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The End of the 'Post-Soviet Space'
The Changing Geopolitical Orientations of the Newly Independent States

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Summary

In the fifteen years since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the geopolitical space occupied by the former Soviet Union and often dubbed the 'post-Soviet space' has undergone far-reaching political, economic and social change.

• The weakening of the Commonwealth of Independent States as an integrative structure, open competition between the economic interests and macroeconomic projects of the Newly Independent States, both as individual competitors and as smaller groups, and rivalry between old and new interstate organizations have broken up the post-Soviet space into new geopolitical entities.

• Both the presence and the influence of 'extra-regional' actors (such as the EU and NATO as well as the United States, China, Turkey and Iran) in the former post-Soviet space are increasing significantly. This development coincides with and challenges Russia's attempts to reclaim the status of regional superpower.

• The 'colour revolutions' in Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan were of an 'anti-post-Soviet' nature, and sought to purge the Newly Independent States' ruling elites and political-economic systems of residual 'Sovietism'. Relatively new interstate organizations such as the reconstituted GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova) and the Community of Democratic Choice are contributing to the centrifugal tendencies by seeking to break ties with Moscow and redirecting their policy towards the West.

• The configuration of the military/security balance is changing. The Collective Security Treaty Organization, which comprises seven post-Soviet states, has rekindled attempts at political-military integration. It provides mechanisms for regional crisis response and peacekeeping as well as for collective defence.

• Neither the West nor Russia has so far adapted to this new geopolitical configuration. New 'dividing lines' – political, military and economic groupings in Northeastern Eurasia (the former post-Soviet space) – have already emerged and demand a corresponding change in the policy of the great powers.

Introduction

The year 2006 marked the fifteenth anniversary of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Those fifteen years constituted an era in itself. The geopolitical space that had been occupied by the Soviet Union underwent far-reaching political, economic and social change. For a decade and a half, the group of fifteen Newly Independent States (NIS) that succeeded the former Soviet republics bore the sobriquet of the 'post-Soviet space'. This umbrella concept stressed the common political and economic roots as well as the shared residual features and specificities of a group of countries that have increasingly diverged over time.

Now, after fifteen years of those states' independent and at times controversial development, it is time to acknowledge the end of the 'post-Soviet space'. Of course, this does not mean that the historical influence of the Soviet period has ended. 'Sovietism' within the NIS, especially in Central Asia, remains. But their common Soviet 'origin' has ceased to be the dominant integrative factor for the NIS. New vectors of policy have had a centrifugal effect, rapidly breaking up the 'post-Soviet space' into new geopolitical entities.

Demarcating NIS, CIS and post-Soviet space

The concept of the 'post-Soviet space' was of a transitory nature. Some analysts regarded it as an analytical 'blanket' aimed at temporarily denoting a group of countries with obvious structural commonalities but whose political relations with one another remained as yet unclear. The terms 'NIS' and 'post-Soviet space' emphasized the opposing developmental currents within this group: 'NIS' was generally preferred by politicians and researchers from the region since it stressed national sovereignty and a break with the former regime, while 'post-Soviet space' tended to be used by Western Sovietologists to stress continuity with the former empire and the common Soviet origin of the group of new states. In the early 1990s numerous institutes of Soviet studies at Western universities were renamed institutes of post-Soviet studies.

For several years after the legal dissolution of the Soviet Union, the post-Soviet space maintained parameters of unity or at least uniformity (although the three Baltic states dispensed with this uniformity more quickly than the other former Soviet republics):

- Political and economic ties within the NIS (including the volume of trade of former Soviet republics with each other) were more intensive than ties with external partners.
- The common economic space of the NIS had originated in the Soviet centralized and 'planned' economy and the system of state ownership.
- The common military infrastructure had not yet been subdivided into fifteen relatively independent military machines (indeed, some elements of mutual military dependency continued well into the first decade of this century).
- A common language of intercultural communication (Russian) and a common cultural interface remained as potential cementing factors.

For those twelve countries[1] (out of the total of fifteen NIS) that formed the alliance of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), several new factors gradually emerged as unifying elements:

- A system of CIS integrative organs was created (the Council of Heads of State, the Council of Heads of Government, the Council of Defence Ministers, the Council of Foreign Ministers as well as (later) the Council of Security Council Secretaries, the Council of Prosecutors-General, the Economic Court and so forth). Besides this system of legislative and decision-making organs, more than fifteen agencies of economic and political cooperation as well as ten international specialized organizations affiliated with the CIS have been established.
- An attempt to form a common legal space was undertaken through the establishment of the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly in St Petersburg[2] (later the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Eurasian Economic Cooperation Organization or EurAsEC was formed), the elaboration and adoption of hundreds of CIS and EurAsEC model laws and numerous campaigns for the 'harmonization' of the legislation of the NIS.
- The Council of Foreign Ministers and the Council of Defence Ministers made various attempts – albeit mostly abortive – to set up a coordinated common foreign and security policy towards the rest of the world (a weak predecessor of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy).
- Relatively regular (until the early years of this century) CIS summits at the presidential level served as a mechanism for political coordination to a limited degree.

