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Russia to Open Military Base in Belarus

By The Moscow Times

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Russia will open its first military airbase in Belarus before the end of this year, air force commander Lieutenant General Vladimir Bondarev said Tuesday.

The base will be near the city of Lida close to the borders of Poland and Lithuania, both of which are NATO members, Bondarev said in a report carried by Interfax.

"The establishment of is the result of an inter-governmental agreement to increase the military strength of the Union," said Bondarev, referring to a Russia-Belarus Union pact signed in 1997 by Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko and then-Russian President Boris Yeltsin, which was seen by many as a response to NATO expansion.

When asked if the base would be operated solely by Russia or with the participation of Belarus, Bondarev answered: "At first it will be Russian, but after that we'll see."

Lida was chosen for the base, which will host Su-27 fighter jets, because of it already has appropriate facilities, Bondarev said.

The base will be the first Russian military location in Europe since the collapse of the Warsaw Pact in 1991. Russia currently has military bases in Armenia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan.

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