

# Briefing Memo

## **Recent Trends in Russia's Military Cooperation: The Case of the Collective Security Treaty Organization**

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### **Introduction**

The integration of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is one of the priorities in Russian foreign policy. For Russia, strengthening military cooperation with other CIS countries through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)—a framework comprised of six CIS countries (Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan)—is at the core of promoting CIS integration. For example, strengthening Russia's military cooperation under the CSTO framework is set out as a military policy priority in the existing National Security Strategy and military doctrine.

The CSTO, established in September 2003 based on the Collective Security Treaty of May 1992, had hardly received any attention, with the exception of the various joint exercises held annually. Recent years, however, have seen various developments to strengthen military cooperation under the Russia-led CSTO framework. The first is the October 2016 adoption of the basic document on military cooperation, the "CSTO Collective Security Strategy until 2025" ("Collective Security Strategy"). The second is Russia's moves to strengthen the military component of the CSTO. The third is attempts to conduct multiple exercises sequentially under a framework of large-scale exercise. And the fourth is ongoing moves to strengthen the joint air defense system. Underlying such moves has been a threat perception by Russia and other CSTO member countries over the serious security situation surrounding the CSTO. In short, Russia's moves to strengthen military cooperation under the CSTO have been driven by several factors, including tension with NATO in Europe, threat of extremism and terrorism in the Caucasus and Central Asian regions, and the growing so-called "threat from the South." This article distills the recent developments in the CSTO and briefly touches upon the CSTO's outlook.

### **1. What is the Military Component of the CSTO?**

Although the Collective Security Treaty that forms the basis of the CSTO uses the term "collective security," it is not a mechanism for member states to exercise any sanctions when one of the member states disrupts order. Collective security in this Treaty is a mechanism for jointly eliminating menace to safety, territorial integrity, and sovereignty of member states (Article 2 of the Treaty). Furthermore, as demonstrated by the Treaty's provision that an aggression against one of the

member states by a nation or nation group would be considered aggression to all member states (Article 4 of the Treaty), the Treaty is an alliance treaty that envisages collective defense. Despite forming alliance relations, it cannot be denied that the CSTO activities are always Russia-led due to the significant gap in military capabilities between Russia and other member states.

The CSTO's zone of responsibility includes three strategic fronts: Europe; the Caucasus; and Central Asia. Regional joint forces for each of the regions had existed from before the CSTO's establishment. They are the: Eastern European Region Russia-Belarus Joint Force; Caucasus Region Russia-Armenia Joint Force; and Central Asian Region Joint Force. The latter Central Asian Region Joint Force is comprised of Russia and three Central Asian countries and formed the Collective Rapid Reaction Forces in May 2001.

Along with these forces, it became essential to create and strengthen a military framework for the whole CSTO. In January 2004, the CSTO Joint Staff was established in Moscow. In February 2009, Belarus and Armenia were added to the Collective Rapid Reaction Forces to form the Collective Operational Reaction Forces. The Collective Operational Reaction Forces aims to coordinate the operations of the aforementioned three regional joint forces under a joint command and strengthen their collaboration. Additionally, as another key military framework, the Collective Peacekeeping Forces was established based on an October 2007 agreement. Whereas the Collective Operational Reaction Forces aims to effectively address the range of threats to member states, the Collective Peacekeeping Forces was created to conduct peacekeeping operations in cooperation with the United Nations (UN).

## **2. Adoption of the Collective Security Strategy**

In October 2016, the CSTO Collective Security Council (summit meeting) adopted the Collective Security Strategy. The Strategy stipulates the main threats to the CSTO and sets out priorities for strengthening collective security in the next decade. The main threats include increases in international terrorism, global implementation of missile defense systems, NATO's moves to expand to the border areas of CSTO countries, and the increasing likelihood of conflicts in the CSTO's zone of responsibility. According to Colonel General Anatoly Sidorov, Chief of the CSTO Joint Staff, CSTO member states face a serious direct threat from the intensification of the operations of extremist armed forces, which in turn could lead to an outbreak of terrorist attacks or conflicts in Afghanistan that adjoins the Central Asian region. Chief Sidorov explains that the Collective Security Strategy prescribes the primary direction in which to develop the CSTO military component to effectively deal with such threats. The primary direction in which to develop the military component as outlined in the Strategy is as follows:

- 1) Ensure sufficient military capabilities in the CSTO's collective security system;
- 2) Increase the mobilizing ability of CSTO member states;
- 3) Reach agreements on the facilities for operations in CSTO member territories for collective

security;

- 4) Implement measures for the operations and combat preparations of command organizations, establish forces and means for collective security system, and improve system for fostering military senior personnel and experts;
- 5) Strengthen military technology cooperation and military economic cooperation among CSTO member states;
- 6) Establish and introduce unified procurement requests for modern equipment for CSTO collective security forces;
- 7) Create system for ensuring repairs of equipment essential for equipment reserves in the territory of CSTO member states; and
- 8) Ensure terms for operational transfers of products for military purposes provided by CSTO member states for CSTO forces.

