

INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY

The Poland-Belarus Border: The first, second and third order effects

REPORT WRITTEN BY:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

These recent developments in Eastern Europe indicate the current Poland-Belarus border crisis has first, second and even third order effects:

- 1 FIRST ORDER**
The border crisis is **HIGHLY LIKELY** to continue as it provides an effective counter-punch for Belarus against EU sanctions.
- 2 SECOND ORDER**
Belarus' actions have provided an opportunity for Russia to exploit the Donbass region, providing misdirection which allows Russia-backed elements in Donbass to increase their efforts to provoke a retaliation from Ukrainian forces.
- 3 THIRD ORDER**
The border crisis appears to have provided a mixed blessing for Russia's efforts to have Nord Stream 2 approved and become operational. The suspension of the certification process and allowing Naftogaz in on the process have **POSSIBLY** been carried out as a way to exert pressure on Belarus via Russia. However, this situation could **POSSIBLY** be used to Russia's advantage in the medium-long term.

INTRODUCTION

Prior analysis of the situation on the Poland-Belarus border assessed

"this state-sponsored human trafficking is highly likely to be Belarus' response to EU sanctions against Belarus following last year's election; the intention appears to be to pressure the EU to remove the sanctions it has imposed on Belarusian officials and businesses. Within the next seven days, it is possible more fronts will be opened up on the southern edges of the Polish-Belarus border; with the possibility of confrontations between migrants and Polish authorities."

- [Intelligence Fusion on LinkedIn](#)



In Figure 1, reports have shown there have been numerous incidents of migrants attempting to cross into Poland further south in Hajnowski County. Belarusian soldiers have been assisting migrants with providing materials to break border fences, tear gas and stun grenades to hinder Polish soldiers, police and border guards. Belarusian soldiers have also been trying to blind Polish personnel with aiming lasers in their eyes.