At the same time, the CIS should not be taken as a fully-fledged substitute for the post-Soviet space. First, the three Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), which from the outset intentionally distanced themselves from the CIS, *de facto* participated in post-Soviet geopolitical and economic processes well into the 1990s (owing to trade flows, security concerns,

ethnic migrations and so forth). It was not until their accession to both the EU and NATO in 2004 that the post-Soviet space finally downsized from fifteen to twelve NIS.[3] Second, not all integrative efforts among the NIS were made at CIS forums. The Commonwealth has remained structurally weak throughout almost its entire existence: political relations between the individual NIS have tended to be cultivated either bilaterally or within other competing or complementing forums such as EurAsEC, GU(U)AM (Georgia, Ukraine [Uzbekistan], Azerbaijan and Moldova)[4] and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). Third, the configuration of CIS members, though formally unchanged, was in fact constantly fluctuating. In the mid-1990s, Ukraine insisted on changing the designation of 'CIS member state' to the less obligatory 'CIS participating state', stressing that no CIS state is obliged to participate in every session and decision. Thus, only a handful of CIS decisions have been co-signed by all twelve heads of the CIS states; numerous CIS resolutions have been approved by only five or six or even by only three or four countries.

The CIS remains the largest but by no means the only political forum in the post-Soviet space. At various times, Ukraine, Georgia, Uzbekistan and Moldova criticized or opposed CIS actions as Moscow- and Minsk-centred. But the creation of interstate organizations that clearly rivalled the CIS, such as GUAM and the Community of Democratic Choice (CDC),[5] was interpreted by the rest of the world as a manifestation of rivalries among post-Soviet elites rather than as a serious attempt to integrate in alternative format.

The erosion of the post-Soviet space

In the mid-2000s cracks within the post-Soviet space became too wide to allow the rest of the world to continue regarding this region as one geopolitical entity from an analytical perspective, let alone a political one. The erosion that signalled a new geopolitical restructuring manifested itself as follows:

- The critical weakening of the CIS mechanisms and the end of summits in CIS format (involving a majority of CIS members).
- The paralysis of the CIS Council of Defence Ministers and the formal disbandment of the Staff for Coordination of CIS Military Cooperation.
- The cessation of operations of many CIS organs (without their formal disbandment).
- Countless new integrative forums involving the same NIS actors (and resulting in an 'alphabet soup' of organizations and groupings).
- The juxtaposition of opposing groups among the NIS (Baltic states vs the CIS, GUAM vs the Collective Security Treaty Organization and so forth).
- The accession of the Baltic states to the EU and NATO, whereby those countries' security, political and economic ties have been reoriented towards another geopolitical region.
- The reorientation of Ukraine and Moldova towards Europe and their self-perception (albeit, arguably, somewhat premature) as constituting the EU's periphery (on account of their European Neighbourhood Policy [ENP] action plans with the union) rather than the periphery of the NIS.
- The politically expressed will of Ukraine and Georgia (and Azerbaijan's firm, albeit less advertised, desire) to interface with NATO in an open and broad manner with the clear goal of achieving membership of the organization.
- The flight from the rouble as a common currency (despite the decade-long attempts to establish a common currency for at least some of the NIS)[6] and the failure to approve joint tariffs and customs regulations[7] or create a CIS customs union.[8]
- The emergence of large-scale macroeconomic projects in the post-Soviet space that openly compete with one another (for example, pipeline routes backed by the rival economic interests of the various NIS).
- The failure of the principle and doctrine of common 'external borders of the Commonwealth'.

The last-named development deserves clarification. When the Soviet Union collapsed, only 16 per cent of the borders between its former republics had been delimited and demarcated; the remainder were merely 'pencil borders', sketched on maps. For some time, none of the NIS (including Russia) were able to exert effective control over their own borders. A significant portion of the external borders of the former Soviet Union remained under the protection of former Soviet border guards,[9] while, one by one, the NIS created their own border guard services and took sovereign control of stretches of their individual borders.[10] The joint protection of the CIS's external southern border (in Central Asia and the Caucasus) was an integral part of the operations of the Staff for Coordination of CIS Military Cooperation. The Council of Commanders-in-Chief of Border Troops was established in the mid-1990s, and steps were taken to re-establish a common air-defence system for the joint protection of CIS air space. However, in 2006 Tajikistan became the last of the CIS states to take control of its own borders (including the troubled southern Tajik–Afghan border)

and thereby withdraw from the protection of the Russian border guard service.

