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THE COLLECTIVE SECURITY TREATY ORGANIZATION: FINDING FUTURE DIRECTION DESPITE OBSTACLES

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Summary

This article critically examines the various difficulties hampering the maturation of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) into an internationally respected guarantor of security in the Eurasian space. It places the organization in a suitable context and accordingly assesses its operational capacities so that its involvement in traditional and broad security threats is apparent. A focus on its active measures in the post-Soviet space provides a strategy for future development and cooperation, despite the issues that hamper the security alliance, both internally and externally.

Key Words: CSTO, Military Alliance, Post-Soviet Space, Regional Security, Russian Defense Policy.

Introduction

The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) or *Organizacija Dogovora o Kollektivnoj Bezopasnosti* (ODKB) is a transnational military alliance established by the ratification of the Tashkent Treaty in 1992. Its membership is solely composed of post-Soviet countries affiliated with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), although CIS participation does directly correlate with inclusion in the security pact. Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan acted as original members however, they were joined later by Azerbaijan, Belarus and Georgia in 1994. Internal political difficulties with fellow member states led Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan to later rescind their involvement with the CSTO.

The Eurasian military alliance is often presented as a Russian-led equivalent to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Sucu 2017, 132; Mrvaljevic 2015). Misunderstandings over the nature of the CSTO consequently result in numerous critiques that the organization never achieved success akin to NATO and it acts exclusively as an instrument of Russian regional policy (Hayrapetyan 2016). The distinctive nature of the CSTO in comparison to the Western military alliance must be addressed. What problems does the treaty organization face that hinder its maturation into a united bloc of likeminded states? In the case that challenges hinder development, what advantages, besides geography, persuade some post-Soviet republics to retain membership? How does the CSTO fit into the Eurasian security framework going forward if its future is often projected as poor?

This paper seeks to analyze these queries by briefly examining the philosophical differences between NATO and the CSTO. Understanding the Western organization is negligible in regard to forthcoming research presented in this investigation, but it is often held up as a barometer of success. Placing the Moscow-based alliance in its proper understanding allows straightforward evaluation rather than comparative criticism. From there, internal difficulties that stall progress will be determined, and subsequently identify motivations why countries retain membership despite these issues. Following this, important aspects, operations and examples of cooperation within the CSTO in the post-Soviet space will be identified. In concluding remarks, this paper will present a way forward for the CSTO in order to retain its relevancy in the Eurasian region for years to come.

Philosophy

Scholars and international security analysts often present the CSTO as the imperfect Russian answer to NATO. This view is faulty as it projects characteristics upon the CSTO that are not necessarily vital to its activities or cohesion. Nevertheless, fair investigation requires that similarities between the two are noted to comprehend why comparison is abundant and constant.

NATO and the CSTO share a few common variables. Both are United Nations-recognized intergovernmental military alliances involved in their respective pan-regional security frameworks. Collective security remains the consistent objective of each organization. Article 3 of the CSTO Charter states that ensuring the “collective defense of the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the member States” is a primary ambition. Accordingly, Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty affirms member states “will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack.” Compatible objectives and similar hierarchical arrangement therefore lend to the argument that the CSTO is a Eurasian facsimile of the Euro-North American alliance.

Further, the CSTO and NATO endure criticism that they act as instruments of politico-military policy for powerful member states. It is often contended that dominant individual countries direct the agenda of their particular blocs and contribute the most resources (Lacroix 2016). As a result, the alliances adopt particular worldviews in regard to defense and interventionism that reflect the strategic culture of their benefactors. Russia fills this role in the Eurasian alliance while the United States acts as chief financier of NATO. For instance, operational structure of the CSTO is based on the Russian military system (Oliker et al 2009, 102) while in 2017, the US contributed 51.1% of the overall NATO budget (Macias, 2018). Cooperative arrangements with an unbalanced power structure typically result in dysfunction in regard to pan-regional unity. Both organizations experience complications in this regard.