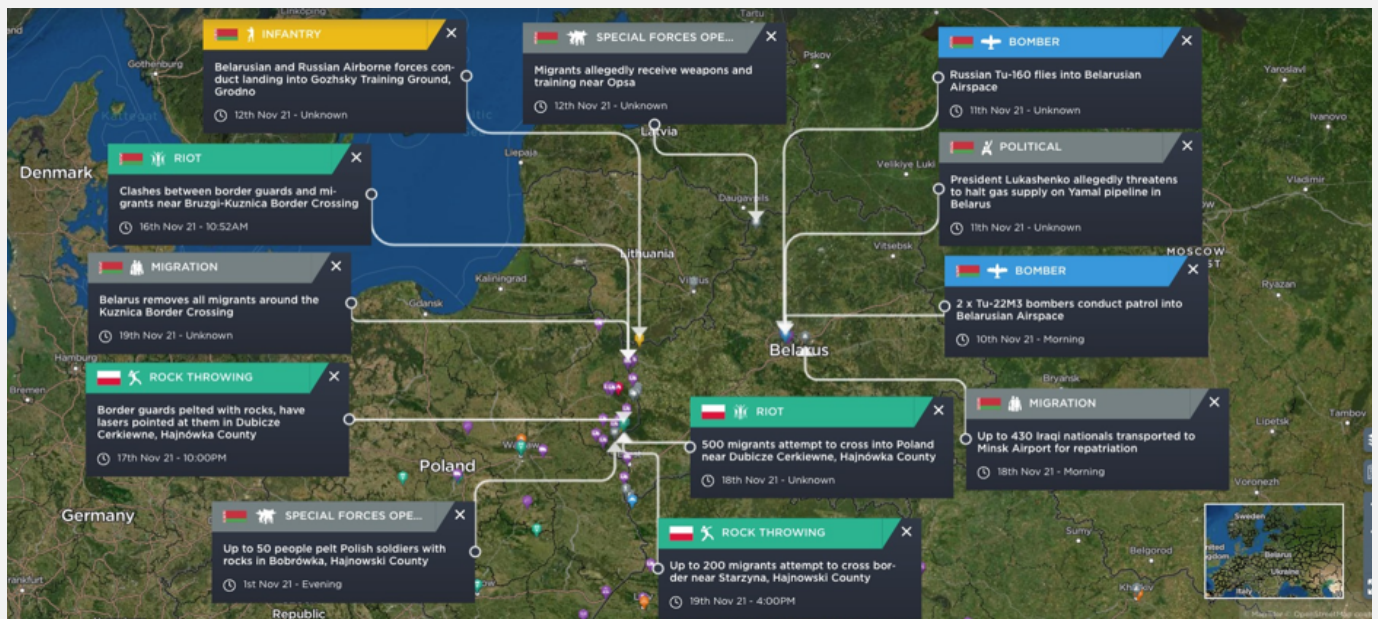


FIGURE 1: Significant incidents relating to Poland-Belarus border crisis.
[Source: [Intelligence Fusion](#)]

Also shown in Figure 1 are numerous incidents showing the involvement of Russian military assets indicating the situation is having effects beyond the border. This report aims to identify and analyse these first, second and even third order effects of this current border crisis.

POLAND-BELARUS BORDER CRISIS AND RUSSIAN INVOLVEMENT

As shown in Figure 2, Russia has also featured in the current border crisis. Russian Tu-160 Blackjacks, Tu-22M3 Backfires and Airborne troops have been conducting joint activities in what appears to be an act of solidarity with President Lukashenko.

Furthermore, single-source and unconfirmed reporting from a former Belarusian official has claimed that Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan migrants are being trained by Belarusian Special Forces and Russia Military Intelligence (popularly known as the GRU).

These incidents - and recent separate reporting on what is happening across Eastern Europe - would indicate that Russia is backing Belarus' efforts to have the sanctions lifted (Holmes & Peterson 2021).

However, President Lukashenko has hinted at shutting down natural gas pipelines connecting Russia to Europe in order to increase his pressure on the European Union to lift sanctions against him, Belarusian officials and businesses. President Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov has stated the move by Lukashenko was not discussed with the Kremlin, stressing its commitment to continue supplying natural gas, but adding that Belarus is its own sovereign state.

