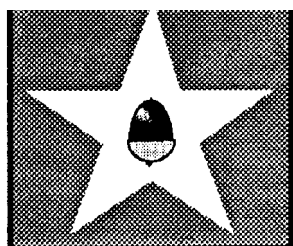


Conflict Studies Research Centre

Dr Steven J Main

**Belarus' & Russia
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Introduction

There have been a number of stages in cementing the intensifying Belarussian-Russian political and economic relationship following the collapse of the USSR in August 1991. However, in one particular area - namely, the military - the success of the move towards union has been most striking. In many respects, the Union relationship between the two states is strongest when one examines the level of military cooperation nurtured and strengthened over the past decade.¹ In contrast to the political and economic "unifying" process, neither the Russian nor the Belarussian military seem to have had many problems in agreeing on a common set of objectives or in mapping out the way ahead for the development of the military relationship between the two states.

However, given the events of September 11th 2001, the drive behind the unification process between both sets of militaries may alter, especially if Russia continues to speak in harmony with the USA in the fight against "international terrorism". If NATO continues to expand eastward - and this seems extremely likely following the November 2002 summit in Prague - with no obvious negative reaction from Moscow, although the military tie-in with Belarus' will still be important to Russia at least on a regional basis, within a wider European context its overall importance to Russia could be reduced. September 11th did not rob states of their right to determine their own national interests, but it did behave them to think on a different level: after all, the world's most powerful state had been attacked, at its very heart, by a determined, well-organised group of men, not another state. Thus, the further deepening of the Russian-Belarussian military relationship may begin to bottom out, as Moscow re-examines its security picture at the local, regional and global levels. Russia may concede the argument that NATO expansion eastwards is, in the overall scheme of things, one of Moscow's less important security problems.

If November 2002 does see invitations being sent to one, two, or all three of the Baltic countries to join NATO, for example, where would the purpose of greater military cooperation between Russia and Belarus' then lie? The military tie-in between the two countries would not have achieved one of its aims: preventing the expansion of NATO in Eastern Europe. It did not prevent the first wave of NATO expansion in mid-1999 and there is no possibility of it preventing a second wave. But this would be only a surface interpretation of events: the whole process, as will be detailed below, began long before NATO expanded in Central Europe. In short, as the security picture in both countries has changed since 1991 - Russia has been involved in two long and bloody wars in the south - whilst there is the possibility that the military alliance will still fall short of full military union, it is nevertheless a relationship which benefits both countries. Although cooperation (especially in relation to anti-aircraft defence) will be very important, the two parts will remain

distinct entities. For the time being at least, there will be no single, unified Russian-Belarussian Army.

Belarussian-Russian Military Cooperation (1991-1998)

According to the official web-page of the Belarussian Ministry of Defence:

*"at present [2000], 30 agreements have been signed between the Republic of Belarus' and the Russian Federation on various areas of military- and military-technical cooperation. The cooperation between the military departments of the Republic of Belarus' and Russia cover the whole spectrum of military matters, is active in nature and is based on the principles of equality and mutual advantage. Greatest success has been achieved within the framework of creating a unified system of regional security."*²

It is in the military sphere, first and foremost, that Belarus' and Russia have proved themselves to be keenest in forging links between their respective states. Both economically and politically, Russia has reservations, to put it mildly, in forging the sorts of links wanted by the Belarussian president, A G Lukashenko, but, as evidenced by the number of agreements signed and actively fulfilled by both countries, in the military area the picture is very different. This is due to a number of reasons, some of which are related to the geographical position of Belarus' in Europe and others to its continuing military significance, not only in the defence of Russia's western regions, particularly Kaliningrad oblast', but also in maintaining two very important Russian military strategic sites, one at Gantsevichi (home to the "Volga" early warning missile detection site, able to detect the launch of any missile in Europe) and the nuclear submarine command and control centre at Vileyka. The Russians themselves do not underplay the geostrategic and military significance of Belarus' to Russia: a set of theses published by the influential Council on Foreign and Defence Policy in October 1999 stated that:

