

Russian Phoenix: The Collective Security Treaty Organization

by Adam Weinstein

Russia's quest for security and power did not die with the collapse of the USSR in 1991, though it did face new complications. Fifteen republics arose from the Soviet rubble, and with them, fifteen competing notions of national prestige. While media images in the West reinforced a uniformly positive view of communism's death throes—statues of Lenin and Marx felled like dead timber, red flags and banners ripped down—little sober thought was given to what might rise in their place. To the lay observer, the age of cold war alliances, arms races, and geopolitical competition was now strictly a concern for historians.

Not so in the Russian Federation and its surrounding regions. Although independence—both from the strictures of Soviet communism and the expenses associated with leading the USSR—was a priority for Russia, life in 1992 presented a bevy of new defense concerns. Control of the Soviet nuclear and conventional arsenals was a priority, as was the prevention or control of sectarian violence in the former USSR, particularly where large numbers of ethnic Russians were concerned. Furthermore, seventy-four years of communist rule, preceded by centuries of czarist domination, reinforced a sense of security interdependence (as well as a Russian sense of imperial pride and responsibility) in the Russian “near abroad.” The breakaway republics shared many such concerns with Russia but disagreed over how to address them. Most of these fledgling republics preferred a “lone wolf” or regional approach to any Moscow-led form of security cooperation.

That appears to have changed in the interceding years. While collective measures and deference to Russian authority were nonstarter issues for most of the post-Soviet states in their infancy, these nations have achieved a degree of stability and sovereignty that enables them to reconsider their old military ties—particularly as shared apprehensions have grown over the threat of terrorism and extremism in the post-Soviet space. The evolution of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) reflects this sea change.

Born in its current form in 2002, the CSTO actually has its genesis in the Russian-inspired early military agreements of the Commonwealth of Independent

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States (CIS), particularly the 1992 Collective Security Treaty. Through most of the 1990s, the Collective Security Treaty (CST) was a weak, unenforceable convention between mainly Central Asian and Eurasian nations that accomplished little, notable only for the public defection of several of its members in 1999. Yet, since the Treaty Organization was formalized and terrorism has become a global concern, “collective security” under the Russian aegis is experiencing a rebirth. Ironically, American diplomacy and military operations in recent years have played a hand in strengthening the CSTO and expanding its mandate beyond cursory matters of military cooperation. At a time when Russia displays a renewed interest in regional hegemony, US policies in Iraq and Afghanistan encourage ex-Soviet nations to cooperate with Russia on security policy. A glance at the CSTO’s evolution suggests that, should current conditions persist, this organization could very well develop into a full-fledged military alliance—a postmodern Warsaw Pact that could help Russia fully realize its aspiration for leadership of the post-Soviet space.

BEGINNINGS: THE COLLECTIVE SECURITY TREATY

In spite of the Soviet Union’s spectacular implosion, the newborn Russian Federation was still a major military power—in theory. Practically, however, the largest former Soviet nation needed extensive cooperation from its counterparts to maintain that strength. Many of the USSR’s tactical and strategic nuclear weapons were widely scattered throughout Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus. When the Soviet Union was dissolved and the Commonwealth of Independent States was created, these nations agreed in principle to transfer their arsenals to Russia. However, principles were not so quickly put into practice. Though hardly equipped to assume status as nuclear powers, the non-Russian nations made the most of their position, concluding the weapons handover and signing non-proliferation pledges only after Russia made considerable economic and defense concessions.¹ Sakwa and Webber argue that, by asserting absolute command and control over former Soviet nuclear arms, Russia undermined its own case for collective security.² Initially, Russian leaders publicly suggested joint control of the arsenal through the CIS framework. However, once able to secure unilateral power over the weapons, Russia was wholly willing to do so—thereby rendering moot the CIS agreements it had lobbied for. This incident suggests that, while Russia is willing to pursue collective security mechanisms, it prefers to dictate strategy from Moscow when possible.