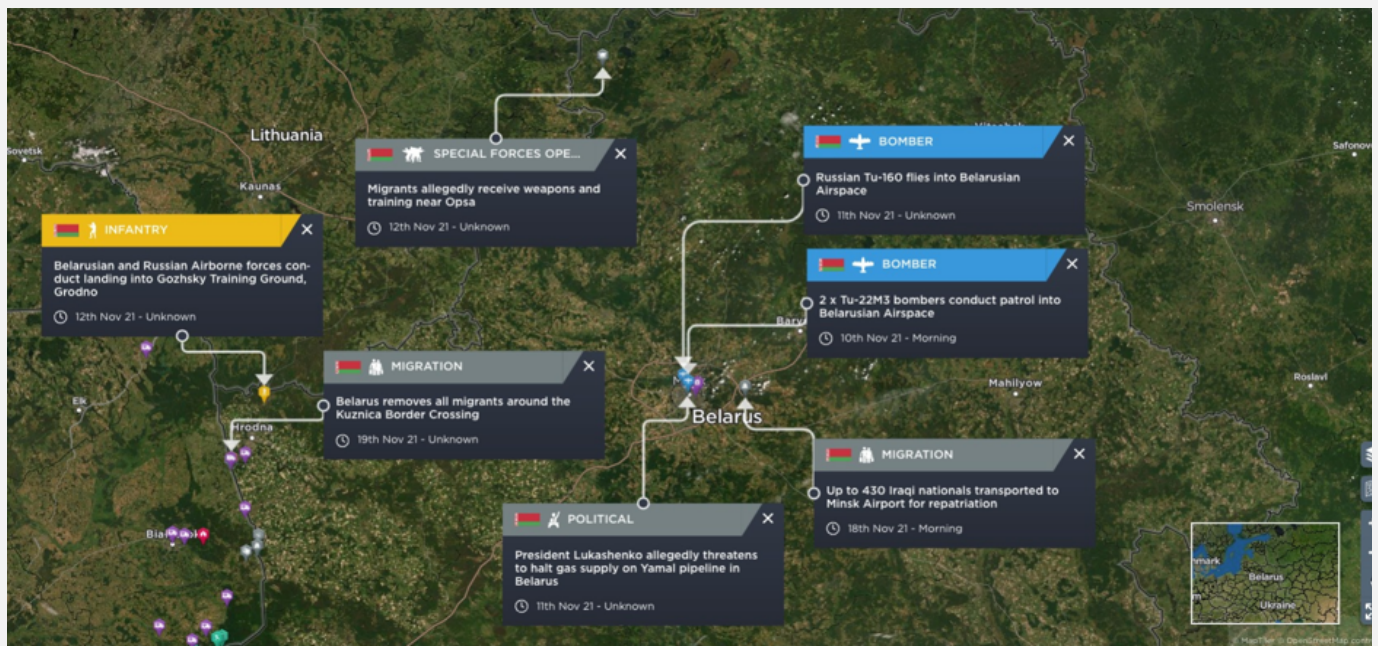


FIGURE 2: Belarusian and Russian activities relating to Poland-Belarus border crisis. [Source: [Intelligence Fusion](#)]

COMMENT

Belarus is a Russian ally but contextual reporting on the relationship between the two leaders indicates that Belarus is not a proxy or anything resembling a 'puppet state' ready to execute any plan by President Putin; Belarus can actually be more of a problem for Russia at times (Yu, Matthews & Forsyth 2021).

The threat to cut off gas would certainly be a problem for Russia given its need to sell natural gas to Europe and its aim to see Nord Stream 2 become operational in order to increase its Diplomatic, Information, Military and - most important - Economic (DIME) instruments (Pratten 2021a; Intelligence Fusion 2021).

COMMENT ENDS

CONCURRENT ACTIVITY IN THE DONBASS REGION

While the Poland-Belarus border has been dominating open source reporting, significant activity has been noticed in the Donbass region from October. There have been reports of Russian military movements in its regions close to Ukraine; including a convoy of SS-26 Stone Ballistic missiles and TOS-1A Flame-throwers. Russian armour and artillery has been sighted on rail transports and BM-21 Grad multiple barrel rocket launch systems operated exclusively by Russian forces have been sighted within Donetsk Oblast.

Separate reporting alleges up to 92,000 troops have been amassed around Ukraine's borders. This is the second time this kind of activity has happened but reports for logging these incidents - supported by contextual reporting - suggest that Russian Military assets have been moved to the border in a more covert manner this time around.

The nature of these movements have sparked concerns that Russia could be planning another offensive into Ukraine to take full control as early as January 2022 (Holmes & Peterson 2021; Altman 2021).