A special role in the deconstruction of the post-Soviet space has been played by the 'colour revolutions' in Ukraine, Georgia and (to a lesser degree) Kyrgyzstan. These widespread public revolts, which resulted in new ruling elites and a change in the countries' political orientation, had what might be described as an 'anti-post-Soviet character'; in other words, the self-proclaimed task of the colour revolutions was to purge the ruling regimes of residual Sovietism. The colour revolutions led to Gerogia's open – even militant – break with Russia by Georgia and Ukraine's curtailing of relations with Moscow, as well as to both countries'geopolitical reorientation towards the West.[11] Of course, pro-Western and/or anti-Russian tendencies were not simply born at the time of the colour revolutions; rather, they had intensified over time in the policies adopted by Ukraine, Georgia and other NIS as well as in the public mood in these countries. But the colour revolutions expedited the projection of these growing tendencies into practical politics.

In the case of Kyrgyzstan, the change of the ruling elite had mostly domestic consequences; however, the new regime quickly realigned the country's foreign and security policy with that of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). For its part, Moldova did not experience a colour revolution but gradually shifted its foreign policy towards a pro-EU stance. Given its geographical isolation between Romania, the new NATO/EU member state, and Ukraine, part of whose leadership aspires to membership of both NATO and the EU, Moldova has recognized that it must reassess its future in European rather than post-Soviet terms.

Extra-regional influences

The erosion of the post-Soviet space is not only manifested in the weakening of its relative interdependence. It is also evident in the higher profile and increased influence of extra-regional actors as well as in the spillover of integrative efforts beyond the former Soviet borders.

'Extra-regional actors' is a relatively new term used in Russian and CSTO doctrinal documents to allude to external influences in the post-Soviet realm that are considered to be unfriendly or potentially dangerous or encroaching on the interests of major regional players (especially Russia). The term refers *inter alia* to the growing presence of the United States and NATO in Central Asia, the influence of China and Iran in the same region, Turkey's influence in the South Caucasus and even the EU's willingness to play a mediatory role in Moldova, Georgia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

The US-led military operation in Afghanistan after 11 September 2001 paved the way and provided the motivation for the United States and NATO to launch or step up military and political cooperation with the Central Asian states. The US air base in Manas (Kyrgyzstan) was established just 30 kilometres from the Russian/CSTO military base in that area. Uzbekistan and even Kazakhstan (which lies too far north to offer facilities or other assistance for the operation in Afghanistan) increased their cooperation with NATO. The post of NATO envoy for Central Asia was founded in 2003, and the NATO Secretary-General toured almost every major Central Asian capital to hold introductory talks.

In 2002–3 Russia and the Central Asian states had obvious reason to tolerate or even welcome the US and NATO military presence in Central Asia: through the military operation against the Taliban in Afghanistan, Western forces were removing one of the major regional threats to the Central Asian states. Russian support for and military assistance to the Northern Alliance forces in Afghanistan constituted one of the relatively rare examples of practical strategic partnership between Russia and the United States. But after the main military stage of the operation, attitudes towards the Western military presence in the region began to change. In 2003 NATO under the UN mandate assumed responsibility for the post-conflict reconstruction and stabilization of Afghanistan,[12] stationing alliance troops in the region south of the Tajik–Afghan border, in direct proximity to the CSTO/Russian contingents positioned to the north of the same border. In 2005 Uzbekistan expelled Western troops from its territory and the following year rejoined the Moscow-centred CSTO.

After the EU's adoption of its Wider Europe Neighbourhood Policy and, more obviously, after the colour revolutions of 2004 in Ukraine and Georgia, Western attitudes towards the post-Soviet space changed significantly. During virtually the entire period from the collapse of the Soviet Union until the middle of the current decade, the NIS (excluding the Baltic states) had been tacitly regarded as constituting a 'Russian sphere of residual influence', and neither the EU nor NATO had the intention to undertake major operations in NIS without consulting Moscow. By the mid-200s, however, the EU and NATO, as well as individual countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and even China, launched their own strategies towards Central Asia, Moldova or the Caucasus. Several NIS expressed their willingness – either formally or informally – to see 'extra-regional' involvement in the resolution of conflicts on their

territories. Georgia, for example, applied to both NATO and the EU to replace Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia and South Ossetia with their peacekeeping forces.[13] Azerbaijan welcomed US and Turkish military assistance as well as a potential EU political/diplomatic role in Nagorno-Karabakh. And Moldova agreed to an EU border monitoring operation on its border with Ukraine.[14]

The wider geometry of integration

The readiness of extra-regional actors to interface with political processes in the post-Soviet space also manifested itself in the participation of Iran (and Azerbaijan) as an observer in CSTO military exercises in Central Asia from 2005 onwards and in the military manoeuvres conducted under the aegis of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), in which the Chinese military played a major role. Azerbaijan and nearly all the Central Asian states have joined the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).[15] Indeed, the OIC played a visible (and positive) role in promoting the peace talks between the government of Emomali Rakhmonov and the United Tajik Opposition, which led to the 1997 Tajik peace accords.