At the time of the Soviet Union’s demise, conventional military strength was also a gathering concern for Russia. On this front, Russian assertions in favor of collective security did not fare much better. At the time of the Soviet Union’s demise, the majority of first-rate ground troops were situated in border areas that were now sovereign: the Baltic states, Belarus, Ukraine, and the Caucasus. The Russian Federation, whose borders lay mostly in the Soviet interior, was manned by weaker and less-equipped forces.³ Further, a civil war in Tajikistan threatened to spill over into the rest of Central Asia (in spite of the presence of large numbers of former Soviet, ethnic Russian troops), and the former Soviet-controlled president of

Afghanistan was ousted from power. All of the former Soviet republics' leaders recognized a need to consolidate their positions and prevent the balkanization of their territories. A debate ensued in the CIS between two camps. One, led by Russia, sought to maintain the integrity of the Soviet army. In the other, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan sought the right to form their own national armies out of Soviet units left in their territory.⁴ Neither was a purely realistic solution; the Russians envisioned that command of a united force would be tied to each nation's contribution, effectively leaving them in charge of a great number of foreign installations—a situation none of the republics rushed to embrace. The argument for national armies, however, was made by states that could not possibly afford them to maintain large indigenous standing forces.⁵

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The Tajik situation forced the parties to come to an agreement. In May 1992, presidents of six of the twelve CIS nations—Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan—signed a Collective Security Treaty.⁶ It provided for the formation of a Collective Security Council in the CIS to jointly coordinate defense policies, and rapidly led to additional agreements in the following months, such as a framework for the assembly of multinational peacekeeping forces and a protocol that defined the borders covered by the Collective Security Treaty as those of the CIS.⁷ Most dramatically, the Treaty echoed Article 5 of the NATO agreement: “aggression or threat of aggression against one country would be regarded as aggression against all participants in the treaty.”⁸ In spite of all this, the Treaty did little to live up to its name. No substantial collective effort arose to address the Tajik crisis (in fact, Russian bilateral assistance to the Tajik government so alarmed the neighboring Uzbeks that they subsequently viewed the Russian military might with greater suspicion). Thousands were killed and hundreds of thousands of refugees fled their homes before Emomali Rahmonov, the former Communist Party leader, consolidated power in the capital. Only then did Russian forces advance to secure the Tajik-Afghan border, not under the Collective Security Treaty, but on the terms of a separate Tajik-Russian accord.⁹

The Collective Security Treaty faced other serious challenges. Even among Treaty states, national sovereignty was too strong a force, and the specter of Soviet domination was too recent a memory, to permit Russians the military command and control that they believed lay at the heart of the Treaty. The Russian military establishment, too, was loath to integrate its forces or command structure. Any common staff arrangement would, at least in the short term, dilute Russian command. Further, although cash-poor, the relative size and strength of Russia guaranteed that it would bear the lion's share of financial expenses entailed in any

collective military project.¹⁰ In fact, it appears that the civilian Russian leadership that pressed for the Treaty was less interested in a stable system of collective security than in a collective defense scheme that served its geopolitical aspirations.

A word is necessary here on the distinction between *collective security* and *collective defense*, at least as it concerns the Russian near abroad. While *collective security* concerns the regulation of behavior within a group of states, a *collective defense* system focuses on external threats to its participants.¹¹ The failure of the Collective Security Treaty countries to produce a coherent response to the Tajik civil war, and Russia's subsequent preoccupation with Commonwealth border security, suggest that the Treaty was a collective defense convention. Certainly this would have served Russia's strategic purposes well. Many of the independent states were accelerating their exports of fossil fuels. As the global impact of such exports began to be felt, Russia's zeal to check outside influence and make itself indispensable to the republics was palpable. As one commentator put it,