*"as a result of full integration with Belarus', Russia will acquire a number of incontestable geopolitical privileges: direct access to the borders of the Central European region [other than Russia, Belarus' borders Poland, Ukraine, Latvia and Lithuania]; removal of the potential threat of the so-called Baltic-Black Sea belt isolating Russia; strengthening of Russia's position with states, blocs, and allies, first of all in Europe; increase in the military resources of the state in conventional forces due to integration with the Belarussian Army; development of new perspectives for manoeuvre in the framework of the CFE Treaty; elimination of the military strategic isolation of the Kaliningrad special defence region".*³

Following the collapse of the USSR in August 1991, both countries established formal diplomatic relations with one another on 26th June 1992.⁴ Less than a month later (and two months after the formal re-creation of the Russian Armed Forces and four months after the formal re-creation of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Belarus'), Belarus' and Russia signed a package of 24 agreements, consisting of 19 economic accords and 5 military agreements, on 20th July 1992. The five military agreements were concerned with the countries' strategic forces, as well as the technical and material maintenance of both sets of forces, officer training, etc.⁵ It should not be forgotten that Belarus' had inherited a lot of equipment and personnel from the Soviet Union. The republic had been one of the

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USSR's old Military Districts (MD), namely the Belorussian MD - part of the USSR's first echelon should a military invasion be carried out against the USSR. Thus, it was staffed by some of the best units and equipment available to the Soviet Armed Forces. Along with 250,000 military personnel, Belarus' also inherited 72 intercontinental ballistic missiles, a weapons' system which the country was more than keen to get rid of.⁶ By international agreement, all of the republic's nuclear weapons were removed to Russia by November 1996.⁷ On occasion, Lukashenko has expressed a degree of doubt about the efficacy of Belarus' getting rid of its nuclear weapons so readily and, again occasionally, one can still hear dark mutterings emanating from Minsk or Moscow, about the potential re-deployment of nuclear weapons to the territory of Belarus' in the light of continued NATO expansion eastwards, but such speculation is quickly denounced and quietly forgotten - until the next time Lukashenko wishes to indulge in unnecessary scare-mongering.⁸

Six months of intense debate followed in the Supreme Soviet (SS) of Belarus', the initial package of agreements between the two states being ratified by the Belorussian SS on 4th February 1993; for its part, the Russian duma ratified all 5 military agreements on 27th April 1993. Commenting on the basic provisions of the Russian-Belorussian agreements, the then Russian Deputy Defence Minister, General B Gromov, noted that the package created a new basis for bilateral military relations "in the interests of both states ... for military security, specific features of the structure of their Armed Forces during the period of transition and their ties in the military sphere".⁹

There can be little doubt, though, that the military burden of the fSU was great and, although there was talk about the need to create a "common defence space" incorporating the whole of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), little of practical importance to achieve this was actually carried out in the initial few years. By the beginning of 1994, the division of the Armed Forces of the USSR had been finally completed, the military might of a super-power had been unevenly divided into 12 parts, with not one of the inheriting states able rationally or economically to manage its inheritance adequately. As was the case for Russia, so it was for Belarus': military reform quickly followed in an attempt to bring the economic burden to a manageable level whilst at the same time reaching levels of equipment and men that the state could maintain, meeting the realistic threat - both internal and external - to the nation's security. In general for all the fSU states, this has been one of the hardest problems to tackle during the transition period and, in many respects, is still being dealt with. Thus, Russian-Belorussian military cooperation also grew partly as a response to assisting one another to cope with the defence legacy of the fSU. As nations which had shared much in the past, both good and bad, they had a commonality of interest born through history, language and culture, which meant that both sides were pre-disposed to one another. The collapse of the USSR had been a wrench for many on both sides of the border post at Rechka, as well as a potential security headache for both countries, unless steps were taken quickly in order to plug the hole in the nations' defences. The loss of many important Soviet military bases in the Baltic republics - especially the radar missile tracking station at Skrunde in Latvia - meant that Russia needed to plug the holes in the Federation's security fence. This was realised very quickly by the political and military leadership in Moscow and the natural choice for a potential military ally was Belarus'. Genuinely concerned by the unfolding security situation amongst its neighbours - Poland, Latvia and Lithuania were all striving to join the "aggressive" NATO military alliance - Minsk was more than happy to respond positively to Moscow's overtures.