NATO and the CSTO are linked by the desire to achieve regional security, but it is at this juncture differences are apparent. Divergent philosophies concerning governance and security frame the worldviews adopted by each military bloc. States enter into alliances with the ambition to

preserve the systemic status quo in their respective regions (Gibler and Sewell 2006, 414). Both intergovernmental alliances hope to ensure stability in their neighborhoods, however North Atlantic Treaty countries are, for the most part, intrinsically linked by adherence to liberal democratic principles typical of the Western political environment. The preface of the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty specifically noted the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law as core beliefs. Recent cases of democratic backsliding — as demonstrated in Turkey, Poland and Hungary — require attention, however NATO interprets the international security framework through the lens of a contemporary liberal philosophy. Gheciu (2005) contends that membership generates features of accountability, transparency, a balance of power in regard to domestic security policy, and government oversight of the military (974). This is key to a proper interpretation on why NATO should not be held as a measure of the success of the CSTO.

The CSTO does not have a distinctive and unitive philosophy. Nikitina (2012) argues that the regional military block lacks any coherent ideology or mission, and thus leaves its external and internal functions unspecified (51). NATO's objectives of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law are exchanged for security, sovereignty and territorial integrity in the CSTO. One represents a general viewpoint on conduct in the international community whilst the other focuses on defensive objectives. A reliance on retaining the regional status quo is best achieved through political stability, the maintenance of traditional structures and limiting political opposition (Oliker et al, 101). Member states appropriately view their participation in the CSTO in purely individualistic terms. They seek assurances from a larger guarantor of security — Russia— rather than a unified stance or commitment to an established set of beliefs.

Russia and the CIS states are united in practical circumstances such as geopolitics, a common history due to Russian and Soviet imperialism, and forms of governance. Buzan and Wæver (2003) reason that such connections typically foster greater levels of cooperation in regional frameworks, but the CSTO's strict adherence to state sovereignty as a core principle limits opportunities for deeper levels of cooperation (23-25). Common histories and cultural connections are not necessarily experienced the same way across a region, thus discordant positions emerge in regard to partnerships with the major power in the region (Russia) and managing relationships between neighbors with antagonistic relationships, such as Azerbaijan and Armenia. As a result, anxieties over state sovereignty, domestic political security and identifying broad security threats bond CIS states in a sort of defensive mechanism than belief in a collective code.

Allison (2018) identifies this arrangement as a form of protective integration. This agenda does little to foster regional integration but it protects or bolsters regime security, stability and legitimacy (297). Governments of member states typically exhibit features of autocracy, therefore it is in their best interests to align with a security organization that holds the individuality of states and political security as vital. An intergovernmental organization united by adherence to a set of principles and preferred form of governance is problematic to states with concerns over opposition movements and political security. A regional alliance based on protective integration promotes a set of statist principles that prioritizes autonomy, protection from external values and constrains any motivation for deeper regional integration (Allison, 98). Therefore, the CSTO should be understood as a regional instrument established to prevent instability from traditional external security risks while concurrently tied to statist principles. The CSTO has not adopted a collective philosophy, such as democratic liberalism inherent to NATO, to ensure its member states they can cooperate without criticism of their internal policies.

Internal Challenges

Internal challenges stymie the development of the CSTO and consequently reflect negatively on its reputation as a functional guarantor of security in its zone of responsibility. The military alliance faces several criticisms over a lack of a united philosophy and perceptible objectives. This notion subsequently transitions to the position that the CSTO is a figurative security actor rather than an actual contributor in the Eurasian space. Scholars have gone as far to say that the Russian-led arrangement is an “emperor with no clothes” (Matveeva 2013, 489) and “an umbrella structure that keeps the appearance of a collective security system, which has never actually come into existence” (Baev 2014, 42). It is difficult to foster external relations with intergovernmental organizations when the foundation of a regional broker — the CSTO — is perceived as inherently flawed and impotent.