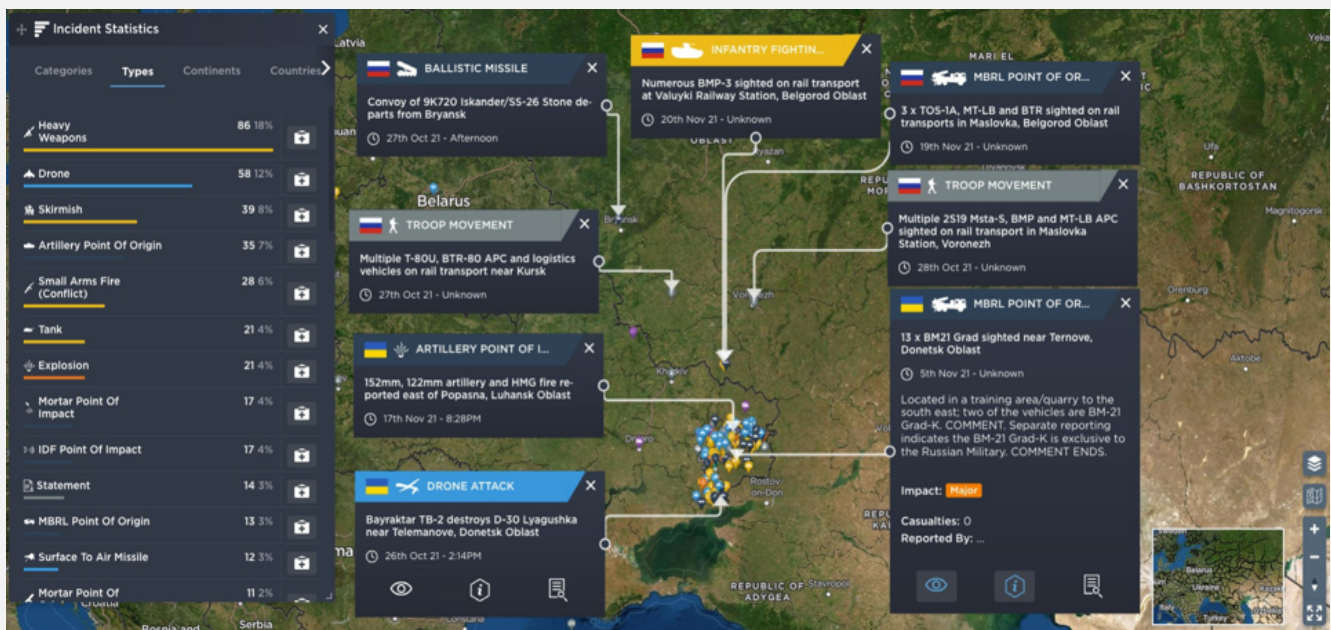


FIGURE 3: Incidents relating to the Donbass conflict since the 1st October 2021. [Source: [Intelligence Fusion](#)]

Additionally, reports used to log ceasefire violations have shown that ceasefire violations shown in Figures 4 and 5 below have been intensifying.

Ceasefire violations since 1st July 2021 are showing that the western outskirts of Luhansk Oblast (in and around Popasna and Zolote) are becoming just as intense as the usual kind of ceasefire violations around Donetsk City and the southern areas between Bohdanivka/Petrivske and Shyrokyne.

Ceasefire violations over the last seven days have greatly contributed to this trend; with reports now showing increasing detail on the weapons being used which have featured 122mm and 152mm artillery rounds.

COMMENT

Reports used to log ceasefire violations in Donbass often provide good information (for open sources) on the dates, times and locations of incidents; but little to no indications of who is responsible for ceasefire violations.

Separate, on-the-ground reporting has provided greater insight into ceasefire violations in this regard. The Russia-backed separatists have reportedly been frequently trying to force Ukrainian forces to retaliate in order to create the perception among local nationals and the international community that Ukrainian forces are not complying with the Minsk II agreement.

If this narrative is accepted, the separatists - in some cases fighters directly from Russia - can then launch an offensive to solidify/increase their gains in Donbass. Greater control of the Donbass region by Russia or its proxies would help strengthen Russian territory in the south - both the Volgograd gap to exposing access to the Caspian Sea and its hold on Crimea - and gain greater control over the oil, gas and mineral resources in Donbass (Peterson 2021a, 2021b; Caspian Report 2021; Pratten 2021a, 2021b).

Based on open source reporting, with the current focus on the Poland-Belarus border crisis, Russia appears to have an opportunity to increase its activities in Donbass, especially those aimed at provoking a reaction from the Ukrainians, with diverted attentions meaning a decreased chance of these being noticed until after the fact.

