

The Collective Security Treaty Organization Before and After the Ukraine War: Some Implications for the South Caucasus

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Until recently, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) was a marginal actor in responding to major security crises in the former Soviet space. Despite receiving multiple requests for support from member governments, the CSTO did not use these opportunities to send military forces under its auspices, reflecting Russia's preference to employ other means for managing these crises. The members resisted proposals to undertake major roles during the conflicts and crises in Afghanistan, Syria, and Kyrgyzstan. They also declined to intervene in the fighting between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Furthermore, the article particularly highlights that the CSTO members rejected repeated Armenian demands for the organization's support in its conflicts with non-CSTO member Azerbaijan. The CSTO did break with precedent when it sent peacekeeping forces to Kazakhstan in January 2022 to assist the government to suppress violent domestic disturbances, but this intervention, supported by all the member governments, occurred due to a unique set of circumstance that may not soon recur. This paper also argues that despite the speculation abounds about a possible CSTO role in the Ukraine War, thus far, the organization has remained disengaged from the conflict, which Russia is waging on its own without foreign military assistance.

Keywords: CSTO, Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Ukraine



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Introduction

The South Caucasus lacks a holistic regional security architecture. Despite concerns about Moscow’s influence in the region, NATO and the EU have also curtailed their partnership programmes in the region. Only Armenia belongs to the CSTO, while Azerbaijan and Georgia have distanced themselves from such Moscow-dominated structures, which also include the Eurasian Economic Union. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has only recently engaged in the region. For the next few years, the international politics of the South Caucasus will remain dominated by bilateral and trilateral initiatives involving one or two of the South Caucasus republics with another country. For example, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey have attained considerable economic and security cooperation, especially in the energy and transportation sectors, thereby enhancing their collective autonomy, prosperity, and security.¹ Even so, Russia’s regional military pre-eminence ensures that Moscow can constrain the influence of these alignments and other

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multilateral structures while manipulating many potential instruments to advance its interests in the region. Though the CSTO is an available tool, Russia typically prefers to employ the unilateral means that have been unfortunately highly visible in the Kremlin’s recent efforts to suppress Ukraine.

This article proceeds as follows. The first section reviews the history and structure of the CSTO. The Organization has developed substantially during

the past two decades, but remains dominated by Russia, which is the most militarily capable member and provides the greatest defence contribution. Rather than resolve tensions between CSTO members, Moscow has seemed to prefer to exploit them to advance its own interests. Partly for this reason, the second section notes how the CSTO has repeatedly eschewed direct involvement in conflicts within and between its members. Of note, despite Armenia’s close ties with Russia and strong commitment to the CSTO, the other members have declined to support Armenia’s territorial claims regarding Azerbaijan’s territory. The next section discusses how the CSTO broke with precedent in January 2022 and deployed military forces in Kazakhstan to help

¹ Weitz, R. “Trilateral Cooperation between Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Georgia: A View from America”, *Baku Dialogues*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Spring 2021), 124–136.

suppress domestic violence, but adds that it is unclear if the CSTO will send military forces to support other member governments facing internal unrest. The final section reviews discussions about the CSTO playing some role in Ukraine, perhaps in enforcing a peace settlement in the Donbas, but emphasizes how the member governments have not backed such proposals.

Background

In October 2002, several former Soviet republics signed a Charter creating the Collective Security Treaty Organization.² The Organization's purpose was to build on the mutual defence pledges contained in the Collective Security Treaty, signed in Tashkent in May 1992, to foster more institutionalized military cooperation.³ The CSTO's full members are Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Russia. Uzbekistan was a member for a few years, from 1994–1999 and 2006–2012, but was not very active even then.

