening integration between CIS member states, including Belarus—subsequently dubbed a “strategic line” of Moscow’s policy.²³⁰ In addition to closer political coordination, Primakov took a more aggressive stance on military issues by warning that the Kremlin would have no choice but to reassess its strategic weapons installations in its western periphery if NATO’s infrastructure approached CIS borders.

Hostility towards NATO expansion and the theme of counterbalancing its influence was by no means limited to the *nomenklatura*. Senior military personnel such as Belarus Major-General Aleksandr Yegorov (retired) director of the Development and Security Research Institute, confirmed that Belarus and Russia shared “mutual strategic goals” and stressed that the security concerns of both states corresponded in many areas, NATO

²²⁸ “Lukashenka’s Statement on Missiles Not an ‘Instruction’” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-96-020, 29 January 1996.

²²⁹ “Russia’s Primakov Pays 2 Day Visit to Belarus—Primakov, Lukashenka Discuss NATO” *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-96-022, 31 January 1996.

²³⁰ “Russian Foreign Minister Primakov Visits Belarus—Lukashenka, Primakov Discuss Integration” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-96-021, 31 January 1996.

expansion being the most prominent. According to Yegorov, as long as Belarus and Russia remained “inherent strategic partners” a threat to Russia would also constitute a threat to Belarus.²³¹ Despite the conviction of Yegorov’s assessment, one would be hard pressed to find a remark from the Russian military confirming this view.

He was equally adamant that military cooperation between the two states could not fully develop without “adequate progress in other spheres.”²³² Yegorov had economic assistance in mind and used the NATO issue to make his point. Yet, this was an important sign that Minsk might be using anti-NATO rhetoric for economic ends. By and large, Russia’s strategic imperatives in Belarus had been fulfilled. Belarus served as a safe conduit for Russian exports (including oil and gas) to the West, its border with NATO hopeful—Poland—served as a strategic position for the placement of Russian forces. The Russian Ministry of Defence acquired basing rights for its soldiers and long-term access to two vital communications bases, all without having to make any significant concessions.

Lukashenko’s anti-NATO rhetoric began to pay off. Indeed steps were taken in the run-up to the creation of the Community of Sovereign Republics—the first *de jure* union treaty between Belarus and Russia—which some Western observers interpreted as “preventative diplomacy” in response to NATO enlargement.²³³ An agreement

²³¹ Aleksandr Yegorov, “Belarus, Rossiya i novaya Evropa” [Belarus, Russia and a New Europe] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*. 25 January 1996.

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ Cited in Peter Ford, “Troubled Neighbors Watch Belarus Rush Into Russia’s Arms” *Christian Science Monitor*. 29 March 1996.

cancelling mutual debt was signed under the so-called “zero option” on 27 February 1996. In exchange for cancelling Belarus’s \$1.27 billion debt to Russia for gas and credits, Minsk annulled Moscow’s \$914 million debt for stationing Russian troops in Belarus from 1992 to 1995, environmental damages incurred by the Russian military, and compensation for relinquished nuclear weapons.²³⁴ Insofar as then Belarus Deputy Prime Minister, Leonid Sinitsyn admitted that Russia’s portion of debt was actually larger than officially reported; he applauded the arrangement and stated that integration between the two former Soviet states was to be “primarily embodied in a political-military alliance.”²³⁵ Boris Yeltsin was quoted making identical statements, citing the need to strengthen integration with Belarus primarily within “economic, military, military-technical and military-political spheres.”²³⁶

A few days prior to the signing of the union treaty, Lukashenko made a passionate plea for unity in the Belarusian Supreme Soviet, reminding deputies of the vital importance good relations played for the future of the republic. On the issue of defence and security, he reiterated an earlier pledge not to send Belarusian troops to ‘hot spots’ while underscoring the important role Belarus played in upholding its eastern neighbour’s security by ensuring that no threat to Russia would cross Belarusian territory.²³⁷ The same day, Russian Defence Minister Grachev cited the NATO question as the primary

²³⁴ Tatiana Kalinovskaya, “Triumf proshcheniya” [A Triumph for Forgiveness] *Belorusskii rynok*. 4-10 March 1996.

²³⁵ “Minister Praises Debt Cancellation Accord with Russia” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-96-044, 1 March 1996.

²³⁶ “Yeltsin Cites Need to Strengthen Integration with Belarus” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-96-040, 27 February 1996.

²³⁷ Aleksandr Lukashenko, “Dogovor s Rossiei predpolagaet usilenie druzhby i ukreplenie suvereniteta” [The Treaty with Russia Intends to Strengthen Friendship and Fortify Sovereignty] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*. 28 March 1996.

reason behind deepening Belarus-Russia military ties, referring to Brussels' decision to expand the Alliance into Eastern Europe as "the most substantial negative factor effecting CIS security considerations."²³⁸ In clear reference to Belarus, Grachev underscored, "apparently the time has come for us too to closely coordinate our positions on the problems of European security."²³⁹

The level of military cooperation between the two states had been raised to yet another level and, as of 1 April 1996—the eve of the Community Treaty signing—Belarusian and Russian air defence forces began operating jointly.²⁴⁰ The Community Treaty envisaged Belarus and Russia adopting a common foreign policy, an integrated political and economic community, joint defence of external borders (non-CIS states), and full retention of each states' respective sovereignty.²⁴¹ The accord also created a Supreme Council, an Executive Committee, and a joint Parliamentary Assembly. Lukashenko termed the agreement as putting right "the historical error of 1991."²⁴²

²³⁸ Vladimir Berezko, "Integratsiya v voennoi oblasti prodolzhaetsya" [Integration in the Military Sphere Continues] *Krasnaya zvezda*. 28 March 1996.

²³⁹ Cited in Ilya Bulavinov and Sergei Zhikharev, "Skies Over the CIS are Declared One and Indivisible. For an Adversary" *Kommersant-Daily*. 28 March 1996. *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*. Vol. XLVIII, No. 13. 24 April 1996, pp. 20-21.

²⁴⁰ Aleksandr Ivanov, "Sily PVO dvukh stran okhranyayut nebo vmeste" [PVO Forces of Both Countries Defend the Sky Together] *Krasnaya zvezda*. 3 April 1996.

²⁴¹ For overview, see "Alexander the Not-So-Great" *The Economist*. 13 April 1996, pp. 28-29; Ustina Markus, "Imperial Understretch: Belarus's Union with Russia" *Current History*. No. 95, No. 603, October 1996, pp. 335-339.

²⁴² Cited in Stephen Main, *Belarus-Russian Military Relations (1991-1998)*. Camberley: Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (1998), p. 4. Lukashenko has made repeated reference to the Belarus-Russia Union as a revival of the USSR. For a personal perspective on the subject, see Aleksandr Lukashenko, "Raspad SSSR byl krupneishei katastrofoi XX veka" [The Collapse of the USSR was the Greatest Catastrophe of the 20th Century] *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. 5 March 1998.

The military alliance grew apace. On 5 April, President Lukashenko confirmed that Belarus had always been Russia's "*de facto* military ally" and mused about the possibility of Minsk taking "adequate measures" of its own if NATO stationed tactical nuclear weapons in the Czech Republic or Poland.²⁴³ Only days later, the Belarusian defence minister echoed Lukashenko's anti-expansionist views, and mused that if Poland was admitted into the Alliance, Minsk might be forced to redeploy troops to the Polish border.²⁴⁴

By 13 May 1996, the NATO variable had been factored into the security equation at a joint collegium meeting of the Belarus and Russian Federation Defence Ministries in Moscow. Discussions centred on defining bilateral military cooperation within the framework of the community treaty, as well as outlining the concept of a common defence policy. The meeting concluded with the signing of ten military accords. It was agreed that both states would prepare draft proposals by the end of the year on joint efforts to ensure regional security, develop a joint defence policy, train personnel in their respective higher military schools, advance the establishment of a regional air defence system and preserve cooperation between their military-industrial complexes in the production spheres of defence-related equipment, spare parts and weapons standardisation.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ "Moscow May Suspend Strategic Missile Pullout" *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-96-068, 5 April 1996.

²⁴⁴ "Army will Remain Army of Sovereign Nation" *Interfax*. FBIS-TAC-96-006, 11 April 1996.

²⁴⁵ "Ten Military Agreements Signed with Belarus" *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-96-094, 14 May 1996.

General Grachev issued a mixed message to the media during a subsequent news conference. On the one hand, he stated that Belarus-Russia military cooperation should not be perceived as a response to NATO expansion, no matter what Belarus's claim to the contrary. On the other hand, he stressed that the Kremlin was closely following the process and would take certain parallel measures if it became a reality.²⁴⁶ The formation of a "powerful" joint military coalition based in Belarus was not ruled out. "If our opinion is not taken into account by NATO leadership," Grachev warned, "the army group in the west can be strengthened as a military counter-response."²⁴⁷ According to the Russian defence minister, Moscow and Minsk were prepared to take "certain moves in response to NATO enlargement" while underscoring that the Belarus leader had already given his consent to the plan.²⁴⁸

The following day, the Belarusian Foreign Ministry denied any knowledge of Grachev's plans. The Presidential Administration, the Security Council, and Deputy Foreign Minister Ivan Antonovich also refused to comment on General Grachev's statements.²⁴⁹ Coincidentally, the first draft of Belarus's foreign policy concept was submitted for presidential approval on the same day. The document envisaged the creation of "a belt of good neighbourly relations" with all adjoining states and only listed civilian aspects of Belarus's "priority relations with Russia."²⁵⁰

²⁴⁶ "Cooperation with Belarus Not Response to NATO Expansion" *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-96-095, 14 May 1996.

²⁴⁷ "Russia, Belarus May Form Powerful Military Group" *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-96-094, 14 May 1996.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ "Minsk Has No Comment on Grachev Statement on NATO" *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-96-096, 15 May 1996.

²⁵⁰ "Belarus Situation Reverberates Internationally" *Jamestown Monitor*. Vol. 2, Issue 95, 16 May 1996. The Foreign Policy Concept was intended to present the republic's overarching foreign policy and principles of its international activities. The final draft was submitted in June 1997, however, its status

Ironically, both the Foreign Ministry and the government appeared oblivious to the extensive body of bilateral military developments. Although the document officially proclaimed Belarus maintained a 'balanced,' 'multi-vector' foreign policy, in practice, it lists biasedly towards Russia.

By mid-1996, the state-controlled Belarusian press began to devote large segments of its publications to the issue of NATO expansion. Invariably, several pieces touched on an array of political-military options Belarus and Russia could potentially exercise in light of NATO expansion. Lieutenant-General Leonid Ivashov chief of the Russian Defence Ministry's Main Directorate for International Military Cooperation, argued that Moscow had a "limited choice of somewhat inadequate means" of "matching" NATO expansion.²⁵¹ He maintained that regardless of assurances from Brussels on its transformation and reduction of its military strength, simple arithmetic dictated otherwise. According to Ivashov, if NATO accepted members of the former Warsaw Pact into its security fold, it would not only gain an upper hand in conventional superiority over Russia, the Alliance would also gain access to strategic military infrastructure in close proximity to the borders of the former Soviet Union.

Ivashov listed several possible options the Kremlin could pursue, including (undefined) "joint containment measures" with Belarus, intensifying military cooperation with

remains unclear. For an official assessment of Belarusian foreign policy at that time, see Vladimir Senko, "Vneshnyaya politika Respubliki Belarus: osnovnie napravleniya i perspektivy" [Foreign Policy of the Republic of Belarus: Directions and Prospects] *Belarus v mire*. Vol. 1, Issue 1, June 1996, p. 45-46.

²⁵¹ Leonid Ivashov, "Yeshcho raz k voprosu o rasshirenii NATO" [Back to the Issue of NATO Expansion] *Belarus v mire*. Vol. 1, Issue 1, June 1996, p. 54. Ivashov presently holds the rank of Colonel-General and remains the most devout anti-NATO spokesman in the Russian Armed Forces.

European states who do not intend to join NATO, increased concentrations of military groupings, reinforcing the Baltic Fleet, “nuclear bluffing,” as well as retargeting “certain Western European capitals” and NATO installations with nuclear missiles.²⁵² However, Ivashov underscored that such actions would only be a “defensive response” and in no way an emerging military threat to the West.

Although the Belarusian Ministry of Defence remained remarkably apolitical throughout the NATO expansion debate, the officer corps tended to be strongly pro-Russian, and as such, continued to perceive the Alliance negatively.²⁵³ Accordingly, NATO expansion gave strong impetus for the creation of a unified (Soviet-style) military within the Belarus-Russia Union.²⁵⁴ Such views were presented by Major-General Yuri Portnov, assistant to the Belarusian Minister of Defence on Military Policy. Portnov contended that regardless of the strength the Belarusian Armed Forces possessed, it would be difficult for the republic to solely safeguard its sovereignty, territorial integrity and national interests in light of the “changing geostrategic situation.”²⁵⁵ According to Portnov, NATO expansion would bring an “imbalance of forces” in Europe, one so severe that “Russia alone would not be able to urge NATO on the way of evolutionary development.”²⁵⁶

²⁵² Ibid, p. 55.

²⁵³ Marc Nordberg, “Limiting a Larger NATO: Diverging Views from Russia and Belarus” *Jane's Intelligence Review*. Vol. 9, No. 8, August 1997, p. 344.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Yuri Portnov, “Voennoe sotrudnichestvo Belarus-Rossiya” [Military Cooperation Belarus—Russia] *Belarus v mire*. Vol. 1, Issue 2, October 1996, p. 64.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 67.

An unforeseen shift in strategy was announced on 3 July 1996, on the occasion of the 52nd anniversary of Minsk's liberation from Nazi occupation. Aleksandr Lukashenko raised the old Soviet concept of creating a nuclear-free zone in East and Central Europe.²⁵⁷ Assuming that weapons of mass destruction would find their way to new NATO-member states,²⁵⁸ Lukashenko suggested that funds earmarked for expansion—a venture he dubbed “dangerous and costly”—would be better spent on the Chernobyl cleanup effort.²⁵⁹ In a later interview, then presidential first aide, Ural Latypov, disclosed the rationale behind the nuclear-free zone.

