Commentary
September 18, 2025

Belarus and Poland Share Military Information Despite Worsening Political Relations

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Originally published in the Eurasia Daily Monitor

Summary

On 10 September, at least 19 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) violated Poland's airspace. Afterward, Poland invoked Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) founding treaty. Belarus's armed forces notified Poland and Lithuania about the incoming drones via existing military-to-military communication channels. Minsk's sharing of sensitive information with the Polish armed forces represents an effort from the Belarusian military in risk reduction and pragmatic dialogue with NATO countries, even in the face of deteriorating bilateral relations.

On 10 September, Prime Minister of Poland Donald Tusk stated that the previous night at least 19 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) violated his country's airspace. The Polish authorities are confident that the drones were Russian and that the incursions happened intentionally. Based on those factors, Tusk concluded that the occurrence brought Poland closer to an open military conflict than at any time since World War II, while also emphasizing that Poland is "not at war".

Most reactions from Western politicians and media naturally focused on Polish assessments of the incursions and their implications for the security of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), of which Poland is a member. Warsaw invoked Article 4 of NATO's founding treaty, which launched formal consultations among its 32 member states as the "territorial integrity, political independence or security [of one of them] is threatened". On 12 September, NATO's Secretary General Mark Rutte announced that, in response to the incursions, the alliance was launching operation "Eastern Sentry" to bolster its posture along its eastern flank.

The international focus on Poland and NATO's big-picture reactions is understandable, as the incident posed a serious challenge to NATO's overall strategy of effectively deterring Russia. There appeared to be little coverage in the West, however, about the drones entering Polish airspace from both Belarus and Ukraine, a fact that has potentially long-term implications for the security of Poland and NATO. In his statement at the Sejm, the Polish Parliament, Tusk underlined that this incident was the first time since the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war in February 2022 that drones entered Poland's airspace from Belarus and Ukraine rather than just from Ukraine. He argued that drones entering NATO airspace at the Belarusian border represented a major escalation that Warsaw and its allies need to counter.

> Crucially, Tusk failed to mention that Minsk did not silently watch the Russian drones fly over Belarus en route to Poland.

Later on 10 September, Major General Pavel Muraveika, chief of the General Staff of Belarus's Armed Forces, issued a statement detailing Belarus's actions during the incursions. Once Belarusian radars detected westbound UAVs, Minsk reportedly notified Poland and Lithuania via existing military-to-military communication channels. That information, in Muraveika's assessment, "allowed Poland to promptly respond to the actions of the drones by scrambling its own forces on duty". The Polish military similarly informed Belarus about the approach of UAVs from Ukraine to Belarus's borders. Muraveika also stressed that, in addition to sharing real-time information with Warsaw and Vilnius, the Belarusian air defence forces shot down several lost drones in the country's airspace.

Polish military officials later corroborated Muraveika's statement. General Wiesław Kukuła, chief of the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces, confirmed that "the Belarusians warned us that drones were heading towards us through their airspace". In Kukuła's words, the advance warning was indeed "helpful" for the Polish and allied air forces. He also confirmed that Warsaw reciprocated by sharing information about UAVs flying toward Belarus.

In his public comments, Kukuła expressed surprise at the fact that Minsk initiated the exchange of military information between the two countries, given how strained their relations are. Just a day before the drone incursions, Warsaw made an unprecedented decision to shut the entire border with Belarus during the 12-16 September *Zapad-2025* joint Russian–Belarusian military exercises. Poland shut down all road border crossings

for passengers and cargo, as well as all railway checkpoints. The measure effectively stopped all transit of goods, including between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Europe, via the Belarusian-Polish border.

Warsaw explained the border closure as necessary to curtail risks to its national security from *Zapad-2025*. As early as May, however, Minsk announced it would significantly downsize the drills and relocate them away from its western and southern borders to reduce escalation risks. According to Minsk, the exercise did not pose a security threat to its borders with Poland, Lithuania, or Latvia, or crossing points there. From the Belarusian perspective, Poland's decision reflects a broader crisis in the bilateral relationship, which has been deteriorating for nearly five years.

Minsk's openness to sharing sensitive information with the Polish armed forces seems surprising considering bilateral tensions. The choice manifests a traditional approach by the Belarusian military that places high value on confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs), risk reduction mechanisms, and pragmatic dialogue with NATO. In official statements, Belarus continues to mention the importance of such measures and advocate for the restoration of mutual inspections, verification missions, and other cooperation mechanisms amid the deepening crisis in European security. In line with that logic, Muraveika reiterated in his 10 September statement that Belarus "will continue to fulfil its obligations within the framework of the exchange of information on the air situation with the Republic of Poland and the Baltic countries".

Following the drone incursions into Poland, NATO is bolstering its readiness for any future escalation.

> Having working channels for military information exchange and at least basic regional CSBMs with Belarus, in addition to strengthened deterrence mechanisms, could help minimize risks of miscalculation and unintended escalation at a time when tensions are high.

The Belarusian and Polish militaries appear to agree with this assessment, as demonstrated by the exchange of information between them on the night of the drone incursions. Another recent instance of military-to-military communication between Warsaw and Minsk was Belarus's request to clarify the parameters of the large manoeuvres that the Polish army launched in response to the *Zapad-2025* drills. According to the Belarusian Ministry of Defence, Minsk was satisfied with the information it received from its Polish colleagues in response. The escalating political tensions between the two countries, however, might quickly derail these incipient military contacts.

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