



# Executive Summary

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## ASSESSING THE COLLECTIVE SECURITY TREATY ORGANIZATION: CAPABILITIES AND VULNERABILITIES

Richard Weitz

The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) consists of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan. The CSTO's membership has been stable, with the exception that Uzbekistan, which joined the organization in 2006, withdrew in 2012. The CSTO operates on the basis of the Collective Security Treaty (CST), a mutual defense pact signed in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on May 15, 1992. The CSTO's initial declared purpose was to counter external aggression against members and to harmonize their foreign policy stances. The organization has since addressed sub-conventional challenges such as cyber threats, transnational terrorism, ethnic unrest, narcotics trafficking, humanitarian emergencies, and peacekeeping. Many CSTO members do not face immediate conventional military threats from other nation-states, but do confront transnational challenges. They further benefit from collaborating on joint weapons acquisition, training opportunities, and military exercises.

The CSTO's joint command structure was originally designed to mobilize multinational coalitions during wartime. The organization has since developed standing decision-making and advisory bodies as well as additional types of military forces. These include rapid reaction forces, comprised of members' elite units, as well as special purpose forces for peacekeeping, drug interdiction, and other low-intensity missions. The organization's Collective Rapid Reaction Force (CRRF) is the main structure for addressing these new missions. Its components are in a higher state of readiness than other CSTO units; they

engage in regular exercises, especially in Central Asia, where the main transnational threats are concentrated. These drills rehearse the canonical scenario of resisting North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) aggression as well as the new sub-conventional missions. The CSTO has also gained some international recognition, signing agreements with the United Nations, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and other multinational organizations. During meetings, CSTO leaders typically issue joint statements on various international security issues to amplify the impact of their individual views by speaking with a collective voice. These joint declarations usually support Moscow's stance but can also back other members' positions.

Russia is the CSTO's dominant member, with the largest economy, population, defense budget, and armed forces. Moscow uses the CSTO to support its foreign basing network in the former Soviet republic. The organization helps justify Russian military presence in other former Soviet republics, which enhances Moscow's influence and provides a defensive buffer from Russian state borders. The other CSTO members also receive discounts, subsidies, and other incentives to buy Russian arms, which promote military interoperability. Additionally, the Russian Government provides subsidized military education and training opportunities to other CSTO members. This Russian domination has weakened the CSTO's institutional legitimacy in the West. NATO members see the CSTO as an instrument to sustain Russian defense primacy in Eurasia.

According to the CSTO Charter, members cannot host foreign bases without the approval of all other members, effectively giving Moscow a veto on NATO military facilities in the CSTO region. The organization also helps limit Beijing's military role in what Moscow sees as its zone of security influence even as the CSTO develops ties with the SCO.

Notwithstanding Moscow's institutional primacy, CSTO member states regularly deviate from Russian positions on some security issues, such as Moscow's creation of separatist states in Abkhazia and South Ossetia following the August 2008 Georgian war and Moscow's military operations in Ukraine. In addition, members have generally declined to back Armenia in its territorial dispute with non-member Azerbaijan. Even when CSTO governments have called on the organization to suppress domestic instability in a member country, such as when mass violence broke out between ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan in 2010, the CSTO failed to take collective action. Despite the persistent threats Afghanistan presents to the organization, the CSTO has considerably restricted its role regarding that conflict. For example, the organization helps interdict the influx of Afghan-origin heroin into Central Asia and Russia, but has not supported NATO's stabilization missions inside Afghanistan. Collaboration with other regional security bodies has also been modest. Despite some interaction, the CSTO

and SCO exist as potentially competitive organizations. The CSTO's internal divisions, shirking of regional challenges, and lack of collective combat experience cast doubt on the organization's capability and resolve to engage in actual operations. If relations between NATO and Russia ever improve, opportunities may arise for cooperation on common security concerns, such as securing the Afghanistan-Tajikistan border, but for now, Washington and its allies should focus on monitoring the organization's activities and challenging its claims to legitimacy and exclusivity.

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