According to Latypov, the presence of NATO's nuclear missiles were no longer justified, since they were deployed in Europe during the Cold War in response to the numeric superiority of Warsaw Pact armour divisions concentrated along the bloc's western border. Latypov argued that following the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO's nuclear presence in Europe became redundant, since “Belarus and Ukraine ceased to pose a real threat to the West.”²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷ See Aleksandr Lyushkevich, “Initsiativa Belarusi uprochit evropeiskuyu bezopasnost'” [Belarus's Initiative Strengthens European Security] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*. 5 July 1996. There is an extensive body of literature dealing with nuclear-free zones in Central and Eastern Europe. For expanded discussions, see Aleksandr Sychev, “Status initsiativy o sozdanii zony svobodnoi ot yadernogo oruzhiya, v Tsentral'noi i Vostochnoi Evrope” [Status of the Initiative to Create a Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone in Central and Eastern Europe] *Belarus v mire*. Vol. 2, Issue 4, December 1997, pp. 49-51; Anatoly Shevtsov and Aleksandr Popov, “Problemy Evropeiskoi bezopasnosti: perspektivy bezyadernoi zony v Tsentral'noi i Vostochnoi Evrope” [Problems of European Security: Prospects for a Nuclear-Free Zones in Central and Eastern Europe] *Ukraina: problemy bezopasnosti*. Vol. 12 [Ukraine: Problems of Security] Irina Kobrinskaya and Sherman Garnett (eds.) Moscow: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (1996), pp. 49-83.

²⁵⁸ NATO employs a “flexible response” policy where nuclear weapons are concerned; making the risks of aggression against the Alliance incalculable in a way that conventional weapons alone cannot. For NATO's nuclear policy, see *The NATO Handbook*. Brussels: NATO Office of Information and Press (1999), pp. 155-157.

²⁵⁹ “Lukashenka Calls for Nuclear Free Zone in Central Europe” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-96-129, 3 July 1996.

²⁶⁰ “Minsk Concerned by Expansion of NATO to State Borders” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-96-193, 2 October 1996.

NATO Headquarters rejected the proposal outright; however, it underscored that the Alliance had no “intention, plan or reason” to station nuclear weapons on the territory of new member states. Brussels stated that it saw no need to change any aspects of its nuclear policy in the foreseeable future,²⁶¹ and Lukashenko was diplomatically informed that relations with NATO would depend upon “progress in the area of democratic reforms” in Belarus.²⁶²

It is worth noting that less than a month prior to the unveiling of the nuclear weapons-free zone proposal, the Russian press reported that Lukashenko had ordered a stop to the delivery of Belarus’s remaining strategic nuclear weapons.²⁶³ The withdrawal only resumed after a series of high-level negotiations and direct interventions by Defence Minister Pavel Grachev and then Commander of Strategic Missile Forces, Igor Sergeyev.²⁶⁴ The issue of countering NATO expansion was again raised in Aleksandr Lukashenko’s speech to the Russian State Duma in November 1996. Lukashenko took aim at Western “double standards” by questioning why, on one hand, the West perceived NATO expansion positively, and on the other, regarded Belarus-Russia military cooperation negatively.

²⁶¹ “NATO’s Solana Rejects Lukashenko’s Non-nuclear Zone Idea” *Interfax*. FBIS-TAC-97-006, 30 January 1997.

²⁶² Yuras Karmanov, “NATO ignoruet initsiativy Minska” [NATO Ignores Minsk’s Initiatives] *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. 15 February 1997.

²⁶³ Viktor Litovkin, “Lukashenko ne otpuskaet rossiiskie ‘Topolya’” [Lukashenko is not Relinquishing Russian ‘Topols’] *Izvestiia*. 13 June 1996. Under a pullout agreement, Russia’s 49th and 33rd Strategic Missile Divisions were scheduled to leave Belarus, along with any remaining Soviet nuclear warheads. The article also cited military experts advising against the stationing of nuclear missiles on Belarusian bases, given their close proximity (as close as 30 kilometres) to the Baltic and Polish borders, which made them potentially susceptible to artillery fire in the event of armed hostilities.

²⁶⁴ “Official Says Belarus Has Disrupted Nuclear Withdrawal” *Interfax*. FBIS-TAC-96-008, 5 June 1996.

Assuming that nuclear weapons would be stationed in neighbouring NATO member states, he raised the issue of why strategic arms were being deployed at the same time as the last nuclear weapons were being removed from Belarus.²⁶⁵ Furthermore, Lukashenko suggested Minsk and Moscow should demand joint guarantees that nuclear weapons not be deployed in new NATO states.

Lukashenko confirmed that “slightly over a dozen” nuclear missiles remained in Belarus, and hinted that their withdrawal might be conditional upon NATO’s promise that similar weapons not be deployed on the territory of its prospective members.²⁶⁶ He proclaimed that Belarus was fully ensuring Russia’s security in its western periphery and confirmed his country’s loyalty to Moscow by affirming that Belarus had always been, and would remain Russia’s main strategic partner.²⁶⁷ During an interview with *Pravda-5*, the Russian Federation’s Communist Party newspaper, Lukashenko saw no reason why NATO should be enlarged, calling attention to the fact that the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact had ceased to exist.

According to the Belarus president, NATO had not only survived, but began to advance its military infrastructure eastward towards the Belarusian border. Passionately defending his position, Lukashenko proceeded to criticise the “dangerous policy of

²⁶⁵ Aleksandr Lukashenko, “Ne obmanut’ svyatykh chuvstv nashikh narodov: Vystuplenie prezidenta Belorusi v Gosdume RF” [Do Not Deceive the Sacred Feelings between Our Peoples: Speech of the President of Belarus in the Russian State Duma] *Pravda-5*. 15-22 November 1996. During the course of Lukashenko’s speech, the liberal “Yabloko” fraction walked out, calling it “buffoonery.”

²⁶⁶ “Guarantees to be Demanded if Nuke Withdrawal Continues” *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-96-221, 13 November 1996.

²⁶⁷ “Lukashenko: ‘Slightly Over a Dozen Nukes’ Yet to be Removed” *Interfax*. FBIS-TAC-96-010, 13 November 1996.

Western double standards.” He questioned why the West supported military rapprochement with former Warsaw Pact states, yet, by the same token, condemned any organised attempt from “eastern states” to oppose those plans.²⁶⁸

Referring to his earlier proposal for a joint Belarus-Russia response to NATO expansion as the “only sensible decision,” Lukashenko confirmed that military cooperation between Belarus and Russia would be strengthened as a countermeasure.²⁶⁹ When pressed about details, he remained aloof, stating only that “politicians and the military” would decide those issues. Despite Lukashenko’s threat to stop the nuclear withdrawal, the final SS-25 left for Russia in late November 1996, making Belarus the last former Soviet republic (save Russia) to become nuclear-free.²⁷⁰ Belarusian officials confirmed that the last warheads were shipped to Russia for dismantling on 23 November. A single missile was retained for the symbolic withdrawal ceremony held near Lida, in northwestern Belarus.²⁷¹ Russian Defence Minister Igor Rodionov attended the ceremony, but President Lukashenko did not. The task ahead was to decommission the remaining launch sites and 81 ICBM silos.²⁷² Under START I, Belarus was obligated to destroy the

²⁶⁸ Igor Lensky and Oleg Stepaneko, “Aleksandr Lukashenko: ‘Budu delat’ vso, chto otvechaet vole naroda” [Aleksandr Lukashenko: I Will do Everything that Corresponds to the Will of the People] *Pravda*-5, 22-29 November 1996.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ By comparison, Ukraine relinquished its last nuclear weapons on 1-2 June 1996. See Fred Weir, “Last Nuclear Weapons Leave Ukrainian Soil” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 12 June 1996, p. 13.

²⁷¹ Ian Kemp, “Russia: NATO Expansion May Prompt Retargeting” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 4 December 1996, p. 5. The missile withdrawal coincided with the test firing of an SS-24 “Scalpel” ICBM from a train-mounted launcher at the Plesetsk test site in Northern Russia. All ten warheads successfully hit their targets in the Far Eastern Kamchatka peninsula. Given the timing and nature of the test, there can be little doubt that the exercise was carried out to demonstrate Russia’s nuclear potency.

²⁷² Marina Volkova, “V Belorussii vstupila v sily novaya konstitutsiya: Vchera zhe s territorii respubliki vyvedena poslednyaya yadernaya boegolovka” [Belarus’s New Constitution Entered Into Power: Yesterday the Last Nuclear Warhead was Removed from the Republic’s Territory] *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 8 November 1996.

stationary structures associated with the SS-25 ICBMs by the year 2000, though a protocol signed in Minsk on 22 October 1997 was to extend this period by one year.²⁷³

In spite of this, Belarus's Soviet-built nuclear launch facilities remain largely intact.²⁷⁴

3.3 GEOPOLITICAL IMPERATIVES AND CONTEMPORARY REALITIES

Between late 1996 and early 1997, Minsk and Moscow began to voice an interest in finding an alternative pan-European security architecture, possibly based within the framework of the OSCE.²⁷⁵ At the core of government policy statements was the concept of two opposing trends—"unipolar," meaning US/NATO domination, and "multipolar," implying many centres of influence including Russia. Minsk's solution has been to work towards re-establishing military ties with its eastern neighbour. The higher echelons of the Russian *nomenklatura* began to discuss the need to consolidate forces with Belarus to counter what they perceived as a threat to its interests and freedom of manoeuvre in Central Europe by an expanding Cold War adversary.

²⁷³ *Jane's Sentinel: Russia and the CIS*. Coulsdon: Jane's Information Group (January-June 2000), p. 136.

²⁷⁴ The removal of the last nuclear missile from Belarusian soil closely coincided with Aleksandr Lukashenko's second controversial referendum. The 24 November 1996 plebiscite granted Lukashenko sweeping powers to rewrite the constitution, extend his five-year term of office to 2001, and dissolve Belarus's democratically elected parliament, which was subsequently replaced with hand-picked supporters. Russia was the first country to acknowledge the referendum's results; the West has so far refused—citing fraud and deeming Lukashenko's rule illegitimate after 20 July 1999. The revised Constitution upheld the republic's 'neutral' and non-nuclear status, the president's earlier reluctance to relinquish nuclear weapons notwithstanding. Given Belarus's military rapprochement with Russia, the republic's definition of 'neutrality' had been modified to mean banning service for Belarusian troops in foreign conflicts. For a more complete discussion on this subject, see Seven M. Eke and Taras Kuzio, "Sultanism in Eastern Europe: The Socio-Political Roots of Authoritarianism in Belarus" *Europe-Asia Studies*. Vol. 52, No. 3, March 2000, pp. 523-547. For revised Constitution, see "Konstitutsiya Respubliki Belarus 1994 goda (s izmeneniyami i dopolneniyami)" [The 1994 Constitution of the Republic of Belarus (with modifications and additions)] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*. 27 November 1996.

²⁷⁵ See "Lukashenka: Future Model of Security Should Unite Countries" *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-96-233, 2 December 1996.

“If NATO moves East, than we move West” was essentially the message conveyed by Boris Yeltsin in a letter to his Belarusian counterpart in January 1997.²⁷⁶ Similar calls were echoed by then Russian Deputy Prime Minister, Sergei Shakhrai who explicitly stated that unification of Belarus and Russia would be “the most effective response” to NATO expansion.²⁷⁷ His statement represented the most open official acknowledgement of the motivations behind the Kremlin’s support for rapprochement with Belarus.²⁷⁸ The Deputy Prime Minister’s claims were neither new, nor surprising, considering only months earlier, he mused with the idea of using Kaliningrad to strategically “contain” NATO’s eastward expansion.²⁷⁹ Shakhrai’s remarks were further underscored by Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov. In a passionate speech, the mayor appealed for unity on many levels of national interest, including security and defence. During the course of his address, Luzhkov boldly stated that “integration with Belarus is a natural reaction to NATO’s unwillingness to take serious account of Russia’s opinion in its long term plans.”²⁸⁰ Luzhkov was later cited as saying that the very process of Belarus-Russia integration could “stop” NATO expansion altogether.²⁸¹

²⁷⁶ “Russia’s Terms for Belarus” *The Economist*. 18 January 1997, p. 48.

²⁷⁷ “Countries Must Unite to Respond to NATO Expansion” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-97-009, 13 January 1997; Cited in “Moskva—Minsk: okno v Evropu” [Moscow—Minsk: Window to Europe] *Trud*. 15 January 1997. Shakhrai claimed to have sent a letter to Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov on Russia’s course of action to counter NATO’s eastward expansion at the end of December 1996.

²⁷⁸ “Belarus-Russia Unification: Shakhrai Spills the Beans” *Jamestown Monitor*. Vol. 3, Issue 4, 7 January 1997.

²⁷⁹ Referring to Kaliningrad as Russia’s “western outpost,” Shakhrai considered the region to be a “unique component” in maintaining the balance of power in Europe, since it was home to units of the Baltic Fleet, the 11th Army and contingents of Russian border troops. However, Shakhrai provided no details on the actual course of action that was to be taken. See “Kaliningrad Can Contain NATO Expansion” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-95-208, 26 October 1995.

²⁸⁰ “Luzhkov Speech on Unity with Belarus” *Rossiiskaya gazeta*. FBIS-SOV-97-042, 1 March 1997.

²⁸¹ “Moscow Mayor: Belarus ‘Union’ to Hamper NATO Expansion” *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-97-134, 14 May 1997.

On the whole, the Russian State Duma was supportive of union with Belarus, despite reservations expressed by some members over its actual effectiveness in limiting a larger NATO. This argument was underpinned by Viktor Ilyukhin, head of the Russian State Duma's Security Committee, who claimed that integration would actually do little to curb expansion.²⁸² Although these carefully scripted comments lacked a sense of realism or consequence, they nevertheless acted as a strong rallying cry for action, and in some cases, an excuse to reconstruct a semblance of bygone Soviet military might. Yet, this *kto-kogo* approach became a source of much tension in Poland and the Baltic States, particularly where the military aspects of Belarus-Russia rapprochement were concerned. These manifestations were perceived as proof of Russian neo-imperialism—thereby justifying NATO expansion and pressuring other states to seek membership.

On 7 March 1997, Presidents Lukashenko and Yeltsin issued a joint communiqué, stating that both countries were united in their opposition to NATO's planned expansion.²⁸³ Similarly, the NATO question was cited as a factor for the advancement of the integration process, and a major impetus in forging closer links in their foreign policies. In a speech to the third session of the Belarus-Russia Parliamentary Assembly in March 1997, Aleksandr Lukashenko spoke of the imminent threat NATO expansion posed to Belarusian security. Lukashenko bemoaned the loss of Belarus's nuclear arsenal, calling the removal a "hasty" decision, and referred to their presence in the republic as a "serious

²⁸² "Duma Supports Yeltsin's Initiative on Union with Belarus" *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-97-010, 14 January 1997.