*If the Russian Federation could retain its position as the primary defender of the Caucasus and Central Asia while the region became a major oil and gas producer, Russia's international stature would increase. If Russia failed to maintain its influence in the new oil regions, its relative importance in world affairs would decrease.*¹²

This was a revival of the "great game" of resource competition in Central Asia and the Caucasus. It combined easily with traditional Russian attitudes regarding the "country's special responsibility" toward "the territory of the former USSR," which found new articulation with President Boris Yeltsin: "I believe the time has come for authoritative international organizations, including the United Nations, to grant Russia special powers as guarantor of peace and stability in the region."¹³ Yet the entire notion of Russia playing *tsar batyushka* in the post-Soviet space was predicated upon a "consensus on external threat perceptions among CIS member nations," which was impossible "owing to their varied geopolitical positions and levels of military development."¹⁴

DISINTEGRATION AND DEFECTIONS

If Russia's aim was regional hegemony under the guise of collective defense, the Collective Security Treaty was a poor vehicle. Each of its members was motivated to sign by a pragmatic calculation of national interest—a weak adhesive for interstate structures. Armenia, for example, hoped to exploit Russia's traditional role as protector of Christians in the Caucasus, just as Tajikistan sought Russian help in fighting its rebels.¹⁵ Absent such tactical necessities, Treaty provisions simply could not hold.¹⁶

The contrast between the Treaty's aims and its accomplishments grew even sharper in 1996 after the radical Taliban captured Kabul and established an Islamic caliphate in Afghanistan. Russian foreign policy displayed a near-obsessive fear of Islamic extremism, particularly in Central Asia; indeed, the fear of religious rebels

was a chief source of Russian interest in the Tajik civil war.¹⁷ This obsession only intensified after the Taliban victory. General Aleksandr Lebed, a respected Afghanistan veteran and Russian presidential candidate, clamored for aid to the mainly Uzbek-Tajik Northern Alliance to combat the Taliban, who he claimed sought to annex Bukhara.¹⁸ In addition, the Central Asian republics also saw Taliban rule (and extremism in general) as a threat to their secular governments. Yet even this immediate external danger failed to provoke a unified response from the Treaty members. Indeed, in the coming years, Uzbek President Islam Karimov would assail Russia for using the Taliban boogeyman as a pretext “for pushing the region’s countries to join forces and urging Uzbekistan to accede to the CIS.”¹⁹

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The Treaty was, in effect, for a five-year term, beginning April 20, 1994. By 1999, not only the Treaty, but also virtually every post-Soviet cooperative scheme was in disarray. The increasingly sovereign nations had lost pretenses to all but the loosest cooperation with Russia; they had all opted instead for self-determination, Western engagement, or regional cooperation. Azerbaijan, dissatisfied with the Russian failure to mediate its dispute with Armenia over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, refused to reaffirm the Treaty for another five years. Georgia, wary of Russian motives and eager to signal NATO (whose expansion plans included the former Soviet Baltic states), followed suit. “National border troops,” stated one Georgian lieutenant general, “can guard state frontiers of Georgia as reliably as Russian colleagues.”²⁰ Uzbekistan withdrew from the Treaty as well. President Karimov still accused Russia of exploiting the Afghan Taliban’s rise to further its interests in the region. Furthermore, since 1996, he had sought membership in the NATO Partnership for Peace, violating the Collective Security Treaty’s prohibition against members’ joining competitive alliances.²¹

As the remaining Treaty members gathered in April 1999 to salvage the agreement, the three defectors took an extraordinary step: they joined Ukraine and Moldova to form GUUAM, an alternative economic and security group. As if this move were not provocative enough in itself, the group’s formative meeting was held in Washington, DC. Its existence, stated one commentator, exposed “the ‘hollowness’ of the CIS Collective Security Treaty framework” and offered the alternative of an “anti-Russian bloc.”²² Regional cooperation—sans Russia—experienced rapid growth. In October, 2000, representatives of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan formed a Eurasian Economic Community to harmonize their customs agreements.²³ The message sent by both of these organizations was clear: Russian initiatives for international cooperation constituted

unwelcome interference, and the “near abroad” would organize collectively to balance Russian power as much as possible.