A relatively new grouping of former Soviet and neighbouring countries spreading beyond the post-Soviet space is the SCO, which began as a series of talks between 1996 and 2000 on the delimitation of the border between China and its immediate post-Soviet neighbours (Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan).[16] When the initial security aims had been met, it was decided not to disband the group but rather to redirect its efforts towards a broader political and economic dialogue. In 2001 the original 'Shanghai Five' group transformed itself into an international political organization[17] and admitted Uzbekistan as its sixth member. In the mid-2000s a new wave of enlargement took place: Mongolia was granted observer status, followed by Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. As China's Xinhua news agency proudly announced on the occasion of the SCO's fifth anniversary, the organization's member and observer states now cover a quarter of the planet and every third human being lives in an SCO member or observer country.

Today, the SCO focuses on political/diplomatic dialogue and economic and social issues. Its security agenda has become very limited: an analysis of documents drawn up and adopted by the organization between 2004 and 2006 shows a concentration on border protection, terrorism, extremism, separatism (Beijing's concern over the predominantly Uighur Xinjiang region is evident here), drug-trafficking and information security. No major integration of military infrastructures is envisaged, although meetings of the defence ministers continue to take place; the next such meeting is planned in Kyrgyzstan later this year. The SCO has undertaken several joint military exercises, the first of which was held in two phases – in Kazakhstan and China – in 2003. The first-ever bilateral Russian–Chinese military manoeuvres took place in August 2005, albeit outside the SCO framework.

Familiar terms have different meanings in different SCO countries. Referring to the threat of terrorism and extremism, Kyrgyzstan points the finger at Islamist armed groups originating in Uzbekistan, while China applies the 'terrorist' label to separatist movements in its own northwestern region that have no links with Islam-related terrorism. It was not until 2006 – that is, two years after its establishment – that the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure, based in Tashkent, began talks on low-profile cooperation with its 'sister structure', the Anti-Terrorist Centre (ATC) of the CIS, which has its headquarters in Moscow and a branch in Bishkek.[18] Both of these structures rejected in principle cooperation with the GUAM 'virtual centre' for combating terrorism (based in Kiev), highlighting the diverging interests in the post-Soviet space.

As noted above, GUAM was established in the 1990s as a counterweight to the CIS; when Uzbekistan joined at the end of the decade, the organization became GUUAM, but lost the extra 'U' when Tashkent withdrew to join the Moscow-centred CSTO. The colour revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine failed to breathe any real new life into GUAM (although they did provide the stimulus to adopt a Charter and establish its headquarters in Kiev, thereby formalizing its modes of operation). Instead, pushing revolutionary phraseology to its peak, in 2005 Kiev and Tbilisi initiated the creation of the CDC. The initial members of this organization included not only Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova but also all three Baltic states (which openly supported the 'anti-post-Soviet character' of the alliance[19]); Romania, Slovenia and Macedonia joined later.[20] The CDC was formally registered as an interstate organization but failed to exert any significant influence or adopt any concrete policies, with the exception of supporting the intentions of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova to further break away from the post-Soviet space.

Another attempt to integrate post-Soviet and other countries was the expansion of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), which brings together the post-Soviet states of Central Asia and their southern and western Islamic neighbours (Azerbaijan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey). The ECO originated outside the post-Soviet space; it was founded in 1985 by Iran, Pakistan and Turkey[21] and expanded to include six of the NIS (five from Central Asia plus Azerbaijan) in 1992. While the criteria for membership appear to be Islam-related, the main

aim of the organization is to promote economic ties and trade. From the very beginning Russia was excluded as a potential member.