The CSTO has developed several permanent decision-making and advisory bodies. The Collective Security Council, comprising the heads of member states, is the highest decision-making body. The Permanent Council, supported by the organization's secretariat, coordinates CSTO activities between sessions of the Collective Security Council. It is led by the CSTO Secretary General who, during a three-year term, is the organization's highest administrative official. The major inter-ministerial bodies are the Council of Ministers of Defence, the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, and the Committee of Secretaries of Security Councils. The CSTO joint staff, located in Moscow, supports the main CSTO Collective Forces, which includes the Russia-Armenia and Russia-Belarus groups of forces, whose area of responsibility are, respectively, the Caucasus and East European regions. The Collective Rapid Deployment Force in the Central Asian region, comprising some 5,000 troops, has lead responsibility for the southern area.⁴

2 Kremlin.ru, *Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*, October 6, 2002, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/3506> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

3 Odkb-csto.org, *Collective Security Treaty*, May 15, 1992, available at: https://en.odkb-csto.org/documents/documents/dogovor_o_kollektivnoy_bezopasnosti/ (accessed: June 10, 2022).

4 Odkb-csto.org, *From the Treaty to the Organization*, Collective Security Treaty Organization, 2022, available at: <https://en.odkb-csto.org/25years/> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

In practice, the CSTO remained essentially a paper shell in its first decade. Its original military purpose was to counter external aggression against its members by mobilizing national forces under joint command, but no such WWII-style collective defence scenario arose. Instead, internal instability, transnational threats, and other lower-level challenges have represented the main issues for members' security. The CSTO spent its second decade strengthening its capacity to respond to such lower-level transnational threats by enhancing its training, doctrine, and exercises for peacekeeping, counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, emergency response, and countering narcotics trafficking.⁵ In particular, in 2009, the Organization formed its Collective Rapid Reaction Force, consisting mostly of elite units kept on a higher state of readiness than most other units.⁶ Further, the CSTO established a Crisis Response Center to share data regarding urgent threats.⁷ It also launched 'Operation Proxy', in which the intelligence organizations of the CSTO states cooperated against non-state cyber threats, and 'Operation Nelegal' to counter illegal migration.

The CSTO has developed formal ties with the United Nations (UN), but NATO has rejected offers of cooperation. The United States and other NATO members have been concerned that such collaboration would help legitimize Moscow's predominant role in the former Soviet space. The Russian Federation has always been the most important and influential CSTO member. The Russian military provides the most combat forces to the CSTO units and exercises. Additionally, leading CSTO command structures are either based in Moscow or led by Russian citizens. Furthermore, only Russia possesses the foreign military bases within the territories of some of its CSTO allies and the robust power projection capabilities required to render immediate military assistance to other member states. To make the CSTO attractive to partners, Russia has provided personnel from other members with

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⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Odkb-csto.org, *The Collective Rapid Reaction Force, the CSTO RRF, turns 10 years old*, February 4, 2019, available at: https://en.odkb-csto.org/news/news_odkb/reagirovanie2019/#loaded (accessed: June 10, 2022).

⁷ Rferl.org, *CSTO Leaders Agree To Set Up Crisis Response Center*, October 14, 2016, available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/csto-summit-crisis-response-center-armenia-russia-kazakhstan/28053760.html> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

subsidized education and training opportunities at Russian military institutions. Moscow also subsidizes other CSTO members' purchases of Russian weapons.

Even so, the other member states have declined to back some of Russia's most controversial national security policies, including Russia's military occupation of Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Tskhinvali) regions in 2008, Moscow's annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014, and Russia's subsequent military intervention in the eastern parts of Ukraine. One reason for other members' aversion to fully following Moscow's line is that, though the issue of territorial conflicts among member states falls outside the Organization's mandate and CSTO mediation in a dispute can occur only with the explicit consent of the conflicting parties, Moscow has repeatedly manipulated tensions among former Soviet republics to exert influence over them. For example, Russia has long been Armenia's main weapons supplier but also sold some military equipment to Azerbaijan in order to leverage the tensions between these two countries.