The next few years represented the nadir of the Treaty’s legitimacy and authority. The remaining members agreed to a few procedural reforms, such as the establishment of a permanent secretary general to oversee the Collective Security Council’s meager administration. A new rotating chairmanship gave each head of state an opportunity to set the Council’s schedule, but in practice the agenda was still Russian-centered and subject to rejection by the other national presidents. Without a shared notion of likely threats to their sovereignty, all of these nations preferred policies that reinforced “the ‘hard shell’ of the modern nation-state.”²⁴

TERRORISM: THE INTEGRATING FORCE

Anti-Russian security policy in Central Asia and Eurasia, crested at the turn of the millennium, then showed signs of receding. The first and greatest factor in this reversal was common anxiety toward interstate terrorism. Muslim *mujabeddin* had a variety of targets to choose from in the post-Soviet space. Renewed fighting between Russia and the secessionist Muslims of Chechnya was especially brutal, with both sides regularly committing atrocities. Central Asian leaders, recalling the Tajik uprising and eyeing the Taliban with ever-greater suspicion (it was, after all, dominated by pious veterans of the successful Afghan war against the Soviets), cracked down on over-exuberant displays of religion in their nations, with the predictable result that radicalism flourished in the region. The problem was particularly acute in Uzbekistan, a police state with a “disastrous” human rights record. That nation’s repressive policies spawned a Taliban-supported jihadist movement, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which also trained combatants for the struggle in Chechnya.²⁵ In spite of this shared stake against extremism, the independent nations did not rush willingly to Russia or the Collective Security Council for help. Uzbekistan sought the aid of the United Nations, China and its neighbors to fight the IMU and assist an Uzbek general, Rashid Dostum, in his campaign against the Taliban’s northern front.²⁶ Yet, the magnitude of the threat—and the lack of international will to address it—drove these nations reluctantly to seek Russian security cooperation. “The UN Security Council closely monitors the situation in Kosovo and Yugoslavia,” Karimov complained, “but pays no attention at all to Afghanistan.”²⁷

September 11, 2001, immediately transformed the global community’s priorities, and it would have profound effects on the Collective Security Treaty’s future as well. Attacks by the Afghanistan-based al Qaeda network challenged America’s physical and emotional sovereignty; the US/NATO response—military action to capture or kill al Qaeda leaders, oust their Taliban hosts, and remake the Afghan state—raised issues of sovereignty with Russia and its neighboring states. The United States undertook a massive program of diplomatic engagement with Afghanistan’s northern neighbors. The Central Asian states, sensing generations’ worth of economic and security incentives within their grasp, eagerly jumped onto the

American bandwagon. Uzbekistan offered the US an airbase at Khanabad from which to launch strikes against the Taliban, and Kyrgyzstan offered a similar arrangement with its airbase at Manas.²⁸

Russia was not nearly as pleased with direct American involvement in its historical sphere of influence, but it, too, had an abiding interest in seeing terrorism combated generally and the Afghan rebels toppled in particular. Moreover, as the largely successful war against the Taliban wound down and American attention turned to the Middle East, the Central Asian republics renewed their interest in cooperation with Russia. In October 2002, the Collective Security Treaty members voted to restructure the convention and turn it into a full-fledged defense regime, the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Its purpose, as Russian President Vladimir Putin put it, was “to guarantee the security, territorial integrity, and sovereignty of its member states.”²⁹ They appointed Nikolai Bordyuzha, a former Russian military intelligence officer with close ties to Putin, as Secretary General. The immediate focus of the new organization was the formation of a multi-state Collective Rapid Deployment Force (CRDF) to address threats as they emerged; its military command headquarters, naturally, would be situated in Moscow.³⁰ An unnamed Kremlin official, just as naturally, praised the revitalized treaty group as “a serious step on the way to developing integration in the military-political sphere... an important element of the global security system.”³¹

