

Belarus and Russia: Nipping the “Annexation” Infowar Narrative in the Bud

By [Andrew Korybko](#)

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The emerging narrative that Russia is planning to “annex” Belarus is nothing more than an external infowar attack on their recently troubled partnership that seeks to accelerate the pace of Minsk’s pro-Western pivot by falsely fearmongering about Moscow’s geopolitical intentions.

Applebaum Rings The “Annexation” Alarm

Even the most casual “Russia watcher” has probably come across the narrative over the past few months that Russia is planning to “annex” Belarus under the aegis of the 1999 Union State agreement between both neighboring countries, with this speculative theory being pushed most prominently by [Anne Applebaum](#), a Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) member and the neoconservative wife of former Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski. For as much as many in the West might [want to believe](#) that President Putin is secretly plotting to exploit the integrational progress that was made in recent months between his country and Belarus in order to “cling to power” after the end of his fourth term in 2024, the reality is that such a scenario is extremely far-fetched, not least because of Belarus’ unwillingness to go along with it to that extent. Truth be told, state-to-state relations between these two fraternal countries are tenser than they’ve ever been before in spite of both sides’ official reassurances to the contrary.

Westward Ho!

The author has been following this trend for some time and most recently published a piece on it back in November about how “[Belarus Just Threw Russia Under The Bus](#)”, which was accompanied by a [Facebook thread](#) documenting the relevant developments that have occurred in their relationship since then. To concisely summarize, Belarus is basically blackmailing Russia for billions of dollars’ worth of energy and other subsidies otherwise it’ll accelerate its pro-Western pivot. Skeptics commonly remark that these two states often quarrel with one another over this issue, but this time their dispute is qualitatively different after Minsk hosted experts from the neoconservative Jamestown Foundation last November that also included former Commander of the US Army in Europe [Ben Hodges](#). In addition, President Lukashenko has since talked extensively about how much he wants to preserve his country’s “[sovereignty](#)” and “[genuine independence](#)” in what was obviously a riposte to the rumors that the Union State might lead to Belarus’ actual Crimean-like incorporation into Russia.

Not only that, but Lukashenko actually directly confronted such a scenario head-on by [denying](#) that anything of that nature was on the agenda of his country’s bilateral relations with Russia, curiously quipping that “If there is no equitable basis, then there is no union” in

what can be interpreted as a jab against what he's framing as his partner's alleged desire to 'dominate' its much smaller neighbor. In other words, while Belarus' merger with Russia is off the table no matter what Western neoconservatives and some overly-zealous Russian-friendly media commentators might say for their own reasons, that doesn't mean that Minsk is ruling out further integration with Moscow on other levels. To the contrary, Belarus is eager to continue along the Union State trajectory, though only if relations between the two can be "rebalanced" on a more "equal" basis. Put another way, Lukashenko won't "betray" Putin if the latter "compromises" on certain financial, economic, and other issues, though it's not assured that the Russian leader will do so.

"Balancing" Or "Blackmailing"?

Being a comparatively small country in an ultra-geostrategic position, Belarus is well aware of its importance to both Russia and the West, and it now seems willing to instrumentalize that in pursuit of what it believes to be its best interests. Its leadership has signaled that its "balancing act" will now become more robust as it actively seeks to court its Western neighbors and their American patron, thereby putting pressure on Russia to act fast or "lose out". Russia recognizes the game that's being played but is reluctant continuing caving into Belarus' demands, worrying that it'll embolden its "partner" even more and will indefinitely perpetuate its ever-increasingly high-stakes "blackmail". At the same time, however, the argument can be made that Belarus' geopolitical "loyalty" (however unreliable it may be nowadays) is "priceless" and that Moscow must do whatever it can to prevent Minsk from moving westward in a manner that could one day endanger the Eurasian Great Power's security.

After having explained these geostrategic sensitivities, it's now easier to understand how the Western Mainstream Media's fake news fearmongering about Russia's alleged intentions to "annex" Belarus through the Union State structure figure into the larger paradigm. Although Russian-Belarusian relations are undergoing unprecedented strain at the moment, these two countries are still closely connected to one another through various systems of complex interdependency (economic, family, religious, historic, military, etc.) that make it all but impossible for Belarus to pull off a "clean pivot" if it's leadership ever decided to do that. It's true that Belarus is gradually moving westward under the pretext of "diversifying" ties with the EU and its American patron, but the progressive pace has yet to destabilize Russia's interests and is still technically "manageable", especially if Moscow cuts a deal with Minsk.

Infowar Intentions

That said, the introduction of the devious infowar narrative about a possibly impending Russian "annexation" of Belarus is designed to sow the seeds of distrust between these two partners by playing to demagogic fantasies on each side, both of hardcore Russian "nationalists" who would actually want to see this scenario implemented into practice and their Belarusian counterparts who will do anything within their power to prevent it from happening. The external generation of this highly emotive scenario is intended to "naturally" provoke very heated (and as the West hopes, public) discussion about this, thereby facilitating this storyline's "organic growth" from the "grassroots" all the way up to the parliamentary and even head of state level, the latter of which was recently breached by the Belarusian leader after he felt compelled to openly deny that any such plan was in the cards.

The ideal scenario for the West is that a prominent social figure, politician, or head of state says something very provocative about the infowar narrative (such as preemptively condemning the other side in very strong language) so as to trigger a self-sustaining cycle of further distrust between Belarus and Russia that could be exploited to accelerate the former's westward pivot at the latter's expense. This cunning plan could actually work because it takes advantage of their unprecedented preexisting disagreements with one another, having been prepared far in advance after infowar experts predicted that another round of "blackmail" was due around this time of the year. That explains why this weaponized narrative was unleashed at exactly this time and in as coordinated and "sophisticated" of a fashion because it's meant to be a crucial component of the West's non-kinetic Hybrid War against Russia.

Concluding Thoughts

There's no credible truth to the reports that Russia is getting ready to "annex" Belarus – whether peacefully through the Union State or forcefully via an invasion – but this narrative is alluring to some forces in each of those two countries and the West, albeit for completely different reasons. Some Russian ultra-nationalists dream of "restoring the Soviet Union" through such a scheme, while their Belarusian counterparts fret this ever happening. Suffice to say, the West would prefer to stand on the sidelines and watch both sides bicker over this non-existent plot that it strategically introduced into their relations for devious reasons. The whole point in hyping up this speculative scenario is to further aggravate the already unprecedentedly tense ties between both countries, though it seems for now at least (key qualifier) that cooler heads are prevailing on both sides and that neither the Russians nor the Belarusians will bite such obvious infowar bait.

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Andrew Korybko is an American Moscow-based political analyst specializing in the relationship between the US strategy in Afro-Eurasia, China's One Belt One Road global vision of New Silk Road connectivity, and Hybrid Warfare. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

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About the author:

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