²⁸³ "Yeltsin, Lukashenka United in Opposition to NATO Expansion" *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-97-066, 7 March 1997.

restraining factor” which NATO would have had to take into account prior to expansion.²⁸⁴

By the same token, he expressed confidence that Russia and Belarus would find (undisclosed) “very effective counter-balances” if NATO crossed the “red line” (the borders of the former Soviet Union) and accepted former Soviet republics into its security fold.²⁸⁵ He also proposed the formation of a Minsk-Moscow-Beijing strategic axis be contemplated as soon as possible to counterbalance an expanding NATO.²⁸⁶ Boris Yeltsin dismissed the proposition outright, ridiculing his Belarusian counterpart by calling him “a young, inexperienced politician.”²⁸⁷ Looking past Lukashenko’s sabre rattling, more concrete plans surrounding the consolidation of Belarus-Russia air defences was being discussed at a parallel meeting between the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Air Force, General Piotr Deinekin and his Belarusian counterpart, General Sergei Sedov. Both sides underscored that they had long been prepared for the inevitability of NATO expansion, citing the “Redoubt 96” strategic command exercises in which scenarios were developed for joint military actions against current and prospective NATO members—including the Baltic States.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁴ “Lukashenka Cites Unity with Russia in Opposing NATO” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-97-070, 11 March 1997.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ Marina Volkova and Yuras Karmanov, “Belorusskii lider predlozhit v tselyakh protivodeistviya rasshireniyu NATO sozdat’ os’ ‘Minsk-Moskva-Pekin’” [Belarus Leader Proposed Creating a Minsk-Moscow-Beijing Axis with the Aim of Countering NATO Expansion] *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. 13 March 1997.

²⁸⁷ Cited in Marc Nordberg, “Limiting a Larger NATO: Diverging Views from Russia and Belarus” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*. Vol. 9, No. 8, August 1997, p. 345.

²⁸⁸ Ilya Bulavinov, “Russia Makes Final Drive to the West” *Kommersant-Daily*. 13 March 1997. *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*. Vol. XLIX, No. 11, 16 April 1997, p. 22. In early April 1997, an exercise in the Moscow Military District was conducted with the goal of defending Belarus from a combined Polish-

Additional Belarus-Russia Air Force exercises were announced for late April 1997 in preparation for the redeployment of joint air contingents in Belarus. Military experts predicted that “it [was] possible within a very short period of time to deploy a joint air contingent in Belarus capable of counteracting NATO air groupings.”²⁸⁹ For his part, General Deinekin pointed out that, “undoubtedly, we cannot help but think about countermeasures. From a military point of view, NATO’s advancement eastward is aggression, but so far without the use of arms.”²⁹⁰

In late April 1997, a declassified report was published in *Nezavisimaya gazeta* that stands out among other analytical materials on Belarus-Russia relations. Authored jointly by Moscow’s *Politika* Fund and the Council for Foreign and Defence Policy, the report is a critical assessment of the ramifications of Belarus-Russia integration, and significantly magnifies the benefits of unification when viewed through the lens of Russia’s foreign and defence policy priorities.²⁹¹

The cited “advantages” of unification include: direct access to the borders of Central Europe; the elimination of an emergent Baltic-Black Sea “Russia isolation belt;” additional leverage on Ukraine; the “optimisation” of Russia’s strategic position in its western periphery; and the augmentation of the Kremlin’s military capacity through an

Lithuanian attack using Russian nuclear weapons. See “Pol’sha i Litva gotovyatsya napast’ na Belarus?” [Are Poland and Lithuania Preparing to Invade Belarus?] *Belorusskaya gazeta*. 28 July 1997.

²⁸⁹ Aleksandr Shaburkin, “Rossiya-Belorussiya” *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*. No. 15, 19-25 April 1997.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ “Rossiisko-belorusskii Soyuz: vygody fundamental’ny, negativnye posledstvia minimal’ny” [Russian-Belarusian Union: Fundamental Advantages, Negative Consequences Minimal] *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. (NG-Sisenarii) No. 5, 29 April 1997.

alliance with the Belarusian Armed Forces.²⁹² Possible “negative” risk factors listed include; closer Polish-Ukrainian-Lithuanian relations; accelerated rapprochement among the Baltic States; greater Western attention focused on Ukraine; and a possible escalation of US-Russia tensions.

The report underscored that Belarus-Russia rapprochement should not be perceived solely within the context of NATO expansion; citing mutual needs for unity on many levels of national interest. The authors argue that the sense of “guilt” over the decision to expand NATO eastward has opened a “window of opportunity” for moving Belarus and Russia closer together, citing a range of strategic advantages within the spheres of defence and security cooperation. It confirms that 180 Russian defence enterprises maintain contact with 120 Belarusian arms manufacturing plants and 15 research institutes engaged in defence-related projects—three of which specialise in the production of sophisticated electronic components that constitute a monopoly within the CIS. Belarus accounts for 15 percent of Russian defence imports, from satellite communication equipment and radar station components to amphibious chassis and mobile strategic missile launchers.²⁹³ To this end, the military-industrial complexes of both states function much as they did prior to the collapse of the USSR. In the final analysis, the report acknowledges that union with Belarus meets—although does not define—Russia’s “national interests.”

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Valery Serov, “Soyuz Rossii i Belorussii” [Union of Russia and Belarus] *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. 25 April 1997.

On 2 April 1997, a day President Lukashenko had earlier declared a public holiday in Belarus, a draft treaty was signed transforming the Belarus-Russia 'Community' into a 'Union.'²⁹⁴ Shortly thereafter, the Belarusian leader said that, "it would be logical to assume that we need a military alliance to guarantee out joint policies."²⁹⁵ Although the Union Charter of Belarus and Russia fell short of establishing a formal military alliance, in Article 11, the following joint security activities were agreed upon:

- ❑ to take, if necessary, joint measures to avert a threat to the sovereignty and independence of each of the other member-states of the Union;
- ❑ to coordinate the activity of the member-states of the Union, in the field of military development and the development of their Armed Forces, to jointly use the military infrastructure and to take other measures, with due account of the interests of member-states of the Union, for maintaining their own defence capability, and the Union's defence capability;
- ❑ to work out and place a joint defence order and to ensure supplies on its basis and use of arms and armaments and military hardware; to create a joint system of technical support for the armed forces of member-states of the Union
- ❑ to carry out a coordinated frontier policy...²⁹⁶

Yevgeny Primakov confirmed that nuclear weapons would "never and under no circumstances" return to Belarus in peacetime.²⁹⁷ For his part, Lukashenko denied allegations that the Belarus-Russia Union was instituted as a "counterbalance" to NATO expansion adding the proviso that "each bloc must realise that if a threat arises, adequate

²⁹⁴ "Dogovor o Soyuze Belarusi i Rossii" [Union Treaty of Belarus and Russia] *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. 1 April 1997. The treaty generated a considerable amount of op-ed pieces in the Russian press. For example, see Otto Latsis, "3 aprelya my ostaemsya v Rossii. A cherez mesyats?" [On 3 April We Will Remain in Russia. But in a Month?] *Izvestiia*. 3 April 1997; Aman Tuleyev, "Proryv k soyuzu" [Break Towards Union] *Sovetskaya Rossiya*. 10 April 1997.

²⁹⁵ "Lukashenka Comments on Military Alliance, Integration" *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-97-142, 22 May 1997.

²⁹⁶ "Ustav Soyuz Belarusi i Rossii" [Union Charter of Belarus and Russia] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*. 27 May 1997.

²⁹⁷ "Primakov Says Nuclear Arms Not to be Deployed in Belarus" *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-UMA-97-144, 24 May 1997.

actions from the other side will follow.”²⁹⁸ At any rate, the NATO variable provided both states reason to ensure that at least some the military provisions end up becoming more than just rhetoric.

3.4 THE REMILITARIZATION OF BELARUS

The situation changed dramatically when, on 27 May 1997, NATO and Russia signed the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security. Both parties declared that they no longer considered each other adversaries and that each would work towards ensuring security in Europe.²⁹⁹ Ukraine signed a similar accord with NATO, Belarus did not. Minsk preferred instead to have its interests brokered by Russia, leaving the republic in an ambiguous relationship with the Alliance.³⁰⁰ A Belarus-NATO treaty is unlikely to be negotiated any time in the foreseeable future, given the republic’s censure in most European institutions and the dubious legitimacy of its president.³⁰¹

²⁹⁸ “Lukashenka Vows to Defend Russia from Western Threat” *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-97-143, 23 May 1997.

²⁹⁹ “Osnovopolagaiushchy Akt” [Founding Act] *Krasnaya zvezda*. 29 May 1997; For official overview, see *The NATO Handbook*. Brussels: NATO Office of Information and Press (1999), pp. 97-102.

³⁰⁰ Speaking at a press conference on 28 May 1997, Lukashenko told journalists that Belarus had guarantees from Moscow that its interests would be upheld on the issue of NATO expansion. See Larisa Rakovskaya and Andrei Akimov, “Prezident Belarusi okharakterizoval obstanovku v strane i otvetil na voprosy zhurnalistov” [The President of Belarus Characterised the Situation in the Country and Answered Journalists’ Questions] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*. 29 May 1997; “Belarus Interests Protected During NATO Talks” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-97-140, 20 May 1997.

³⁰¹ In reaction to the special agreements being negotiated with Russia and Ukraine by NATO, President Lukashenko hinted in March 1997 that he would also like to forge a bilateral accord with the Alliance. Needless to say, the proposal achieved little success. See “Lukashenka: Belarus for Direct Talks, Bilateral NATO Accord” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-97-063, 4 March 1997; The NATO-Ukraine Charter was also implemented in 1997, but in contrast to the NATO-Russia Founding Act, the document was oriented towards convergence rather than establishing safeguards against the Alliance. See Olga Alexandrova, “The NATO-Ukraine Charter: Kiev’s Euro-Atlantic Integration” *Aussenpolitik*. Vol. 48, Issue 4, 1997, pp. 325-334.

The NATO-Russia Founding Act marked Moscow's acquiescence, however, President Lukashenko continued to disapprove strongly of expansion following the Madrid summit in July 1997, where the decision to open the Alliance to include the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland by 1999 was announced. Echoing the Kremlin's discontent over the decision to expand the Alliance eastward, Lukashenko underscored that Belarus's border with Poland would become one with NATO, and the *de facto* "dividing line" of Europe.

The Belarus president subsequently labelled the resolution at Madrid as "possibly the greatest mistake of Western politicians in the 20th century."³⁰² Shortly thereafter, Lukashenko called for tougher workplace discipline to face NATO's eastward expansion, interpreting Poland's invitation to the Alliance as Belarus's 'wake up call' to pay more attention to enterprises with potential military purposes.³⁰³ In August 1997, presidential aide Sergei Posokhov took this one step further by professing that the CIS Treaty on Collective Security could act as the *de jure* foundation upon which an anti-NATO bloc could be created.³⁰⁴ Assuming that it would only be a matter of time before nuclear weapons found their way to new NATO member states, Posokhov believed that the deployment of Russian coalition units and tactical nuclear arms to Belarus would "serve the republic's national interest."³⁰⁵

³⁰² Aleksandr Lukashenko, "Rashirenje NATO—vozmozhno samaya bol'shaya oshibka zapadnykh politikov XX veka" [NATO Expansion—Probably the Greatest Mistake of Western Politicians in the 20th Century] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*. 9 July 1997.

³⁰³ "Belarusian President on NATO Expansion" *RFE/RL Newslines*. Vol. 1, No. 72, 14 July 1997.

³⁰⁴ Matvei Levdansky, "Leto: nashi sani yedut sami?" [Summer: Our Sleds Propel Themselves?] *Belorusskaya gazeta*. 4 August 1997.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

The war of words escalated in the following months. Lukashenko fumed over NATO's announcement at Madrid, referring to it as the consolidation of the West's "Cold War victory," in addition to musing about unspecified retaliatory countermeasures, including development of "expensive military programmes."³⁰⁶ Rhetoric aside, a major step towards the further re-integration of Belarusian and Russian Armed Forces took place on 19 December 1997, when the Russian Minister of Defence, Marshal Igor Sergeyev met his Belarusian counterpart, Colonel-General Aleksandr Chumakov, in Minsk for an official one day working visit. The high-level meeting concluded with the formal signing of a comprehensive package of defence agreements, including a formal military treaty, and an agreement on joint regional security.³⁰⁷ Insofar as the accords tied in a variety of mutually advantageous provisions for both Belarus and Russia, NATO expansion was tacitly cited as the impetus behind the military treaty.³⁰⁸ Although a comprehensive package of defence agreements had been signed in May 1996, their provisions were adjusted to reflect both "the contemporary realities of Belarus-Russia relations and the current international situation."³⁰⁹ The military treaty itself envisages the development of joint defence policies and unifying legislation in the military sphere. It also detailed the creation of a joint regional military group, and set its command procedures for military operations.³¹⁰

³⁰⁶ On Cold War comments, see "Lukashenka Says to Discuss Security with NATO" *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-97-248, 5 September 1997; For military programmes, see "Lukashenka on Council of Europe's 'Tense' Ties with Belarus" FBIS-SOV-97-304, 31 October 1997.

³⁰⁷ Oleg Falichev, "Oboronny soyuz Rossii i Belorussii ne protivorechit Dogovoru o kollektivnoi bezopasnosti SNG" [Military Union Between Russia and Belarus Will Not Contradict the CIS Treaty on Collective Security] *Krasnaya zvezda*. 23 December 1997.

³⁰⁸ Aleksei Bezveselny, "Sdelan vazhny shag v oblasti voennoi integratsii Belarusi i Rossiei" [An Important Step was Taken in the Area of Belarus-Russia Military Integration] *Vo slavu Rodiny*. 23 December 1997.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

³¹⁰ *Jane's Sentinel: Russia and the CIS*. Coulsdon: Jane's Information Group (January-June 2000), p. 149.

According to Marshal Sergeyev, the document allowed Belarus and Russia “to plan and carry out a range of measures, including operational and military training.”³¹¹ Although the issue of returning nuclear weapons to Belarus was not on the agenda, the matter of decommissioning Belarus’s nuclear launch sites was. When pressed on the question why Minsk did not proceed with the dismantlement of its ICBM launch sites immediately following the return of nuclear weapons to Russia, Defence Minister Chumakov replied that decommissioning would only proceed when ordered by the Commander-in-Chief of the Belarusian Armed Forces—namely, President Lukashenko.³¹²

A month after Russia unveiled its National Security Concept in December 1997, a joint defence policy was formally signed at a session of the Belarus-Russia Parliamentary Assembly in Moscow.³¹³ The document defines the principles and directions of both states’ defence policies; unifies approaches towards organising and defending the Union of Belarus and Russia from external aggression, and outlines joint defensive measures should a military threat to either state emerge.³¹⁴ Aside from its highly symbolic value in light of NATO expansion, the accord introduced a significant variable in Belarus-Russia strategic relations by placing both states within the framework of a “common defence

³¹¹ Oleg Falichev, “Oboronny soyuz Rossii i Belorussii ne protivorechit Dogovoru o kollektivnoi bezopasnosti SNG” [Military Union Between Russia and Belarus will not Contradict the CIS Treaty on Collective Security] *Krasnaya zvezda*. 23 December 1997.

³¹² “V Minske pobyval ministr oborony Rossii” [Russian Minister of Defence Visited Minsk] *Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta*. 22 December 1997.