NATO AND THE US: ACCELERATORS OF CSTO INTEGRATION

NATO was a far more significant element of the global security system. After the Taliban's ouster, US forces passed strategic control of their Afghanistan coalition, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), over to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. NATO activity in the post-Soviet space had always been a burr in the Russian side. The Alliance's plans for expansion of its membership remained a sticky issue. The Partnership for Peace (PfP), a NATO program set up to engage formerly communist states not slated for full alliance membership, further rankled the Russians and emboldened the republics; all five of the smaller CSTO members signed on to the PfP. NATO's moves against the Russian-backed Serbs in Bosnia and Kosovo further hardened the Federation against the alliance. Before 2002, Russia could say very little to dissuade its neighbors from engaging the West and inviting in NATO.

Subsequent events in Afghanistan, however, enabled Russia to argue against NATO's presence in the region on the grounds that it was heavy-handed, uncooperative, and ineffective. The Afghan political progress had slowed to a crawl, violence continued to flare in the south of the country, and the NATO-run ISAF largely ignored the illicit Afghan opium trade, a boon to tribesmen and terrorists, and a destabilizing force. A Russian minister for organized crime-related issues attacked NATO's lack of an “effective solution to the problems of terrorism and narcotics” in Central Asia. “Russia,” the minister continued, “has repeatedly proposed NATO-CSTO cooperation” in the region, “but we have not heard a substantive answer from

Brussels.³² At the same time, Russia stirred up discontent with NATO among its Eurasian CSTO allies. While the US, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland met to discuss the possible deployment of a NATO missile defense system in mid-2004, Russia and Belarus held talks on a CSTO response. Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenka summed up the mood: “I suggested deploying S-300 [antiaircraft] systems in certain locations in Belarus to increase the defense capability of Belarus and Russia.”³³ By the beginning of 2006, the CSTO had set up its own working group to explore ways of intervening in Afghanistan, and Secretary Bordyuzha called cooperation with NATO “not so important to the CSTO, which is a self-sufficient organization [...]”³⁴

Initially, Russia’s problems with the Afghan situation were directed at both NATO *and* the United States. This changed in late 2002, after the US shifted its strategic focus from Afghanistan to Iraq. If anti-terrorism and suspicion of NATO brought the CSTO powers together, the American invasion of Iraq firmly cemented CSTO relations on the basis of fear of American power. The US case for war with Iraq was partially based on ending the tyrannical rule of Saddam Hussein. In making this argument, the Bush administration expressed a general desire to forcibly replace or reform undemocratic governments. Democracy enforcement gained prominence as the war dragged on and its primary justification—the existence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction—was thoroughly discredited. But this American pressure for regime change in authoritarian states proved especially alarming to the former Soviet republics. It came at a point when popular support was flagging throughout the region. Peaceful coups occurred in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, all with tacit American blessings or tolerance.

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A major crisis ensued in Uzbekistan in May 2005, when a number of businessmen in Andijan were arrested for “Islamic extremism.” Townspeople gathered en masse to protest the arrests, and police fired indiscriminately into the crowds. As many as seven hundred protesters may have been killed, but the true number remains unknown, because government agents quickly disposed of the dead bodies.³⁵ The Uzbek government subsequently faced intense international scrutiny of its behavior. The US Department of State announced that it was “disturbed” and “disappointed” by “the indiscriminate use of force against unarmed civilians” at Andijan, hinting that the incident would have serious diplomatic consequences.³⁶ Uzbek President Karimov then decided that US troops in his country represented a potentially destabilizing force. He soon announced that “the resentful forces... have been told to leave the Khanabad airfield,” but colorfully warned that US

representatives “will not rest. They never tire of subversive activities. I would say their main goal is to discredit Uzbekistan’s independent policy, disrupt peace and stability in the country, and make Uzbekistan obey.”³⁷

