

# RUSSIA, EU, NATO, AND THE STRENGTHENING OF THE CSTO IN CENTRAL ASIA

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## Abstract

*Central Asia is a region with great geopolitical and geo-economic significance. Although the war on terrorism brought the USA, the EU, and NATO into Central Asia, after the 2005 Andijan event, Russia has been resurgent in the region. This paper analyses the Russian political-military strategies toward the Central Asian states, focusing both on bilateral and multilateral security cooperation. The strengthening of the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organisation), especially through the creation of the Rapid Reaction Forces, should not be neglected in Europe. According to Russian officials' speeches, the CSTO requires equal partnership with NATO in Afghanistan. This would strengthen the importance of the CSTO in Eurasia and would limit bilateral dialogue between the former Soviet republics and EU or NATO.*

**Keywords:** *Central Asia, Russia, CSTO, Rapid Reaction Forces, military bases, EU, NATO.*

## Introduction

Central Asia is often described by a set of characteristics, from which there are five of critical importance: (i) the post-1991 power vacuum in which a complex geopolitical game occurs, first between Russia, China, India, the US, and the European Union, as well as Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, South Korea, Japan, the United Arab Emirates, and others; (ii) a strategic area of energy resources; (iii) an important part of the Islamic world in which, because of low living standards, ethnic tensions and the oppressive nature of the political regimes often create a fertile area for terrorism, drugs and weapons trafficking, and organised crime; (iv) a region at the crossroads of the great trade routes and pipelines; and (v) a buffer zone between countries with nuclear arms (or those developing the potential), e.g. Russia, China, Iran, India, and Pakistan.

Having Russia as a neighbour and the being landlocked has always limited the Central Asian countries in choosing their partners for cooperation. The deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan, the European Union's energy dependence on Russia, and the Russo-Georgian war have led to the perception that the Central Asian states have much less room for manoeuvre than other CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) members, the Russian influence being

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noticeable on political, military, and economic levels. The strengthening of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) is both a result of these processes and an instrument to further enhance Russian supremacy in its “Near Abroad.”

## Russia's Policies Toward Central Asia

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, on December 26, 1991, Russia tended to neglect its relations with the former Central Asian republics. Its foreign policy seemed to have a pro-Western orientation, and Central Asia occupied the second or even the third place among Russia's interests. But Russia became more actively involved in Central Asia as a result of the civil war in Tajikistan, especially because of the large Russian minorities in the region.

In 1993, Moscow decided to promote renewed “special relations” between Russia and Central Asia. The Russian National Security Council articulated the new policy in “Main Aspects of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation” (April 1993). The document asserted that Russia could not leave Central Asia without endangering its southern borders. Consequently, the Russian control over CIS borders in Central Asia was a desirable objective. Other priorities included: the Russian troops and their military bases in the region; the development of economic relations; Russia's contribution to conflict prevention and resolution through efficient peacekeeping mechanisms; and no interference from third parties in Central Asian affairs.<sup>1</sup>

Already in 1995 were the public speeches of the Russian officials changing. They insisted on pragmatic policies in Central Asia, taking into account the contracts of the Western energy consortiums in the CIS, as well as NATO's Partnership for Peace programme. The strengthening of Russia's position in Central Asia was in part made possible by then-Prime Minister Evgheni Primakov's initiatives, which promoted closer relations with Central Asia's neighbours – Iran, China, and India – in order to weaken relations between the Central Asian states and the West; an approximation process within the CIS through the Group of Four (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan); and the settlement of Tajikistan's civil war.

Vladimir Putin took the presidency in 1999 with the objective of Russia's reemergence as great power, following the model used by Prince Aleksandr Gorchakov in the nineteenth century that was based on internal reforms and flexible foreign policy.<sup>2</sup> Putin could develop a coherent and pragmatic foreign policy with clear priorities and well-structured interests, concentrating on Russia's “near abroad.”

The new foreign policy concept, from 28 June 2000, asserted that Russia's geopolitical role as one of the largest Eurasian powers came with the responsibility of maintaining security in the world, both at global and regional levels.<sup>3</sup> The first visits Putin made were to Turkmenistan and

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<sup>1</sup> Andrei Kortunov, “Russia and Central Asia: Evolution of Mutual Perceptions, Policies, Interdependence,” James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Lena Jonson, *Vladimir Putin and Central Asia*, (New York: Taurus, 2004), 6-8.