COMMENT ENDS

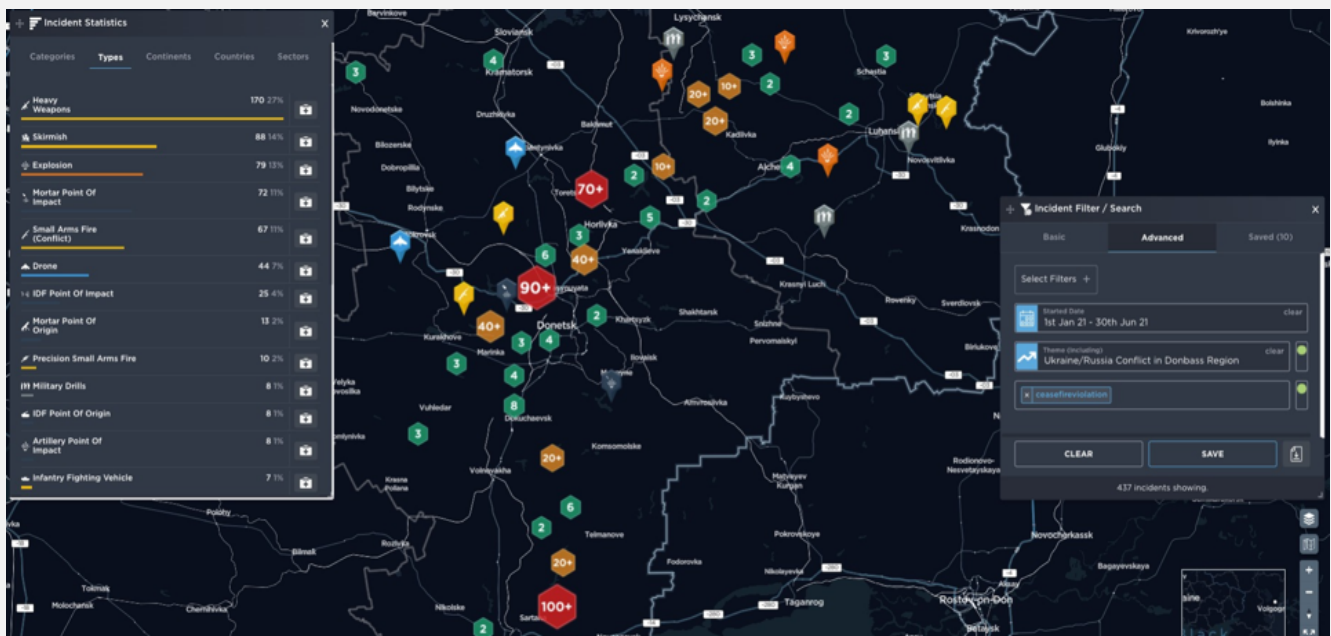


FIGURE 4: Ceasefire violations in Donbass between the 1st January and the 30th June 2021. [Source: [Intelligence Fusion](#)]