CSTO constrained before 2022

Though CSTO governments agree on the Organization's responsibility to defend members from external dangers, CSTO leaders and scholars of the organization have constantly debated whether the CSTO can, like the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact, render emergency assistance to member states threatened by internal matters. Article 5 of the CSTO's Charter requires "non-interference in matters falling within the national jurisdiction of the member States."⁸ Yet, leaders of the CSTO and its member governments have repeatedly referenced concerns about threats within member countries warranting a CSTO role due to their having regional security implications.⁹ In particular, representatives of Russia have constantly warned about the danger of

Nonetheless, Russia has often preferred to manage these crisis issues through direct engagement with the countries in conflict, thus minimizing the role of other states and institutions, including the CSTO and its members.

8 Kremlin.ru, *Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization*, October 6, 2002, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/3506> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

9 Weitz, R. "Assessing the Collective Security Treaty Organization: Capabilities and Vulnerabilities", Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute of the US Army War College, 2018, available at: <https://publications.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/3661.pdf> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

Western-backed ‘colour revolutions’, under the guise of promoting democracy, to the security of CSTO governments.¹⁰ Nonetheless, Russia has often preferred to manage these crisis issues through direct engagement with the countries in conflict, thus minimizing the role of other states and institutions, including the CSTO and its members. Before the January 2022 riots in Kazakhstan, the CSTO repeatedly declined potential opportunities to neutralize conflicts within member countries, such as the periodic forceful changes of government in Kyrgyzstan, or between members, such as the border conflict between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

In June 2010, the Organization rejected a Kyrgyz government request that the CSTO send military police to help end the bloody riots between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan, which led tens of thousands of ethnic Uzbeks to flee into Uzbekistan and elevated the danger of military intervention by Uzbekistan, after the other members and the CSTO leadership affirmed that the Organization did not have a legal basis to dispatch peacekeepers to suppress such an internal conflict.¹¹ Then Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev, stated that, “only in the case of a foreign intrusion and an attempt to externally seize power can we state that there is an attack against the CSTO.”¹² Importantly, Uzbekistan’s then President, Islam Karimov, who opposed CSTO or Russian intervention in the Kyrgyz situation, made clear that the military forces of Uzbekistan would refrain from intervening to protect ethnic Uzbeks on Kyrgyzstan territory.¹³ When Kyrgyzstan experienced political riots again in October 2020, leading to the forced resignation

10 The Moscow Times, *Russia-Led Military Bloc Will Not Allow ‘Color Revolutions’ in Post-Soviet Countries – Putin*, January 10, 2022, available at: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/01/10/russia-led-military-bloc-will-not-allow-color-revolutions-in-post-soviet-countries-putin-a76000> (accessed: June 10, 2022); Buss, K. “Russia Stirs Fear of Color Revolutions”, *International Republican Institute*, September 9, 2019, available at: <https://www.iri.org/news/russia-stirs-fear-of-color-revolutions/> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

11 Dubnov, A. “Tashkent Goes, Problems Stay”, *Russia in Global Affairs*, July 10, 2012, available at: <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/tashkent-goes-problems-stay/> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

12 Grzegorzczuk, M. “What is the CSTO? And what exactly is it doing in Kazakhstan?”, *Emerging Europe*, January 7, 2022, available at: <https://emerging-europe.com/news/what-exactly-is-the-cstos-role-in-kazakhstan/> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

13 Trenin, D. “CSTO: Ripe for Reform?”, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, August 25, 2010, available at: <https://carnegiemoscow.org/2010/08/25/csto-ripe-for-reform-pub-41469> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

of President Sooronbay Jeenbekov, CSTO Press Secretary Vladimir Zaynetdinov initially characterized the events as a domestic affair, expressing confidence that Kyrgyzstan could resolve its problems.¹⁴ Though CSTO Secretary General Stanislav Zas later offered to mediate between the factions, he was ignored.¹⁵

The CSTO has also not had a role in Russia's war in Syria, despite instances of Russian officials suggesting that the CSTO participate in the conflict. In September 2013, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that "The CSTO cannot ignore as serious an issue as the Syrian conflict ... The issue of terrorism 'spilling over' from one country into another is very real and can affect the interests of any of our countries."¹⁶ In the summer of 2017, some Russian government officials probed whether some members would dispatch military observers to enforce the de-escalation zones that Russia, Iran, and Turkey had established in Syria. On 22 June 2017, Vladimir Shamanov, the chair of the Defence Committee of the State Duma, said that Russia was negotiating with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to send peacekeeping forces to Syria.¹⁷ Such a deployment could enhance the international legitimacy of the Syrian government and any Moscow-backed Syrian peace accord.¹⁸ Though Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan decided against making such a contribution, Armenia later sent military personnel to Syria, but this contribution, justified on humanitarian grounds to provide demining and medical assistance, occurred outside the CSTO framework.¹⁹