Furthermore, the Collective Security Strategy prescribes the establishment of the CSTO Crisis Response Center for coordinating responses to the urgent issues facing the CSTO. The Center is located in the building of the CSTO Joint Staff in Moscow. Its role is to provide various information and analysis to CSTO agencies around the clock and in real time, and thereby, systematically support the CSTO's decision-making at the highest level.

### **3. Moves to Strengthen the CSTO's Military Component**

Coinciding with the adoption of the Collective Security Strategy, the defense ministers of the CSTO member states agreed upon a plan for further developing the CSTO military component. It includes improving the system of fostering senior military personnel under the CSTO framework, standardizing equipment, and clarifying force formations and personnel. According to the explanation of Chief Sidorov of the CSTO Joint Staff, the plan sets out, for example: 1) improving the organization, formation, and procurement of forces tailored to real threats; 2) the need for pursuing high adaptability, versatility, and mobility of forces; and 3) force formations for increasing the effectiveness of joint exercises. At the Collective Security Council meeting held in October 2016, the Council sought to clarify the duties and role of the Joint Staff in the preparations for and adoption of decisions on the use of CSTO forces, in the formation of the forces, and in the various stages of the operations.

An important duty of CSTO forces is to conduct operations in a timely manner to support militaries anywhere in the member states. To this end, the CSTO Collective Air Force was already established in 2014, and it was prescribed that its main duty is to smoothly transport forces and supplies to the areas of their use. In this connection, the parties are also considering creating a system for supplying unified supplies and equipment of CSTO forces for supplying supplies and equipment essential for the operations of CSTO forces.

According to Lieutenant General Alexander Vyaznikov, Deputy Commander of the Russian Airborne Force in charge of the operational reaction forces, the Collective Operational Reaction Forces includes not only highly mobile units of the militaries of CSTO member states but also the units of their internal, security, special operations, and emergency components. Accordingly, strengthening the Collective Operational Reaction Forces involves not only the military but also various organs of military authorities. At its meeting in November 2017, the Collective Security Council adopted a decision on the formation of the Special Operations Forces of the Collective Operational Reaction Forces.

There have also been moves to strengthen the regional joint forces of the CSTO. They include the strengthening of the Caucasus Region Russia-Armenia joint forces into combined forces. An agreement on creating the Russia-Armenia combined forces was signed in November 2016. The forces consists of forces stationed at the 102nd Russian military base in Armenia and Armenia's 4th Army Corps. The command for the combined forces is located on the premises of the Armenian military forces, and the commander is appointed by the President of Armenia in consultation with the President of Russia. The forces is under the command of the Armenian Chief of the General Staff during peacetime and under the command of the Russian Commander of the Southern Military District during wartime. The prescribed duties of the combined forces include defending the borders of the two countries, protecting critical facilities, and repelling enemy aggression.

#### **4. Transformation of Joint Exercises**

A variety of joint exercises has been conducted for strengthening military cooperation under the CSTO framework. They include the joint exercise "Vzaimodeystviye (Interaction)" of the Collective Operational Reaction Forces, the joint exercise "Nerushimoe Bratstvo (Unbreakable Brotherhood)" of the Collective Peacekeeping Forces, the joint exercise "Rubezh (Frontier)" of the Collective Rapid Reaction Forces, and the joint exercise "Poisk (Search)" of the Reconnaissance and Surveillance Forces. These exercises, however, have not necessarily been conducted based on adequate collaboration.

At the CSTO defense ministers' meeting in June 2017, the ministers discussed the issue of strengthening military cooperation from the latter half of 2017 to the first half of 2018, and in particular, examined the issue of implementing the above exercises based on a single plan in accordance with common operational and strategic circumstances. Following this examination, the large-scale operation and strategic exercise "Boyevoye Bratstvo (Combat Brotherhood) 2017" was carried out from October to November 2017, which mobilized 12,000 personnel, approximately 1,500 vehicles, and approximately 90 aircraft. This exercise was conducted in three phases to rehearse conflict settlement, peacekeeping operations, and combat procedures in mountainous and wild areas. In phase 1, the "Poisk 2017" and "Vzaimodeystviye 2017" exercises for conflict settlement were conducted at multiple training grounds in Armenia and Russia's Southern Military

District. In phase 2, the “Nerushimoe Bratstvo 2017” exercise based on a scenario of post-conflict peacekeeping operation was conducted at multiple training grounds in Kazakhstan. In phase 3, the final stage, a concluding exercise was conducted at a training ground in Tajikistan. Tajikistan is at high risk for a real conflict breaking out as a result of an unstable situation in adjacent Afghanistan, and such circumstances factored into the selection of Tajikistan as the location for the final stage exercise. According to Russian reports, the scenario of the Nerushimoe Bratstvo exercise envisioned participation in UN peacekeeping operations outside the territory of CSTO member states. Underlying this, for example, was the announcement by the CSTO’s senior personnel, such as CSTO Deputy Secretary General Valery Semerikov, that the CSTO Peacekeeping Forces stands ready to participate in peacekeeping operations in eastern Ukraine if the UN decides to carry out such operations. It suggests Russia’s intention to secure influence in post-conflict dispute resolution outside its country, while demonstrating a cooperative posture towards the UN.