<sup>3</sup> Roland Dannreuther, “Can Russia Sustain Its Dominance in Central Asia?” *Security Dialogue*, vol. 32:2 (2001): 245.

Uzbekistan in May 2000, the states which had gone further in developing political and economic relations with the West.

Putin's strategy went in two directions. First, his administration looked to build a consistent strategy regarding the development of political and economic relations with Central Asia. The introduction of a customs union (1996) and the decision to allow the free movement of citizens between several of the former Soviet republics, which altogether resulted in the creation of the EurAsEC (Eurasian Economic Community) in October 2000, strengthened the inclination toward cooperation. Second, every official statement emphasised the dangers of Islamic fundamentalism and international terrorism, which took on a special urgency after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US. Russia was thus able to receive further Central Asian support for its military actions in Chechnya.

In 2003, President Putin developed a new foreign policy concept. The policy instruments became more diverse: support for and personal relationships with local leaders, military cooperation, investments in energy and infrastructure, scholarships for attending Russian universities, and the huge influence over the mass media of the region, whereby Russia became the most important source for news in Central Asian countries.

Between 2005 and 2007, Putin spoke frequently of several issues, including the requirement of treating Russia on the same level as the developed countries, a multipolar world order, the rejection of "exporting democracy," the development of the CSTO, and Russia's right to retain "special interests" in the CIS. His Munich speech of February 2007 abounded with criticism against the US policies in this regard.

On March 27, 2007, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a document about the revision of the foreign policy.<sup>4</sup> It stated that Russia's most important achievement was its new independent foreign policy.<sup>5</sup> It centred on the importance of the energy exports and the economic recovery, the enhancement of the military power, the West's engagement in other regions of the world, and the settlement of Chechnya conflict.<sup>6</sup> The document underscored the importance of the Single Economic Space (SES), Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and EurAsEC. The bilateral relations between Russia and Central Asian states were described separately. Kazakhstan was considered Russia's most important strategic partner in Central Asia.

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<sup>4</sup> Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "A Survey of Russian Federation Foreign Policy," March 27, 2007, [http://www.norway.mid.ru/news\\_fp.html](http://www.norway.mid.ru/news_fp.html) (accessed June 15, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Review of Russian Foreign Policy by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs," March 27, 2007, [www.mid.ru](http://www.mid.ru) (accessed June 6, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Mark A. Smith, "A Review of Russian Foreign Policy," Conflict Studies Research Centre (July 2007): 1, and Steven J. Main et al., "The Pattern of Russian Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia," Conflict Studies Research Centre (December 2003).

Similarly, the foreign policy concept of Russia from July 2008 emphasised the bilateral relationship with Kazakhstan and the necessity to develop the SES, CSTO and EurAsEC.<sup>7</sup> The new approach took on a more critical tone toward the US and was followed by the first military intervention in a CIS member state (Georgia) after the disintegration of the Soviet Union (7 August 2008).

In an interview on August 31, 2008, President Dmitry Medvedev presented the Russian foreign policy in five points: (i) Russia recognises the primacy of the fundamental principles of international law; (ii) the world should be multipolar; (iii) Russia does not want confrontation with any other country, has no intention of isolating itself, and will develop friendly relations with Europe, the United States, and other countries as far as possible; (iv) protecting Russian citizens, wherever they may be, is an unquestionable priority, and Russia will respond to any aggressive acts committed against them; and (v) Russia has privileged interests in certain regions (former Soviet Union).<sup>8</sup>

## **The Birth of the CSTO**

According to Weber, international relations in the former Soviet Union are distinct: the common Soviet past is influencing the present; therefore, within the regional organisations dominated by Russia, there are visible cooperation impulses and disagreements.<sup>9</sup>

In 1995, President Boris Yeltsin asserted in the document “On Affirming the Strategic Course of the Russian Federation with the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States” that Russia’s policies planned to form a single security space, but also a defence alliance in the CIS. The initial objectives were thus: a single security structure under Russia’s command, the control of the Soviet army goods, Russian military units stationed within the CIS, a common defence space, and an integrated mechanism for conflict resolution on the territory of the former Soviet Union.