Membership of the CSTO expands across vast territory that once fell under the same foreign and military policy of the Soviet Union. The alliance can be understood in the frame of three internal blocs: Eastern Europe represented by Belarus along the western periphery of Russian territory, Transcaucasia signified by Armenia and the heart of Central Asia with most — but not all— of the Central Asian republics (CAR). Security threats impacting each region are intrinsically different, and as a consequence, an extremely interest based organization emerged. These respective blocs have self-oriented perceptions of security and are additionally complicated by internal disputes, at the bilateral level, between fellow member states or closely affiliated neighbours. Thus, internal obstacles present another limitation in the ascension of the CSTO as a universally respected intergovernmental security actor.

Central Asia emerged as the primary point of focus of the CSTO (Weitz 2018, 25). Cooperative activities within the CSTO thereupon shifted towards those that are fundamentally identified as risks to the republics of the region. Another layer of discord between member states emerges at this point as contrasts abound in regard to economic power, and related influence, across the Central Asian space. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan emerged as an economic dynamo while Tajikistan continues to struggle with entrance into fiscally beneficial arrangements. Member states of lesser prominence often consider their stronger counterparts as the true leaders and accordingly lose interest in collaboration (Buzan and Wæver, 24). An adherence to self-oriented principles is a natural consequence.

As a result, the CSTO appears as an intergovernmental military alliance with bureaucratic linkages established by the ratification of a treaty, but little motivation as a cooperative unit. It is apparent that states enter regional organizations dependent on the individual needs instead of actual commitment to a common goal (Buzan and Wæver, 23). Member states feel little responsibility to support their counterparts in matters trumped by other advantageous variables, such as ethnic or economic. Shakhanova (2017) concludes that there is no real solidarity in the CSTO framework (49). Strained diplomatic relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia present this supposition clearly. Central Asian republics generally support the non-member leadership in Baku based upon their shared Turkic Muslim culture over their Orthodox Caucasian partners in Armenia. It is difficult to act as a regional guarantor of security when internal relations lack unison and are better defined by discussions in the realm of capital to capital.

Aris (2010) notes that bilateral relations remain the most important aspect of Russia’s diplomatic relations in the post-Soviet space (5). The intergovernmental alliance of the CSTO presents constructive opportunities to manage politico-military affairs with diverse member states in

one framework, however this task appears insurmountable to overcome. It is easier for Moscow to navigate distinct foreign policy concerns and offer security assurances in the limited agreements between itself and neighbors than achieve consensus during a CSTO session. This once again spotlights the lack of a unified philosophy and discordance that plagues the Eurasian military alliance. Nevertheless, member states' inclination to keep foreign relations — primarily those focused on the use of the military — narrowly focused with the key power broker acts as their insurance against enmeshment into regional conflicts in which they have little to no interest.

Member states' adherence to the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity are constructive in cooperation to neutralize external threats. As a result, the treaty alliance has a defensive character and CIS states are able to cooperate over broad issues manifesting outside their territorial jurisdictions (Shakhanova, 48). This is ineffective in resolving internal ones, although the CSTO amended its charter to include such threats (Stratfor 2012). Domestic security threats produced by terrorist, nationalist or opposition organizations have the potential to disrupt the status quo in their respective internal dynamics and consequently result in levels of political insecurity. Post-Soviet states within the CSTO are typically represented by forms of autocratic governance that typically dismiss the notion of power sharing. Allison notes that political leadership in countries with similar political frameworks are hesitant to share decision-making authority not only domestically, but in regional organizations as well (309). CSTO member states strongly uphold the positions of territorial integrity and sovereignty as insurance against regional intervention in their domestic affairs. A reluctance to unify in the face of difficulty consequently contributes to the accusations that the Eurasian alliance is ineffective and a hollow manifestation of a military bloc.