The economic configuration of the ECO complements the relatively new geopolitical concept of a 'Wider Central Asia' (or 'Central Eurasia'), which is currently being debated in Western analytical literature and openly criticized by Russian strategists. The traditional Soviet concept of 'Middle Asia' (later changed to 'Central Asia' under pressure from Kazakh and Uzbek leaders to distinguish between contemporary and Soviet terminology) assumed that the region comprises five actors (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) and regarded Russia as a sixth 'Central Asian power' because of that country's vital interests in the region (by the same token, Russia insisted on being counted as the fourth Caucasian power, after Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan). The concept of a 'Wider Central Asia', however, excludes Russia from the region and unites the five Central Asian powers within one geopolitical entity alongside Afghanistan; occasionally, Pakistan and Iran are also included in this configuration.[22]

Changing of the guard: CSTO inherits security/defence dimension of integration

In September 2002 the CSTO charter came into force, marking a significant geostrategic change in the NIS region. The transformation of the Collective Security Treaty[23] into a fully-fledged interstate organization – the CSTO – had begun at the Moscow session of the Collective Security Council on 14 May 2002. Following the establishment of the CSTO, the integration of the military/security structures of the NIS that were members of the organization was removed from the CIS framework and the CSTO became a self-supporting integration mechanism. The disbanded Staff for Coordination of CIS Military Cooperation handed over its functions (as well as its office space on Moscow's Leningradsky Prospekt) to the CSTO military staff.

The CSTO proclaimed three regions of collective security under its auspices: the Eastern (Belarus–Russia), Caucasian (Armenia–Russia) and Central Asian regions. While the first two remain of nominal significance only, the integration of the Central Asian region has been proceeding apace. Indeed, the formation of the CSTO was expedited by the threat to the security of both Russia and Central Asia posed by the strengthening Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2000–1. Even before the creation of the CSTO in May 2002, it had been decided that the Collective Rapid Deployment Forces (CRDF) would be created for the CSTO's Central Asian region of collective security under the aegis of the CIS. Initially, in the summer of 2001 (just before 9/11), the CRDF comprised some 1,500 troops (battalions from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan); in 2004 they were upgraded to comprise eleven battalions. The CRDF headquarters in Bishkek are manned by up to 61 officers during military exercises. An air base in Kant with an international staff numbering up to 800 was added to the CRDF arsenal and vastly improved the forces' mobility. As CSTO Secretary-General Nikolai Bordyuzha commented, 'the decision-making time for deploying the CRDF does not exceed one-and-a-half hours to two hours in the event of an escalation of the local situation. Just several more hours would be required by the military to relocate the contingent to the conflict region'.[24]

An important integrative factor was the trade in arms and military technologies at low internal (non-commercial) prices that the CSTO introduced among member states in January 2004. This provided new momentum to rearm and re-equip the armies of the CSTO states with Russian-made military equipment and weaponry. Under another preferential agreement, concluded in June 2005, military cadres from the CSTO states are entitled to free training and requalification at Russian defence academies and institutions. Peacekeeping, anti-terrorist and anti-drug-trafficking courses for specialists from all CSTO countries have since been organized.

Elements of the CSTO collective security system

The CSTO is gradually developing a system of collective security for its members (now seven since the accession of Uzbekistan in 2006).

One of the main goals is to establish a fully-fledged coordinated military/security machine involving the armed forces of all the member states. However, this strategic goal will not be achieved until the next decade. For now, the CSTO is focusing on the formation of a system of political and military command structures that would be able to coordinate the security and defence efforts of its member states. This system includes regular CSTO summits (which replaced a series of CIS summits) as well as the meetings of the Council of Foreign Ministers, the Council of Defence Ministers, the Council of Secretaries of Security Councils and the Council of Commanders-in-Chief of Border Troops. The CSTO military staff in Moscow have close ties with the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces.[25] Moreover, the CSTO has set up a scientific expert council to work on matters of doctrine.

The first operational component of the CSTO security system was inherited from the CIS: the Collective Rapid Deployment Forces (or the CRDF) for Central Asia, which have been significantly upgraded since coming under the aegis of the CSTO. The CSTO is currently planning the creation of two other regional 'operational brigades': a Russian–Belarussian force and a Russian–Armenian crisis response force for the South Caucasus.

In addition, the CSTO has finished a project begun by the CIS: the re-establishment of the system of Anti-Ballistic Missile Defence (based on a restructured network of Soviet fixed phased array radars, protected communication lines and a limited quantity of missile interceptors) to include all seven member states. It has also created a collective air defence system and a system for the collective protection of key rail links among the member states.

In 2006 the coordination of numerous doctrinal documents on the formation of a joint system of peace support was completed. The plan is to create the Collective Peace Support Forces, which could be deployed under a mandate of the UN or a regional organization.[26] Another planned instrument is the Collective Emergency Reaction Forces for use on the territory of the CSTO during natural (or social) emergencies.

Highlighting the non-confrontational nature of its military/security system, the CSTO has proposed the establishment of cooperative relations with both the EU and NATO based on a common understanding of modern-day threats and security challenges as well as on the absence of ideological differences.[27] Since 2005–6 the CSTO, rather than the CIS, has clearly been the focus of and main mechanism for the military and political integration of the NIS. The CSTO represents itself as an organization working, above all, in the field of new types of soft and hard security threats and challenges: the fight against terrorism, illegal transborder migration, drug-trafficking, illegal arms trade, the spread of weapons of mass destruction and so forth.