14 Sumaira FH, "Collective Security Treaty Organization Expresses Concerns Over Protests in Kyrgyzstan", *UrduPoint*, October 6, 2020, available at: <https://www.urdupoint.com/en/world/collective-security-treaty-organization-expre-1048945.html> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

15 TRT World, *Military called in to quell violent protests in Kyrgyzstan*, October 11, 2020, available at: <https://www.trtworld.com/asia/military-called-in-to-quell-violent-protests-in-kyrgyzstan-40458> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

16 Kremlin.ru, *Speech at a CSTO Collective Security Council summit meeting in narrow format*, September 23, 2013, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/19270> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

17 Botobekov, U. "Russia wants to use CSTO in Syria", *Modern Diplomacy*, June 27, 2017, available at: <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2017/06/27/russia-wants-to-use-csto-in-syria/> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

18 Kucera, J. "CSTO Ready, But Not Yet Willing, To Send Troops to Syria", *Eurasianet*, December 1, 2017, available at: <https://eurasianet.org/csto-ready-but-not-yet-willing-to-send-troops-to-syria> (accessed: June 10, 2022); Ramani, S. "CSTO Rift Grows Between Moscow And Astana", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, August 6, 2017, available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/qishloq-ovozi-csto-kazakhstan-russia-nazarbaev/28661553.html> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

19 Rferl.org, *Armenia Sends Another Group Of Sappers, Medics To Syria*, June 5, 2019, available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenia-sends-another-group-of-sappers-medics->

Even in Afghanistan, which neighbours several CSTO members and has been a perennial source of regional narcotrafficking and terrorism, the CSTO has eschewed a direct combat role, instead letting NATO assume responsibility for defending the Afghan government. The CSTO merely created a working group on Afghanistan and rendered limited support to the government's counter-narcotics and law-enforcement personnel.²⁰ The CSTO Parliamentary Assembly also granted Afghanistan observer status.²¹ Rather than pursue activities inside Afghanistan, the CSTO has prioritized blocking the flow of Afghan militants, drugs, and weapons into Central Asia through its annual *Kanal* (Channel) operations, which interdicts shipments heading northward from Afghanistan. The CSTO also established a counternarcotics centre and a database of transnational narcotics exporters.²²

The Armenian connection

Armenia has long relied on Russia's patronage and protection. The deep security, economic, and military ties between Armenia and Russia continued even after the former became independent from the Soviet Union and then experienced several changes in government. Most recently, following the so-called 'Velvet Revolution' of 2018, the new prime minister, Nikol Pashinyan, quickly recommitted his country to Moscow-led regional structures such as the Eurasian Economic Union and the CSTO.²³ Since independence, Armenia has signed dozens of bilateral mutual defence and military procurement agreements with Russia. Armenia also hosts thousands of Russian personnel at several military bases and has established a joint group of forces and a united air defence system. In 2010, Moscow and Yerevan extended the

to-syria/29983442.html (accessed: June 10, 2022).

20 Odkb-csto.org, *Partnership and Observation*, available at: <https://en.odkb-csto.org/institute/> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

21 Kazinform, *Afghan and Serbian parliaments acquire observer status at CSTO PA*, April 12, 2013, available at: https://www.inform.kz/en/afghan-and-serbian-parliaments-acquire-observer-status-at-csto-pa_a2549816 (accessed: June 10, 2022).