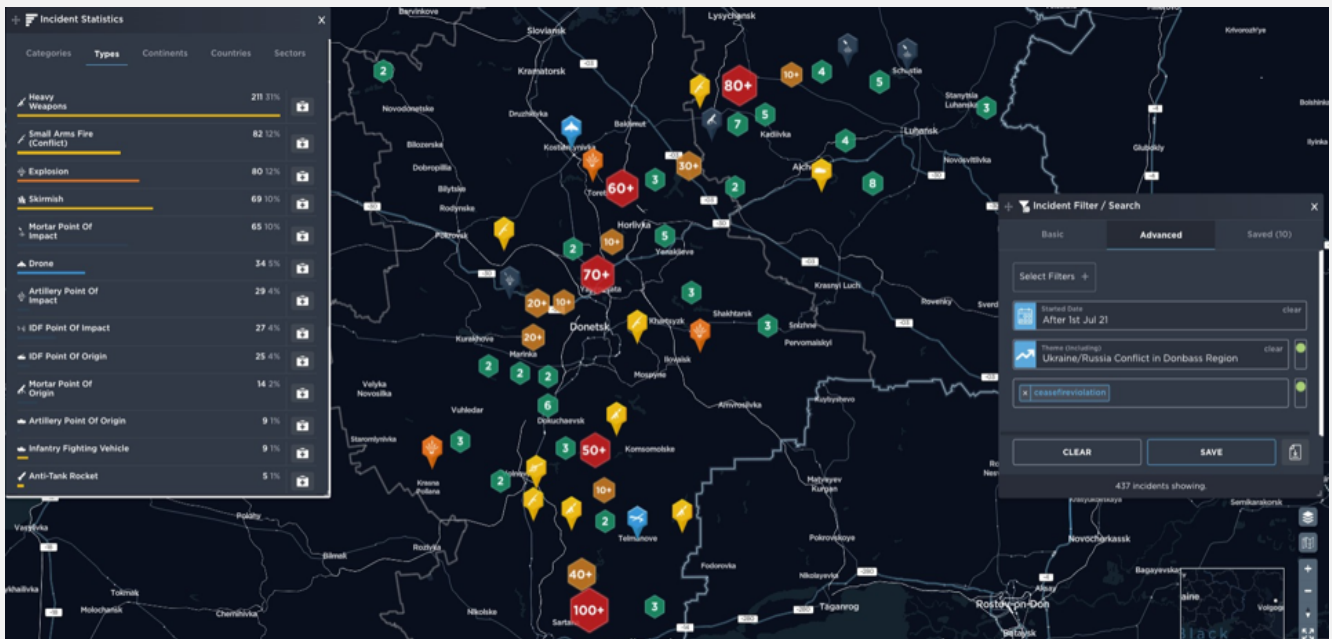


FIGURE 5: Ceasefire violations in Donbass since 1st July 2021. [Source: [Intelligence Fusion](#)]

NORD STREAM 2 DEVELOPMENTS

Recent analysis on the Nord Stream 2 pipeline concluded that approval of the pipeline would increase Russia’s DIME instruments over Europe by enabling Russia to apply economic pressure over European gas supplies due to its majority shareholder status of Gazprom (Intelligence Fusion 2021; Pratten 2021a).

Figure 6 below shows recent developments relating to Nord Stream 2. Germany’s energy regulator has allowed Ukraine’s Naftogaz to participate in the certification process but without veto power and has since suspended the certification process for Nord Stream 2 until Swiss-based Nord Stream 2 AG sets up a Germany-based subsidiary.

This decision has followed Belarus’ suggestion it could shut down natural gas pipelines crossing through its territory in an effort to have sanctions removed. This threat does not appear to have been made in consultation with Moscow, whose supplies of natural gas to Europe are a vital economic interest. Also of interest is the recent decision by Belarus to stop supplying electricity to Ukraine.



