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Russia Withdraws Security 'Reserve' From Belarus Border

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Vasily Kuzmichyonok / TASS

Russia has withdrawn a rapidly formed unit of "law enforcement reserves" that had been standing by to intervene in Belarus if the country's post-election unrest got out of hand, the Kremlin said Monday.

Russian President Vladimir Putin announced on Aug. 27 that he has formed the unit of law enforcement officers at the request of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. Putin said it would be deployed as soon as "extremists start plundering" amid sustained demonstrations against Lukashenko's disputed presidential election victory Aug. 9.

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Putin and Lukashenko agreed at a summit in southern Russia that the unit will stand down, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said following their talks Monday evening.

On Tuesday morning, Russian state television showed what it said were live images of truckloads of the units returning to their areas of deployment.

Meanwhile, Russian troops arrived in Belarus on Monday for 10-day "Slavic Brotherhood 2020" drills. Serbia, which was originally scheduled to join the drills, pulled out at the last minute.

The Belarusian defense ministry said Tuesday that it did not rule out a military response to outside threats.

In the wake of widespread post-election protests, Lukashenko has ordered multiple war games, stepped up border security and deployed troops in Minsk as a show of force.

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