The Minsk Agreements and the Declaration of Almaty, from December 1991, set the foundation for a common security policy. The civil war in Tajikistan and the incapacity of the Central Asian countries to preserve their security led to several agreements regarding peacekeeping operations and conflict resolution. These documents paved the way for the “Protocol on the Temporary Procedure for the Formation and Use of Collective Peace-Keeping Forces in Zones of Conflict between or within Member States of the CIS,” and led to the Collective Security Treaty (CST), signed in Tashkent on May 15, 1992, by the heads of state and government of Russia,

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<sup>7</sup> Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation,” July 17, 2008, [http://www.norway.mid.ru/news\\_fp.html](http://www.norway.mid.ru/news_fp.html) (accessed May 4, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Interview given by President Dmitry Medvedev to Television Channels, Channel One, Russia, NTV, 31 August 2008, [http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2008/08/31/1850\\_type82916\\_206003.shtml](http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2008/08/31/1850_type82916_206003.shtml) (accessed May 29, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Mark Weber, *The International Politics of Russia and the Successor States* (Manchester University Press, 1996), 15.

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Armenia.<sup>10</sup> The treaty was later joined by Azerbaijan, Georgia and Belarus.

The Collective Security Treaty sets up a defensive alliance, forbids joining any military alliance or group of states against other members, and considers that aggression against one member is aggression against all. In spite of this, all CIS member states established national military structures during and up to the end of 1992. Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan withdrew from the Collective Security Treaty in 1999.

In order to enhance the Treaty's effectiveness, the heads of state ratified a number of documents in May 2000 in Minsk. For example, the "Memorandum on Increasing the Effectiveness of the CST and its Ability to Adapt to the Present Day Geopolitical Situation" and "A Model for a Regional Security System" both promoted the fight against terrorism and the need to build rapid deployment peacekeeping forces. The Council on Collective Security, one of the high-ranking bodies of the treaty, also decided to define three distinct security regions: European, Caucasian, and Central Asian.

The Bishkek meeting in October 2000 decided to establish a collective security force within the subsequent five years. Therefore, in Yerevan (May 2001), the CIS members created a Collective Rapid Deployment Force (CRDF) in order to be able to provide a collective response to terrorist attacks or incursions. The CRDF for Central Asia, according to an August 2001 decision, would comprise Russian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Tajik units, totaling around 4,000 persons.

In May 2002, the Collective Security Treaty became the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, and the CSTO Charter entered into force on September 18, 2003. According to Nikolai Bordyuzha, the Secretary General of the organisation, the CSTO focused on three important areas: foreign policy, opposition against threats and challenges, and the military dimension.

Beginning in 2004, Russia promoted the systematic cooperation within the CSTO. In June 2004, the members of the Council on Collective Security and of the Council of Defence Ministers laid out plans for the military component of the organisation. The "Plan for the Construction of the CSTO's Military Coalition Forces through 2010" proposed the establishment of military ties on an interstate level and the formulation of a structure for political cooperation, as well as a second phase of the integration of the military forces on a macro-level.<sup>11</sup>

In August 2004, the Collective Security Treaty Organization conducted an extensive military anti-terrorism exercise, *Rubezh-2004* ("Border" 2004). Held in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, it tested the CSTO's Rapid Deployment Force in action for the first time. Compared to the previous

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<sup>10</sup> Armand Clesse & Vitaly Zhurkin, "The Future Role of Russia in Europe and in the World," Luxembourg Institute for European and International Studies, 1997, 217-18.

<sup>11</sup> Alexander I. Nikitin, "Post-Soviet Military-Political Integration: The Collective Security Treaty Organization and its Relations with the EU and NATO," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, vol. 5:1 (2007): 35.

exercises, it was organised on the premise of pre-emptive strikes.<sup>12</sup> *Rubezh-2005* and *Rubezh-2007* were held in Tajikistan, while *Rubezh-2006* took place in Kazakhstan.<sup>13</sup>

## The EU and NATO's Security Interests in Central Asia

The European Security Strategy (December 12, 2003) identified the following major threats for the European Union: terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, failing states, organised crime, and recognised the energy dependence as a special concern for Europe.<sup>14</sup> Although Central Asia was not specifically mentioned, all these challenges from the international environment are valid for this region.