The break-up of the USSR meant that perceptions of the nature of the military threat facing each country were very different from country to country, therefore, whilst Minsk still saw the main danger as emanating from the West, Kazakhstan saw the main threat as emanating from China, Armenia as emanating from the south. Even now, as pointed out recently by one Russian scholar, only Russia and Belarus' are, publicly at least, still alarmed at the prospect of future NATO expansion in Europe: "the majority of the members of the Commonwealth ... are quite indifferent."¹⁰ The threat of NATO expansion was a reason for the growing military rapprochement between the two states - although it should be emphasised that the creation of the Commonwealth of the two states in April 1996 was not designed to be an exclusive "club" simply for Belarus' and Russia. Their growing "togetherness" in the military sphere was predicated on sharing a joint perception of the military threat to stability and security in the region as a whole. The military inheritance of the USSR was not simply in the number of military personnel, or the number of ICBMs, planes and tanks, left in the MDs, but also included a question of mind, an overall strategic outlook, a view of the world that was suspicious of the West and distinctly hostile to NATO. Of course, in some respects, that attitude has changed, as both Russia and Belarus' themselves have changed over the past decade but, initially, their views on security matters were largely to distrust any overtures being made by the West, especially in the military sphere, and sharing a commonality of views meant that it was comparatively easy to translate that way of thinking into practical action on the ground. The other members of the CIS had different perceptions of the security threat - even Ukraine did not share Moscow's or Minsk's perception of the threat emanating from NATO - helping further to underline the intensification of the military relationship between the two countries.

A significant boost was given to the overall drive for closer relations between the two countries with the election of a new President for Belarus', A G Lukashenko, in the spring of 1994. He has been one of the main stalwarts in the process for the closest possible economic, political and military integration between the two powers. Thus, it was no great surprise that his first foreign trip abroad as President was to the Russian Federation in August 1994. B N Yel'tsin returned the compliment in early 1995.¹¹ Early 1995 marked a significant step forward in relations between the two states, particularly in the military sphere, with the signing of two important agreements: on 6th January 1995, two-year talks on Russia's strategic bases in Belarus' - at Gantsevichi and Vileyka - were successfully concluded. Russia was allowed to begin construction of an early-warning radar site - to compensate for the one it would have to de-commission at Skrunde - at Gantsevichi, just outside Baranovichi and was also granted the use of both sites for a minimum period of 25 years.¹² On 21st February 1995, on the wider political front, Belarus' and Russia signed a Treaty on Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation, thus firming up the basis for further military-political cooperation between the two states.¹³ In the official Russian delegation in February 1995 was the then Russian Minister of Defence, Pavel Grachev. He was to make a return visit to Minsk in early December 1995 and held two days of talks with his Belarussian counterpart, General L Mal'tsev. The overall purpose of the talks was "to discuss the current state of affairs and the prospects for military and military-technological cooperation between the two states, ways of solving outstanding problems".¹⁴ Both sides stressed the importance of strengthening relations with one another and, at the close of the visit, Grachev and Mal'tsev signed a further 20 documents improving military cooperation between the two countries, including the preparation of joint air defence missions.¹⁵ The practical nature of the military relationship between the two states has particularly revealed itself in this activity: on the eve of the signing of the Treaty on the Creation of the Community of Belarus' and Russia (2nd April

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1996), both Anti-Aircraft Defence Forces (PVO) had already undertaken a number of joint military patrols of Russia's western border provinces.¹⁶ According to one analyst, this particular aspect of the military cooperation between the two countries should not be underestimated:

*"as of 1st April 1996, the national PVO forces of Belorussia and Russia began carrying out joint military patrols. The significance of this step from the point of view of increasing the security of both countries is hard to over-estimate."*¹⁷

The April 1996 Treaty also envisaged both sides adopting a common foreign policy, the creation of a ruling Supreme Council, including both heads of state and government; the establishment of an executive committee and a joint parliamentary assembly, in order to ensure that decisions taken are actually put into effect - in short, more mechanisms were being put in place in order to allow for greater co-ordination of the foreign and security policies of both countries.¹⁸