22 Hamroboyeva, N. "CSTO counternarcotics agencies sets up database of transnational drug dealers", *Asia-Plus*, December 2, 2009, available at: <http://www.asiaplus.tj/en/news/47/59880.htm> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

23 Huseynov, V. and Rzayev, A. "The 'Velvet Revolution' is affecting Armenia's ties with Russia", *EurActiv*, October 23, 2018, available at: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/opinion/the-velvet-revolution-is-affecting-armenias-ties-with-russia/> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

presence of Russia’s military base in Armenia until 2044 in return for almost \$800 million worth of Russian arms supplies.²⁴ As Armenia is the only CSTO member located wholly in the South Caucasus, Russia’s power-projection capabilities benefit from access to its bases. Armenia is a founding member of the CSTO and has remained one of the Organization’s most active members. Armenia held the rotating chair of the Organization in 2007–2008, 2015–2016, and 2021–2022, and has regularly participated in CSTO exercises and meetings. The current Chair of the CSTO’s Permanent Council is an Armenian general, Viktor Biyagov, while this country’s Prime Minister Pashinyan is the Chair of the Collective Security Council.

Nonetheless, Armenians have long complained that the other CSTO members refuse to side with their nominal ally, Armenia, against non-CSTO-member Azerbaijan. Rather than support Armenia’s position, though, the other members, especially Belarus and Kazakhstan, have either backed Azerbaijan or remained neutral. They have maintained that, since the zone of the [now former] conflict lay outside of Armenia’s internationally recognized territory, this zone was not the Organization’s responsibility.²⁵ In 2016, Belarus and Kazakhstan’s objections and boycotts of CSTO sessions forced a one-year delay in former Chief of Joint Staff of Armenia Yuri Khatchaturov’s appointment as CSTO Secretary General. Though Khatchaturov was scheduled to become Chair over a year earlier, according to the principle of alphabetical rotation embedded in the CSTO Charter, he only became CSTO Secretary General in May 2017.²⁶ That same year, the members of the Parliament of Armenia vetoed

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24 O’Rourke, B. “Russia, Armenia Sign Extended Defense Pact”, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, August 20, 2010, available at: https://www.rferl.org/a/Russian_President_Medvedev_To_Visit_Armenia/2131915.html (accessed: June 10, 2022).

25 Chirciu, D. “Russia says defense pact does not apply to Karabakh”, *Anadolu Agency*, October 7, 2020, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/russia-says-defense-pact-does-not-apply-to-karabakh/1999169> (accessed: June 10, 2022); Tariverdiyeva, E. “Envoy: Kazakhstan doesn’t link Karabakh conflict with CSTO,” *Trend*, July 14, 2017, available at: <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/karabakh/2777241.html> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

26 Shirinyan, A. “For Armenia, an Alliance That May Be More Trouble Than It’s Worth,” *Chatham House*, January 24, 2017, available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/armenia-alliance-may-be-more-trouble-it-s-worth> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

Pakistan becoming a CSTO observer due to the Pakistani government's support for Baku's position.²⁷ Additionally, when Belarusian authorities extradited the Russian-Israeli travel blogger, Alexander Lapshin, to Azerbaijan in 2017 for travelling to the latter's occupied territories, some Armenian politicians called for Belarus's expulsion from the CSTO.²⁸ In 2020, Armenia also sought to deprive the government of Afghanistan of its observer status in the CSTO parliamentary assembly for supporting Azerbaijan's recovery of its occupied territories.²⁹

In addition to Russia's refusal to back Armenia's claims to Azerbaijan's internationally recognized territories, another source of tension between Yerevan and Moscow was Russia's sale of arms to non-CSTO member Azerbaijan. Russian officials have not seemed overly concerned by Armenians' concerns about Moscow's ties with Azerbaijan.

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signed a declaration on allied interaction in February 2022, the Azerbaijani government did not make any commitment regarding membership of Moscow-led blocks.