i: Internal Problems Leading to an Outside Consideration

Internal discord and a lack of political will to intervene in small-scale conflicts within member states led to punitive criticism over perceptions that the CSTO is incapable of securitization. The 2010 unrest in Kyrgyzstan, in which Bishkek asked for CSTO intervention and police forces, if an oft-cited example that led to conclusions that the alliance “lacks the capacity to intervene properly in the first place” (Matveeva, 489), has yet to “meaningfully engage in a crisis” (Buzan and Wæver, 28), and general questions over whether it is an instrument of stabilization at all (Allison, 325). As a consequence of the previously listed concerns, analysts suggest looking outside the realm of the CSTO and toward another regional organization: the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

The SCO is an economic, political and security alliance that came into force in 2003 and is regularly viewed as the more influential organization and on the ascent. Its membership includes the two Eurasian hegemony (Russia and China), three additional CST signatories (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), as well as two nuclear-weapon states (India and Pakistan). A focus on global issues and four members with nuclear warfare abilities results in the supposition that it is the more authoritative organization in the region (Shakhanova, 47). Despite this influence, the SCO lacks a military arm and it is at this point that analysts contend that the CSTO could merge as one Eurasian guarantor of security. On the contrary, this is an unformed idea as it dismisses the desire for each regional power — Russia and China— to engage in activities as they see fit without requirement of approval from the other (Weitz, 73). Analysis over the future and viability of the CSTO must be conducted in the view it is a standalone instrument rather than theorizations on how a functional Eurasian security environment would operate on paper.

ii: Issues with Russian Leadership

Russian leadership of the Eurasian military alliance results in critiques amongst members and in the international community. Western organizations are hesitant to engage with the CSTO based on the conclusion it acts as an extension of Moscow's hard power interests. Simply put, Russian dominance weakened the CSTO's institutional legitimacy and general acceptance as an actual guarantor of security (Weitz, xii). This creates an endless cycle in which the organization seeks recognition from the international community or military actors (NATO) to substantiate its legitimacy, however it requires Moscow's involvement for financial and operation sustenance. One cannot be separate from the other. Shakhnova accordingly argues that the CSTO, as well as the SCO, are based upon the pivotal role of Russia and how Moscow envisions the global threat environment (47). The future of the alliance rests with Russian geopolitical philosophy as well as how valuable it views the Eurasian alliance.

The post-Soviet space is discernibly a Russian sphere of influence and as such, Moscow is partly responsible for the numerous internal problems plaguing the CSTO, and its inability to mature into a generally accepted intergovernmental military cooperative. Russia is satisfied to devote desultory attention and let the CSTO operate in its current form (Aris 2016, 9). The alliance has already served the purpose of consolidation of states under its sphere of influence in military matters, and therefore prevents outside powers from full-time defensive investments in the area. Put plainly, existence of the CSTO encumbers future Western actions in proximity of Russia's southeastern periphery.

Further, internal mistrust over Russian leadership and domestic involvement contributes to the overall discord amongst CSTO member states. It is acknowledged that in exchange for a "military umbrella" that signatories must offer loyalty and degrees of political influence to Moscow (de Haas, 1). In the realm of military affairs, the adoption of policies reflecting Russian interests, the purchase of weapons, and subsequent subsidies to purchase military goods are reflective of Russian sway. This creates a favorable, although financially burdensome in some cases, situation for Moscow. In favorable cases, CSTO members like Kazakhstan can purchase weapons with their own financing. Russian financial assistance is, however, the typical norm in the post-Soviet space. For instance, Russia signed an agreement to supply Kyrgyzstan with \$ 200 million in used army equipment for free, while at the same time, provide Tajikistan with all their needed weapons and training (Barabanov 2018). Belarus cannot afford to purchase new military equipment without the aid of Russian subsidies either (Bohdan 2014, 10). Russian subsidies are, in fact, drying up in general, as Moscow focuses on modernizing its own military infrastructure, rather than equip neighbors, as expected. Member states consequently face the need to reexamine their defense policies (Bohdan, 2018). Relationships based upon dividends tend to experience instability as available assets or subsidies fluctuate.