Further evidence of increased military cooperation was revealed in May 1996, when a joint session of the Defence Ministry collegiums of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus' was held in Moscow (14th May). According to the officially released bulletin of the meeting, the agenda contained "a dozen issues" and the package of documents signed included measures "to ensure the fulfilment of the 2nd April 1996 Treaty on the Establishment of the Union; determining the deadline and the procedure for the elaboration of the guidelines for the development of the armed forces of Russia and Belarus'; plan joint functions in operational training and the use of military infrastructure in the interests of ensuring regional security ... train personnel in the higher military schools of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus'," etc.¹⁹

Unlike many of the agreements signed by the CIS as a whole, many of the agreements signed and adopted by Russia and Belarus' in relation to one another's security are put into effect so, within a year of this particular meeting, several of these steps had been translated from paper into concrete action. In a wider context, politically things began to gather pace, especially in January 1997, when Russia's President, B N Yel'tsin, wrote to A G Lukashenko, stressing the need for the fuller implementation of the integration programme between the two countries, accepting Lukashenko's original proposal that referenda be held in both countries on the idea of formal unification of the states and a common government duly formed.²⁰ Needless to say, of course, referenda were not held, but on 2nd April 1997 a new Union treaty was signed and the Community became a Union, with a Charter (*ustav*). But this was still far from being enough for Lukashenko: on 22nd May, in Moscow, Lukashenko stated that, in his opinion, Belarus' and Russia should sign a formal military alliance - "it would be logical to assume that we need a military alliance to guarantee our joint policies".²¹

Although the Charter fell well short of being a formal military alliance, nevertheless it did contain a number of important provisions concerning the security of both member-states. Thus, according to Article 11 of the Charter, signed on 23rd May 1997, in the area of mutual security, the following tasks were agreed upon:

"(a) to take, if necessary, joint measures to avert a threat to the sovereignty and independence of each of the member-states of the Union;

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(b) to co-ordinate the activity of the member-states of the Union, in the field of military development and the development of their armed forces, to use jointly the military infrastructure and to take other measures, with due account of the interests of the member-states of the Union for maintaining their defence capability and the Union's defence capability;

(c) to work out and place a joint defence order and to ensure supplies on its basis and the use of armaments and military hardware; to create a joint system of technical support for the armed forces of the member-states of the Union;

(d) to carry out a co-ordinated frontier policy;

(e) to combat corruption, terrorism and other crimes."²²

As one commentator has noted: "the creation of the Community (2nd April 1996) and then the Union of Russia and Belorussia (2nd April 1997) opened the widest possible opportunities for integrating the countries in the military sphere".²³ This was further emphasised towards the end of 1997, when the Russian Defence Minister, Marshal I Sergeev, visited his opposite number in Minsk, Colonel-General A P Chumakov, on an official visit. The meeting was more than a simple courtesy call, ending in the formal signing of Treaty of Military Cooperation between the two states. In accordance with this new Treaty and the Agreement on the Joint Maintenance of Regional Security in the Military Sphere, the military establishments were becoming ever more closely welded together:

"on 19th December 1997, in Minsk, the Ministers of Defence of both countries signed the Agreement on Joint Maintenance of Regional Security ... and the Treaty of Military Cooperation. The latter defined joint steps to be taken in repulsing threats to the sovereignty and independence of Russia and Belorussia. The use of military infrastructure and the adoption of other steps to maintain the defence capability of one another's states, in particular, as well as the Union as a whole, was outlined. A method of defining and placing the joint defence order was worked out; on this basis would be worked out orders for the purchase of weapons and military equipment; the creation of a unified system for the technical maintenance of the armed forces."²⁴

It should be noted that within the broader context of the security of CIS Member-States, apart from peace-keeping missions, the most important and obvious practical manifestation of military cooperation over the past 10 years is the creation and maintenance of a unified PVO system covering the air space of much of the fSU. With specific reference to Russia and Belarus', joint patrol missions presuppose "that, if the situation so demands, in agreement with the commander of the national PVO system ... joint measures can be taken to stabilise the situation, including the use of Russian units on patrol".²⁵ Thus, if Russia requires the assistance of Belarussian Air Force units on patrol, or vice versa, they can be called upon in an instant and can take the steps necessary to "stabilise" the situation on hand. In an interview, the former Commander of Belarussian PVO, Lieutenant-General V Kastenka, stated that "on 1st April last year [in April 1996], we started combat duty with the forces and means of Russian Air Defence Troops. Taking part in this, from the Russian side, are detachments and units of the Moscow Air Defence area and the Air Defence Army deployed in the north-west of Russia. The