The EU's interests in Central Asia are geopolitical and geo-economic: growing stability and the capacity of these states to manage the threats; support of the military operations in Afghanistan; tackling drug-trafficking and organised crime; prevention of states from failing and enhanced capacity of crisis management; non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; and migration and energy security. Although the Central Asian countries have not been included in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), they could be involved in its regional programmes. The ENP and the EU's relationships with the Central Asian states reinforce each other. Consequently, the concepts of "wider neighbourhood" or "the neighbours of the EU's neighbourhood" are often considered to be of great importance.

According to its 2007 political strategy, the European Union has a strong interest in a peaceful, democratic, and prosperous Central Asia, because the strategic, political, and economic developments, as well as trans-regional challenges, affect the EU in some capacity, whether directly or indirectly. These are ideas that were also emphasised by EU officials in their speeches.<sup>15</sup>

Regarding the security initiatives, in January 2001 the European Union set up the Central Asian Drugs Action Programme (CADAP). Its objective was the development of drug control strategies in Central Asia in line with EU anti-narcotics strategies. Initially, CADAP covered Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, offering equipments and trainings, while Anti-Drugs Measures in Tajikistan (ADMIT) has functioned in Tajikistan.

The Border Management in Central Asia Programme (BOMCA) was launched in April 2003 in order to strengthen border control and to facilitate transit and legal commerce. CADAP and BOMCA have received a similar budget since February 2004.<sup>16</sup> BOMCA also has the support of

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<sup>12</sup> J. H. Saat, "The Collective Security Treaty Organization," Conflict Studies Research Centre, (February 2005): 1.

<sup>13</sup> Vladimir Paramonov & Aleksey Stokov, "The Evolution of Russia's Central Asia Policy," Conflict Studies Research Centre (June 2008): 14.

<sup>14</sup> Council of the European Union, "European Security Strategy. A Secure Europe in a Better World," (Brussels, 12 December 2003), 3.

<sup>15</sup> German Presidency of the European Union, "The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership," (26 June 2007), 3, ([http://www.eu2007.de/en/News/download\\_docs/Juni/0630-RAA/030-Hintergrundinformation.pdf](http://www.eu2007.de/en/News/download_docs/Juni/0630-RAA/030-Hintergrundinformation.pdf)).

<sup>16</sup> International Crisis Group, "Central Asia: What Role for the European Union?" *Asia Report*, No. 113, April 2006, 13.

the US, OSCE, and UNDOC (the UN's Office on Drugs & Crime). Additionally, BOMCA 8 and 9 will try to introduce the concepts of an integrated border management (IBM) and a corridors approach, which were also embraced by the SCO and EurAsEC. In Central Asia, BOMCA projected two corridors: the Ferghana Valley and the North-South transit corridor in the west of Central Asia. The European Commission stated that progress was limited because of the insufficient expertise of the local institutions, uncontrolled border areas, corruption, and lack of political will.

The topic of the insecurity of Central Asia was approached in other international organisations as well. Within the OSCE, Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Netherlands, and the United Kingdom promoted projects regarding police reform, water management, anti-terrorism, the fight against organised crime, weapons and drugs trafficking, and crisis management in Central Asia.<sup>17</sup> On September 18, 2008, the EU-Central Asia Forum on Security Issues was launched by the EU French Presidency.<sup>18</sup>

NATO has formal relations with all Central Asian countries, which entered the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (1992), Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (1997), and Partnership for Peace programme (1994). The cooperation in the framework of the latter programme is developed proportionally with individual interests, needs, and capacities. Partner states can choose various activities, such as: defence reform, defence policy and planning, civil-military relations, education and training, military cooperation, common exercises, civil emergency planning and disaster response, and science and environment – all in order to prepare an Individual Partnership Action Plan.

