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## What Will The Belarusian Armed Forces Do In Ukraine? Opposition Leader Weighs In

Christian Orr

April 3, 2023

In the past few weeks, I have written two articles covering the capabilities of the Armed Forces of Belarus, specifically their Ground Forces and their Air Force and Air Defense Forces. I analyzed the threat they would pose should Belarus's longtime autocrat, Alexander Lukashenko, decide to commit them to full participation in Vladimir Putin's "special military operation" in Ukraine.

As luck and coincidence would have it, earlier this week, this reporter had the honor and privilege of attending an event at the American Enterprise Institute titled "A Conversation with Belarusian Opposition Leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya: The Fight for European Democracy."

### Panelists' Bios

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This speaking event was co-sponsored by AEI and the International Republican Institute, and Tsikhanouskaya's co-panelists were IRI Vice President for External Affairs Antonia Ferrier and AEI Senior Fellow Dalibor Rohac.

Antonia's prior background includes 15 years on Capitol Hill, with positions such as staff director for Senate Majority Leader Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY).

Dalibor's prior affiliations include the Cato Institute's Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity, the Max Beloff Institute at the University of Buckingham, the London-based Legatum Institute, and the Center for the New Europe in Brussels. He holds a doctorate in political economy from King's College London.

As for the guest speaker herself, the AEI event description put it thusly: "Following the arrest of presidential candidate Sergei Tikhanovsky, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya took the mantle as the main opposition candidate in the 2020 Belarusian presidential election.

Despite reports that she won a decisive victory, officials in Belarus declared that incumbent President Alexander Lukashenka won the vote instead. Since the election, Ms. Tsikhanouskaya continues her political activism as an exile who advocates for a return to

democracy in Belarus. As recently as March 6, 2023, she was sentenced in absentia to 15 years in prison for her advocacy for freedom and democracy.”

Fittingly, Ferrier and Rohac addressed Tsikhanouskaya as “Madame President” throughout the course of the evening, in acknowledgement of the election victory that was stolen from her.

### **The Speech**

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During her speech, President Tsikhanouskaya mentioned several items in particular that made my ears perk up: She said the first shots of Putin’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine were actually fired from Belarusian soil, with up to 1,000 missiles fired in the process, and that in turn means that “Lukashenko is now a war criminal just like his master [Putin, that is].”

She also mentioned that Russia was actually placing nukes on Belarusian soil, that 86% of Belarusians oppose the war, and that some partisans manifest this opposition by sabotaging railways used to transport Russian military equipment. (These acts of sabotage have been verified.)

### **My Question to Tsikhanouskaya**

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Since my official title with 19FortyFive is senior defense editor, naturally the question I posed to President Tsikhanouskaya was of a military-related nature:

**“What is your knowledge about the morale and state of readiness of the Belarusian Armed Forces, their officer corps and enlisted troops alike? Any indication of discontent within the ranks that could lead to resistance in case Lukashenko were to actively join Putin’s war against Ukraine — whether an outright coup attempt, or at least large-scale desertions and defections, as we’ve been seeing with Russian conscripts in Ukraine?”**

She started her response by stating that Belarusians don’t see Ukrainians the same way Russians do. Relations between the two nations’ peoples have always been good, with a roughly 80% commonality of language. She also said high-ranking Belarusian officials advised their Russian counterparts that the Belarusian army was not ready to fight alongside Putin’s forces — there is a lack of willingness by Belarusian troops to kill Ukrainians — and that these troops would indeed defect or otherwise refuse to fight in large numbers. From there, she reiterated that Lukashenko is already a “full accomplice” in the war.

Tsikhanouskaya added that Lukashenko is indeed afraid of the possibility of a coup d’état. He fears “not only soldiers but also people who are around him,” as his “future is on trial.” Finally, she stressed the need for the democratic countries of the world to keep up the pressure on Lukashenko to “keep his region in constant stress, to exhaust him.”