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combined system protects the borders of Belarus' and the border of Russia in the western direction."²⁶

According to Marshal Sergeyev, the agreements signed "allow us to plan and carry out a whole range of measures, including operational and military training".²⁷ For his part, Chumakov made the realistic assessment that he saw "an improvement in the military capability of our army only in mutual cooperation with the army of Russia".²⁸ The two men also discussed the passing - by the Union's executive committee - of the Concept of the Joint Defence Policy, as well as the need to create a joint Collegium of both Ministries of Defence, working out programmes for the training of Belarussian officers in Russia's military education system.²⁹

Thus, by the end of 1998, Russia and Belarus' had created a regional military security sub-system within the overall framework of the CIS' collective security system. As important as a common perception of the threat were the work and policies of President Lukashenko. Ever since coming to power in 1994, Lukashenko has done everything he could to bring both nations closer together. In many respects, his policy of political, economic and military integration with Russia does seem to enjoy the support of the Belarussian people. There does seem to be genuine support for closer relations with their big eastern neighbour. On a wider scale, the creation of this regional sub-system of collective security may provide the basis for the reinvigoration of the military security aspects of the Collective Security Treaty: in Russia's future security relationship with, for instance, the republics of Central Asia, Russia may use the "Belarussian experience" to encourage a further sub-regional security system there, especially in view of the new American military presence in the region. There are signs that, with the creation of the Anti-Terrorist Centre and the Central Asian Rapid Reaction Force, Russia may be moving towards a series of sub-regional security systems, moving away from attempting to create one huge whole CIS security system: except in the area of PVO defence, Russia's previous attempts at creating a CIS-wide system have not been crowned with much success to date.

Military Cooperation 1999-2002

Lukashenko has been more than keen for his country's defence and foreign policies to be co-ordinated with those of Russia - indeed, Belarus' was the only member of the CIS which actively supported Russia in the latter's stand against the NATO bombing campaign against FRY in 1999. He has been quick to emphasise the combined sacrifice of the Belarussian, Russian and Ukrainian peoples in their fight against Nazism in WW2. As a former political officer, he is still struck by the symbols and images of the country's Soviet past and, indeed, the current emblem of the Republic of Belarus' bears a striking resemblance to the old Belarussian SSR emblem. Lukashenko does give the impression that in many ways things were better in the past and he does have a tendency to venerate both the USSR that was and the Russia that is. Occasionally, he tends towards emotive use of language, as evidenced by the title of an interview he gave to the Russian MoD's main newspaper, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, in May 2000: "we will defend Mother Russia with our [bare] chests".³⁰ Given his perception of the threats facing both Russia and Belarus', as well as his own understanding of history, he sees the defence of Belarus' and Russia as one and the same thing:

"Russia has a strong interest in military cooperation, with regard to the defence of our state and the Russian state, of our Union. The reason

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probably is that the Belarussian Army is the only thing the Russian Federation has in the west ... Only the Belarussian Army, which is willing to guarantee the security of its own territory and that of the Russian Federation."³¹

This view of the common defence of both Union states has received much support from the senior Russian military leadership: the growing military cooperation between Russia and Belarus' has allowed Russia to fill a very important gap in its strategic defence system in the western direction, since the collapse of the USSR and the active expansion of NATO in Central Europe since 1999. Russia's bases in Belarus' are important in providing communication with its strategic submarine fleet, as well as ensuring radar cover. Geographically, Belarus' is also important in easing access to the important strategic exclave of the Russian Federation, Kaliningrad oblast', home to the Baltic Fleet. Then, of course, there are the Belarussian Armed Forces themselves, well-trained and reasonably well-equipped, plus the country's native defence industry, all important factors.