Since 2006, Kazakhstan has an Individual Partnership Action Plan. Beginning in 2002, Kazakhstan, and then Kyrgyzstan in 2007, have participated in the Planning and Review Process. Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have limited relations with NATO, but all five Central Asian states have established diplomatic representation at NATO's headquarters at Mons (Belgium). Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are also represented in the so-called Partnership Coordination Cell. Additionally, the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC) supported Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in 2003, 2005, and 2006. NATO has an information centre in Almaty, and cooperates with universities, NGOs, and local media in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan in order to improve its visibility in the region.<sup>19</sup>

The Madrid Foreign Ministers' Session, on June 3, 2003, confirmed NATO's long-term commitment in Central Asia, which plays a crucial role for the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. The Istanbul summit (June 2004) further strengthened these political-military relationships. NATO set up the position of "Special Representative for the South Caucasus and Central Asia" and established two liaison officers for each region.

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<sup>17</sup> International Crisis Group, "Central Asia: What Role for the European Union?" *Asia Report*, No. 113, April 2006, 21-23.

<sup>18</sup> Présidence française de l'Union Européenne, « Déclaration conjointe des participants au Forum UE-Asie Centrale de Paris sur les enjeux de sécurité, » [Joint Declaration by the members of the EU-Central Asian Forum (Paris) on security issues] Paris, 18 September 2008.

<sup>19</sup> NATO Public Diplomacy Division, "Partners in Central Asia," *NATO Backgrounder*, November 2007, pp. 4-9.

The Central Asian countries, however, prefer bilateral security relations with the United States of America and other NATO members, such as Germany, France, and Netherlands. They supported the operations in Afghanistan with military bases for Western forces. Germany has an air base with 300 men in Termez (Uzbekistan); US has an air base in Manas (Kyrgyzstan); France had troops in Kyrgyzstan and one logistic centre in Dushanbe (Tajikistan), while the Netherlands had an agreement with Kyrgyzstan, allowing the use of Bishkek airport by its F-16 airplanes.

Russia is carefully watching the developments within NATO. The Foreign Policy Concept (July 2008) has a few important sentences to this effect. “Russia maintains its negative attitude towards the expansion of NATO, notably to the plans of admitting Ukraine and Georgia to the membership in the alliance, as well as to bringing the NATO military infrastructure closer to the Russian borders on the whole [...]” Additionally, “Russia will build its relationship with NATO taking into consideration the degree of the alliance’s readiness for equal partnership.”<sup>20</sup>

Although the Russian officials consider NATO the only structure capable of denying Russia’s ability to establish its dominion over its “near abroad,” CSTO Secretary-General Nikolai Bordyuzha has persistently called for a direct CSTO-NATO dialogue, including joint stabilisation activities in Afghanistan. Sergei Lavrov (Foreign Minister of Russia) and Sergei Ivanov (Deputy Prime Minister) have also made declarations in this respect in 2006 and 2007. The CSTO-NATO cooperation would strengthen the importance of the CSTO in Eurasia and would limit bilateral dialogue within the Partnership for Peace framework between the former Soviet republics and NATO.

According to Allison, the CSTO-NATO competition can be identified in:

*[T]he recent idea to turn the CSTO from a military-political organization into a universal international structure that can collectively react to all challenges and threats; the loose notion of a “zone of CSTO responsibility”; the October 2007 decision to create joint “CSTO peacekeeping forces” [...]; the efforts by the CSTO to develop its own security relationship with Afghanistan, involving training, arms supply and counter-narcotics, assisted by a CSTO Working Group on Afghanistan.*<sup>21</sup>

## **The Strengthening of the CSTO after the Russo-Georgian War**

Russia’s Foreign Policy Concept announced on July 17, 2008, stated:

*[Russia] will promote in every possible way the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) as a key instrument to maintain stability and ensure security in the CIS area, focusing on adapting the CSTO as a multifunctional integration body to*

<sup>20</sup> Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 17 July 2008, [http://www.norway.mid.ru/news\\_fp.html](http://www.norway.mid.ru/news_fp.html) (accessed May 16, 2009).

<sup>21</sup> Roy Allison, “Security Cooperation between Western States and Russia over Central Asia/Afghanistan: the Changing Role of Uzbekistan,” (programme paper, London: Chatham House, 24 November 2008), 4-5.