³¹³ Russia’s National Security Concept maintained that Moscow has no external enemies *per se*, and is interested in wider and deeper political-military cooperation. At the same time, it unequivocally warns “NATO’s expansion to the East is unacceptable to Russia, as it represents a national security threat.” The Concept also formalises nuclear deterrence as part of the Russian Federation’s military doctrine, effectively abandoning its ‘no first use’ policy. See “Kontseptsiya Natsional’noi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii” [National Security Concept of the Russian Federation] *Rossiiskaya gazeta*. 26 December 1997.

³¹⁴ Aleksandr Petrovich, “‘Dvoika’ ... ‘Chetverka’ ... Soyuz?” [‘Duet’ ... ‘Quartet’ ... Union?] *Belorusskaya gazeta*. 26 January 1998.

area,” and entails the creation of a joint military coalition, integrated defence systems, and mutual access to military infrastructure.³¹⁵

There was an immediate context made to the Minsk-Moscow accord, revealed by Marshal Igor Sergeyev during an official visit to Germany on 29 January 1998. Sergeyev delivered a curt anti-expansion message by stating that NATO threatened only Russia and as a result, deployment of joint Belarusian and Russian military contingents in western Belarus could not be ruled out.³¹⁶ By the same token, he warned in no uncertain terms of a potential “stand-off between the two military unions.” Sergeyev’s outburst was in reaction to the planned multi-national Danish-German-Polish North-East Corps based in Szczecin, which was envisaged as strategic defence for the western approaches of the Baltic Sea.³¹⁷ Sergeyev stated that the move was tantamount to NATO “advancing toward the Russian border with weapons in hand.”³¹⁸ Further steps were soon taken towards the reintegration of Belarus-Russia defence forces. In March, joint staff exercises were held in the Moscow Military District,³¹⁹ and on 15 April 1998 Lieutenant-General Kostenko announced that Belarus and Russia were establishing a unified regional air defence system slated for service by the year 2000.

³¹⁵ This agreement should not be confused with the Treaty on Coordination of Activities in the Defence Area signed in July 1992, which brought Belarus and Russia into a “single strategic area” and was designed specifically to allow the former to establish its own national Armed Forces.

³¹⁶ “Russian Minister: NATO Expansion Threatens Only Russia” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-98-028, 29 January 1998.

³¹⁷ “Sergeyev Worried by German, Danish, Polish Military Corps” *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-98-028, 29 January 1998.

³¹⁸ Cited in Jan de Weydenthal, “Russia Criticizes Plan to Create North-East Corps” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. 4 February 1998.

³¹⁹ Vladimir Mukhin, “Voennoe sotrudnichestvo konkretiziruetsya” [Military Cooperation Solidifies] *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. 17 April 1998.

Kostenko spoke of the need for an integrated regional air defence system whose main purpose would be “to monitor airspace in the western direction, to guard and defend it.”³²⁰ Kostenko compared the project to a Eurasian version of the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD).³²¹ Yet, it was left to Aleksandr Lukashenko to irrefutably confirm that Belarus-Russia military ties were strengthening specifically in response to NATO expansion. In an address to the Belarusian Supreme Soviet in May 1998, he said:

The nature of the military-political relations between our countries is predetermined by the communality of fundamental views that our nations share and the necessity of joint defence from potential and real threats. Both our nations spoke as one in relation to the enlargement of NATO and consider it our task to maintain stability in Europe. The Supreme Council of the Union has approved the joint defence policy concept for Belarus and Russia. Ministers from both countries have signed the Treaty of Military Cooperation and the Agreement on Joint Maintenance of Regional Security in the Military Sphere. Objective reasons have led us to adopt such measures, not least the enlargement of NATO and the desire of certain circles to turn it [NATO] into the dominating system on the European continent...work is also being carried out on a draft defence doctrine for the Union, ensuring the necessary conditions for the creation of regional military groups, the defence infrastructure, unifying the security system of both countries.³²²

President Lukashenko's remarks were further elaborated upon by Major-General Aleksandr Bevzo, head of the Special Program Board on the Executive Committee of the Union of Belarus and Russia. Bevzo revealed that both states would be able to start “the formation of a regional army group once the legislatures of the two countries ratify the

³²⁰ “Russia, Belarus to Create Single Air Defense System” *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-UMA-98-105, 15 April 1998.

³²¹ “Russia and Belarus to Set Up Joint Air Defences” *Jane's Intelligence Review*. Vol. 10, No. 5. May 1998, p. 1; Igor Kandral, “Voiska PVO—strazh poryadka v nebe” [PVO Forces—On Guard in the Sky] *Vo slavu Rodiny*. 8 April 1999.

³²² Aleksandr Lukashenko, “‘Soyuz dvukh’—ne zastyvshie ponyatie” [Union of Two—Not Stagnant Ideas] *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. 5 May 1998.

1997 agreement on joint provision of regional military security...if a political decision to this effect is made, a common defence area may be set up eventually.”³²³ He confirmed that the defence ministries of both states were taking stock of their military infrastructure and were “choosing the sites where joint security systems will be on alert.”³²⁴

In July 1998, Lukashenko underscored that military reform in both countries should be coordinated in order to defend the Belarus-Russia Union against “political, economic and informational pressures”—techniques which he believed were being applied by NATO, and thus required a “combat-ready” army.³²⁵ As a subset to the later, the Belarusian Ministry of Defence announced a comprehensive restructuring package, which included a merger of the republic’s Air Force and Air Defence Forces into a single entity by 2002.³²⁶

By September, Lukashenko was again raising the issue of Belarus’s relinquished nuclear arsenal, calling his predecessor’s decision to remove nuclear arms from the republic “a crude mistake, if not a crime.”³²⁷ Lukashenko elaborated by referring to the nuclear withdrawal as a “tragedy”—not because Belarus ceased to possess a nuclear arsenal—but because he perceived it to be a “major political miscalculation” that weakened the Kremlin’s position in its relationship with NATO.³²⁸ The Belarus leader boasted about his direct role in stalling the removal of nuclear arms for 18 months, and underscored that

³²³ “Russia, Belarus to Set Up Regional Military Group” *Interfax*. FBIS-UMA-98-148, 28 May 1998.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ “Lukashenko Wants Joint Military Reforms in Russia, Belarus” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-98-199, 7 July 1998.

³²⁶ “Belarus Plans Restructuring” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*. 8 July 1996, p. 6.

³²⁷ “Lukashenko: Withdrawal of Belarus Nuclear Weapons a Mistake” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-98-266, 23 September 1998.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*

Belarus was once again under pressure from the West to destroy its remaining nuclear launch sites as soon as possible.

In early October, the Russian State Duma unanimously ratified two Belarus-Russia military treaties previously signed in December 1997. Under the agreements, neither country can disclose information obtained from their military cooperation to a third party without the other's written permission; while the regional security accord established the parameters of their inter-operational capabilities.³²⁹ Military agreements were signed on 16 October 1998 at a joint session of the Belarus-Russia Defence Ministries in Moscow. The main item on the agenda centred specifically on coordinating efforts of both military establishments following the accession of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland into NATO.³³⁰

A number of military accords were signed, including a document on the foreign political activity of their departments following the decision to enlarge NATO.³³¹ The ministers also approved a comprehensive cooperation package governing the joint use of military infrastructure, information exchanges, as well as a programme for weapons and munitions procurement.³³² Marshal Sergeyev announced that the defence ministries had worked out specific measures to resist NATO's enlargement, but refused to elaborate on

³²⁹ "State Duma Ratifies 2 Defense Agreements with Belarus" *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-98-275, 2 October 1998.

³³⁰ Vladimir Berezko, "V interesakh yedinogo oboronnogo prostranstva" [In the Interests of a Single Defence Space] *Krasnaya zvezda*. 17 October 1998.

³³¹ "Na zapadnom 'fronte' gryadut peremeny" [Limiting Variables on the Western 'Front'] *Krasnaya zvezda*. 16 October 1998.

³³² "Russia, Belarus Sign Defense Accords" *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-98-289, 16 October 1998.

account of “secrecy.”³³³ He disclosed that following the Visegrad trio’s accession into NATO, the Belarusian Armed Forces would become the Belarus-Russia Union’s “the first line of defence.”³³⁴ Expansion aside, Belarusian and Russian defence ministries specifically identified the threat of NATO air strikes against Yugoslavia as a major factor in strengthening bilateral military ties.³³⁵

By Minsk’s request, the Russian Defence Ministry upgraded Belarus’s air defence systems with medium-range Buk (SA-11) surface-to-air missiles (SAM) capable of destroying multiple targets at various altitudes, including fighter aircraft and helicopters, as well as cruise and tactical ballistic missiles.³³⁶ Correspondingly, President Lukashenko expressed his readiness to extend military assistance to Belgrade—including arms shipments—musing that NATO would set its sights on Belarus next.³³⁷ By the same token, he suggested the Belarus-Russia Union be opened up to include Yugoslavia. The plan never reached fruition, however, Belgrade received permanent observer status in the Belarus-Russia Parliamentary Assembly.

³³³ “Russia’s Sergeyev: Irreversible Settlement Begins in FRY” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-98-289, 16 October 1998.

³³⁴ “Voennye vedomstva ozabocheny aktivnost’yu NATO” [Military Departments Concerned Over NATO Activity] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*. 17 October 1998.

³³⁵ “Sergeyev: Russia, Belarus See Eye to Eye on Kosovo” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-98-289, 16 October 1998.

³³⁶ “Russia Modernizing Belarusian Anti-Aircraft System” *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-98-292, 19 October 1998; Aleksei Lyashchenko, “...I nebo odno na dvoikh” [...And One Sky for Both] *Krasnaya zvezda*. 31 October 1998. For holdings, see Table 7: Air Defence Weapons.

³³⁷ “Lukashenka: Belarus Can Provide Military Aid to Yugoslavia” *Interfax*. FBIS-UMA-98-282, 9 October 1998.

As the Kosovo crisis reverberated throughout the CIS, Belarus provided fertile soil for several conspiracy theories. The scenario that generated the most controversy by far, was unveiled by Deputy Director of the International Committee on International and CIS Affairs, Sergei Kostyan, who mused about a Yugoslav-like scenario developing in Belarus—with the Polish minority enacting the role of Albanian Kosovars in bizarre a plot to undermine and topple the Lukashenko government.³³⁸ Earlier reports by the Belarusian KGB claimed that Polish operatives backed by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) were playing an active role in Belarus by recruiting Belarusian Poles for the purpose of organising a coup.³³⁹ Kostyan hypothesised that the ensuing turmoil would trigger a NATO-led intervention, similar to that applied in Kosovo. He accused both Warsaw and Berlin of conducting “secret negotiations” in a plot to reclaim Poland’s former eastern territories annexed by the Soviet Union at the conclusion of World War II, in exchange for former German lands now comprising western Poland.³⁴⁰

Six months later, a parallel conspiracy theory was unveiled by Viktor Ilyukhin, head of the Russian Duma Security Committee, who “uncovered” an alleged CIA plot to spark civil unrest with the help of the Polish minority in Belarus. Ilyukhin depicted a scenario in which President Lukashenko would be accused of ethnically suppressing Polish Catholics in the Grodno region and obliging NATO to intervene by bombing Belarus.

³³⁸ Olga Tomashevskaya and Viktor Martinovich, “Lukashenko ugrozhaet Evrope: ‘budet zharko’” [Lukashenko Threatens Europe: ‘It Will Be Hot’] *Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta*. 12 October 1998.

³³⁹ “Belarus Accuses Poland of Subversion on West’s Behalf” *Jamestown Monitor*. Vol. 4, Issue 26, 9 February 1998.

³⁴⁰ For full interview with Sergei Kostyan, see Cezary Góliniński, “Wierni słudzy Zachodu” [Loyal Servants of the West] *Gazeta Wyborcza*. 30 December 1998.

Ilyukhin ascertained that an attack was imminent because of Lukashenko's "complex" relations with the West and his desire to return nuclear weapons to Belarus.³⁴¹

On 4 November 1998, a delegation of Belarusian and Russian generals met in Moscow to discuss the adjustment of their operational plans in light of NATO expansion and the cooling of relations with Brussels over the situation in Kosovo.³⁴² Colonel-General Yuri Baluyevsky announced that the Russian Ministry of Defence was creating a joint defence structure with Belarus, in addition to making adjustments to the tactical planning of its Armed Forces groupings on its Western flank.³⁴³ Accordingly, the Russian press reported that the generals were creating a joint military structure specifically to defend against NATO.³⁴⁴ Further evidence of military cooperation became apparent in late December 1998, when the Russian Defence Ministry implemented a series of additional upgrades to Belarusian air defence systems just days prior to the signing of a union protocol in Moscow.³⁴⁵ Shortly thereafter, Lukashenko commended rapprochement with Russia for the added security guarantees it would provide Belarus. By the same token, he

³⁴¹ "Lukashenko Ready to Defend Belarus" *Belarus Today*, 16 June 1999; "Ilyukhin Fears NATO Attack on Belarus" *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-1999-0711, 11 July 1999. In a related development, Moscow agreed to deliver eight MiG-29 fighters to Belarus in late August 1999. For its part, Minsk refused to confirm or deny the purchase. See "Belarus Buys MiG-29s" *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 25 August 1999, p. 11; Yuri Strigelsky, "MiG-29: prizraki ili voennaya taina?" [MiG-29: Ghosts or Military Secret?] *Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta*, 13 September 1999.

³⁴² "Russia and Belarus Coordinate Responses to NATO" *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-98-308, 4 November 1998.

³⁴³ "Russia Adjusts Tactical Troop Deployment to Counter NATO" *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-98-308, 4 November 1998.

³⁴⁴ Viktor Litovkin, "General'y Rossii i Belorussii vystraivayut oboronu protiv NATO" [Russian and Belarusian Generals Build Defence Against NATO] *Izvestiia*, 5 November 1998.

³⁴⁵ "Russia Improves Air Defense Systems Deployed in Belarus" *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-98-357, 23 December 1998; The protocol was published in Belarus and Russia shortly thereafter in both languages, see "Deklaratsiya o dal'neishem yedinenii Rossii i Belarusi" [Declaration on the Further Unification of Russia and Belarus] *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 26 December 1998; "Deklaratsiya ab daleishym yadnanni Belarusi i Rasii" [Declaration on the Further Unification of Russia and Belarus] *Zvyazda*, 29 December

praised the republic's air defence capabilities, underscoring their effectiveness in protecting Russian airspace, "from Riga to Kiev."³⁴⁶

The theme of regional security was dredged up even economic discourse. In a speech to a joint session of the Belarus-Russia Parliamentary Assembly in January 1999, for example, Lukashenko lashed out at critics who chastised Minsk for its mounting energy debts by reminding deputies that only the Belarusian Army stood between Moscow and NATO.³⁴⁷ Lukashenko's remarks were defiantly underscored in an official congratulatory message printed in the state-controlled press on Armed Forces Day—a statutory military holiday characterised by anti-NATO and anti-Western rhetorical outbursts. Lukashenko's message emphasised the menace NATO's "expanding zone of influence" projected onto Belarus's western border.³⁴⁸

In view of this, and the fact that the North Atlantic Alliance is now trying to assume the role of international arbiter, ignoring the views of entire peoples, we are obliged to maintain the country's defence capability at a high level and to strengthen the combat readiness of the Armed Forces. Only by pooling the efforts of the two states can we guarantee the military security of the Union of Belarus and Russia and make a substantial contribution to strengthening the all-European system of security.³⁴⁹

1998. For summary analysis, see Sergei Karelin, "Rossiya i Belorussiya gotovy k sozdaniyu konfederatsii" [Russia and Belarus are Prepared to Form a Confederation] *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. 26 December 1998.