Russia was quick to capitalize upon such fears and portray itself as a staunch defender of the status quo in Central Asian politics. The Russian Security Council Secretary accused America of fomenting instability to further its own imperialist aims: “What we see are practical attempts to interfere in the political life of new independent states under the guise of advancing democratic values and freedoms, by putting pressure on authorities via protest practices.”³⁸ A Russian newspaper asked Bordyuzha in an interview if “political regimes in certain allied states” supported the CSTO in an effort “to find in Moscow a potential defender from possible external mop-ups, like the Iraqi [invasion].” Bordyuzha’s reply was telling: “The Iraqi developments forced many political leaders, whether they liked it or not, to ponder over the security of their states.” He worried aloud about the plight of countries, which “will be unable to defend themselves and have no allies capable of raising their voice in their defense.” The general secretary suggested that cooperation with Russia could ease the regimes’ anxieties: “I think that the CSTO member countries, including Russia, look to each other for certain help with counteraction against the existing threats.”³⁹ Uzbekistan, of course, was no longer a Treaty party, but it reached out to the CSTO with new sincerity, especially after the Russian government supported the official Uzbek account of events in Andijan: that the uprising was planned as part of a plot by outside Muslim extremists to depose Karimov and that only 170 people died in the government response.⁴⁰

Russia effected similar reversals of fortune elsewhere. At the same meeting that opened the CSTO for business in 2003, Russia secured its own Kyrgyz airbase at Kant near the capital, Bishkek.⁴¹ Kant was to become the “centerpiece of Russian efforts to maintain a ground and air presence in and around Central Asia.”⁴² The United States, too, had already established a Kyrgyz base at Manas after 9/11 (which now took on an even greater significance after the US expulsion from Uzbekistan). However, in early 2006, Bordyuzha and Russia’s top air force general, Vladimir Mikhailov, met with the new Kyrgyz cabinet and secured an agreement to expand Russia’s CSTO-related operations at Kant. While Mikhailov told the Russian media that “our base is here forever,” Kyrgyzstan’s new president stated in an interview that the Americans were also welcome to maintain their presence at Manas, as long as the Afghan situation dictated it—and as long as they were willing to tolerate a raise in annual rent from \$2 million to \$207 million. At least one Western analyst expressed concerns that this might “be the first step among many, many steps to come... making it so difficult for the American military to be there that they decide to leave.”⁴³

THE RUSSIAN PHOENIX: CONSOLIDATION

The cumulative effect of these forces—terrorism and extremism, perceived NATO interference, fear of America, and belief in Russia as an effective

counterbalance—has been to transform the CSTO into an organization that, while flying under the international radar, is an alliance with real teeth. The CSTO has been particularly successful in its recent military goals. Member nations are able to purchase Russian-built military hardware at cost, which increases interoperability between forces and encourages the nations to cooperate with Russia on training and joint exercises.⁴⁴ The CSTO's Rapid Deployment Force is currently 2,000-strong, and plans are underway to pool national military assets for a standing peacekeeping force.⁴⁵ CSTO cooperation has produced two fully integrated army groups, Russia-Belarus and Russia-Armenia, and Boryuzha has announced intentions to organize a third, a "Central Asian army" comprised "not by battalions, but by regiments and divisions;" in the event of a major conflict, the member nations' armed forces would probably be subordinated to the Central Asian army group.⁴⁶