*the changing environment, as well as on ensuring capability of the CSTO Member States to take prompt and effective joint actions, and on transforming the CSTO into a central institution ensuring security in its area of responsibility.*<sup>22</sup>

The Russian-Georgian war accelerated the militarisation of the CSTO. The Moscow Declaration of the Collective Security Council of the CSTO (September 5, 2008) was considered “the first real consolidated position of the alliance, a view on international politics and the place of CSTO in it.”<sup>23</sup> The document mentions: concerns about “Georgia’s attempt to resolve the conflict in South Ossetia by force;” concerns about “the growing military capabilities and escalating tensions in the Caucasus region;” “the situation in Europe, the proliferation of medium- and short- range ground-based missiles; strengthening the role of the United Nations as well as the situation in several conflict zones; the situation in Afghanistan; the situation around Iran; the prospects of establishing relations between the CSTO and NATO on a number of issues; and support for the initiatives of the Russian Federation relating to a treaty on European security.”<sup>24</sup>

During a press conference, following the Moscow CSTO summit on February 4, 2009, President Medvedev stated that “the Collective Rapid Reaction Force should be an effective, all-purpose instrument that can be counted on to realize security objectives throughout the CSTO. And these would include resisting military aggression, conducting special operations to eliminate terrorists and extremists, the fight against organized crime and drug trafficking, as well as dealing with the consequences of natural and industrial disasters.” The Collective Rapid Reaction Force will have “the same sort of training as the troops of the North Atlantic Alliance”.<sup>25</sup> According to Stratfor, it would comprise 16,000 troops, with Russia providing 8,000 troops, Kazakhstan 4,000, and Tajikistan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia 1,000 troops each. Of the 16,000, Russia will consider deploying 5,000 troops to Central Asia.<sup>26</sup>

There were some underlying tensions at the CSTO summit. Kazakhstan showed strong commitment to the project, but Tajikistan and Uzbekistan had concerns over the legal issues and the precise terms under which the new force structure could be used within Central Asia. Uzbekistan secured a separate protocol limiting its participation in CSTO operations and will make military forces available for CSTO operations under certain conditions, depending on the political decision made at the time.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 17 July 2008, [http://www.norway.mid.ru/news\\_fp.html](http://www.norway.mid.ru/news_fp.html) (accessed June 16, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> David Erkomaishvili, “Collective Security and Unilateral Decisions – Security Prospects for the post-Soviet Space,” *CEJISS*, vol. 2:2 (November 2008): 33.

<sup>24</sup> Press Conference following the Collective Security Treaty Organisation Summit, Moscow, 5 September 2008, [http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/09/05/2125\\_type82912type82914type82915\\_206180.shtml](http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/09/05/2125_type82912type82914type82915_206180.shtml) (accessed June 16, 2009)

<sup>25</sup> Press Conference following CSTO and EurAsEC Summits, Moscow, 4 February 2009, [http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2009/02/04/1956\\_type82914type82915\\_212504.shtml](http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2009/02/04/1956_type82914type82915_212504.shtml) (accessed June 18, 2009)

<sup>26</sup> Roman Muzalevsky, “CSTO Rapid Reaction Force Reveals Russia’s Security Priorities,” *CACI Analyst*, 25 February 2009.

<sup>27</sup> Roger McDermott, “Tashkent and Dushanbe Cautious on CSTO Forces,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol. 6:27 (10 February 2009).

President Medvedev concluded:

*[T]he Russian Federation and other member states of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, Central Asian states, are ready for full and comprehensive cooperation with the United States and other coalition nations in combating terrorism in the region. This fight should be comprehensive and modern, and based on military and political components – only in this case will it have a chance of success.<sup>28</sup>*

On 16-17 April 2009, the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the CSTO held a session in Yerevan to discuss international security issues, the potential for cooperation within other multilateral structures, the situation in Afghanistan, and the progress toward establishing the CSTO Rapid Reaction Forces. Uzbekistan declined the invitation to the meeting, and Kazakhstan did not attend the session either. Uzbekistan advocates a more equal distribution of forces, especially among the larger members (Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan), which has not yet materialised.