³⁴⁶ "Lukashenka: Union with Russia Gives Security Guarantees" *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-98-362, 28 December 1998.

³⁴⁷ Aleksandr Lukashenko, "Nastupil kachestvenno novyi etap v yedinenii bratskikh narodov Belarusi i Rossii" [A Qualitatively New Stage in Uniting the Fraternal Peoples of Belarus and Russia Has Set In] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*. 23 January 1999.

³⁴⁸ On 12 February, Aleksandr Lukashenko accused Lithuania and Poland of electronic espionage by erecting surveillance systems on its borders. Accordingly, the breach to Belarusian security in light of NATO expansion forced the republic to maintain a high level of military preparedness. See "Lukashenka Accuses Poland, Lithuania of Electronic Spying" *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-1999-0212, 12 February 1999.

³⁴⁹ Aleksandr Lukashenko, "Imya tvoe—zashchitnik!" [Your Name—Defender!] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*. 23 February 1999.

Shortly thereafter, Lukashenko told an Iranian interviewer that Belarus, Russia, Iran, India and China should form an anti-NATO bloc to restore the “multipolar world” that disappeared along with the Soviet Union.³⁵⁰ Lukashenko again hinted that he would like a new atomic arsenal, stressing that Belarus had made a “big mistake” when it relinquished Soviet nuclear weapons—comments he would later deny.³⁵¹

Minsk’s reaction to the formal accession of the Visegrad trio into NATO on 12 March 1999 was ostensibly sombre. Belarus Defence Minister Aleksandr Chumakov repeated his government’s concerns over NATO’s eastward expansion and the approach of its military infrastructure to Belarus’s western border. Chumakov specifically underscored that Minsk did not want Poland to possess any new military units, nuclear arms, large-scale conventional weapons, [or] new military infrastructure on its territory.³⁵² Conversely, the defence minister highlighted that neither President Lukashenko, the Belarusian government, nor the republic’s military doctrine regarded any state as its enemy.

Senior Belarusian defence and national security officials also voiced concerns over Poland’s entry into NATO, calling attention to the size of country’s Armed Forces and the fact that many Polish generals received their formal military training in the Soviet

³⁵⁰ Svetlana Karpekova, “Belorusskii prezident khochet spasti planetu” [The Belarusian President Wants to Save the Planet] *Izvestiia*. 24 February 1999.

³⁵¹ “Lukashenka: Nuclear Arms Could Be Returned to Belarus” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-1999-0225, 25 February 1999; “Lukashenka Denies Planning to Deploy Russian Missiles” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-1999-0317, 17 March 1999.

³⁵² “Belarus Defense Minister Concerned by NATO Expansion” *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-1999-0316, 16 March 1999.

Union. The later point was cited as a significant security threat in itself, since most Polish generals retain extensive knowledge of Belarusian and Russian operational art and tactical doctrine, which remain unchanged from Soviet times.³⁵³

The onset of NATO air strikes on Yugoslavia in March 1999 and Poland's participation in that campaign led the Belarusian government to negotiate a series of weapons contracts with Moscow, including a nine million dollar upgrade package to its existent Osa and Tor-M1 anti-aircraft systems, as well as an extra \$15 million for additional air defences.³⁵⁴ Accordingly, sources in the Russian Defence Ministry announced that military officials were in the process of conducting feasibility studies on the re-deployment of Russian bombers to Belarus in response to "NATO aggression"—including tactical Tu-22, strategic Tu-160, and Tu-95MS bombers.³⁵⁵ The bombing of Yugoslavia caused a freeze in the NATO-Russia Founding Act. This was thrown into sharp focus by the Belarusian government, which announced that it was taking "appropriate measures" together with Russia, including a full review of its foreign and domestic policies.³⁵⁶

In a fiery speech to the Belarusian Supreme Soviet on 7 April 1999, which lasted more than two hours and was broadcast by state radio and television, Aleksandr Lukashenko

³⁵³ Vasily Krupsky, "Voiska NATO uzhe pod Brestom" [NATO Forces Already Near Brest] *Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta*. 15 March 1999. For operational art and tactical doctrine, see *Jane's Sentinel: Russia and the CIS*. Coulsdon: Jane's Information Group (January-June 2000), p. 143.

³⁵⁴ Yuri Golotyuk, "Minsk priglashaet Moskvu na Balkany" [Minsk Invites Moscow to the Balkans] *Izvestiia*. 4 March 1999.

³⁵⁵ "More on Possible Transfer of Russian Bombers" *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-1999-0326, 26 March 1999.

³⁵⁶ "NATO Acts Said to Cause Belarus to Review Policies" *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-1999-0329, 29 March 1999.

passionately supported joint Belarus-Russia defence initiatives in light of the NATO question, arguing that Minsk had just as much right to enter into a military alliance with Moscow as former Warsaw Pact members have to join NATO.³⁵⁷ Departing from his written text, Lukashenko drew an analogy to NATO military actions in the Balkans and his own country, exclaiming “For your movements in neighbouring Poland and Lithuania you will get what you deserve—we are not Yugoslavia!”³⁵⁸ The following day, Lukashenko threw his support behind the military, telling ministers that the republic’s Armed Forces had become a national priority in light of NATO expansion. In this regard, the Belarus president pledged to boost the country’s defence spending and stressed that “arms were more important than ploughshares.”³⁵⁹

On 23 April 1999, Belarus and Russia formally announced the establishment of a joint regional military group—the same day as NATO’s 50th anniversary celebrations in Washington. Russian Defence Minister Igor Sergeyev and his Belarusian counterpart signed four defence agreements, including accords on technical cooperation for 2001 to 2005, unification of military law, utilisation of arms and ammunition, and the creation of a single technical maintenance service programme specifically for the joint forces. Defence Minister Chumakov stressed that the joint contingent was being established “under difficult circumstances, when Belarusian security and stability were facing a real danger.”³⁶⁰ He also maintained that the joint military group’s purpose was not geared for

³⁵⁷ Aleksandr Lukashenko, “Poslanie Prezidenta Natsional’nomu sobraniyu” [President’s Message to the National Assembly] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*. 8 April 1999.

³⁵⁸ Larisa Sayenko, “Belarus Leader Shuns West, Lashes Out at Reforms” *Reuters*. 7 April 1999.

³⁵⁹ “Belarus Leader Says Arms More Important Than Bread” *Reuters*. 8 April 1999.

³⁶⁰ Vera Rich, “Russia and Belarus Agree to Set Up Joint Military Group” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*. 5 May 1999, p. 13.

offensive action, but rather for maintaining security and stability in and around Belarus, and to defend the “outer frontier” of the CIS—a task that Chumakov deemed the republic would find difficult to carry out on its own.³⁶¹

For his part, Marshal Sergeyev disclosed few details, stating only that the formation would be set up “at a scheduled time.”³⁶² It was revealed that an evaluation of military infrastructure in both states had been undertaken to determine the optimal variants for the logistical formation of the joint military coalition. Planners emphasised that the group’s actual numbers would be determined upon the degree of perceived threat.³⁶³ Accordingly, it was agreed that from then on, both states would hold joint ground and air defence exercises simultaneously and that the Chiefs of Staff would work in close cooperation with one another. *Izvestiia* had proclaimed that the military coalition was conceived in order to defend both states against an expanded NATO.³⁶⁴

On 28 April 1999, Presidents Lukashenko and Yeltsin signed a series of subsequent bilateral military agreements in Moscow, including a joint security concept (increased coordination of security strategies); a joint weapons production programme (granting Belarus permission to manufacture Su-27 interceptor aircraft under licence, in addition to entering into joint production of the Tor-M1 anti-aircraft defence system); and an accord

³⁶¹ Yuri Strigelsky, “Nashemu narodu zemli predostatochno” [Our People Have More Than Enough Land] *Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta*. 26 April 1999.

³⁶² Vitaly Strugovets, “My vyshli na uroven’ kontseptsii bezopasnosti” [We Have Attained the Level of Security Concept] *Krasnaya zvezda*. 29 April 1999.

³⁶³ Vitaly Strugovets, “Oboronnaya gran’ Soyuzu” [The Union’s Defence Aspect] *Krasnaya zvezda*. 30 April 1999.

³⁶⁴ Yuri Golotyuk, “Belorussiia stala zapadnym antinativskim forpostom” [Belarus Became a Western Anti-NATO Outpost] *Izvestiia*. 24 April 1999.

on border security (assigning the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Border Guard, Colonel-General Totsky operational control of both Belarusian and Russian borders).³⁶⁵

By May 1999, a comprehensive package of Belarus-Russia military agreements on defence coordination (signed October 1998) was ratified in the Russian State Duma.³⁶⁶

The documents oversaw a broad spectrum of inter-operational plans geared specifically towards a unified military command. These strategies were put through its paces during the first large-scale joint military exercises the following month. The *Zapad-99* manoeuvres were held in European Russia and Belarus on 21-26 June 1999 and were the largest military exercise of its kind in post-Soviet history.³⁶⁷ Dubbed a “response in the event of NATO aggression,” Belarus played a tactical role as the forward “wedge” in a simulated counter-offensive against a theoretical NATO attack.³⁶⁸ In addition, the republic became the staging ground for simulated retaliatory conventional and nuclear strikes against undisclosed new NATO members from whose territory the attacks originated.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁵ Semen Novoprudsky, “Rossiya i Belorussiya budut vmeste protivostoyat’ NATO” [Russia and Belarus Will Resist NATO Together] *Izvestiia*. 29 April 1999; Steven Main, “Belarus-Russia: Politics versus Economics?” *Moscow, the Regions and Russia’s Foreign Policy*. Tracy German (ed.) Camberley: Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (1999). p. 27-31; Yuri Strigelsky, “Sovmestny oboronnyi zakaz” [Joint Defence Order] *Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta*. 5 May 1999.

³⁶⁶ Vladimir Kuznechevsky and Aleksei Chichkin, “Strategichesky otvet” [Strategic Response] *Rossiiskaya gazeta*. 7 May 1999.

³⁶⁷ Yuri Golotyuk, “Dan prikaz yemu na ‘Zapad-99’” [He Has His Orders for ‘West-99’] *Izvestiia*. 22 June 1999.

³⁶⁸ The exercise scenario envisaged an air and naval strike force deployed in Northern Europe attacking Belarus and Kaliningrad with a combined force of 450 warplanes/120 cruise missiles and 110 warplanes/40 cruise missiles, respectfully. For tactical details, see Sergei Babichev, “I prikrytie, i karayushchy mezh” [And Cover, and a Punishing Sword] *Krasnaya zvezda*. 25 June 1999; Oleg Falichev and Feliks Semyanovsky, “‘Zapad-99’: zadachi resheny, tseli dostignuty” [‘West-99’: Tasks Determined, Goals Achieved] *Krasnaya zvezda*. 29 June 1999.

³⁶⁹ Yuri Golotyuk, “Voennye ne priznayutsya, po komu oni nanesli uchebnyi yaderny udar” [The Military Will Not Admit Who it Hit with a Simulated Nuclear Strike] *Izvestiia*. 29 June 1999.

According to the exercise coordinator, Colonel-General Baluyevsky, the manoeuvres were necessary in order to demonstrate reactions “to any use of force against Russia and its allies.”³⁷⁰ The Belarus leadership claimed and probably believed that NATO expansion was a serious threat to the republic’s security, and so encouraged Belarus-Russia defence cooperation to counter a perceived military threat.³⁷¹ Lukashenko announced that the Belarusian military was to undergo a series of reforms over a period of two years designed at augmenting overall combat effectiveness, rather than increasing troop numbers. Insofar as the first step had already been taken by modernising Belarus’s air defences, the second stage involved repairing existent aircraft, raising the effectiveness of ground forces, and upgrading armoured vehicles.³⁷²

Further consolidation of Belarus-Russia military infrastructure was announced in August 1999. The former Soviet early warning radar base at Baranovichi was to be made part of the joint Belarus-Russia defence system.³⁷³ The facility was recommissioned to restore the ‘hole’ in the single radar field over the western and northwestern sectors of the CIS left by the closure of the Skundra radar base in Latvia.³⁷⁴ On 6 October 1999, Russian Defence Minister Igor Sergeyev and his Belarusian counterpart, Colonel-General Aleksandr Chumakov, signed nine documents on Belarus-Russia military cooperation,

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ See Valery Kovalev, “Belorussiya namerena krepit’ oboronu” [Belarus Intends to Strengthen Defences] *Krasnaya zvezda*. 30 June 1999.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Vera Rich, “Russia, Belarus Join Forces on Radar Defence” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*. 11 August 1999, p. 6.

³⁷⁴ Yuri Strigelsky, “‘Volga’ nachinaet rabotu” [‘Volga’ Begins Work] *Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta*. 6 August 1999. On 21 October 1999, Russia officially handed back the Skundra radar station to Latvia, ending a 50-year presence in the country. See “Russia Closes Skundra” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*. 27 October 1999, p. 5.

including a resolution on the establishment of a western regional military coalition.³⁷⁵

The agreements encompass a common air defence system, a draft joint armaments programme, a plan for operational and strategic development, and a framework for the collective use of military infrastructure in both states. In a carefully worded statement, Marshal Sergeyev insisted that the joint military coalition would not target a specific adversary, but would nevertheless “be ready for action if [the enemy] did appear.”³⁷⁶ Similar remarks were made by Chumakov, who deemed that a regional army group would provide defence for both states in the Eastern European region “should it become necessary,” a task which he believed either state would find difficult to accomplish if attempted individually.³⁷⁷

Semantics notwithstanding, the inference to NATO was clear. Only weeks later, Sergeyev received an order from Boris Yeltsin to “reconsider” Russia’s military doctrine in light of NATO activity and the “changing international situation.”³⁷⁸ Accordingly, Major-General Aleksandr Bevzo, head of the Special Programme Board on the Executive Committee of the Union of Russia and Belarus, made the argument that a joint Belarus-Russia military doctrine was necessary to safeguard both states equally.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁵ “Documents on Russo-Belarus Military Cooperation Signed” *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-1999-1006, 6 October 1999.