Most remarkably, an organization that for so long failed to achieve any consensus is now potent enough to expand its agenda and its membership. "The media associate our treaty, first of all, with its military component," lamented Boryuzha. "But the first consideration, in my opinion, is to create conditions in which there would be no need to use armed forces. It's not enough to speak of the area of military security only."⁴⁷ The CSTO nations have begun to address environmental security, the drug trade, trafficking in persons, and organized crime—issues that they cannot solve alone and that the West has generally shown little interest in.⁴⁸ Partisans of the CSTO also argue that the way to greater solvency on these issues is to cast a wider net. The Russian Defense Minister expressed his interest in enlargement of the CSTO membership beyond its six current members.⁴⁹ Boryuzha echoed the sentiment: "We are open for all those wishing to reinforce our ranks or (for a start) to conduct with us a dialogue on the mutual tackling of similar tasks—both with CIS countries and with other states."⁵⁰

FINAL ANALYSIS: WHY THE CSTO WORKS

Given the weight of recent history, the question is no longer *whether* or *how* the CSTO works, but rather *why* it works. Gregory Gleason proposes three possible models for international cooperation. Constitutionalism entails the subordination of short-term interests to draft a compact based upon stable norms; functionalism allows for more skepticism and incremental progress among the participants. Hegemony, for Gleason, is "a situation in which a cooperative regime is established through the imposition of the will of a single, dominant cooperator."⁵¹ Writing in 2001, Gleason foresaw functionalism as the proper course for collective action in Central Asia. Though the CSTO's evolution demonstrates the current salience of hegemony as a binding force in the post-Soviet space, it is not clear how stable and lasting that hegemony will be as a basis for future cooperation.

John Mearsheimer, a contemporary scholar of "offensive realism" whose work examines hegemony in depth, suggests that cooperation depends chiefly upon two factors: "relative-gains considerations, and concern about cheating."⁵² The first consideration indicates that it is not enough for each member to achieve gains from

an agreement; the individual state must also see that its counterparts do not make disproportionately greater gains. Taken at face value, CSTO growth seems to contradict this. But the relative-gains considerations of smaller CSTO states look quite different from those of great powers. They have not yet reached a point where they can compete for global or even regional hegemony. A large part of the international pie is only available to a few actors, such as the US, Western Europe, Russia, and China. Their primary concern, then, would be the balancing of great power threats. The republics have clearly determined that the balancing of Western military influence, even if it cedes Russia more power, is an acceptable relative gain. Why should these states see a relative loss of power to Russia as an overall gain? Mearsheimer's second consideration explains this: owing to a variety of factors, the republics see Russia as more transparent, more stable, and less willing to cheat. Politically, the current Russian political regime (which shows no signs of changing course) pledges support to existing power structures in its CSTO counterparts, while "regime change," democratization, and preventive war are observable tenets of US and NATO foreign policy. Militarily, while Russian strength is overwhelming, it is far less formidable, stealthy, and quick to mobilize than Western firepower. It is also worth noting that the nations in question are equipped with Russian military hardware; hence, numbers aside, they possess a parity in weapons platforms that makes Russian military aggression unlikely.

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Of course, there are also considerations outside the realist scope that raise the states' trust in Russia. Fifteen years on from the fall of the Soviet Union, the twelve CIS nations are viable and sovereign. National survival is no longer contingent upon the establishment of a separate identity—such identities are now political facts. The USSR's fall and the early CIS and CST failures taught these states that they could effectively resist Russian hegemony when determined to do so. Finally, with fears of terrorism and Western interference eclipsing separatist fervor, the states are willing to reexamine their historical bonds to each other and to Russia. "We all used to live in a single country," Bordyuzha proclaims. "We have so much in common."⁵³ Fifteen years ago, he would have been roundly lambasted for that comment. Such rhetoric is far less controversial today.