Preservation of sovereignty and territorial integrity in the post-Soviet space remains at the center of CSTO cohesion. Member states are accordingly suspicious of deeper integration with Russia and asking for military intervention in times of crisis, due to Moscow's track record of frozen conflicts. States within the Russian sphere of influence are faced with complicated questions if they ask for CSTO involvement, in the case that it does occur. Allison contends that this scenario is a "double edged sword" for smaller states seeking assistance in the events of domestic political instability or combatting insurgencies (329). Post-Soviet states value their autonomy and independence, thus CSTO members must navigate the Eurasian security environment balancing

military dependence on Russia, individual security risks and disagreements amongst their counterparts. Russia understands this position, especially in the aftermath of the 2014 annexation of Crimea. It seeks to maintain its role of guarantor of security whilst engage in the concurrent interest of directing attention away from its past strategic encroachment on territory. As a result, Moscow wishes to expunge any discussion of separatism in the Eurasian military alliance (Allison, 331).

Nevertheless, though heavily funded and headquarters based in Moscow, the CSTO does not solely act according to Russian interests. As de Haas notes, a final conclusion that the alliance exists only as an arm of the Russian security framework is too simple (12). Rather, the ultimate goal remains the establishment of a stable environment in the post-Soviet space so that threats are defused prior to gaining a transregional presence. Moscow has little desire to expand its resources to act as the regional watchdog (Shakhanova, 45). Therefore, resolution of disputes, integration and military training of CSTO members potentially shifts the balance of responsibilities in the future. Disparate positions and internal disagreement further demonstrates that members of the CSTO act according to self-oriented interests. In spite of these serious criticisms, membership in the European military alliance remains attractive to its members.

Why States Stay?

Focus on lack of a unitive philosophy, infighting and mutual mistrust pivots toward the subsequent area of discussion: why do states retain membership in the CSTO? Constant criticism focused on stagnation and inefficiency presents a context where remaining in the military alliance provides few benefits.

The case of Uzbekistan's intermittent affiliation with the bloc further contributes to the supposition that bilateral relations with Russia, rather than an intergovernmental framework, trump commitment to a regional organization. Tashkent left the CSTO over the alliance's decision to include pressing internal issues, therefore complicating the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty, rather than external issues. Despite this recantation of membership, Moscow views Uzbekistan as a strategic partner in Central Asia and consequently offers it similar proposals as CSTO members, such as a willingness to sell weapons at domestic Russian prices (Barabanov). Weitz notes that if Tashkent receives similar benefits as CSTO member states without commitment to the alliance, then attraction to remain, or join in the case of future members, declines (62). Other essential reasons exist to retain active participation.

Reasons to remain are existential and strategic. Burchill and Karpauskaite (2018) contend that identity and self-determination rest are the core of securitizing the Eurasian space. They prefer opportunities to direct their own futures (21). As a result, post-Soviet states, especially those in Central Asia, prefer regional arrangements in which they are free from adoption of external views of governance, political philosophy and civil society. Russian influence is apparent in the CSTO however, member states are able to manage their internal affairs without the addition of an overarching set of principles. This is attractive, especially in instances of autocratic governments that view military and security affairs linked to wider state stability. Only a regional organization with comprehension of the unique political culture of the post-Soviet space can function in this manner.

The nature of the contemporary global order necessitates that states align with those that offer the best assurances of security. Isolationism and positions of official non-alliance often clash in situations where regional solidarity is required to resolve broad security threats. Therefore, varying degrees of cooperation are required in regional security networks (Burchill and Karpauskaite, 21). The CSTO arrangement provides a community of states linked by variables related to a common

history and strategic culture focused on insecurities unique to that specific region. An alliance solely focused on Eurasian interests allows states to collaborate, at their comfort, within an insular bubble, and without critiques of their governance.

Official documents state the importance of CSTO involvement as beneficial to member states, and to Eurasian security in general. In Central Asia, Kazakhstan considers its involvement as vital (de Haas, 5) and further expressed the organization's contribution to peace and security (KazInform, 2019). Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan hold similar views as affiliation with the military alliance increases their interactions with Russia (the regional guarantor) during times of domestic political insecurity and the proliferation of regional terrorism (de Haas, 5-6).

