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Lukashenko Heads to Russia for Putin Meeting Amid Rising Tensions With Ukraine

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Presidents Alexander Lukashenko and Vladimir Putin. **kremlin.ru**

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko was heading to Russia to meet with President Vladimir Putin on Friday evening, state media reported, a visit that comes amid escalating tensions between Ukraine and Belarus.

Lukashenko and Putin will discuss bilateral relations, as well as the "current regional and global situation," according to the state-run news agency Belta. No other details regarding the previously unannounced visit were provided.

The timing of the trip appears significant as it follows days of heightened rhetoric between Belarus and Ukraine.

Lukashenko accused the Ukrainian military of launching a drone strike in Russia's Bryansk region last week that hit a bus carrying a Belarusian youth soccer team.

At the same time, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky threatened to strike radar stations inside Belarus, accusing the country of helping Russia launch attacks on Ukrainian territory.

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However, Zelensky appeared to back away from that ultimatum this week, claiming that Belarus had deactivated the radar stations in question.

Lukashenko also moved to defuse the situation after he said he had met with a Ukrainian representative in Minsk and reiterated that Belarus would not be dragged into the war.

Although Russia used Belarusian territory as a launching pad during its initial 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Minsk has so far avoided direct involvement in the conflict, even as the two nations continue to deepen their military and economic ties.

Lukashenko's regime remains heavily reliant on the Kremlin both economically and politically, and Belarus currently hosts a portion of Russia's tactical nuclear weapons.

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