To be sure, the CSTO is no Warsaw Pact. Six nations a super alliance doth not make. Further, the smaller states of the CSTO are not pure satellites: they do not depend upon Moscow for social, political, or economic sustenance, nor are they in immediate danger of doing so. Notwithstanding Russian rhetoric to the contrary, the alliance is certainly not cemented by fraternal or ideological bonds. Yet it is clearly evolving as an effective organ of Russian military and diplomatic policy, funded

chiefly by Russia. Bordyuzha estimated that “Russia assumes financially 50 percent of” CSTO expenses, since “its economic potential is significantly higher” than that of the partners. “For security,” he concluded, “one has to pay.”⁵⁴ This doubles the republics’ security dependence; for they not only come to rely upon the umbrella of Russian security, they also grow accustomed to a peace dividend, dedicating their domestic budgets to non-security matters—a difficult course to alter. Of course, these states’ very willingness to delegate some defense responsibilities to Russia only arose after their nations achieved a degree of economic and political self-sufficiency that a hegemon cannot easily roll back. Yet, once those defense functions are ceded, it is unclear just how disgruntled republics might later recover them.

Hence, sober comparisons to a communist-era security bloc are apt. A perceived heightening of US/NATO belligerence, particularly with respect to human rights, democracy, or weapons proliferation, encourages Central Asian and Eurasian reliance on Russian power. The dilemma for the United States is that, while the continuance of a vigorous foreign policy of rights or arms control may galvanize the CSTO, disengagement may have the same effect: the absence of a potent alternative may reinforce faith in Russia’s natural role as the regional arbiter and defender.

The “Bush Doctrine,” as exemplified in the United States’ National Security Strategy of 2002, assumes that a willingness to decry, disarm, or depose certain undemocratic regimes will send a clear message to others, ultimately deterring bad behavior and encouraging liberalization. In places like Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Cuba, and the Palestinian territories, the United States now finds that “muscular democracy” is just as likely to reinforce anti-Western fears and harden resistance. This, more than any other phenomenon, explains why states in Central Asia and Eurasia, which strove so vigorously for independence in 1991, now look to the Russian Federation for security. In half a generation, Russian regional hegemony has ceased to become the independent states’ greatest fear; it is now the lesser of evils. If conditions allow, Russian dominance may again be seen in a positive, protective light. That, in any case, is Russia’s hope for the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Thus far this hope is well founded.

Notes

¹ Richard Sakwa and Mark Webber, “The Commonwealth of Independent States, 1991–1998: Stagnation and Survival,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, no. 3 (May 1999): 381.

² *Ibid.*, 382.

³ “Interview with Vladimir Mikhaylovich Mashchits, First Deputy Minister of Russian Federation for Cooperation with CIS Member States,” *Vooruzheniye, Politika, Konversiya*, June 1, 1996. Available at: <www.fas.org/news/russia/1996/druma198_s96003.htm> (accessed February 26, 2007).

⁴ Sakwa and Webber, “The Commonwealth of Independent States, 1991–1998: Stagnation and Survival,” 382–383.

⁵ “Interview with Vladimir Mikhaylovich Mashchits.”

⁶ Belarus, Georgia, and Azerbaijan would all sign the CST by 1993. Turkmenistan concluded a separate military accord with Russia, while Moldova and Ukraine refused any subsequent military cooperation.

⁷ Flemming Splidsboel-Hansen, “The Official Russian Concept of Contemporary Central Asian Islam: The Security Dimension,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 49, no. 8 (Dec. 1997): 1508.

⁸ Gregory Gleason, “Inter-State Cooperation in Central Asia from the CIS to the Shanghai Forum,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 53, no.7 (Nov. 2001): 1088.

- ⁹ Ibid, 1088; Splidsboel-Hansen, "The Official Russian Concept of Contemporary Central Asian Islam: The Security Dimension," 1508.
- ¹⁰ Sakwa and Webber, "The Commonwealth of Independent States, 1991–1998: Stagnation and Survival," 383; Robert V. Barylski, "The Russian Federation and Eurasia's Islamic Crescent," *Europe-Asia Studies* 46, no. 3 (1994): 400.
- ¹¹ Sakwa and Webber, "The Commonwealth of Independent States, 1991–1998: Stagnation and Survival," 384.
- ¹² Barylski, "The Russian Federation and Eurasia's Islamic Crescent," 399.
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