The agreement on the formal creation of the Rapid Reaction Forces, and a number of documents regulating their activity, were signed at the CSTO summit in Moscow on June 14, 2009. Belarus did not sign the agreement, partially because of Russia's restrictive commercial measures and abusive practices in the energy sector against it. Uzbekistan signed the documents with reservations attached, limiting its participation in future CSTO activities, while Armenia's position is not clear.<sup>29</sup> However, although Belarus contested the validity of the summit decisions, President Medvedev indicated that the door remained open to Belarus to sign the agreement at a later date.

### **Central Asia's Military Bases in Russia's Strategic Planning**

The Central Asian countries have received, on a bilateral basis, mutual military assistance from Russia. In the 1990s, the majority of the Central Asian military and technical elites were Russians working on a contract basis. The Russian military academies continued to train Central Asian officers. Furthermore, Russia offered weapons and equipment at Russian market prices for the CSTO units.<sup>30</sup> In the spring of 2003, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan signed mutual defence treaties with Russia.<sup>31</sup> After the Andijan event, Uzbekistan and Russia signed the Treaty

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<sup>28</sup> Press Conference following CSTO and EurAsEC Summits, Moscow, 4 February 2009.  
([http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2009/02/04/1956\\_type82914type82915\\_212504.shtml](http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2009/02/04/1956_type82914type82915_212504.shtml)).

<sup>29</sup> Vladimir Socor, "Belarusian President Boycott Moscow's CSTO Summit," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol. 6:114 (15 June 2009).

<sup>30</sup> Vladimir Paramonov & Aleksey Stokov, "The Evolution of Russia's Central Asia Policy," Conflict Studies Research Centre (June 2008): 14.

<sup>31</sup> European Commission, "TACIS Central Asia Indicative Programme 2005-06" (Brussels, 20 August 2004), 5.

of Strategic Partnership (June 2005) and the Treaty of Alliance (November 2005).<sup>32</sup> Russia has also initiated, in 2005, to establish an international naval force in the Caspian Sea (CASFOR).<sup>33</sup>

But the bases and transit rights were the most important. Taking into account the EU's and NATO's enlargement and the foreign military bases in Central Asia, Moscow launched a diplomatic offensive to strengthen its positions.

The meetings between Putin and the presidents of the Central Asian republics paved the way for the Russian base at Kant (Kyrgyzstan), inaugurated on October 23, 2003. This would have housed over 500 Russian personnel deployed under CSTO auspices. Since 2003, the Kant base has gradually been expanded to include SU-25 ground-attack aircraft, SU-27 fighter aircraft, AN-26 transport aircraft, and helicopters.

For a few years, Kyrgyzstan was the only country in the world that had on its territory both a Russian and an American base, only 30 km from each other. In May 2005, Bishkek began negotiations with Moscow for a second military base in Osh. In 2006, Russia announced plans for considerable military investments in Kyrgyzstan, and the Kyrgyz government decided to raise the rental price of the Manas Air Base used by the US.<sup>34</sup> Washington D.C. had paid \$65 million per year for the Manas Air Base, established in 2002, while injecting another \$150 million through economic incentives.<sup>35</sup>

On February 3, 2009, Russia and Kyrgyzstan signed an agreement worth \$2 billion, representing Russian assistance to the Kyrgyz economy in crisis, which was followed by the announcement that Kyrgyzstan would permanently close the Manas base.<sup>36</sup> Bakiev said he was ejecting US forces after repeated requests for increased rent payment had been ignored.

In the aftermath of the announced closure of the Manas Air Base and the expected activation of the CSTO Rapid Reaction Forces, a unit of 30 Russian Railroad Troops arrived at the Kant Air Base, on 20 February 2009, to carry out road and railroad repairs. The major objective was to connect existing Russian military facilities within the country. As *Eurasia Daily Monitor* noted "[I]n a crisis situation, Kant can be reinforced by air, rail, and road, facilitating the rapid movement of Russian troops and supplies. It would probably offer emergency access to the former Soviet air base at Osh".<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Farkhod Tolipov, "Uzbekistan and Russia: Alliance against a Mythic Threat?" *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute*, 2006, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/3664> (accessed June 13, 2009).

