

Can the US Stop Russia from ‘Pulling a Crimea’ in Belarus?

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Region: [Europe](#), [Russia and FSU](#), [USA](#)

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*US Deputy Secretary of State **Stephen Biegun** is rushing to Moscow from 25-26 August in a desperate attempt to stop Russia from “pulling a Crimea” in Belarus after the ongoing Color Revolution there has thus far failed to depose Lukashenko amid his dangerous saber-rattling with NATO, though it remains to be seen if the US and Russia can succeed in reviving their “New Detente” by reaching a pragmatic “compromise” on a “political solution” to this crisis or whether the situation has already gone so far that its current trajectory of either pro-Western regime change or (re)unification with Russia is irreversible.*

Has The Hybrid War On Belarus Backfired?

The US’ [Hybrid War](#) on Belarus is at risk of backfiring after the ongoing [Color Revolution](#) has thus far failed to depose Lukashenko amid his dangerous saber-rattling with NATO created the opportunity for Russia to “[pull a Crimea](#)” in the former Soviet Republic (or possibly even be “tricked” by him into doing so), which America wants to avoid at all costs. It’s for this reason why its Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun is [rushing to Moscow](#) from 25-26 August in a desperate attempt to stave off that scenario. He was in Vilnius on Monday [to meet with](#) self-proclaimed president Tikhanovskaya and will then travel to Kiev after his meetings in Moscow. [Judging by his itinerary](#), it’s obvious that the US is trying to revive its “[New Detente](#)” with Russia in order to reach a pragmatic “compromise” on a “political solution” to the crisis which might see the two rivals jointly shape a “[phased leadership transition](#)” there. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen if that’s even possible at this point or whether the situation has already gone so far that its current trajectory of either pro-Western regime change or (re)unification with Russia is irreversible.

Belarus’ “Democratic Security” Improvements

Belarus bolstered its “[Democratic Security](#)” (counter-Hybrid Warfare capabilities) over the past week by organizing [patriotic rallies](#) across the country, [awarding more than 300 members](#) of the security services in order to presumably ensure their loyalty, and exposing the [foreign hand behind](#) the latest unrest, which altogether improved its odds of surviving this unconventional onslaught against its sovereignty, one which Lukashenko himself is [partially responsible for](#) due to his failed “balancing” act between Russia and the West. In addition, Lukashenko [publicly acknowledged](#) that Russian media specialists are working in the Belarusian National State TV and Radio Company after a large number of employees walked out. This proves that Russia is still supporting him, at least for the time being, since it otherwise wouldn’t play so active of a role in strengthening its “Union State” partner’s “Democratic Security”. This spree of developments raised hope that the tide might have

finally turned in the Hybrid War on Belarus, though it's too early to arrive at that conclusion since the serious challenge of labor strikes still remains.

The Labor Strike Challenge

Like the author analyzed last week, "[The Belarusian Labor Strike Movement Could Bring Down Lukashenko](#)" since it stands to potentially deprive his government of much-needed revenue in the event that the "elite proletariat" working at its five biggest businesses succeed in halting production at their enterprises. Interestingly enough, Lukashenko seems poised to help them in this respect, whether he realizes it or not, after [announcing](#) that factories experiencing labor strikes might shut down starting next week. This suggests that he's not too concerned about the economic damage such a decision could cost his country, perhaps because he secured promises of emergency Russian financial assistance and/or "labor replacement" along the lines of what just played out in state media last week in exchange for accelerating Belarus' integration with its neighbor through the "Union State" framework like Moscow's wanted for a while now. Even if that's not what he's planning, the "mission creep" that Moscow has already gotten itself involved in by replacing some of Minsk's protesting journalists could foreseeably lead to that outcome by inertia, which scares the US to no end.

Biegun's Objectives

Biegun's task is therefore unenviable since he might not be able to alter the course of events that his country already set into motion after approving the Belarusian Color Revolution earlier this month. Firstly, he must ensure that Belarus doesn't stage any military provocations along its border with NATO-members Poland and Lithuania since that could lead to an uncontrollable escalation from all sides. Secondly, he must contemplate whether it's worth continuing the Color Revolution considering the (re)unification outcome that's emerging from this crisis as a result, hence his planned visit to Vilnius to meet with Tikhanovskaya. Thirdly, he needs to assess Russia's grand strategic intentions and whether it's even interested in (re)unifying with Belarus at this point in time under such crisis circumstances. If not, then it's theoretically possible to reach a pragmatic "compromise" on a "phased leadership transition", otherwise he needs to make Moscow aware of the political, economic, and other costs that Washington plans to impose upon it in coordination with its Western allies if that happens.

Concluding Thoughts

The situation is presently at its most sensitive moment since its onset a few weeks ago and can go one of three ways. Either the Hybrid War is intensified to the point of overthrowing Lukashenko, Russia (re)unifies with Belarus after "pulling a Crimea" (irrespective of whether military means are employed ahead of time or if it's only just via referendum), or the "New Detente" is revived and the two greatest stakeholders in this crisis (the US and Russia) reach a "pragmatic compromise" on a "phased leadership transition". The last-mentioned option is the "best-case" scenario for East-West relations but it might be offset if Lukashenko resorts to his characteristically eccentric ways by behaving as the ultimate wildcard to spoil that scenario, perhaps by staging a military provocation with NATO in order to prompt a Russian military intervention through the CSTO and thus eventually compel Moscow into keeping him in power, albeit as a comparatively lower-ranking official in a (re)unified state than the president that he currently is. It's presently uncertain which of these three scenarios will unfold, but what's known for sure is that the trajectory will be a lot

clearer after the end of Beigun's trip.

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