To further enhance the security of both nations, the decision was taken in April 1999 to create a unified regional group of troops of Belarus' and Russia.³² Sergeyev alluded to this in an interview published in *Krasnaya Zvezda* on 27th April 1999 (the interview itself was published a few days after his formal visit to Belarus', which took place on 21st-23rd April). An *Interfax* statement, dated 6th October 1999, once more alluded to the decision, saying that both Ministers of Defence - Sergeyev and Chumakov - had signed a resolution "establishing a regional military coalition (group) in the western direction". According to the statement, Sergeyev pointed out that the creation of the regional group "does not target a concrete enemy" but that it would be "ready for action if [the enemy] does appear". His Belarussian counterpart added that "if separate, our countries might fail to protect frontiers. Units of the regional army group will provide defence in the East-European region, should it become necessary". The statement also alluded to the fact that "command and supply headquarters" were being set up so that "the group could be formed".³³ The grouping will be drawn from units already in existence in each nation's armed forces, brought into action when the situation so demands.

More detail about the group was released a year later: in his annual address to the Belarussian parliament, Lukashenko spoke about the need to create "a new concept for the defence system in the western direction".³⁴ A couple of days later, Belarussian TV interviewed the Belarussian assistant minister of defence for military policy, Major-General Yu Portnov, who spoke about the size and functions of the military group: "The make-up of the regional grouping will be the armed forces of the Republic of Belarus and the military formations of the Russian Federation that are assigned to its composition. The grouping's strength, manning and staffing will be determined by the tasks to be assigned to it by the Supreme State Council's decision." In response to speculation about its size, he admitted that the figure of "300,000 is a purely theoretical figure" and that its size would reflect the tasks it was allocated to perform. Given that the size of the Belarussian Armed Forces is no more than 80,000, this would imply that Russia was prepared to commit in the region of nearly a quarter of a million men in order to ensure that the grouping was able to meet the threat.³⁵ In effect, Russia would deploy those units to the grouping already serving in the country's western oblasts, as well as those military units based in Kaliningrad oblast'.³⁶ Fearing an over-reaction on the part of the Russian media, the RF MoD was quick to point out that the figure of 300,000 would include not only army units, but also border guard troops and interior troops. Moscow MD would be the main supplier of men for the regional grouping

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(including Air Force and PVO units), supplying approximately 100,000 men; including border guards and interior troops, the overall figure would increase to 150-170,000 men.³⁷ But it should be stressed that Belarus' is not going to be suddenly swamped by 240,000 Russian soldiers marching over the border; there is no large combined Russian/Belarusian military group quartered in Belarus' waiting to pounce on any unsuspecting neighbours. When a suitable threat arises, then the machine will be cranked up and the group brought into practical existence. Until then, the only units serving on Belarussian soil - with the exception of the two Russian bases at Gantsevichi and Vileyka - are Belarussian.

In the recently published military doctrine of Belarus' (January 2002), a number of mentions of the role of this joint military group were made, specifically in relation to the outbreak of a regional war, in which "the Armed Forces [of the Republic of Belarus'] ... will be used ... for the armed defence of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state by all means and forces including the use of the combat potential of the regional grouping of troops (forces) within the framework of the unified defence space with the Russian Federation". Further on, the doctrine spoke about using the regional grouping of troops (forces) in the "armed defence of the Union state to repel foreign aggression ... on a planned basis, in accordance with the decision of the Supreme Higher Council of the Union state". In terms of command and control of the regional grouping of troops (forces), during the so-called "threat period", by the decision of the Supreme Higher Council, a "collegial organ ... the Unified Command of the Regional Grouping of Troops (Forces)" will be created.³⁸ Interestingly enough, no such detail on the use of the Regional Grouping of Forces (Troops) is to be found in Russia's military doctrine, published in April 2000.³⁹

Concerning the drafting of a common defence doctrine for the two Union states, one commentator has noted:

"according to statements in the press, the draft document does not propose the creation of a common army for the Union state, however, it does foresee the creation of a powerful Russian-Belarusian military grouping under a single command. According to the then Commander of Moscow MD, Colonel-General I Puzanov, "the composition and numbers of the regional group have been predetermined and the troops are ready to operate within the grouping".⁴⁰