<sup>33</sup> Stephen Blank, "The Great Game goes to Sea: Naval Rivalries in the Caspian," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute*, 2006, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/3666> (accessed June 14, 2009).

<sup>34</sup> Marlène Laruelle, "Russia's Central Asia Policy and the Role of Russian Nationalism," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program*, (April 2008): 15.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Bridge, "US military gets the squeeze in Central Asia," *Global Research*, 14 February 2009, [www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=12305](http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=12305) (accessed June 14, 2009).

<sup>36</sup> Eugene Huskey, "Foreign Policy in a Vulnerable State: Kyrgyzstan as Military Entrepot between the Great Powers," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, vol. 6:4 (2008): 18.

<sup>37</sup> McDermott, Roger, "Kant Air Base and Russia's Strategic Planning in Central Asia", in: *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Volume 6, Issue 41, 3 March 2009,

Recently, Russia and Kyrgyzstan negotiated a new 49-year lease for the Russian airbase in Kant (May 2009), which will allow for automatic 25-year extensions. There are many factors that will continue to push Kyrgyzstan toward Russia: political ties, labour migration, Russian investments, fear of Chinese expansionism, and resentment about the Western assistance.

During the civil war in Tajikistan (1992-97), Russian forces, under the aegis of the CIS, gave support to President Emomali Rakhmonov. Today Russia has the 201<sup>st</sup> Motorised Rifle Division at Dushanbe (opened at the end of 2004) and Russian officers in the Federal Border Guard Force.<sup>38</sup>

Tajikistan's President Rakhmonov has tried to maximise potential financial dividends from the Russian base at Dushanbe. Additionally, at a bilateral meeting on November 2008, President Medvedev explored the possibility of opening a second Russian base in Tajikistan, at Ayni, where India has also had a temporary air base since 2002.<sup>39</sup>

In Uzbekistan, Western criticism of the brutal suppression of riots in Andijan led to the closure of Karshi-Khanabad basing privileges of the US. Russia and China supported Uzbekistan's decision, through the SCO Declaration on July 5, 2005. Additionally, Uzbekistan was reintegrated into the CSTO in June 2006.<sup>40</sup>

## Conclusion

The establishment of the CSTO Rapid Reaction Forces should be viewed as an extension of the Russian influence in Central Asia. Emphasising the threats coming from Afghanistan and NATO's problems in managing the situation, Russia attempts to portray itself as a better security solution for the Central Asian countries.

NATO's activity in the CIS has always been regarded by Moscow rather as a threat than as factors of stability or security cooperation. Therefore, limiting the organisation's activities was Russia's constant objective. It has been helped by NATO's internal uncertainty: first, the organisation had difficulties in finding adequate motivations and activities for the Central Asian states' security needs, and, second, the security assistance programmes offered limited financial resources.

Russia's success in influencing the CIS, through the strengthening of the CSTO, as well as its renewed interest in Afghanistan, means costly failures of the European and American strategies

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[http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=34651&tx\\_ttnews\[backPid\]=407&no\\_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=34651&tx_ttnews[backPid]=407&no_cache=1) (accessed June 18, 2009)

<sup>38</sup> Jacquelyn K. Davis & Michael J. Sweeney, "Central Asia in U.S. Strategy and Operational Planning: Where do we go from here?" (Washington D.C.: The Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 2004), 66.

<sup>39</sup> Roger McDermott, "Tashkent and Dushanbe Cautious on CSTO Forces," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol. 6:27 (10 February 2009).

<sup>40</sup> Marlène Laruelle, "Russia's Central Asia Policy and the Role of Russian Nationalism," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program*, (April 2008): 17, <http://www.isdp.eu/files/publications/srp/08/ml08russiacentral.pdf> (accessed June 20, 2009).

in these areas. If the EU, NATO, and the US wish to maintain influence in Central Asia, they must be prepared to demonstrate their flexibility and coordination; to understand Russian foreign policy and to try to cooperate with Moscow; to cooperate with other actors; and to invest heavily in the region.