Though the CSTO had been developing conflict-management and peacekeeping structures for over a decade, Russia established an ad-hoc peacekeeping force (with no connection to the CSTO command structures) to deploy in the Karabakh region after the Second Karabakh War following the signing of the 10 November 2020 Statement with Azerbaijan and Armenia. Not only did the CSTO have no role in negotiating or executing the ceasefire, but the 1,960 peacekeeping troops that Russia sent to enforce the agreement also lacked any connection to

27 Kucera, J. "Armenia Nixes Pakistan's Ties with CSTO," *Eurasianet*, November 29, 2016, available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/81476> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

28 Kucera, J. "Armenia Proposes Kicking Belarus Out of CSTO," *Eurasianet*, February 10, 2017, available at: <https://eurasianet.org/armenia-proposes-kicking-belarus-out-csto> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

29 ArmenPress, *Armenia requests CSTO to oust Afghanistan as observer*, October 1, 2020, available at: <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1029829.html> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

CSTO structures. Pashinyan later tried to invoke Article 2 of the CSTO treaty – which enables members to “immediately launch the mechanism of joint consultations” on orchestrating a collective response to threats to a member state – during a May 2021 clash with Azerbaijan in the southern sector of the two countries’ border region. When he raised the matter with Vladimir Putin in a phone call on May 13, however, Putin said the Russian government would deal with the issue through “active mediation efforts and close contacts with Yerevan and Baku, aimed at ensuring stability in the region.”³⁰ Meanwhile, CSTO Secretary General Zas called this situation “a border incident” that did not fall under the CSTO charter’s provisions on collective defence.³¹ At the May 2022 CSTO heads-of-state summit, Pashinyan observed, “Frankly, the CSTO member countries’ response during the 44-Day War of 2020 and the post-war period did not make the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian people very happy”.³²

Kazakhstan: A debatable precedent

Notwithstanding the CSTO’s long history of eschewing controversial military deployments in member states, the Organization made the exceptional decision on 6 January 2022 to accede to the request of Kazakhstan’s President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to send peacekeeping troops to help his government suppress escalating mass violence. What had commenced as a protest against subsidy cuts in the far west of Kazakhstan rapidly snowballed into urban rioters making political demands in the financial capital of Almaty. The member states justified the 6 January decision to dispatch CSTO forces to Kazakhstan that same day by citing the Collective Security Treaty, the CSTO Charter, and the CSTO Agreement on Peacekeeping Activities.³³ The decision

30 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, *Armenia Turns To Russian-Led CSTO Amid Border Standoff With Azerbaijan*, May 14, 2021, available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenia-azerbaijan-putin-troops-border-withdrawal/31254474.html> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

31 Ghazanchyan, S. “CSTO sees situation in the south of Armenia as a “border incident” with Azerbaijan”, *Public Radio of Armenia*, July 3, 2021, available at: <https://en.armradio.am/2021/07/03/the-csto-sees-the-situation-in-the-south-of-armenia-as-a-border-incident-with-azerbaijan/> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

32 Kremlin.ru, *The Kremlin hosted a meeting of the heads of state of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation*, May 16, 2022, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/68418> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

33 Kremlin.ru, *Session of CSTO Collective Security Council*, Collective Security Treaty

The deployment of CSTO peacekeeping forces in Kazakhstan dispelled many perceptions that the Organization was a virtual structure that engaged in exercises and mimicked NATO structures, but failed to engage in actual operations.

was executed surprisingly fast given the likely lack of planning for such a contingency. The Russian armed forces provided rapid transportation for the approximately 2,500-person collective force contributed by all the other members, but mainly by Russia. During their short sojourn, the CSTO forces eschewed direct directly confronting with the protesters and, in accordance with their restricted rules of engagement, instead secured strategic sites such as Almaty Airport, Baikonur Cosmodrome, and power plants. After the local security forces restored order, all CSTO forces left the country by 19 January.³⁴

The deployment of CSTO peacekeeping forces in Kazakhstan dispelled many perceptions that the Organization was a virtual structure that engaged in exercises and mimicked NATO structures, but failed to engage in actual operations. That the Russian forces entered Kazakhstan under the auspices of the CSTO, and refrained from using force against protesters by securing only key sites from potential attacks that never occurred, made it easier for the Kazakh population to swallow the intervention. They might have bristled more from an exclusively Russian intervention given Kazakhs' inferior treatment during the Moscow-led Soviet Union and more recent concerns that some Russians desired to control northern Kazakhstan, where millions of ethnic Russians reside. The Russia-led intervention proved effective at communicating to wavering Kazakh elites that Moscow backed the Tokayev government, leading most of them to join the bandwagon and support Tokayev. That said, the intervention apparently occurred without an explicit Russia-Kazakhstan quid pro quo. Despite the Moscow-led CSTO intervention, Kazakhstan did not follow Moscow's line when Russia invaded Ukraine the following month.