³⁷⁶ “Russia, Belarus Set up Military Group” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-1999-1006, 6 October 1999.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁸ “Sergeyev: Russia Reconsidering Military Doctrine” *Snark*. FBIS-SOV-1999-1020, 20 October 1999.

³⁷⁹ Aleksandr Bevzo, “Oboronnaya doktrina Soyuza” [Union Defence Doctrine] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*. 28 October 1999.

By year's end, the Kremlin enshrined military rapprochement within the Union Treaty of Russia and Belarus.³⁸⁰ To ensure that goals would be achieved, a detailed and somewhat verbose programme outlining each step was published in both countries alongside the treaty.³⁸¹ According to the agreement, Russia and Belarus retain their sovereignty and national identity, and remain separate entities in the UN and other international organisations.³⁸² Military cooperation includes adoption of a wide array of joint military reforms, coordinated activities in the sphere of defence, cooperative military research and development, creation of a regional military coalition, and the establishment of a joint military doctrine. They also agreed to a collective armaments procurement programme for 2001 to 2005, and to undergo by mid-2000 an inventory of armaments designated for joint use.³⁸³

[Based on these agreements] President Lukashenko mused that a "powerful western army group" could be forged in Belarus to effectively protect Russia's approaches "from Riga to Odessa."³⁸⁴ Experts from the Russian Presidential Administration remained considerably more restrained. They confirmed that the defence clauses presumed close military coordination between both states; however, they underscored that the Belarusian

³⁸⁰ "Dogovor o sozdanii Soyuznogo gosudarstva" [Treaty on the Creation of a Union State] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*. 11 December 1999; *Rossiiskaya gazeta*. 29 January 2000.

³⁸¹ "Programma deistvii Rossiiskoi Federatsii i Respubliki Belarus po realizatsii polozhenii Dogovora o sozdanii Soyuznogo gosudarstva" [Action Programme of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus on the Realisation of the Treaty on the Creation of a Union State] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*. 11 December 1999; *Rossiiskaya gazeta*. 29 January 2000.

³⁸² For an official overview, see Leonid Drachevskii, "Russia and Belarus Form a Union" *International Affairs*. (Moscow) Vol. 46, No. 1, 2000, pp. 61-67.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ "Russia, Belarus Form Powerful Western Army Grouping" *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-1999-1208, 8 December 1999.

Armed Forces would remain separate from the Russian Army.³⁸⁵ No reference was made to the stationing or storage of nuclear weapons in Belarus under the treaty's security clauses; however, General Vladimir Yakovlev, Commander of Russian Strategic Missile Forces confirmed that the republic would remain under the protection of Russia's nuclear umbrella.³⁸⁶ Despite Yeltsin's earlier reluctance to affiliate with Belarus, strategic considerations linked to NATO expansion had prompted the Kremlin to seek closer ties.³⁸⁷ In the final analysis, the Union Treaty's military clauses provide Russia with solid strategic footing in the Eastern European sub-region by facilitating a highly integrated forward outpost alongside NATO's eastern border, and additional geostrategic leverage if or when the Alliance proceeds to expand further eastward.

³⁸⁵ "Russia, Belarus Not to Unite Their Armed Forces" *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-1999-1208, 8 December 1999.

³⁸⁶ "Belarus Still Under Russian Umbrella" *Jane's Defence Weekly*. 15 December 1999, p. 5.

³⁸⁷ At the signing ceremony, Yeltsin emphasised that the Belarus-Russia Union was not aimed against anyone, "even Clinton." Alternatively, Lukashenko called the Union Treaty an act of "historical justice" by drawing an analogy to the disillusion of the Soviet Union exactly eight years earlier and the renewed impetus for reintegration. Cited in Larisa Rakovskaya and Ludmila Maslyukova, "Prezidenty Belarusi i Rossii podpisali Dogovor o sozdanii Soyuznogo gosudarstva" [The Presidents of Belarus and Russia Signed a Treaty on Creation of a Union State] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*. 9 December 1999.

3.5 ANTI-NATO OUTPOST OR POTEMKIN VILLAGE?³⁸⁸

As the Visegrad trio embarked on their first year as full NATO members, 2000 was markedly less jubilant for the Belarusian leadership. Boris Yeltsin's sudden resignation on 31 December 1999 came as an unexpected setback to the Lukashenko administration, which had originally hoped for a speedy merger of the two states.³⁸⁹ With the changing of the Kremlin guard, Minsk was presented with a new set of variables. In spite of the unclear commitment towards the Union, both Vladimir Putin and Aleksandr Lukashenko agreed that there was no need to change the status quo between the two states. For his part, Lukashenko assured his Russian counterpart that Belarus had been and would continue to be "a reliable and loyal ally."³⁹⁰ Although the more pragmatic Putin did not share Lukashenko's enthusiasm for integration, the Union Treaty was nevertheless ratified in January 2000.³⁹¹

Restraint towards NATO was another factor. Unlike his predecessor, Putin subscribes to a tough but friendly approach by openly expressing his desire for a more amicable relationship with Brussels. Yet, by the same token, his actions and statements reflect a desire to assert Moscow's hegemony across the former Soviet Union and pursue a more

³⁸⁸ The term 'Potemkin village' refers to the clever ruse employed by Count Potemkin to convince Catherine the Great of the well being of the feudal Russian countryside. On one of Catherine's royal inspection tours, Potemkin ordered facades of entire villages be built all along her carriage route and organised peasants to cheer for their queen. The plan worked, and has subsequently come to represent the illusion that an inventive politician can put between perception and reality.

³⁸⁹ Lukashenko admitted that he wanted to exploit Yeltsin's "sense of guilt" over the collapse of the USSR in 1991 to speed up the integration process. See "Belarus Leader Says Yeltsin Resignation a Big Loss" *Reuters*. 1 January 2000.

³⁹⁰ "Putin, Lukashenka Speak by Telephone, 'To Meet Soon'" *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-2000-0103, 3 January 2000.

³⁹¹ "Putin, Lukashenka Praise Creation of Union State" *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-2000-0126, 26 January 2000.

proactive role by rebuilding the military establishment and industrial sectors of the Russian economy.

With the NATO question not laid to rest, Minsk's official agenda was concisely summed up in Lukashenko's New Year's address, when he stated, "the policy of the president remains the same."³⁹² The Belarusian military took a parallel position. Major-General Yuri Portnov announced that Russian nuclear missiles might be returned to Belarus if NATO stationed similar arms in proximity to the republic's borders, or if a "conflict situation" arose. Portnov warned that the Belarusian and Russian Armed Forces might be merged in the event of a "major security threat."³⁹³ Given the timing and nature of these comments, there can be little doubt of their links to Russia's updated Security Concept which encompasses a more proactive role for the military, including the right to launch pre-emptive nuclear strikes to deter aggression against itself and its allies.³⁹⁴

The war of words escalated the following month with Lukashenko's announcement that Belarus and Russia were proceeding to form a military bloc aimed solely at counteracting an expanding NATO.³⁹⁵ Lukashenko described the coalition as a "powerful military group" consisting of several hundred thousand troops armed with state-of-the-art weaponry.³⁹⁶ He also inferred to the Kremlin's new security concept by stressing Russia's preparedness to use nuclear weapons if Belarus was attacked by a hostile state.

³⁹² *RFE/RL Poland, Belarus, Ukraine Report*. Vol. 2, No. 1, 4 January 2000.

³⁹³ "Belarus Invites Russian Nuclear Weapons Back" *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*. 4 January 2000.

³⁹⁴ "Kontseptsiya natsional'noi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii" [National Security Concept of the Russian Federation] *Rossiiskaya gazeta*. 18 January 2000.

³⁹⁵ "Belarus to Form Joint Army with Russia" *RIA*. 1 February 2000.

³⁹⁶ "Belarus Leader Says to Form Joint Army with Russia" *Reuters*. 1 February 2000.

To this end, Lukashenko made it clear that Minsk and Moscow had reached an undisclosed “relevant agreement” earlier.³⁹⁷ He also took a rhetorical shift by announcing that there would be no need to redeploy nuclear weapons in Belarus, since the Union Treaty effectively brought the republic under the protection of Russia’s military doctrine, which entails a first-strike policy in the event of aggression against Moscow’s allies.³⁹⁸

Rhetorical grumblings aside, a working group led by Russian Deputy Prime Minister Ilya Klebanov (military-industrial complex) and Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Air Force, Colonel-General Anatoly Kornukov visited Minsk on 10-11 February to discuss plans for joint cooperation in the sphere of weapons procurement. The meeting concluded with the establishment of the Defence Systems Group, a consortium of two Belarusian and 17 Russian arms manufacturing companies.³⁹⁹ Despite the lack of information on the actual arms slated for production, military analysts hinted that the conglomerate would focus on production of such weapons as the S-300 and S-400 mobile SAM systems.⁴⁰⁰ No doubt, their choice of weaponry was linked directly to NATO’s heavy reliance on air power throughout its bombing campaign in Yugoslavia.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁷ “Russia Ready to Use Nuclear Arms to Defend Belarus” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-2000-0206, 6 February 2000.

³⁹⁸ “Belarus President: No Need for Nuclear Arms Back” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-2000-0210, 10 February 2000.

³⁹⁹ “Belarus, Russia Merge Weapons Companies” *Reuters*. 12 February 2000.

⁴⁰⁰ Vladimir Mukhin, “Russia, Belarus Unite on Air Defense” *The Russia Journal*. Vol. 3, No. 6, 21 February 2000; For specifications, see Christopher F. Foss, “Details of Russian S-400 SAM are Finally Revealed” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*. 29 September 1999, p. 12

⁴⁰¹ In April 2000, rumours of a covert multi-million dollar arms deal allegedly brokered through *Beltechexport*, a state-owned Belarusian defence enterprise, surfaced between Russia and Iraq. The contract was directed at modernising Iraq’s air defence systems, allowing the Iraqi military to target British and US fighter aircraft enforcing the UN enforced no-fly zone. The allegations were flatly denied by the Belarusian Foreign Ministry and the National Security Council, both of which underscored that military

At a parallel meeting, Colonel-General Kornukov and his Belarusian counterpart discussed plans for the transition from a joint to a single air defence system.⁴⁰² The changeover would result in the creation of a single command structure and, evidently, redeployment of Russian fighter aircraft on Belarusian territory. The later point was alluded to by Kornukov, who stated that Russian pilots had no difficulty familiarising themselves with forward-positioned air bases in Belarus, since many served in the republic during Soviet times.⁴⁰³ The general also announced that Russia was modernising its fighter aircraft on a “massive scale,” and that negotiations were taking place for upgrading Russian and Belarusian-owned MiG-29 fighters, Su-24 and Su-25 fighter-bombers at the Baranovichi aircraft repair plant in western Belarus.⁴⁰⁴

Defence Minister Chumakov boldly described the planned merger as a “countermeasure to the attempts of the United States and NATO to acquire dominance by enlisting the cooperation of the East European, Balkan and Baltic states.”⁴⁰⁵ Despite Minsk’s enthusiasm for the plan, the Russian delegation expressed a more cautious approach. Klebanov and Kornukov acknowledged, independently, that military integration outpaced the political and economic aspects of the Belarus-Russia Union, and that bilateral cooperation in the defence sector already surpassed all other areas.

assistance to Baghdad constituted a breach of the UN arms embargo. See “Russian-Iraqi Arms Deal in the Offing?” *RFE/RL Iraq Report*. Vol. 3, No. 11, 24 April 2000.

⁴⁰² This project was slated for completion by the end of 2001. See “Strelyayut Belorusy—platit Rossiya” [Belarusians Shoot—Russia Pays] *Rossiiskaya gazeta*. 18 January 2001.

⁴⁰³ “Belarus, Russia Cooperating in Building Military Aircraft” FBIS-SOV-2000-0211, 11 February 2000.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Cited in “Russia Taking Over Military Plants, Air Defence in Belarus” *Jamestown Monitor*. Vol. 6, Issue 31, 14 February 2000.

Be that as it may, these statements represented the first public acknowledgement of Moscow's integration priorities.⁴⁰⁶ In a related development, a high-level meeting took place on 24 February between the Belarusian and Russian foreign ministers. Igor Ivanov and Ural Latypov signed a cooperation accord whereby both countries agreed to coordinate their foreign policies in 2000-2001, in addition to working closer together within international organisations such as the UN and the OSCE.⁴⁰⁷

Interestingly enough, the signing of the aforementioned agreements took place only weeks after Russian President Vladimir Putin approved a draft of the Union Treaty,⁴⁰⁸ leaving little doubt that the succession and speed at which these political-military provisions were implemented was directly linked to the rapidly changing geopolitical situation.

On 7 March 2000, *Novye Izvestiia* reported that it had uncovered a classified document concerning the redeployment of nuclear missiles to Belarus. The article alleged the order might have been accompanied by a secret protocol, which sparked rumours that Russian ICBMs may have already been covertly returned to the republic.⁴⁰⁹ Insofar as military tacticians confirmed that it remained technically possible to do so, others considered it a strategic mistake because Soviet-built launch sites had long been identified on NATO maps as priority targets. Under these circumstances, it was argued that it would be more

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ "Russia, Belarus Sign Foreign Policy Cooperation Agreement" *BelaPAN*. 24 February 2000.

⁴⁰⁸ Vladimir Kuznechevsky, "Soyuz delaet pervye shagi" [The Union Takes Its First Steps] *Rossiiskaya gazeta*. 27 January 2000.

⁴⁰⁹ Aleksandr Starikov, "Yaderny marsh" [Nuclear March] *Novye Izvestiia*. 7 March 2000.

feasible to redeploy strategic bombers to Belarus instead, given the republic's extensive network of military airfields and its previous role as headquarters to two Soviet strategic aviation divisions.⁴¹⁰

Despite official denials of any covert operations, the Belarusian government's stance on NATO expansion hardened. The need to counter NATO with large-scale conventional forces was again brought up during Aleksandr Lukashenko's annual state of the nation address on 11 April 2000. It was then that the president announced plans concerning the formation of a 300,000-strong joint regional military coalition envisaged as the Belarus-Russia Union's "first strategic echelon of defence." Lukashenko underscored that the group's conception was prompted by "the complicated military and political situation in the world, NATO's expansion to the Belarusian border, [and] the escalation of regional conflicts."⁴¹¹

Lukashenko's claims were confirmed by Colonel-General Leonid Ivashov, who revealed that the coalition was being set up around the Moscow Military District and Belarusian Armed Forces. Ivashov admitted that joint military infrastructure, command, reconnaissance and communication posts were in the process of being created, and that both Armies would coordinate their activities accordingly. Nevertheless, the general stressed that both militaries would remain under their respective national commands and

⁴¹⁰ During a working visit to Berlin, Foreign Minister Ural Latypov summarily rejected claims of nuclear weapons returning to Belarus, calling the allegations in *Novye Izvestiia* "absolutely groundless" and reminding journalists of the republic's constitutionally entrenched non-nuclear status. Cited in "Foreign Minister: Russian Nukes Will Not Return" *Berliner Zeitung*. 10 March 2000; For air base locations, see Map 2: Air Force Bases.