However, these reasons do not resolve the disparate positions and internal disputes. Like the breakdown of relations with Uzbekistan, Moscow and Astana butt heads over the future direction of the CSTO in regard to external versus internal threats, as well as interventionism abroad (Ramani, 2017). This is problematic as Kazakhstan represents the second-most influential country within the organization. It would not enjoy such leverage in another military alliance though.

Belarus officially promotes the stance that the Eurasian military alliance is important to the defense of its territorial integrity, and association with the skilled armed forces of 'brotherly nation' Russia as beneficial (TASS, 2016). Its membership extends the CSTO's boundaries to the periphery of Europe, which is advantageous for political messaging, but complicates Belarus' position in the European security space. Nevertheless, the Belarusian-CSTO relationship is not without faults as its enthusiasm rests with political relations with Russia. Instances of quarrelling over domestic affairs, such as a trade dispute, manifested as uncooperative actions, such as a boycott of a CSTO summit (Shraibman, 2019). As it currently stands, the CSTO provides Belarus with the best opportunity to engage in protective integration as sudden entrance into neighboring NATO is unreasonable. It is a pragmatic alliance.

In the Caucasian region, Armenia is faced with its own sets of pros and cons in regard to the maintenance of CSTO membership. It must manage relations with Azerbaijan in the case of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute and carefully engage in relationships within the alliance who typically support Baku. Within the CSTO, Armenia has been labelled a '*chuzhoy sredi svoikh*' (stranger among friends) due to the situation that its allies back a non-member rather than Yerevan. Armenia's National Security Strategy pinpoints inefficiency of the CSTO structure and requests the alliance elucidate its position on military intervention against member states. The Caucasian country is strategically located so it engages with NATO and the United States, thus it has options in the case it decides to shift its defensive policies going forward (Shirinyan, 2017). Nevertheless, Armenian leadership contends that bilateral Russian relations and involvement in the CSTO are vital to securitizing the nation due to its strong politico-military relationship with Moscow (Malek 2008, 31).

Internal disputes and an unclear mandate foment conclusions that the CSTO rests upon a precarious foundation that remains unfit for future progress. This contributes to the academic hypothesis that the military alliance will remain stagnant or slowly cease in an actual form. However, intrinsic views held by member states in regard to their autonomy and the requirement of holding on to strong ties with a historical power are important to comprehending why states retain membership. In theory, isolationism and adopting unfamiliar political philosophies are uncondusive to stability, therefore alignment with those of a common history and geopolitical view contribute to why states remain. Signatories of the CST evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of retaining membership in the CSTO and in their particular worldview, the military alliance presents the best opportunities for them to engage in Eurasia as they determine in their best interests.

Current Objectives and Future Endeavors

The CSTO is often considered to have a “problematic present and obscure future” (Khalatyan, 2017) and struggles to shirk the label as a paper tiger in the Eurasian space. Such views linger due to the previously discussed disparate positions and lack of coordination within the organization. Nevertheless, the CSTO accomplishes various forms of cooperation across its zone of responsibility and recognizes areas of future collaboration. The military alliance seeks to expand its defensive capabilities and transition into a relevant organization in the face of modern security threats. As a result, a multifaceted future outlook materializes: defending the post-Soviet space — primarily Central Asia— from traditional external threats; managing elements of contemporary warfighting; and human security considerations, such as transnational crime and border security. The CSTO must somehow encourage dialogue and teamwork to successfully fulfil this broad understanding of security. Areas of current and intended cooperation are extensive, however they can be grouped according to traditional security threats, peacekeeping and crisis situations, education and information sharing.

i: Traditional Security Threats

Large scale and multinational military exercises are the public face of the CSTO. Events like *Boyevoye Bratstvo* (Combat Brotherhood) united the armed forces of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan in month-long drills formatted to defend Central Asian interests in the case of infringements on regional stability. Security is sought in the regard to air defense and anti-aircraft installations too. Military transport assets from Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia united in the *Vozdushnyy most* (Air Bridge) training operation in 2018 as Part of the Collective Aviation Forces. A unified system of Collective Air Defense remains elusive though in 2012, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan jointly held the *Chistoye Nebo* (Clear Sky) exercises that focused on the interception of cruise missiles.