Although command and control facilities would already appear to be in place, the main force of the grouping will not assemble except in the face of a severe and serious military threat either to Russia or Belarus'.⁴¹ This was emphasised by Portnov: "Every time when I'm asked where and how will we see this regional group, I reply: you will see it when there is a real military threat to the Union of Belorussia and Russia."⁴² According to one Russian analyst, NATO's semi-official reaction to the news was along the lines that if such a grouping is created, it will not happen quickly.⁴³ Despite this cynicism, however, Belarus' neighbours have shown more concern about the potential functions of such a group in the region, worried that the group may re-deploy operational-tactical missiles in the area.⁴⁴ In an interview published in 2001, the Belarussian Defence Minister, L Mal'tsev, made a partial allusion to the deployment of the grouping within the geographical locale of Russia's western regions: "As much as we are located in the East-European region of the DKB [Collective Security Treaty] (territory of Belarus', Kaliningrad oblast' and the neighbouring regions of Russia, the area of the Baltic Sea), naturally, the regional grouping of forces ... will operate here ... thus, questions of the type, who needs it?

are simply not applicable here. It is our common grouping. This is the region which we are both answerable for. And the higher the combat readiness of the group, the better it is for both sides."⁴⁵

This regional grouping of forces, operating within the Collective Security Treaty of the CIS, is set to operate in the western direction: it can be seen as a regional sub-security system operating within the overall framework of the CIS security system. As one Russian analyst pointed out, "within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty, they are only [now] forming the Collective Rapid Reaction Forces, but Moscow and Minsk already have a regional group of troops and are improving ways of controlling it".⁴⁶

A further indication of how serious plans were being made in relation to the creation and functioning of such a group was the decision to hold large-scale command staff exercises, involving both Russian and Belarussian military units, in June 1999 under the code-name "West-99", not quite on the scale of the huge Warsaw Pact exercise of the same name held in 1981, but certainly "the largest strategic command-staff exercise in post-Soviet history".⁴⁷ Units of the Belarussian Armed Forces, units from the Moscow and Leningrad MDs as well as the Northern and Baltic Fleets took part. The exercise was conducted in three stages: the first stage (held on 21st-22nd June) involved putting the troops on full military alert; the second stage (23rd-25th June) involved preparing and using the troops deployed "to repel aggression in the West". This stage involved planning joint operations with the Belarussian military command, using the regional grouping of troops. The third and final stage (26th June) involved "inflicting defeat on the aggressor and restoring the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation and Allied states". The Russian MoD was quick to point out that the exercise had nothing to do with contemporary events in the Balkans, but at least part of the exercise did involve repelling aircraft and missile attacks after a long air operation - NATO's air campaign against FRY readily comes to mind. Belarus' mobile forces, as well as its regional PVO system, were used in the exercise. The exercise was important not only in its scale and timing, but because it was the first time that the regional group of troops was actually deployed in simulated combat conditions.⁴⁸

In October 2000, a report appeared in *Krasnaya Zvezda* concerning the conduct of a command staff military game held at the Academy of the Russian General Staff. In charge of the exercise was the Commandant of the Academy, former Commander of the Far Eastern MD, Chechevatov. The assessment was made that the command staff military game was "a practical step on the path towards the creation of the regional group of troops of Belarus' and Russia".⁴⁹ Chechevatov also alluded to the fact that the "flower of the Belarussian Armed Forces was studying at the Academy".⁵⁰ In 2000 alone, 19 Belarussian officers and generals studied there. In general, there is an increasing number of Belarussian officers training in Russia; in 1999, the figure was 158; in 2000, the figure was 217. All are financed by the Union budget.⁵¹ Studying together at the Academy should ensure that, in the longer term at least, future cooperation will be easier to implement.⁵²

At a session of the joint collegium, held in Moscow in October 2000, Sergeyev and Chumakov stated that the actual process of military integration had assumed particular significance "under existing conditions". Within the framework of their own bilateral treaties, as well as within that of the CIS, both states had taken a number of "concrete steps" in the area of "military integration". In particular, the joint defence of the airspace and the functioning of the unified PVO system were singled out. According to Chumakov, "the integration of Belarus' and Russia in the

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military sphere has developed more quickly than in other areas". Chumakov also alluded to the signing of an Agreement on creating a unified regional PVO system of the two countries which would call on the conduct of joint military patrols by the air forces and PVO forces of Belarus' and Russia. Chumakov did not rule out the possibility that under these conditions, Russian air force planes could well be deployed to Belarussian air force bases.⁵³