⁴¹¹ "Belarus and Russia to Establish Joint Military Grouping" *BelaPAN*. 11 April 2000.

that the coalition would only come under the auspices of joint control if a threat emerged.⁴¹² Russian Major-General Vladimir Belous, director of the International and Strategic Research Centre confirmed that long-range nuclear missiles would not be redeployed in Belarus; however, he could not rule out the possibility that the military coalition might be “reinforced” with short-range nuclear weapons.⁴¹³

On 16 April, Russian President Vladimir Putin—having been formally elected in March—arrived in Belarus on the first leg of his European tour. Aside from the highly symbolic value of Putin’s first choice of stops, his visit reflected Russia’s foreign policy priorities, as well as an element of his trademark pragmatism.⁴¹⁴ Despite the high profile of his trip, nothing concrete appeared to have emerged from the meeting, except for vague and non-committal statements from both sides that provided little indication of the goals and outcome of the visit.⁴¹⁵

Shortly after Putin’s departure, *Nezavisimaya gazeta* published an article citing unnamed sources in the Kremlin who insisted that a force of 300,000 already existed. These claims were furthered by the Commander of the Moscow Military District, Colonel-General Igor Puzanov, who underscored “the composition and strength of the new force has already been determined and troops are preparing themselves for joint actions within the

⁴¹² “Russia, Belarus Armed Forces Forming Joint Grouping” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-2000-0411, 11 April 2000.

⁴¹³ “It Won’t Be a Stylish Wedding” *Jane’s Foreign Report*. No. 2592, 18 May 2000, p. 4.

⁴¹⁴ See Dmitry Gornostayev, “Pervy vizit Vladimira Putina v soyuzny Minsk prines sensatsiyu” [Vladimir Putin’s First Visit to Allied Minsk Brought Sensation] *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. 18 April 2000.

⁴¹⁵ For example, see Alexander Feduta, “Marching in Step” *Moscow News*. 19-25 April 2000; Vladimir Yefanov, “Tri vizita—tsel’ odna” [Three Visits—One Goal] *Rossiiskaya gazeta*. 18 April 2000.

coalition.”⁴¹⁶ No further details of the military group were made available until the following day, when the independent Belarusian press revealed that it had all been a misunderstanding. Colonel-General Ivashov rephrased his previous statement on the matter, by indicating that the coalition was still in the process of negotiation, and as such existed only on paper.⁴¹⁷

In the background to these events, the Russian Federation’s Military Doctrine came into force on 21 April 2000. The document identifies the Republic of Belarus as Moscow’s major military ally and strategic partner⁴¹⁸—a point noticeably absent from a draft published earlier in October 1999.⁴¹⁹ Under the revised doctrine, Belarus’s place under the Russian Federation’s ‘nuclear umbrella’ is secured. The Kremlin reserves the right to use nuclear weapons in retaliation or deterrence to an attack against itself, its allies or in response to “large-scale aggression” with conventional weapons.

Though NATO expansion is not mentioned explicitly, the inference is clear. Listed among the country’s main external threats are attempts to marginalise Moscow in world affairs and the stationing of troops in proximity to Russia’s borders.⁴²⁰ This point was

⁴¹⁶ Vladimir Georgiev, “Sovmestnaya gruppirovka uzhe sushchestvuet” [Joint Group Already Exists] *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. 19 April 2000.

⁴¹⁷ Yuri Strigelsky, “Voenno-politicheskie manevry” [Military-Political Manoeuvres] *Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta*. 20 April 2000.

⁴¹⁸ Subsection 7 of the Russian Federation’s Military Doctrine establishes a host of joint military activities with the Republic of Belarus including: the implementation of a common defence policy, coordination of activities in the sphere of military procurement, development of the Armed Forces, the use of military infrastructure, and taking “other measures” to maintain the defence capacity of the Belarus-Russia Union State.

⁴¹⁹ See “Voennaya doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii” [Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation] *Krasnaya zvezda*. 9 October 1999.

⁴²⁰ “Voennaya doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii” [Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation] *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. 22 April 2000.

underscored by Ivashov, who insisted “undoubtedly, some provisions of the military doctrine are to a certain extent a response to US and NATO attempts to act from a position of strength, build a unipolar world and expand the geography of the North Atlantic Alliance.”⁴²¹

Despite Russian nuclear guarantees, Aleksandr Lukashenko tenaciously held to the idea of a joint Belarus-Russia army coalition. During the course of an interview with *Krasnaya zvezda* only days prior to the 55th VE Day anniversary, Lukashenko reiterated his view that NATO posed a direct security threat to Belarus, requiring the republic to take appropriate measures by pooling military efforts with Russia. According to Lukashenko, NATO forces in Europe topped one million “well-trained and well-equipped” troops, a factor which led him to revise his earlier calls for a 300,000-strong army group with a figure of 500,000. Bemoaning the loss of the Soviet military presence in East-Central Europe, the Belarusian leader justified the augmented numbers, while at the same time voicing traditional concerns over encirclement:

The Soviet forces in Germany are gone. There are no [Soviet] troops in Poland, Hungary or the Czech Republic. We have lost the Baltics, which were once armed to the teeth. Kaliningrad and the Baltic Fleet have been cut off. You are aware of Ukraine’s policy. The 100,000-strong Belarusian army is what we have left in the area. Somehow we manage to maintain a high degree of combat readiness. So 300,000 turns out to be quite a ridiculous figure.⁴²²

⁴²¹ “Ivashov Plays Down Nuclear Threat from Russia” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-2000-0421, 21 April 2000.

⁴²² Vadim Markushin, “Aleksandr Lukashenko: My budem grud’yu zashchishchat’ matushku Rossiyu” [Aleksandr Lukashenko: We Will Defend Mother Russia with our Bare Chests] *Krasnaya zvezda*. 5 May 2000.

Lukashenko insisted that the coalition would be reinforced with reservists if a military conflict or a threat thereof arose, in which case the Belarusian army would be deployed and troops from the western regions of Russia would fill in the second echelon. Lukashenko's retracted his confrontational statement two weeks later, stressing that the bloc would only be mobilised in self-defence during a military conflict and would not constitute a standing army. Nevertheless, the defining reason behind the sudden shift in policy was his reluctant admission that Minsk could neither afford, arm, nor maintain a military force of such large proportions.⁴²³

In a closely related development, the Belarusian Defence Ministry completed the final draft of the republic's new military doctrine, intended to supersede the document which had been in force since 1992. Defence Ministry officials described the original doctrine as "hopelessly overtaken" by recent developments, such as the formation of the Belarus-Russia Union with its "common defence space," the nascent "joint regional group of forces," the unification of air defence systems, and the decision to integrate Russian and Belarusian military-industrial complexes.⁴²⁴ Under the planned defence cooperation with Russia, it seems likely that Belarus will adopt a version of the new Russian military doctrine.⁴²⁵

⁴²³ "Belarus Says No Plans to Maintain New Force" *Reuters*. 17 May 2000.

⁴²⁴ "Belarusian Neutrality Conclusively Discarded Belarus Unifies Air Defence with Russia's, Changes Military Doctrine" *Jamestown Monitor*. Vol. 6, Issue 106, 31 May 2000.

⁴²⁵ *Jane's Sentinel: Russia and the CIS*. Coulsdon: Jane's Information Group (January-June 2000), p. 139.

As May drew to a close, the Belarusian and Russian air defence commanders, together with an accompanying delegation conferred in Baltiisk and Minsk to finalise plans for the creation of a joint regional air defence system encompassing the Kaliningrad *oblast*, Belarus and the Moscow Military District.⁴²⁶ Insofar as no public mention of defence against NATO *per se* was made during the proceedings, the inference to the Alliance was clear. According to the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Air Force, Anatoly Kornukov, the project was “dictated by the significance of that direction and the need for unified command.”⁴²⁷

The system was designed around a centralised command structure in Moscow, supported by joint air patrols and backed by real-time data relays from Belarusian air defence units linked to Russia’s central air defence headquarters in the Moscow Military District.⁴²⁸ Kornukov insisted there was no need to inform NATO of the project, considering that it was based on existing formations and was neither threatening, nor new.⁴²⁹ By early August, the joint regional air defence system was put through its paces during military exercises on Cape Taran in Russia’s Kaliningrad enclave where drills were conducted in combat-like simulations with competing units intercepting low-altitude anti-ship missiles with restricted flight times.⁴³⁰ Again, these combat scenarios mirrored NATO’s heavy

⁴²⁶ Oleg Shapovalov, “PVO: integratsiya uglublyayetsya” [PVO: Integration Deepens] *Vo slavu Rodiny*. 30 May 2000.

⁴²⁷ “Russia, Belarus to Have Common Air Defense System” *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-2000-0526, 26 May 2000.

⁴²⁸ “Belarusian Neutrality Conclusively Discarded Belarus Unifies Air Defence with Russia’s, Changes Military Doctrine” *Jamestown Monitor*. Vol. 6, Issue 106, 31 May 2000.

⁴²⁹ “Belarus and Russia to Create Common Air Defense System” *Belarus Today*. 30 May-5 June 2000.

⁴³⁰ “Russian, Belarusian Units Hold Joint Defense Exercises” *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-2000-0809, 9 August 2000.

reliance on air tactics—a point duly noted in the Russian press.⁴³¹ Only a month later, a comprehensive exercise involving Russian long-range bombers was held in cooperation with the Belarusian military. For the first time since their official withdrawal from the republic in 1995, Russian strategic Tu-95MS, Tu-22M3 bombers and long-range cruise missile carriers returned to the Baranovichi and Machulishi air bases. No details of the actual exercises were made available to the public, nevertheless, their presence warranted NATO air defences in Poland to be placed on heightened alert.⁴³²

The culmination of these joint exercises and high-level meetings came to a head by October 2000 at a joint collegium of the Belarus and Russia defence ministries, where discussions centred on the military aspects of integration within the framework of the Union State. Presumably in partial response to NATO expansion as well as a reaction to events in the Balkans, Marshal Sergeyev emphasised that stepping up military integration efforts was “particularly topical now that things were not quiet everywhere in the world.”⁴³³

By mid-November, President Lukashenko confirmed that the Belarusian military would reinforced “to withstand pressure from the West” and stressed the need to boost military efficiency 30 percent by 2001 in light of the republic’s common border with NATO. Reacting to the fate of his deposed Serbian counterpart, Lukashenko hypothesised that

⁴³¹ For an interesting case in point, see Sergei Ptichkin, “Ne poteryat’ by klyuchi ot neba” [Let’s Not Lose the Keys to Heaven] *Rossiiskaya gazeta*. 19 August 2000.

⁴³² “Russian Strategic Bombers Take Part in Military Exercise in Belarus” *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-2000-0911, 11 September 2000.

⁴³³ “Russian Defense Minister Discusses Military Integration with Belarus” *ITAR-TASS*. FBIS-SOV-2000-1017, 17 October 2000.

the Alliance had a similar fate in store for Belarus.⁴³⁴ As the year drew to a close it was announced that by mid-2001, a joint Belarus-Russia military doctrine would be formulated. The projected doctrine will be defensive in nature and embrace a “system of views on the military policy of the Union State in changing conditions.”⁴³⁵ Its aim is to protect both states’ territorial integrity within the framework of a single military organisation.⁴³⁶

Thus, it would appear that a joint doctrine, a common defence space and even mutual operational command indicates a re-unification of both militaries. Although the professed level of defence collaboration hoped for by the Belarusian administration has not been reached, it remains the most advanced aspect of inter-state cooperation. Nevertheless, existent military treaties, contingency plans and defence mechanisms ensure that if NATO expands further eastward, Belarus has the potential of becoming anything but a Potemkin village.

⁴³⁴ “Belarus to Build Up Army to Resist West—Lukashenko” *Reuters*. 14 November 2000.

⁴³⁵ “Russia, Belarus to Produce Joint Military Doctrine” *Interfax*. FBIS-SOV-2000-1212, 12 December 2000.

⁴³⁶ “Russia-Belarus Military Doctrine to be Completed ‘by Spring 2001’” *Rossiiskaya gazeta*. FBIS-SOV-2001-0123, 23 January 2001.

4 CONCLUSION

The evolution of Belarus-Russia security relations observed under the NATO expansion lens offers an intriguing view of contemporary post-Soviet geopolitics. Minsk and Moscow have concurred on a wide range of European security issues—especially the undesirability of NATO’s eastward expansion. Yet, in the highly charged atmosphere that prevails in the Belarusian political arena over this issue, rhetoric has tended to complicate objective analysis, rendering the task of differentiating between perception and reality all the more challenging. In this regard, the hypothesis outlined at the beginning of the thesis has shown, in particular, that Belarus and Russia have regularly characterised military cooperation as the basis for an ambitious set of countermeasures to NATO expansion.

Having established that, the two major methods examined have been military reintegration (mobilising large-scale concentrations of conventional forces in Belarus) and invitations to reintroduce nuclear weapons on Belarusian soil. Although such measures are widely supported by the Lukashenko administration and some conservative elements of the Russian military, the formal accession of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to the NATO alliance passed without such a demonstration. The Founding Act temporarily solved the problem. Neither Belarus nor Russia could seriously contemplate a large-scale military response—both for financial reasons and the international alarm such actions would invariably raise. Nevertheless, a significant element of the *nomenklatura* continues to perceive the need to rekindle a traditional “Western threat” to regain lost resources and strategic leverage in a region increasingly

linking its security interests with NATO. In this regard, NATO expansion became an effective vehicle for channelling popular discontent over domestic shortfalls into a foreign policy issue.

The Kremlin's interest in Belarus remains predominantly geopolitical. To this end, Russia's generals acknowledge the republic as a key ally and bridgehead for the Russian Armed Forces in Europe, as well as a forward base for early warning radar and electronic eavesdropping.⁴³⁷ Russia—geographically separated from the rest of Central Europe—requires Belarus to remain a secure conduit for dealing with a continent whose political and military institutions continue to expand eastward and challenge Moscow's traditional "sphere of influence." In turn, Belarus has been central to the Kremlin's security reassessment in light of NATO expansion. Even though it no longer plays the role of forward garrison for large concentrations of conventional and nuclear forces as it did during the Soviet era, it remains an integral component of Russia's western defences.

Moscow continues to look upon Belarus as a conduit to project force in the Eastern European sub-region and as its traditional "western shield." Although conventional forces fall well short of the 300,000-strong joint regional coalition envisaged by Lukashenko as a counterbalance to NATO, more practical defence and security projects continue to develop as both militaries actively engage in (re)creating a single security system. Close military cooperation has not come without its share of controversy, particularly where the future of Belarus's nuclear status is concerned.