At the same time, some elements of collective security (such as the 'horizontal' integration of the member states' weapons systems – artillery, air forces and so forth – proclaimed in the 'Plan for Military Coalition Building Until the Year 2010') clearly belong to the arsenal of 'collective defence' organizations aimed at territorial defence and large-scale land–air operations. In 2006 the CSTO leadership expressed concern that domestic pressures would lead NATO and the Western coalition to withdraw from Afghanistan – sooner rather than later – leaving the CSTO to deal with a second wave of threats and challenges from a Taliban that is recovering its strength.

One of the practical proposals currently debated among CSTO circles is the possibility of obtaining a UN Security Council mandate for the post-conflict stabilization of the Tajik–Afghan border; such a mandate would provide a legal foundation for the CSTO to carry out this task in cooperation with NATO. Following the announcement at the NATO summit in Riga in November 2006 that the NATO Response Force (NRF) has reached full capacity (20,000 troops) and full operational capability, now may be the time to plan for regional interoperability between NATO's NRF and the CSTO's CRDF for the Central Asian region.

Conclusions

A geostrategic reconfiguration of the former post-Soviet space is currently under way.
Old integration models, such as the CIS, GUAM and the Organization for Central Asian Cooperation (OCAC),[28] have declined or disbanded. Relatively new models, such as the SCO and the CDC, as well as Ukrainian and Georgian initiatives to interface with NATO, all extend beyond the post-Soviet territory.

The military role of regional organizations is growing. Both the EU and NATO recently created and tested new instruments of rapid reaction and crisis response (NATO's NRF and the EU's Rapid Reaction Force). Pursuing a parallel path, the CSTO has also created new instruments of crisis response. In some regions (for example, Central Asia and the Caucasus), NATO, EU and CSTO mechanisms could be used jointly. Indeed, their simultaneous or parallel uncoordinated use could create an imbalance and unpredictability that would help generate conflict. The CSTO is ready to deploy its military instruments under a UN or OSCE mandate or, in certain circumstances, in accordance with its own political decision-making.

The restrictions self-imposed by NATO and the EU on entering post-Soviet territory have been almost entirely removed. They and extra-regional actors (the United States, China, Iran and Turkey, among others) are becoming more and more involved in conflict resolution, large-scale economic projects and political balances in the post-Soviet space. Russian public opinion is increasingly recognizing areas of the South Caucasus and Central Asia as 'not ours' or, to be more precise, 'not necessarily fully ours'. At the same time, the Russian ruling establishment is neither ready for nor interested in a political, military and economic withdrawal from these areas (at least not to the extent that it withdrew from the Baltic states).

Although issues related to the 'grand security architecture' remain under the control of Russia – the most important actor in the post-Soviet space and the owner of key assets of the post-Soviet military

infrastructure – it has become impossible for the West to resolve or even negotiate some military/security issues with Moscow alone. Several important security issues now come under the purview of the 'CSTO basket' with its Russia-dominated but nonetheless multilateral diplomatic procedures and mechanisms.

Two major 'anti-CIS' or 'anti-Moscow' integrative structures (GUAM and CDC) remain unfinished and lack a security dimension, although GUAM has significantly developed its political infrastructure in the last two years. While they share the objective of freeing themselves from 'Moscow's net', Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova have, objectively speaking, too few common economic interests and too divergent political agendas to create a coherent alliance. While they all base their current strategies on intensifying ties outside the former post-Soviet space, they do so individually rather than collectively.

Currently, the most intensive 'post-post-Soviet' projects aimed at integration are the CSTO in the military/security sphere, EurAsEC in the economic sphere and the SCO in the sphere of policy/diplomacy. All three are Central Asia-centred and allow for an affirmative Russian role. However, Russia's integration record in the Caucasus is poor, while Georgia and Azerbaijan have significantly broadened their political and economic ties with partners outside the former post-Soviet space.

If the newly reborn Russia lacked the resources, the intention and the political will to lead some fifteen years ago, when the post-Soviet space emerged, today it is laying claim to the status of a regional superpower. At the same time, it seems to be late in recognizing the end of the post-Soviet space and drawing the political conclusions from this inevitable change in its geopolitical surroundings. Russia's domestic politics and foreign policy were counter-cyclical to events in the former USSR during the post-Soviet period. When in the early and mid-1990s the countries of the post-Soviet space were still sufficiently interdependent to achieve at least partial reintegration, Russia's political and economic weakness prevented Moscow from pursuing an active policy in the CIS region. Now that centrifugal tendencies have irrevocably broken up the post-Soviet space into conflicting parts, Moscow (in an external projection of its domestic 'consolidation') is seeking to return to an 'assertive' foreign policy. Such efforts have inevitably led to growing tensions with at least half of its CIS neighbours.