Conclusion

In short, ever since the collapse of the USSR in 1991, a whole series of steps have been taken by two of the three Slavic members of the fSU, namely the Republic of Belarus' and the Russian Federation, to re-form an effective military relationship, answering both their own regional security concerns, as well as to counter-balance the impact of the military expansion of others in the region. Given their shared history, language and culture, this was not a difficult relationship to re-forge and, as has been shown over the past decade, the senior military and political leadership in both countries have been keen to promote the process at every possible turn. Whilst the politicians may have been pursuing the policy for their own reasons, the military establishments in both countries would appear to have been keen to plug the gap in the western direction of the countries' defence system: in the re-creation of a unified PVO system, the creation of the regional grouping of troops, as well as increased joint training and exercising of both sets of militaries. The steps taken, however, still fall well short of formal unification - a project which, certainly in the political and economic arena, seems to be far off in the future - but, for the time being, the military cooperation between the two countries seems to be at a level adequately meeting the security demands of both countries. Given the economic and constitutional constraints, Belarus' will not deploy its military forces outside a very confined geographical area and only when its interests are directly threatened by others; obviously Russia, given its size, its resources and its nuclear arsenal, is in a very different geo-political position and will react - as has been demonstrated on a number of occasions in the past 10 years - militarily when required. But the military part of the relationship between the two countries is on a different level, from the economic and political, as well as in relation to military relationships with the other CIS states. Practical steps would appear to be more important than words on paper: both share a common view in relation to analysing the threat to stability in the region and have responded accordingly.

The events of September 11th 2001 may encourage Russia to take a harder look at its relationships and cause it to continue to revise its attitude towards the USA in their "common" fight against "international terrorism". If that is the case, then this could have an impact on Russia's relationship not only with Belarus', but also with the other members of the CIS. How Russia reacts to the possible incorporation into the NATO alliance of any - or all - of the Baltic republics come November 2002, for example, will provide the West with a strong indication not only of how Russia intends to develop its relationship with Belarus', but also with the CIS. Grudging acceptance may cause Russia to revise its military relationship with Belarus' downwards; rejection of NATO expansion would most definitely see it increasing and further intensifying. Either way, the security picture in this part of the world is going to be very different post-November 2002.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ In order more adequately to define the word "cooperation" in this particular context, I will use the definition in an essay analysing military-political cooperation in the CIS: "cooperation includes co-ordination and rendering mutual assistance in questions of constructing, reforming and developing the national armed forces of member-states; conducting joint measures in operational and combat training of their armed forces and other troops; working out an agreed programme for training different types of troops of the national armed forces in achieving joint tasks in various conditions; agreeing matters of operationally equipping territories, the creation and improvement of the military infrastructure in the regions in the interests of collective defence; working out a unified approach to the standards for creating and maintaining material supplies." Colonel-General P N Andreyev, "Geopolitika i bezopasnost'. Voyenno-politicheskoye sotrudnichestvo gosudarstv SNG: etapy i osnovnye napravleniya razvitiya", *Voyennaya Mysl'*, No 4, 2000, 25-35; 31.
- ² "Deyatel'nost' Ministerstva oborony Respubliki Belarus", http://www.mod.mil/by/megd_sotr.html. According to a later interview of the then Belarussian Minister of Defence, Colonel-General A Chumakov, by February 2001 the total number of agreements in the military sphere had reached 38 <http://news.monitor.bbc.co.uk/pubs/cgi/pubs.pl?temp=view&path=/intake/p.../12+Mar+2003/12/01>.
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- ⁴ "5 let vmeste", <http://www.embassybel.ru/index.php?page=27>
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- ¹¹ M McMahan, "Aleksandr Lukashenko, president of Belarus", *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Vol 13, No 4, December 1997, 129-137.
- ¹² Fedulova, *ibid*, No 5, 2000, 69-84; 71.
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- ¹⁴ Woff, *ibid*.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid*.
- ¹⁶ Fedulova, *ibid*, p71.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid*, pp71-72.
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- ²⁰ *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 15 January 1997.
- ²¹ FBIS-SOV-97-142, 22 May 1997.
- ²² *Military News Bulletin*, No 6, June 1997, p2.
- ²³ Fedulova, *ibid*, p72.
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