Catch up

Nord Stream 2 Pipeline: European gas and Russia’s economic weapon

9th November 2021

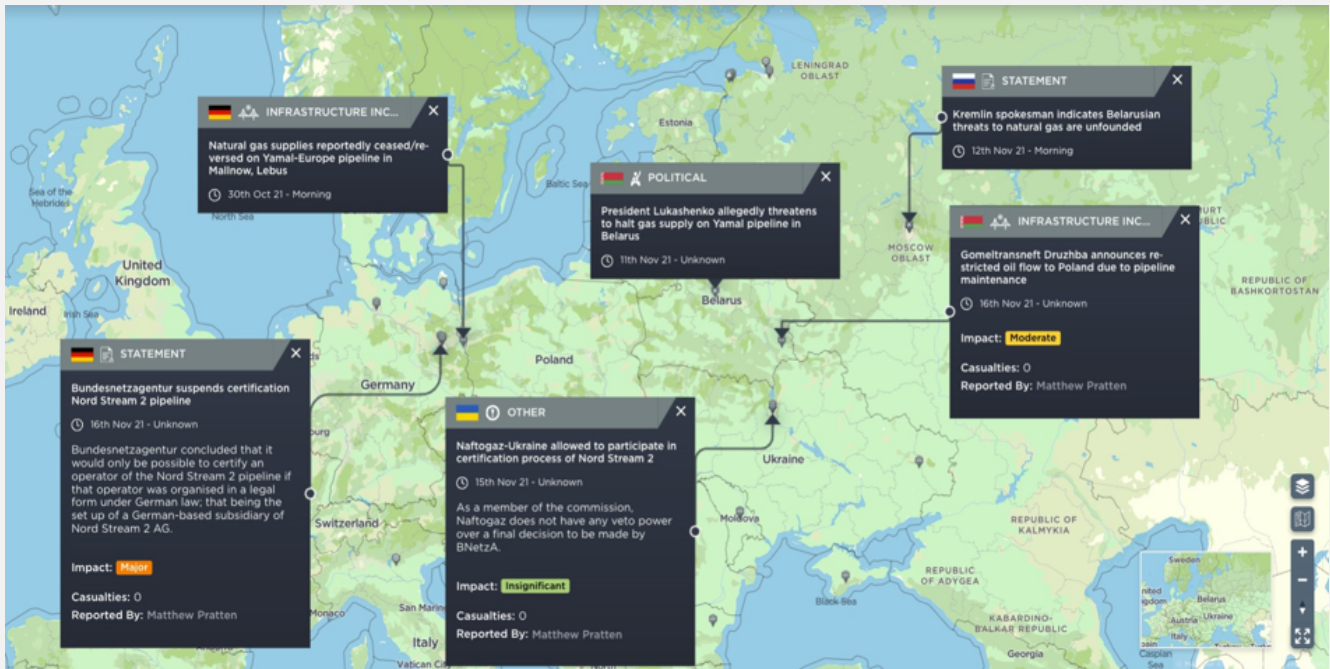


FIGURE 6: Nord Stream 2 related incidents during the Poland-Belarus border crisis. [Source: [Intelligence Fusion](#)]

COMMENT

Ukraine being allowed to participate in Nord Stream 2's certification process and the suspension shortly afterwards would appear to be a form of push back against Russia in order to exact pressure on Belarus.

However, when considering that Europe needs natural gas just as much as Russia needs to sell it - and Russia has resilience in its supply chains with overland, Baltic and Black Sea pipelines - Russia could still supply gas, at higher prices, should Lukashenko decide to follow through with his threat. Additionally, cutting electricity supply to Ukraine provides Russia an indirect way of applying pressure against Ukraine's efforts to hinder/halt Nord Stream 2 certification.

Overall, it would appear that while Belarus can prove problematic for Russia as previously mentioned, it can still be useful for Moscow's interests.

COMMENT ENDS

ASSESSMENT

LANGUAGE OF PROBABILITY

	Highly Unlikely	Unlikely	Plausible	Possible	Likely	Highly Unlikely	Almost Certain
Associated Probability	<10%	15-35%	25-45%	35-55%	55-75%	75-85%	>90%

These recent developments in Eastern Europe indicate the current Poland-Belarus border crisis has first, second and even third order effects.

FIRST ORDER

The border crisis created by Belarus may have seen migrants removed from the Kuznica Border Crossing but this crisis is **HIGHLY LIKELY** to continue as it provides an effective counter-punch for Belarus against EU sanctions. The migrants are **LIKELY** to have moved south to Hajnowski County and will see the activity which occurred around Kuznica begin to occur there.

The problems this creates for Poland and the EU will **POSSIBLY** begin to increase the potential for sanctions against Belarus to be lifted. Should the sanctions remain, the **PLAUSIBLE** cutting of natural gas via pipelines travelling through Belarus could become a reality.

SECOND ORDER

Belarus' actions have provided an opportunity for Russia to exploit the Donbass region. The border crisis which has been created appears to have focussed attention on Poland, providing misdirection that makes it easier for Russia to position military assets along its territories bordering Ukraine with less chances of being noticed.

Additionally, this misdirection has made it easier for the Russia-backed elements in Donbass to increase their efforts to provoke a retaliation from Ukrainian forces. Should there be more instances of large attempted border crossings into Poland and/or the set up of another migrant camp like what was seen near Kuznica, the ceasefire violations will **LIKELY** intensify across the Donbass frontlines, with more use of artillery and even armour in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts.

THIRD ORDER

The border crisis appears to have provided a mixed blessing for Russia's efforts to have Nord Stream 2 approved and become operational; and with it the potential towards increasing its economic power. The suspension of the certification process and allowing Naftogaz in on the process have **POSSIBLY** been carried out as a way to exert pressure on Belarus via Russia since it is Belarus' ally.

However, this situation could **POSSIBLY** be used to Russia's advantage in the medium-long term should it persist. Europe needs natural gas and human trafficking of migrants is already a huge problem for Europe. Should Belarus decide to continue to push migrants into Poland, Russia could exploit efforts to stop Belarus' by offering to influence their behaviour if Nord Stream 2 is certified for operation.

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