Organization, January 10, 2022, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67568> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

34 Pannier, B. "How Intervention in Kazakhstan Revitalized the Russian-led CSTO", *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, March 7, 2022, available at: <https://www.fpri.org/article/2022/03/how-the-intervention-in-kazakhstan-revitalized-the-russian-led-csto/> (accessed: June 10, 2022); and Samaran, S. "Kazakhstan, January 2022: A Strategic Surprise?", *IRSEM*, March 2022, available at: <https://www.irsem.fr/media/5-publications/nr-irsem-122-samaran-kazakhstan-en.pdf>. (accessed: June 10, 2022).

Impact of the Ukraine War

Azerbaijan's skilfully executed military operation in 2020 and the successful CSTO intervention in Kazakhstan may have misled the Kremlin into thinking that employing force against Ukraine would bring Moscow an easy victory (of course, the operations in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan occurred entirely within those countries' internationally recognized territories, in contrast to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.) The large number of Russian casualties in Ukraine have since led the armed forces of Russia to redeploy Russian soldiers and equipment from foreign bases and deployments to the Ukraine front.³⁵ Even so, there has been no formal Russian government statement of a military drawdown from the Russian bases in CSTO members Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

Before the launch of the Russian attack on Ukraine on 24 February, CSTO Secretary-General Stanislav Zas suggested the possibility that the CSTO could, with the consent of the governments of Russia and Ukraine and with a UN mandate, deploy peacekeepers in the Donbas region.³⁶ Since the fighting began, only Belarus has supported the Russian invasion with military support, allowing Russian forces to use its territory to launch ground and missile attacks. This assistance has been provided within the framework of the Belarus-Russia alliance, rather than through the CSTO.³⁷

That said, the other members also have not withdrawn from the CSTO or suspended all military-industrial cooperation with Russian defence industries; some of them rely heavily on imported parts from CSTO members. Additionally, the government of Russia has thus far not made

35 Demirjian, K. "Russia begins to mobilize military reinforcements for Ukraine as casualties mount, Pentagon says", *The Washington Post*, March 25, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/03/25/russia-reinforcements-georgia-ukraine/> (accessed: June 20, 2022); Kingsley, K., "Russia begins transfer of troops from Syria to Ukraine as Finland signals Nato membership", *The Independent*, May 12, 2022, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-ukraine-war-syria-troops-moved-b2077499.html> (accessed: June 20, 2022).

36 Bohdan, S. "Can Belarus use the Collective Security Treaty Organisation to fend off Moscow's pressure?", *Belarus Digest*, May 26, 2022, available at: <https://belarusdigest.com/story/can-belarus-use-the-collective-security-treaty-organisation-to-fend-off-moscows-pressure/> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

37 Kremlin.ru, *The Kremlin hosted a meeting of the heads of state of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation*, May 16, 2022, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/68418> (accessed: June 10, 2022).

One reason for the CSTO's absence from the current war may be that Moscow insists on calling its attack on Ukraine a 'special military operation', a condition the CSTO Charter does not provide for.

a formal call for CSTO involvement in the Ukraine War. That possibility was notably not discussed when the CSTO leaders met in May 2022 to celebrate the Organization's 20th anniversary, though Putin did give the other heads of state a briefing on the war.³⁸ One reason for the CSTO's absence from the current war may be that Moscow insists on calling its attack on Ukraine a 'special military operation', a condition the