The erosion of the post-Soviet space signals a change in the region's geopolitical situation that is no less significant than that heralded by the collapse of the Soviet Union a decade and a half ago. Of course, post-Soviet interdependence has not dissolved overnight; rather, it has been a process that took place over time. Indeed, it is possible to depict the entire post-Soviet period as a gradual erosion of the post-Soviet space. But the steady accumulation of factors can give way to a sudden qualitative leap: the mid-2000s have been characterized by precisely such a leap amid the rapidly changing political relations within the NIS. Neither Russia nor the West is reacting adequately or in a timely manner to this qualitative change.

The adjustment of policies to the new geopolitical situation may require both Russia and the West to take measures or adopt attitudes that would diminish the conflict potential both within the region and in its relations with the rest of the world. This situation may also require Russia to entirely redefine its policies towards the former CIS region. The CIS itself, as an international structure, should be allowed to pass away peacefully, while some of its functions should be claimed by newer structures, such as the CSTO or EurAsEC, in an open and legally transparent succession rather than an unfriendly takeover.

At the same time, the two groups of relatively new integrative structures – the CSTO and EurAsEC, on the one hand, and GUAM and the CDC, on the other – should find ways to conduct a dialogue and avoid being juxtaposed as opposing forces. Equally important, the efforts of Georgia, Ukraine or Moldova to seek closer integration with the West should not lead to alienation from the Russia-centred group within the NIS, which has no intention of knocking on the door of the EU or NATO.

For its part, NATO underestimates the CSTO and does not pay it sufficient attention. This may be a serious political mistake. It is extremely important not to allow rivalry to emerge between the CSTO and NATO and not to succumb to the logic of the 'zero-sum game' of 'who is pushing out whom'.

Meanwhile, extra-regional actors should seek to avoid rhetoric that is potentially or actually harmful. It is time for Moscow to recognize that the conflict resolution process in Transnistria (Moldova) as well as in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Georgia) can no longer be conducted without the participation of and a larger role for the EU, NATO and the Council of Europe. By the same token, Western institutions seeking a mediatory role in the NIS should recognize that such mediation can only take place in coordination with Russia, rather than without it.

Both Russia and the West must now overcome the residual 'post-Sovietism' in their policies towards the NIS and avoid a new round of competing for influence at each other's expense. Their historic task is to minimize the potentially destabilizing consequences of the new dividing lines that have already emerged in Northeastern Eurasia, formerly known as the post-Soviet space.