Critics contend that these exercises provide little use value as the CSTO is reluctant to engage in any sort of hot conflict in the region. Shakhanova states that Eurasian alliance acts more as a military training center rather than a tangible instrument of security, since its activation of its mission remains largely absent (49). On the other hand, military drills composed of member states offer mutual benefits. Firstly, they provide experience in managing diverse multinational units even if in the context of an artificial theater of war and secondly, they train member armies to provide their own security internally. This could subsequently negate the mistrust of asking for outside help during a crisis and coincides with Russia’s wish to relinquish some duties as the regional watchdog.

The CSTO established frameworks in regard to peacekeeping and crisis reaction management. Member states contribute armed forces, police and civilian personnel to administer a wide range of tasks ranging from monitoring ceasefire agreements to allocation of humanitarian aid. It seeks to act under the auspices of a United Nations (UN) mandate and consequently, the UN highly praises the professionalism and skills primed within CSTO forces (Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, 2018). Large-scale peacekeeping centered exercises, such as *Nerushimoye bratstvo* (Indestructible Brother) combine military might of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan, with police forces and emergency management personnel.

Disagreements within the CSTO contribute to the scenario that the collective forces are ready to engage in sanctioned operations, but consequently have not. This is especially apparent in

the alliance's reaction to send peacekeepers as part of the Russian intervention in the Syrian Civil War (Kucera, 2017). It is yet another case where the Eurasian military alliance encouraged sophisticated military skills internally without the opportunity to apply them externally.

Another body with a similar untested reputation is the CSTO's Collective Rapid Reaction Forces (CRRF) or *Kollektivnyye sily operativnogo reagirovaniya* (KSOR), established in 2009. On paper, the responsibilities of the CRRF are broad. On the one hand, they are tasked with neutralizing traditional security threats, such as the application of force to stall the further development of a conflict. Concurrently, they are trained to engage in broader security measures such as counterterrorism operations, territorial integrity monitoring, and activities combatting transnational organized crime (CSTO, 2019b). Their training exercises are labelled *Vzaimodeystviye* (Interaction) and are composed of elite military units. For instance, at one such drill, the Russian airborne forces, Belarusian special operators, Kazakh airmobile forces were joined by operational teams from Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan (CSTO, 2016). Central Asian insecurities result in their own regional exercises composed solely of applicable forces under the moniker of *Rubezh* (Frontier). It is within the purposes of these niche exercises that the most successful operations of the CSTO can be identified.

ii: Expanding Securitization

The Eurasian military alliance achieves perceptible accomplishments in regard to non-traditional security threats, such as modern counterterrorism operations, transnational crime, border security and information technology. These particular issues are especially pressing for the Central Asian republics, therefore the CSTO's attention is appropriately focused on that sphere. Specialized projects and operations often overlap in their objectives since modern regional security threats are often connected to other transgressions. Key aspects of each campaign, such as collective agreement on purpose, unity and international involvement demonstrate that the CSTO actively contributes to the security nexus in the post-Soviet space.

Traditional military exercises provide actionable training in large-scale counterterror operations, however cooperation between concerned intelligence agencies and law enforcement remains vital as well. The Central Asian republics are especially vulnerable to both domestic terrorism and their linked to external networks, as many citizens across the region became foreign fighters for the Islamic State. Therefore, CSTO leadership forwarded the initiative for Operation *Nayemnik* (Mercenary) in 2017. All CSTO member states are anticipated to act in unison to destroy terrorist bases and recruitment centers, based upon collective information sharing, provided by policing and intelligence expertise (TASS, 2019). It is expected that the efficacy of terrorist organizations in the CAR will be significantly reduced and subsequently, reduce the possibilities of foreign extremists emerging from the region.