⁴³⁷ Dmitry Alexandrov, "Russia and Belarus: Ever-closer Union" *Moscow News*. 22-28 November 2000.

President Lukashenko has repeatedly bemoaned the loss of his country's nuclear arsenal and openly welcomed Russian tactical and strategic missiles back to Belarusian soil. As is the case with most aspects of integration, the final decision to return nuclear arms will be determined by the Kremlin and not by Minsk. While the chance of such weapons making a return to Belarusian arsenals are remote, Minsk's refusal to destroy its remaining Soviet ICBM silos stands as a moot testament to its defiance against NATO expansion.⁴³⁸ Insofar as the Belarus leadership continues to relish the ambiguity of military cooperation with a nuclear power, "hawkish" rhetoric emanating from Minsk emphasises intentions over actual capabilities.

In spite of this, each arbitrary outburst further undermines any prospect at building a constructive relationship with NATO, while at the same time, perpetuating Belarus's international self-isolation and exacerbating geopolitical fault lines. By actively fostering East-West antagonisms, Minsk is assuring itself a place on the outer periphery of an expanding Europe. Despite cardinal changes to the European security architecture, the Belarusian leadership has failed to fundamentally rethink defence from bipolar confrontation. Minsk continues to take a rigid 'zero sum' approach toward security by advancing military rapprochement with the Russian Federation as the only solution to what it perceives as a threat from NATO expansion. Thus, by default and an overwhelming focus on military issues, the definition and scope of security reverts back to narrow, traditional concepts of deterrence, power politics and bipolar confrontation

⁴³⁸ Accordingly, Belarus still possesses ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear warheads. For holdings, see Table 10: Strategic Weapons.

characteristic of the Cold War. Although the risk of confrontation has been significantly reduced, residual tensions remain evident in the form of suspicious competition and even wary cooperation.

During the limited discussion surrounding the Belarus-Russia Union, it was pointed out regularly that the most successful aspects of integration have been in the spheres of defence and security. Certainly, military cooperation in light of NATO expansion has not been lacking. To this end, the rapid pace and scope of military rapprochement can be attributed directly to Aleksandr Lukashenko's rhetorical posturing and his Moscow-compliant security policies which provide the Russian Ministry of Defence with a virtual *carte blanche* to Belarus's extensive military infrastructure. Clearly, rhetoric has played a distinctive role in the advancement of military cooperation and in many regards, fashioned as a weapon in itself. Evidence of this resonates throughout official policy statements and the state-controlled media, which articulate a strong message for unified defence against a common threat. In this regard, it would appear that the military integration process is so far advanced that Belarus and Russia are now being presented with a *fait accompli*.

Although the Belarusian and Russian Armed Forces mesh seamlessly and function much as they did prior to the collapse of the USSR, what has emerged is but a shadow of their former Soviet military strength. In spite of this, Minsk's continued economic dependence on Russia and Moscow's heightened regional strategic interests will invariably keep both states close. While it is difficult to predict what direction the Kremlin's military policy

might take, it would appear, based on Vladimir Putin's statements since his ascension to power, that he may emphasise and concentrate on rebuilding Russia's relations with NATO. If this occurs, even Lukashenko's best attempts to convince the Kremlin of an imminent showdown with the Alliance and portraying Belarus as Russia's "western shield" might fall on deaf ears.

One cannot dismiss the aforementioned scenario as a foregone conclusion, as the situation remains ostensibly moot. The hypothesis will invariably be put to the test once again as NATO gears up for its next scheduled summit meeting in 2002, when it is expected that expansion will be announced as a topic for review. If approved, the second wave will likely bring NATO closer to the Belarus-Russia Union borders and could, presumably, include former Soviet republics. If this scenario is to proceed, current Belarus-Russia military relations might change radically. The so-called "countermeasures" identified throughout this case study could rapidly manifest themselves and presumably lead to the redeployment of either large-scale contingents of Russian conventional forces and/or nuclear weapons to Belarusian soil. Regardless, the Republic of Belarus has already made its regional geostrategic presence felt. Given current political-military trends, it will undoubtedly continue to present complex challenges to a rapidly changing Europe.

Table 1: Current Holdings and CFE National Ceilings

	Manpower		Tanks		APC		Artillery		Attack Helicopters		Combat Aircraft	
	Holding	Ceiling	Holding	Ceiling	Holding	Ceiling	Holding	Ceiling	Holding	Ceiling	Holding	Ceiling
Non-NATO												
Armenia	60,000	60,000	102	220	204	220	229	285	7	50	6	100
Azerbaijan	69,894	70,000	220	220	210	220	282	285	15	50	48	100
Belarus	83,083	100,000	1,724	1,800	2,478	2,600	1,465	1,615	60	80	224	284
Bulgaria	79,658	104,000	1,475	1,475	1,964	2,000	1,750	1,750	43	67	232	235
Georgia	26,811	40,000	79	220	113	220	109	285	3	50	7	100
Moldova	10,318	20,000	0	210	209	210	153	250	0	50	0	50
Romania	178,777	230,000	1,373	1,375	2,098	2,100	1,414	1,475	15	120	323	430
Russia*	584,841	1,450,000	5,375	6,350	9,956	11,280	6,306	6,315	741	855	2,733	3,416
Slovakia	44,519	46,667	275	478	622	683	383	383	19	40	82	100
Ukraine	310,000	450,000	3,939	4,080	4,860	5,050	3,720	4,040	247	330	911	1,090
NATO												
Belgium	38,785	70,000	140	300	569	989	242	288	41	46	135	209
Canada	0	10,660	0	77	0	263	0	32	0	13	0	90
Czech Republic	57,735	93,333	792	957	1,211	1,367	740	767	34	50	110	230
Denmark	29,362	39,000	228	335	273	336	471	446	12	18	68	82
France	217,558	325,000	1,234	1,226	3,491	3,700	895	1,192	298	374	588	800
Germany	274,587	345,000	2,738	3,444	2,415	3,281	2,103	2,255	204	280	517	765
Greece	158,621	158,621	1,735	1,735	2,286	2,498	1,894	1,920	20	65	525	650
Hungary	43,790	100,000	806	835	1,439	1,700	839	840	51	108	107	180
Italy	222,679	315,000	1,301	1,267	2,831	3,172	1,390	1,818	134	142	533	618
Netherlands	36,638	80,000	348	520	671	864	397	485	14	50	61	230
Norway	20,971	32,000	170	170	218	275	189	491	0	24	73	100
Poland	205,270	234,000	1,674	1,730	1,437	2,150	1,554	1,610	107	130	271	460
Portugal	37,783	75,000	187	300	330	430	363	450	0	26	101	160
Spain	160,372	300,000	681	750	976	1,588	1,118	1,276	28	80	209	310
Turkey	516,205	530,000	2,464	2,795	2,616	3,120	2,883	3,523	25	130	359	750
United Kingdom	193,688	260,000	584	843	2,330	3,017	424	583	243	350	520	855
United States	100,000	250,000	793	1,1812	1,572	3,037	345	1,553	136	396	233	784

Source: *The Military Balance 2000/2001*. London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies (2000), p. 303

* Manpower and Treaty Limited Equipment covers the Atlantic to the Urals zone only.

Table 2: Armour⁴³⁹

Type	Role	Quantity	In Service
T-54	Main Battle Tank	80	None
T-55	Main Battle Tank	640	640
T-62	Main Battle Tank	450	290
T-64	Main Battle Tank	300	300
T-72	Main Battle Tank	1,800	1,800
PT-76	Amphibious Light Tank	10	10
BRDM-1	Reconnaissance Vehicle	150	150
BMP-1	Infantry Fighting Vehicle	900	800
BMP-2	Infantry Fighting Vehicle	1,300	1,300
MBD-1	Infantry Fighting Vehicle	110	110
BTR-60	Armoured Personnel Carrier	350	20
BTR-70	Armoured Personnel Carrier	400	400
BTR-80	Armoured Personnel Carrier	190	190
BTR-D	Armoured Personnel Carrier	110	110
MT-LB	Armoured Personnel Carrier	130	70

Table 3: Artillery⁴⁴⁰

Type	Role	Quantity	In Service
203 mm 2S7	Self-Propelled Howitzer	50	50
152 mm 2S3	Self-Propelled Howitzer	170	170
152 mm 2S5	Self-Propelled Howitzer	120	120
152 mm 2S19	Self-Propelled Howitzer	15	15
152 mm M1943	Howitzer	10	10
152 mm	Gun Howitzer	60	60
152 mm D-20	Field Gun	50	50
152 mm 2A36	Field Gun	140	140
122 mm D-30	Howitzer	200	200
120 mm 2S1	Self-Propelled Howitzer	240	240
120 mm 2S0	Heavy Mortar	50	50
300 mm 9A52	Multiple Rocket System	50	50
220 mm 9P140	Multiple Rocket System	85	85
130 mm BM-13	Multiple Rocket System	5	5
122 mm BM-21	Multiple Rocket System	280	280
122 9P138	Multiple Rocket System	20	20
120 mm PM-38	Mortar	6	6
120 mm 2S12	Mortar	30	30

Notes

⁴³⁹ Under the CFE Treaty, Belarus is allowed 1,800 tanks and 2,600 armoured personnel carriers.

⁴⁴⁰ Under the CFE Treaty, Belarus is allowed 1,615 artillery pieces.

Source: All tables and maps *Jane's Sentinel: Russia and the CIS*. Coulsdon: Jane's Information Group (January-June 2000).

Table 4: Fixed-Wing Aircraft⁴⁴¹

Type	Role	Quantity	In Service
MiG-21R	Fighter/Reconnaissance	14	None
MiG-23M	Interceptor	39	35
MiG-25PD/RB/PU	Interceptor/Reconnaissance	101	90
Su-17	Close Air Support	6	4
Su-24M/MP/MR	Strike/Reconnaissance	131	120
Su-25	Close Air Support	101	100
Su-27M/D	Interceptor	24	24
An-2	Light Transport	40	40
An-12	Tactical Transport	6	6
An-24	Transport	24	24
An-26	Transport	12	10
Il-76	Strategic Transport	30	30
Tu-134	VIP Transport	1	1

Table 5: Rotary-Wing Aircraft⁴⁴²

Type	Role	Quantity	In Service
Mi-2	Liaison/Trainer	26	26
Mi-6	Medium Lift	12	12
Mi-8C	Support	32	32
Mi-8MT	Support	20	20
Mi-24R	Attack	18	18
Mi-24V	Attack	24	24
Mi-26	Heavy Lift	12	12

Table 6: Air Defence Systems

Type	Role	Quantity	In Service
S-75 Dvina (SA-2)	Low/Medium-Altitude SAM	48	48
Pechora-M	Low/High-Altitude SAM	36	36
Antey (SA-5)	Low/High-Altitude SAM	24	24
2K12 (SA-6)	Low-Altitude SAM	700	500
S-300 (SA-12)	Low/High-Altitude SAM	12	12

Table 7: Air Defence Weapons

Type	Role	Quantity	In Service
Strela 2 (SA-7)	Portable SAM	250	250
Igla-1 (SA-16)	Portable SAM	64	64
Antey 2K11 (SA-4)	Medium-Altitude SAM	N/A	N/A
Buk (SA-11)	Low/High Altitude SAM	12	12
9K33 (SA-8)	Low-Altitude SAM	48	48
Strela 10 (SA-13)	Low-Altitude SAM	24	24
Tor-M1 (SA-15)	Self-Propelled SAM	12	12
23 mm ZSU-23-4	Quad Self-Propelled AAG	48	48

Notes⁴⁴¹ Under the CFE Treaty, Belarus is allowed 260 combat aircraft.⁴⁴² Under the CFE Treaty, Belarus is allowed 80 attack helicopters.

Table 8: Air Force Unit Locations

Unit	Type	Location
2nd Air Army		Minsk
61 st Fighter Regiment	MiG-25PD, Su-27	Baranovichi
201 st Fighter Regiment	MiG-23M	Machulishchi
24th Air Army		Vinnitsa
953 rd Bomber Regiment	Su-24M	Baranovichi
26th Air Army		Minsk
10 th Reconnaissance Regiment	MiG-21R, MiG-25RB	Shchuchin
116 th Bomber Regiment	Su-24MR	
151 st Electronic Warfare Regiment	Su-24M	Ross
206 th Combat Regiment	MiG-25RBU, Yak-28	Shchuchin
305 th Bomber Regiment	Su-24M	Pruzhan'y
378 th Combat Regiment	Su-24M	Postavy
379 th Combat Regiment	Su-25	Postavy
497 th Bomber Regiment	Su-25	Kobrin
	Su-24M	Lida

Map 2: Air Force Bases **Air Force Bases**

Baranovichi	Molodechno
Bereza	Mozyr
Bobrovichi	Orsha
Bobruisk	Pokolyubichi
Brest	Polotsk
Bykhov	Postavy
Dobryanka	Pribytki
Gomel	Pruzhan'y
Grodno	Ross
Kobrin	Shchuchin
Krichev	Slonim
Lesnaya	Smorgon
Lida	Vitebsk NE
Luninets	Vitebsk SE
Minsk/Machulishchi	Yermolovichi
Minsk/Slepyanka	
Minsk/Velikidvor	

Table 9: Army Bases

Unit	Location
Common Headquarters	Minsk
5 th Army Corps	Bobruisk
28 th Army Corps	Grodno/Slonim
65 th Army Corps	Borisov
8 th Tank Division	Gorka
120 th Guards Motor Rifle Division	Minsk
30 th Guards Independent Brigade	Gorka
6 th Mechanised Brigade	Grodno
11 th Mechanised Brigade	Grodno
50 th Mechanised Brigade	Brest
Mechanised Unit	Lepel
Mechanised Unit	Slonim
Mechanised Unit	Bobruisk
Mechanised Unit	Polotsk
Mechanised Unit	Slutsk
Mechanised Unit	Borisov
51 st Orsha Artillery Division	Osipovich

Map 3: Army Bases **Garrisons**

Bobruisk
 Borisov
 Brest
 Grodno
 Gorka
 Minsk

Table 10: Strategic Weapons

Type	Role	Quantity	In Service
FROG-7	Area Rocket System	15	15
SS-1C Scud B	Ballistic Missile	60	60
SS-21	Ballistic Missile	40	40

Table 11: Anti-Tank Weapons

Type	Role	Quantity	In Service
9P148/9M113 (AT-5)	Anti-Tank Guided Missile	70	70
9K115/9M115 (AT-6)	Anti-Tank Guided Missile	40	40
100 mm D-12/MT-12	Anti-Tank Gun	40	40
RPG-7	Rocket-Propelled Grenade	1,000	1,000
RPG-16	Rocket-Propelled Grenade	400	400

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