



Belarus-Poland Border Crisis

Why in News

Recently, Belarusian and Russian paratroopers staged joint drills near the Polish and Lithuanian borders.

- It is taking place during a **standoff between Belarus and the [European Union \(EU\)](#)** over migrants camped in freezing forests at the frontier.



Key Points

▪ Background:

- In Belarus there were **months of protests following the August 2020 election** that gave authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko a sixth term in office.
 - The **opposition and the West rejected the result** as a sham.
- Belarusian authorities responded to the demonstrations with a **fierce crackdown that saw more than 35,000 people arrested** and thousands beaten by police.
- The **EU and the US reacted by imposing sanctions** on the Belarus government.
- In May 2021 **Belarus forcibly diverted a passenger jet** and scrambled a warplane to arrest an opposition journalist in an act denounced by Western powers as “state piracy” (an act of piracy where the state is involved). After which the **[sanctions were further strengthened](#)**.
 - The Belarus government reacted by saying he **would no longer abide by an agreement to stem illegal migration**, arguing that the EU sanctions deprived his government of funds needed to contain flows of migrants.
 - **And it would stop trying to prevent undocumented migrants and refugees from reaching the EU.**
- The Belarusian **opposition has urged the EU to take even tougher measures**, including a trade embargo and a ban on transit of cargo via Belarus.
 - However the **Belarus government has threatened to cut off Russian gas supplies to Europe** through pipelines over Belarus. But Russia appeared to distance itself from that threat.

▪ Current Crisis:

- Thousands of people arriving from the Middle East are camping at the border with Poland, enduring **freezing conditions**, the migrants also include women and children.
 - **Poland** is a member of the EU.
- The government in Poland is not even allowing aid organizations access to provide them with supplies. This violates **[international conventions \(United Nations Refugee Convention 1951\)](#)**.
 - **Poland** is ruled by the right-wing populist Law and Justice party (PiS), which is **hostile to immigrants**.

▪ Russia's Support:

- Belarus **has received strong support from its main ally, Russia**, which has helped buttress Lukashenko's government with loans and political support.
- Russia said the **migrant flows resulted from the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan** and Western-backed **[Arab Spring uprisings](#)** in the Middle East and North Africa.
- In a response to Poland's troop build-up along its border with Belarus, **Russia dispatched two strategic, long-range Tu-22M3 bombers to patrol the border region**.
- Russia has also squarely **blamed the EU for the migrant crisis**, arguing that it was the EU's refusal to accept asylum-seekers that is creating the crisis.

▪ EU's Stand:

- The EU has **made a strong show of solidarity with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia**. EU officials are expected to discuss **another round of sanctions against Belarus**.
- The EU has **accused Belarus of mounting a “hybrid attack”** on the bloc by flying in thousands of migrants, mainly from West Asia, and pushing them to try to cross illegally into Poland.
 - Neighbours of Belarus have **expressed concern that the crisis could escalate**

into a military confrontation.

- However, Belarus also denies encouraging the flow of migrants and said the **EU is violating migrants' rights by denying them safe passage.**

▪ **Global Reaction:**

- Western members of the [United Nation Security Council](#) have condemned Belarus for the escalating crisis over migrants stranded on its border with Poland.
- **The [UN Refugee Agency](#), and the [International Organization for Migration \(IOM\)](#)** are calling for an urgent resolution of the situation and immediate and unhindered access to the EU to ensure that humanitarian assistance is provided.

Way Forward

- With the EU set to impose further sanctions on Belarus, Poland determined to keep the migrants out, Belarus unwilling to take measures to aid the migrants camping out in the forests without food or water, and winter closing in, **the fate of thousands of migrants remains dire.**
- The EU, for its part, should **stop its blind declarations of solidarity with Poland and put pressure on the government to work immediately** on a humane solution for the people on the border, perhaps with the help of international organizations.

[Source: TH](#)

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