The multi-stage international anti-narcotics operation *Kanal* (Channel) remains the most recognizable example of CSTO success. It presents all the qualities of what is capable through alliances within the organization and through international partnerships. All member states contribute law enforcement resources as well as engage in partnerships with counterparts in Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and China. It is undoubtedly a large scale regional project. As further legitimization of these efforts, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNDOC) retains observer status in *Kanal*. In totality, since its institution, the CSTO operation is reported to have intercepted 360 tons of narcotics as well as illegal weapons. The UNDOC considers *Kanal* to be an important instrument to counter transcontinental narcotics trafficking as it has 'made significant inroads into blocking illegal drug

smuggling from Afghanistan to Europe' (UNODC 2018).

In the realm of border security, Operation *Nelegal* (Illegal) touches on the obligations of the prior two collective actions, but include illegal migration as well. It is typical that non-sanctioned border transgressions result in additional offences. *Nelegal* combines the actionable law enforcement and military resources of the CSTO with the CIS Anti-Terror Center, the Council of Heads of Financial Intelligence Units and the Coordination Service of the Council of Commanders of the Border Troops (CSTO, 2019c). By way of this cooperation, *Nelegal* resulted in substantial criminal cases related to narcotics trafficking, illegal border crossings and at least 30 instances of crimes linked to terrorism and extremism (CSTO, 2019c). The successes of the last installment of the operation means that it will continue for yet another year and as a result, maintains the regional importance of the CSTO at the forefront.

A current area of involvement and one for future development is information security. Layers of law enforcement and intelligence agencies across member states provide pertinent localized intelligence that is beneficial for the Eurasian alliance as a whole. In 2016, the CSTO agreed to the establishment of a Crisis Response Center as a means to exchange intelligence and facilitate real time decisions within the membership. As it currently stands, the project has not achieved functionality, however recent decisions over its implementation and regulations denote it remains on the agenda (CSTO, 2019a). Creation of the Response Center coincides with the CSTO's sponsorship of the Center of Modern Technology based at Moscow State University, and its goal to train information security specialists (Weitz, 12). As for operations in cyberspace, PROXY fulfills that purpose (CSTO, 2019d). Its focus on terrorist, extremist, transnational organized crime and politically provocative entities on the Internet demonstrates an acknowledgement that the concept of securitization involves intangible risk that have the ability to materialize into actionable threats.

The combination of traditional security threats and contemporary issues results in the CSTO's development as a multifunction security structure of the new type (Nikitin 2014, 4). It does not act solely as an intergovernmental military alliance but rather, it includes aspects more attuned to homeland security threats, such as activities of transnational criminal organizations and border security. The CST member states identify the promotion not only of military technical developments as important going forward, but honing information security skills as well. As a consequence, the CSTO has an extremely broad range of security interests geographically and organizationally. The current condition of the CSTO in which disparate positions stifle the cohesive development of the organization and a broad security agenda contributes to the supposition of a problematic present and obscure future. Nonetheless, official statements in areas of working together — especially those with past successes — demonstrate a willingness to engage and thus, many projects to ensure the CSTO's regional relevancy.

In conclusion, though the CSTO has been labelled as an alliance that lacks purpose, direction and unity, it still provides appreciable aid in the realm of Eurasian security. It provides a unique opportunity for former Soviet states to engage in a military alliance that fulfills their particular needs for defensive regionalism. As a result, member states typically remain to ensure cordial relations with Russia and to augment their own national security frameworks. A focus on the CSTO's limits, slow progress and lack of international recognition dismisses its activities, such as valuable military training, law enforcement connectivity and future information sharing, that are contemporarily apparent. Disputes between member states will continue as they would if they were in the scope of bilateral relations, however the CSTO will remain a part of regional securitization discussions in the near future, even if it remains restricted in its current form.

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