Endnotes

[1] The CIS formally began as an alliance of eleven countries insofar as Turkmenistan failed to attend the first CIS summit, which took place in Almaty in December 1991. Although Turkmenistan later joined the 'club', it was never an active participant. In 2005 it downgraded its status to that of CIS observer.
[2] The CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly was established in March 1992, initially as a consultative body for the parliamentary deputies of seven member countries. Between 1993 and 1996 Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova joined the assembly; Ukraine did not become a member until 1999.
[3] Given that Turkmenistan withdrew its permanent membership of the CIS on 26 August 2005 and requested the status of observer, and that Ukraine and Georgia all but ceased participating in CIS activities in 2005 (although they have not formally withdrawn from the organization), it is correct to assert that the CIS no longer covers all the remaining post-Soviet space.
[4] In the mid-1990s Georgia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan launched an interstate initiative aimed at establishing an 'alternative to the CIS'; they were joined in 1997 by Moldova (to form GUAM) and in 1999 by Uzbekistan (GUUAM). On 5 May 2005 Uzbekistan withdrew from the group, which was formally re-registered in 2006 as the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development with headquarters in Kiev.
[5] The CDC was an attempt to reconfigure GUAM as an organization. In August 2005 Mikhail Saakashvili and Viktor Yushchenko, at the time the recently elected presidents of Georgia and Ukraine respectively, signed the Borjomi declaration. In December 2005 the CDC was launched in Kiev as a cooperative initiative of nine countries, including the three Baltic and several East European states.
[6] Of the NIS, Belarus and Russia have come closest to taking a formal decision to convert the rouble into a common currency. However, they have been debating the issue for more than six years, with no major breakthrough.
[7] In fact, 'customs wars' have been waged between Ukraine and Russia as well as between Uzbekistan and its Central Asian neighbours.
[8] The last formal agreement to establish a 'common economic space' within the CIS – involving Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan – was announced in February 2003. A supranational commission on trade and tariffs was to be based in Kiev. But after the colour revolution in Ukraine in 2004, the plan was rejected by Kiev and initiatives towards economic cooperation were shifted mainly from CIS structures to EurAsEC, whose focus is on Central Asia.
[9] In 1993 and 1996 a series of interstate agreements on joint border guards was concluded within the CIS. Until 2006 they provided a legal foundation for the presence of Russian border guards in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.
[10] Technical, financial and training assistance in the creation of Georgia's border guard service was among the political costs that Russia had to pay under the 1994 agreements allowing it to establish four Russian military garrisons on Georgian soil with the official status of 'foreign military base'.
[11] As Giorgi Arveladze, head of the Georgian presidential administration, put it, Georgia and Ukraine led 'an axis of democratic counties that do not wish to remain in Russia's orbit' (*http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community_of_Democratic_Choice*).
[12] Since August 2003 NATO has led the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, which was created under UN Security Council Resolutions 1386, 1413, 1444 and 1510. Previously (from 2001 until August 2003) the ISAF was organized on a rotation basis led by the US, the UK, Germany and the Netherlands, and contingents of all 26 NATO states participated at different stages of ISAF's operation.
[13] On 30 May 2006 it was announced that GUAM plans to establish its own peacekeeping force as an alternative to Russian or CIS-mandated peacekeepers (*http://today.az/news/politics/26721.html*).
[14] The aim of the EU border monitoring operation is to monitor the border between the Transnistrian area of Moldova and Ukraine; the border between the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic, which has not been recognized by any country, and Moldova's main territory continue to be monitored by trilateral patrols comprised of Moldovan, Transnistrian and Russian troops.
[15] Pointing to its Islamic population in regions such as Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, Russia too joined the OIC in 2002 as an observer.
[16] The Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions was signed in April 1996 and the Treaty on the Reductions of Military Forces in Border Regions in April 1997.
[17] The SCO was formally founded on 14 June 2001.
[18] Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan declined to support the decision to create a Bishkek branch of the ATC. The

proposal to transfer the ATC from the aegis of the CIS to that of the CSTO remains blocked by non-CSTO members of the CIS.

[19] However, the organization makes no official reference in its founding documents to relations with Moscow and aims at promoting cooperation between the Black Sea and Baltic Sea regions.

[20] The CDC's membership remains unclear. Two of the founding members – Macedonia and Slovenia – did not take part in the 2006 Vilnius conference, while Poland numbered among the host countries and Swedish Prime Minister Goran Persson stated his country's intention to join the organization.

[21] The ECO was, in fact, a successor organization to the Regional Cooperation for Development. This was founded in 1962 and had ceased its activities by the beginning of the 1980s.

[22] See, for example, William A. Byrd et al., *Economic Cooperation in the Wider Central Asia Region* (World Bank, May 2006). All publications of the Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies at the University of Peshawar (Pakistan) are based on this broad interpretation of the geographical scope of the region.

[23] The Collective Security Treaty was concluded on 15 May 1992 in Tashkent by the heads of six CIS states: Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In September 1993 Azerbaijan joined the treaty; in December of the same year Georgia and Belarus became members (Belarus was interested in joining from the very beginning but had to seek a legal way to circumvent its own political neutrality, proclaimed in Belarus's new constitution). The treaty remained in force for all nine signatories for five years from April 1994 without automatic extension. In 1999 three of the nine countries – Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan – declined to extend the treaty for various political reasons. In 2006, however, Uzbekistan rejoined the treaty, discouraged by its own experiment in military cooperation with the West over the previous few years.

[24] Interview with N. Bordyuzha by the Russian news agency RIA Novosti, 10 August 2004.

[25] The dependency of the CSTO staff on the communication lines or satellite information network of the Russian General Staff may not be considered a weakness. Rather, it is in keeping with international practice: most NATO and EU operational command centres depend on US satellite information and navigation as well as on communication, reconnaissance and other military support.

[26] Chapters VI and VIII of the UN Charter allow regional security organizations to undertake operations of a peacekeeping nature (operations that take place in accordance with the explicit political will of the legitimate authorities of the states on whose territory conflict occurs). The CSTO has referred to the possibility of operations under UN, OSCE or CIS mandates, although the CSTO itself was recognized by the UN in 2004 as a regional security organization under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter.

[27] Following the decision of the CSTO summit in Astana in June 2004, the CSTO Secretary-General addressed a letter to the NATO Secretary-General formally proposing the establishment of cooperation mechanisms. While engaging in cautious exchanges of information, NATO, for its part, remains unwilling to establish cooperation at the level of organization, preferring bilateral contacts with each of the individual CSTO member states.

[28] After Russia's accession to the OCAC in 2004, the organization announced its merger with EurAsEC.

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