CSTO Charter does not provide for. The Ukrainian government would also not welcome a role for the CSTO since Moscow's leading role in the institution, the organization's ties to Russia's ally Belarus, and Ukraine's non-membership status mean that even CSTO 'peacekeepers' would be perceived as inherently biased in Moscow's favour. Furthermore, former CSTO Secretary General Nikolai Bordyuzha acknowledged that the required consensus among all the member governments for CSTO intervention is presently lacking.³⁹ Nonetheless, in June 2022, Andrey Kartapolov, Chairman of the State Duma Committee on Defence, suggested that CSTO peacekeepers might be needed in the Russian-occupied parts of eastern Ukraine after the fighting ends, as Russia would not permit the deployment of forces from NATO countries there.⁴⁰

Conclusion

The CSTO's intervention in Kazakhstan and Russia's attack on Ukraine have fuelled speculation about the organization's future role. Analysts no longer can dismiss the CSTO given its recent activities. Following the operation in Kazakhstan, the CSTO launched a task force to examine lessons learned from this 'baptism of fire' – the first deployment of CSTO forces in an actual operation – for improving the organization's effectiveness.⁴¹ Though such work may have been disrupted by the

38 Kommersant, *Gensek ODKB: vopros uchastiya organizatsii v voyennoy operatsii na Ukraine ne obsuzhdalsya v khode sammita*, May 16, 2022, available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5355327> (accessed: June 13, 2022).

39 Solovyov, V. "Ukraina ni pri chem: Kak v ODKB obyasnili izmeneniya v soglasenii o mirotvorcheskoy deyatel'nosti organizatsii", *Kommersant*, March 4, 2022, available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5240328> (accessed: June 13, 2022).

40 Interfax, *V Dume sochli, chto mirotvortsy ODKB mogut ponadobitsya na Ukraine lish po okonchaniy spetsoperatsii*, June 6, 2022, available at: <https://www.interfax.ru/world/844876> (accessed: June 13, 2022).

41 Krivosheev, K., Konstantinov, A., Mgdesyanyan, A. and Karabekov, K. "Kollektivnaya

Ukraine war, at some point Russia may return to pushing the items outlined in Putin's November 2019 statement regarding Moscow's objectives for its 2020 CSTO presidency, which included enhancing the CSTO's counterterrorism and counternarcotics capabilities, streamlining its organizational mechanisms, strengthening foreign-policy coordination, and elevating the organization's combat training and peacekeeping potential.⁴² The COVID-19 pandemic, along with the political and social crises in several member states, thwarted the realization of many of these goals during the 2019–2020 Russian presidency.

The CSTO was designed to defend its members from a traditional external military attack, but such a scenario has yet to arise. Though NATO and China have substantial military power, neither is going to invade a CSTO member the way that Germany attacked Poland and France in World War II. One reason the CSTO did not intervene in the wars between Armenia and Azerbaijan is that the fighting was confined to Azerbaijan's soil in conflicts that violated the internationally recognized borders of Azerbaijan. If a CSTO member ever genuinely faced a foreign military intervention, the CSTO could mobilize against the aggression, but Moscow would have to support (and presumably orchestrate) that decision. Without the Russian military, the CSTO lacks the power projection capabilities to execute such a mission. The Russian government also can, and generally does, employ substantial military power independently of the CSTO even in cases involving another member of that organization. The CSTO peacekeeping intervention in Kazakhstan offers a more plausible future scenario. As the CSTO governments justified the peacekeeping deployment by blaming the chaos in Kazakhstan on foreign terrorists, the intervention has not formally legitimized the CSTO's right to intervene within a member country to counter internal threats. But other governments could appeal for similar support to repress internal disorder by claiming that foreign terrorists or state sponsors were behind the incidents. Again, though, Moscow would have to support such a decision or the CSTO would lack the means to execute it.

bezopasnost krepchayet: Lidery stran ODKB otprazdnovali v Moskve dva yubileya", *Kommersant*, May 16, 2022, available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5355404> (accessed: June 11, 2022).

42 Kremlin.ru, *CSTO summit*, November 28, 2019, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/62146> (accessed: June 10, 2022).