

# Lukashenko Denies Plans for Russian Air Base in Belarus (Video)

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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*President Alexander Lukashenko denying any plans for a Russian air base in Belarus. (Russian only)*

Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko has denied that Moscow and Minsk are negotiating the possible establishment of a Russian air base in Belarus, days after Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu alarmed several NATO member states by announcing that they are.

Lukashenko told journalists that the two sides are discussing Belarus' desire to purchase about two dozen Russian-made fighter jets, not plans for a Russian air base in the country, according to a video posted by the Belta news agency on Friday.

"As far as the air base, it might have sounded somewhat like a base, but it's not. We're talking about deliveries to our armed forces," he said, adding that Belarus was interested in buying Su-27 and MiG-29 fighter jets to "ensure the inviolability of our state borders."

Shoigu said Russia and Belarus had begun considering plans for a defensive base with fighter jets, the first of which could arrive by year's end, with the contingent potentially growing to a full regiment of roughly 60 warplanes by 2015, after a meeting with Lukashenko last week.

The announcement sparked concern in neighboring Poland, a NATO member, whose ambassador to Belarus requested additional information about the planned airbase. Lithuania and Latvia also asked for details on the plan, the ambassador [said](#) in comments carried by Interfax.

Russian officials were surprised by Lukashenko's apparent about-face, which one suggested was inspired by concerns that the base would damage Belarus' ties with Europe, Kommersant reported.

The source also told the newspaper that it was essential for Russia to gauge NATO's reaction to the plan. "This is an element of political and military strategy. We must understand the existing situation and risks," the source said.

Tensions between Russia and NATO have long been aggravated by U.S.-led plans to deploy an anti-missile shield in Europe that Moscow fears could be used against it.

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