



Russian Response to Polish “Threat”

OE Watch Commentary: As might be expected, the Kremlin leadership has reacted negatively to a recent Polish proposal to “host significant forces from the US Army on its territory, while footing the bill for the US formation’s presence.” As the first accompanying excerpt from the moderate news site, *Vedomosti* points out, such a move “could provoke a further escalation of Russia’s military and political standoff with the West.” The article quotes a European expert who suggests that the Polish offer is predicated on “doubts about the ability of European NATO member countries to provide it with fast and effective assistance in the case of a military threat.”

The excerpt describes the escalation of tensions between Russia and the West, offering a more balanced approach by reminding readers of certain Kremlin officials who have been guilty of “not always well-judged verbal interventions” regarding the possible use of Russian force. The article goes on to suggest that “Russia’s reaction [to this possible American base on Polish territory] may be more drastic than the Soviet one.” It concludes on an ominous note, quoting a senior Kremlin official who asserts that “such actions will trigger a reciprocal response in order to reestablish the disrupted parity” by perhaps stationing “additional Iskanders in the Baltic.”

The second accompanying excerpt comes from the centrist, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, and while the focus on the article deals with current Russian-Belarus relations, it also refers to possible Russian fallout should an American division be relocated to Poland. It describes earlier Kremlin efforts to convince the leadership in Belarus to agree to locate a Russian military airbase within their country. Despite their close ties (especially in the military sphere), the Lukashenko government has been able to delay such a move. However, given the possibility of a new American base in Poland, the article quotes the Belarusian Foreign Minister, who asserts that while “at present we do not intend to station new foreign military bases on Belarusian territory, because we want stability in our region... However, we have to take account of the steps that will be taken by our neighbors.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“...Dmitriy Peskov, President Vladimir Putin’s press secretary, has already stated that the stationing of a US military base is Poland’s sovereign right, but added that such actions will trigger a reciprocal response in order to reestablish the disrupted parity.”

Source: “Pavel Aptekar, “Сколько стоит защита от России? (What Does Protection From Russia Cost?),” *Vedomosti*, 29 May 2018. <https://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2018/05/29/771000-skolko-zaschita-rossii>

...Poland’s aspiration to host significant forces from the US Army on its territory, while footing the bill for the US formation’s presence, is a bad signal, confirming the growth of mutual mistrust between Europe, particularly the former Soviet bloc countries, and Russia. The presence of one division in Poland is not capable of radically changing the balance of forces in the region, however, it could provoke a further escalation of Russia’s military and political standoff with the West.... The need for the deployment of a powerful US formation, the document’s authors believe, is driven by Russia’s “aggressive” attempts to destroy the European security structure that has been created in recent decades....

The request results from Warsaw’s doubts about the ability of European NATO member countries to provide it with fast and effective assistance in the case of a military threat, thinks Timofey Bordachev, director of the Center for Comprehensive European and International Studies of the National Research University Higher School of Economics.

...Poland is not the only European country ready to pay excessively for its fear of Russia.

...It is not just the exercises, and the stationing of additional troops and the latest military hardware in the western regions of Russia (in particular Iskander missiles, which according to the official line from Moscow, are stationed in Kaliningradskaya Oblast in response to the rollout of the US missile defense system in Poland, Czech Republic, and Romania) that are making Europeans nervous, but also the not always well-judged verbal interventions.

...It is not yet known whether Washington will agree to deploy a whole division to Eastern Europe. ...Nevertheless, this will lead to an increase in tension, and provoke the other side to take retaliatory measures, playing into the hands of the hawks of both sides. ...Dmitriy Peskov, President Vladimir Putin’s press secretary, has already stated that the stationing of a US military base is Poland’s sovereign right, but added that such actions will trigger a reciprocal response in order to reestablish the disrupted parity. And the prospect of additional Iskanders stationed in the Baltic is no laughing matter, but a cause for alarm.

Source: “Anton Khodasevich, “У Минска нарастает напряжение на восточном направлении (Minsk Has Rising Tension in Eastern Direction),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 4 June 2018. http://www.ng.ru/cis/2018-06-04/1_7238_minsk.html

...These painful issues could include the topic of military cooperation, experts argue. In particular, the question of stationing a Russian airbase on Belarusian territory, which has been deferred “until better times.” In the past Aleksandr Lukashenko has “fended it off,” but last week the issue was made topical by a report that Poland allegedly is longing to station American armored divisions on its territory. Belarusian Foreign Minister Vladimir Makey was even asked to comment on the issue during his visit to Brussels. “At present we do not intend to station new foreign military bases on Belarusian territory, because we want stability in our region. We do not want to be a disturber of the peace. However, we have to take account of the steps that will be taken by our neighbors,” Vladimir Makey said.

In the opinion of political observer Aleksandr Kraskovskiy, the very fact of the emergence of the report about Poland’s intentions, and the interpretation of Makey’s statement as a sign of Belarus’s readiness to reconsider its position on the airbase, could be elements of pressure on the Belarusian leadership in this matter. “So far, there has been no official approach by Poland to the United States about a base. Let alone a decision by Washington, of course. But Moscow is already stirring up the media and creating the conditions for a fresh phase of pressure on Minsk over the stationing of a military base on Belarusian territory,” the expert writes.