## **5. Strengthening of the Joint Air Defense System**

According to retired Colonel General Viktor Bondarev, former Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Aerospace Forces, the joint air defense system has long continued and functioned effectively as a component of the CSTO military cooperation. The joint air defense system was established based on the Agreement on the Creation of a Joint Air Defense System for the CIS States of February 1995. Its current members are the six CSTO member states and Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan was a party to the Collective Security Treaty from its inception but withdrew from the Treaty in 1999. It later rejoined the CSTO in 2006 but terminated its membership in the CSTO in 2012. Although Uzbekistan has had a complex relationship with the Russia-led multilateral framework, it has continued to participate in the joint air defense system. Though Uzbekistan is a member, the joint air defense system has been Russia-led, with the main duty being to ensure air and space defense of ally states. That the system is Russia-led is also evident from the fact that the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Aerospace Forces serves as Chair of the Air Defense Coordination Committee of the CIS Defense Ministers’ Council, which coordinates the operations of the joint air defense system. As part of the system’s drills, the joint exercise “Boyevoye Sodruchestvo (Combat Cooperation)” has been conducted since 1995, seeking to improve system command and enhance the capabilities of monitoring and surveillance forces. Furthermore, in December 2015, the CIS Defense Ministers’ Council adopted a decision on a plan for mutual coordination of the joint air defense system, which prescribed the composition of the forces and equipment of the joint air defense system. This has been followed by moves to create regional unified air defense systems between Russia and other member states bilaterally, in order to strengthen cooperation and the organization of the joint air defense system and advance the integration and strengthening of the joint system as a whole. First, an agreement to establish the Russia-Belarus regional integrated air defense system was signed in February 2009, and the system was established in April 2016. An agreement to establish the

Russia-Kazakhstan regional unified air defense system was signed in January 2013, and work has been under way to establish the system, including holding an experts' meeting between their defense ministries in December 2016 for the materialization of the agreement. An agreement to establish the Russia-Armenia regional unified air defense system was signed in December 2015, and preparations are under way to materialize the agreement. Moreover, similar draft agreements to establish regional unified air defense systems are being considered between Russia and Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, respectively. Such moves to strengthen the joint air defense systems between Russia and CSTO member states have encouraged the strengthening of military technology cooperation between Russia and member states, and Russia has expressed an intention to supply these countries with equipment such as radar system, surface-to-air missile system, and aircraft. The pursuit of such an approach reflects Russia's intention to transform the joint air defense system to find solutions to broad issues of air and space defense prioritized by Russia.

## **Conclusion**

This article summarizes the recent trends in CSTO military cooperation. It shows that, against the backdrop of the perceived threat of the increasingly severe security situation in Eurasia, Russia seeks to strengthen international influence by bolstering Russia-led military alliances. In addition, Russia's perceived threat is shared by some non-Russian CSTO member states, and such factors have contributed to the establishment of the Collective Security Strategy, which is the basic document on military cooperation. In considering the CSTO's outlook, the following two factors must be taken into account.

First, it needs to be accounted for that primary threats vary among the CSTO's three strategic fronts—Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. In the European front, Russia and Belarus face NATO's eastward expansion and intensification of its operations. In the Caucasus front, Russia and Armenia face the dispute over the attribution of Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the issue over the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the cause of the conflict between Russia and Georgia—issues that trace their origin to the Soviet Union era. In the Central Asia front, the increases in extremist armed forces and terrorism pose as serious threats.

For non-Russian member states, there is thus nothing to motivate them to engage deeply in regional threats outside their own regions. For instance, it is doubtful that Central Asian countries would engage actively in issues of the Caucasus and Europe. Conversely, the same is true for the Armenian and Belarusian response to Central Asian issues. Therefore, while the strengthening of the three regional integrated forces is expected, the strengthening of the Collective Operational Reaction Forces and the Collective Peacekeeping Forces is questionable. Whether these two frameworks will be strengthened or not will significantly affect the outcome of CIS integration.

Secondly, the relationship between Russia and other member states need to be taken into consideration. It is clear from the scale of Russia's military strength and capabilities that the CSTO is

Russia-led. The issue is to what extent other member states will accept Russia's superiority and influence. As long as these countries must rely on Russia militarily, there will likely be no countries like Uzbekistan that take actions towards the CSTO. However, it is conceivable that countries, while maintaining their relationship with Russia, would also develop military and security relationships with such powers as European countries, the United States, and China and explore strategies to balance Russia's expanding influence. In reality, all non-Russian member states are currently deepening an array of military and security cooperation with non-Russian countries, though they vary in degree. Attention must continue to be paid to whether military cooperation in the CSTO will be strengthened or not as indicated in the Collective Security Strategy and its associated agreements and decisions.

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**(Completed on March 12, 2018)**

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