

Belarus' Ryanair Flight Diversion Might Open Pandora's Box

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Belarus' fighter jet-assisted diversion of a Ryanair flight to Minsk in response to an ostensible bomb threat onboard and subsequent arrest of an extremist member of the country's Color Revolution movement upon landing might open Pandora's Box by setting the precedent whereby Western countries might eventually follow in its footsteps for purely political reasons against unilaterally sanctioned individuals from Russia or elsewhere.

Belarus [ordered](#) a fighter jet to escort a Ryanair flight to Minsk that was transiting through its airspace en route to Vilnius on Sunday in response to an ostensible bomb threat onboard. Upon landing, an extremist member of the country's [Color Revolution movement](#), Roman Protasevich, was arrested by the authorities. The flight was then allowed to continue to Vilnius after no bomb was ever found on board. The Western reaction was swift and a growing number of countries lined up to condemn Belarus for what they claimed was an intelligence operation aimed at arresting Protasevich but which allegedly might have put innocent lives at risk. Minsk [shrugged off](#) the allegations while Moscow called the West out for its [double standards](#).

There are several angles through which to analyze this development. The first is to take the Belarusian authorities' word about what happened, that it was merely a coincidence that someone informed them of a bomb onboard the same flight that Protasevich was taking over Belarusian airspace. The second is to applaud President Lukashenko for a clever operation whereby his government was able to bring an extremist member of the country's Color Revolution movement to justice. The third, however, is to condemn him for allegedly putting lives at risk and [possibly violating](#) international aviation regulations by purportedly faking a bomb threat in order to arrest that political extremist.

Either way, the move might have been a game-changer since it could open Pandora's Box by setting the precedent whereby other countries might eventually follow in its footsteps for political reasons. For instance, there are Russian individuals that are sanctioned by the US, and America might stage a similar intelligence operation regarding a supposedly fake bomb threat in order to arrest them in the same way that Protasevich was arrested. The US is known for its belief in so-called “extra-territorial jurisdiction” so it could at least in theory have its agents waiting at a European airport to arrest whoever it is that they'd be targeting

provided that they have the host country's permission. They might also do it without informing them in advance, too.

Technically, it was the US itself which first opened this Pandora's Box during its earlier efforts to capture Edward Snowden in what seems like a lifetime ago to many. Former Bolivian President Evo Morales' plane was [diverted and forced to land](#) in Austria amid suspicions that the American whistleblower was on board. It turned out that he wasn't, but the incident showed just how far the US will go if it has the political will to stage such operations. With this in mind, Lukashenko was in a sense just giving the US a taste of its own medicine by staging Sunday's operation to arrest one of its regime change proxies. Nevertheless, everyone knows that the US regularly implements double standards, hence why its EU ally just [banned](#) Belarusian airlines from the bloc.

Unlike during the Snowden-Morales incident, the world is nowadays unquestionably in the midst of a [New Cold War](#). This means that there might be more of a political will for the US and its allies to repeat what Lukashenko just did, which to remind the reader was basically him just doing what America was the first to pioneer. Any unilaterally sanctioned individual flying over the airspace of an American-friendly country could therefore be at risk of having the same thing happen to them too. This will greatly reduce their freedom of movement across the world and perhaps in some cases basically trap them in their homeland for the rest of their lives if they don't feel safe traveling anymore.

Of course, nothing of the sort might also happen, but it's highly unlikely that the US won't exploit Sunday's incident. It has a clear pattern of accusing others of doing exactly what it's done before, or pretending that their application of whatever tactic or strategy was the first time it's ever been employed, and hence justify the US doing the same from then on out. To facilitate the public's possible acceptance of this scenario, an intensified information warfare campaign might soon be forthcoming, perhaps even [accusing Russia](#) of somehow being involved in Sunday's incident. It obviously wasn't, but the facts never got in the way of any of the US' other conspiracy theories about the Eurasian Great Power, so they probably won't be an obstacle to this one either.

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