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## INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

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**Fissures in the force - Multilateral co-operation can only go so far**

- Although military co-operation between China and Russia has intensified through the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO) and Collective Security Treaty (CSTO), there is a limit to both organisations' collaboration.
- Neither has proved to be effective in addressing security issues in Eurasia, among them drug trafficking, organised crime and terrorism.
- An Asian NATO remains a remote possibility, with differences in military capabilities and ambitions preventing further consolidation of the organisation.

**Regional Eurasian organisations are increasing the scope and size of military exercises. However, as Erica Marat reports, internationally weak Central Asian partners and fraying members' relations are likely to prevent the groups forming an Asian NATO.**

Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has existed as the world's unrivalled international collective defence organisation. Famously stating in Article Five of its charter that "an armed attack against one or more of [the party states] in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against all", NATO has even moved beyond its originally conceived ideal to act as an interventionist force in the Balkans and Afghanistan. Other regions of the world retain separate collective defence or military co-operation organisations, but none have expanded sufficiently to offer any competition to NATO's size and scope.

However, the development of organisations in Asia, in particular the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO), their names reflecting that the former is a collective defence organisation and the latter a military co-operation organisation, have raised concerns that an Asian group may emerge to challenge NATO.

This issue will likely become more widely discussed in coming months, with the CSTO holding its annual summit in July in Moscow, followed in August by the SCO's annual summit in Bishkek and later in the year the SCO's second Peace Mission joint military exercises, entitled Peace Mission 2007.

Moreover, expansion of the organisations' overlapping membership and increasing co-operation between the two, particularly in the military field, suggest they could merge to form a viable collective defence organisation. However, although the SCO and CSTO are examples of increasing co-operation and shared threat perceptions, various obstacles exist before any pan-Asian defence organisation can be created.

**A new NATO?**

Both the SCO and the CSTO deny being part of a nascent programme of defence collectivisation in Asia, despite the CSTO's charter explicitly stating in Article Three that its purpose is "to ensure the collective defence of the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the member states". Both organisations also claim that they do not intend to align against any state or group of states. In fact, the SCO's charter states that the SCO is not "directed against other states and international organisations." Russian mass media regularly condemn Western negative perceptions of the SCO's co-operation with the CSTO, especially after Russia and China conducted the bilateral Peace Mission 2005 exercises in China.

Yet both organisations were clearly formed with security in mind. The SCO is based on the 1996 Shanghai Five border agreement between China and its immediate neighbours in Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. The formation of the Shanghai Five heralded a considerable decrease in border tension between China and its immediate post-Soviet neighbours, leading to border dispute settlements. However, the Shanghai Five emerged not just as a result of a desire to lessen friction, but also as a result of concern in both Moscow and Beijing with the growing activity of Islamic radical movements in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, as well as the Taliban's capture of Kabul in 1996.

By 1998, the Shanghai Five had moved from being a mere border agreement to a regional security structure that, in the words of Beijing, sought to fight "the three evils" of separatism, fundamentalism and terrorism. This goal was enshrined in the charter of the renamed SCO upon the group's creation in June 2001, with the document outlining the organisation's security goal as jointly "counter-acting terrorism, separatism and extremism", rather than collective defence.

The development of the SCO as a more concrete regional security structure has occurred alongside a gradual expansion of the group. The formation of the SCO in 2001 coincided with the admission of Uzbekistan to the organisation, bringing the membership to six. In June 2004, observer status was granted to Mongolia, and in early July 2005 India, Iran and Pakistan were admitted as observers. In March 2007, Chinese President Hu Jintao explicitly mentioned the possibility of further expansion of full members of the organisation, something craved by all observers as well as Afghanistan.

The CSTO was similarly a security-focused organisation at its inception. The organisation was based on the May 1992 Collective Security Treaty signed by Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) that sought to reunite former Soviet states. Azerbaijan signed the treaty in September 1993, and Georgia and Belarus joined in December 1993. However, given the CIS' failure to ensure unity among former Soviet states, the Collective Security Treaty was a weak organisational basis for increasing security co-operation. This was amply demonstrated in 1999 when Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan refused to sign a renewal of the treaty, effectively withdrawing as full members.

This failed to prevent the creation of the CSTO in October 2002 by the remaining six full members, with goals more ambitious than those of the SCO, encompassing collective defence rather than just joint security co-operation. Membership has remained more static than that of the SCO, although Uzbekistan rejoined in June 2006 as a full member, after realigning its foreign policy towards Russia following the May 2005 Andijan massacre.

### **Military co-operation**

This formalisation of the two organisations combined with the concurrent expansion of the SCO's membership have fuelled concern that a regional security bloc may be forming. This has been exacerbated by increasing foreign policy competition in Central Asia in the wake of the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, although US influence has been limited and undermined by the Andijan massacre and the subsequent withdrawal from the Khanabad air base in November 2005, and amid growing awareness of the region's energy resources.

China and Russia have also seen their interests converge in other arenas. Arguably, both countries share a common concern with secessionist movements on their territories. Moscow's experience with secessionist Caucasian rebels and Beijing's strained relations with Taiwan and counter-secessionist campaign in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region and Tibet Autonomous Region form a common interest between the two countries. Both partners also seek to increase loyalty among the Central Asian states.

This coincidence of foreign policy has been complemented by increasing military co-operation within and between the organisations since 2002, further encouraging speculation that a military bloc may be coalescing. Although neither organisation is able to match NATO's formal military infrastructure, and there is no obligation, as there is in NATO, for member states to spend a particular percentage of their gross domestic product on defence, military co-operation has expanded significantly, albeit from humble beginnings. The CSTO formed the Collective Rapid Reaction Forces (CRRF) in 2002, with a joint headquarters in Moscow and initially 1,500 troops (this figure has since expanded to 4,500 troops). In 2003, an air base was established in Kant, Kyrgyzstan, underlining the organisation's role as a possible forum through which to intervene into possible conflict in Central Asia with non-state armed groups.

Unlike the CSTO, the SCO lacks joint military forces, although the organisation maintains a permanent body, the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure in Tashkent, created in 2004, which theoretically co-ordinates policy and deployment towards meeting the organisation's goals.

Since 2002, both organisations have also sought to conduct annual collective anti-terrorism military exercises, with Russia and China being the main suppliers of personnel and armaments. Collective military exercises represent a central part of both the SCO and CSTO's functioning. They provide a sense of institutional evolution, consolidation of the organisations' agenda and fostering of military development among the organisations' member states. Moreover, the scope and size of collective military activities have been growing since 2003, involving greater numbers of troops and more sophisticated technologies.

The SCO's first military drills were conducted in Kyrgyzstan in October 2002 and involved Chinese People's Liberation Army personnel. Although the 2002 drills were relatively small in scale, they were the first inter-state

military activities abroad both for China and the SCO.

In mid-2003, the SCO's first large-scale military exercises, Coalition 2003, took place in eastern Kazakhstan and China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. The Coalition 2003 exercises were predicated on the possibility of anti-terrorism activities in a small town, involving 100 'terrorists' and 700 military personnel.

In total, the 2003 military exercises involved 1,300 military personnel from China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. Uzbekistan refused to participate in Coalition 2003 owing to its active co-operation with the US and NATO at that time. Sixty foreign representatives from 16 countries observed the drills. According to an agreement at the June 2002 St Petersburg summit, China and Russia provided 30 per cent of funding, personnel and equipment for SCO joint activities, while the Central Asian members provided 10 per cent each.

Although not officially acknowledged, Uighur separatist movements in Xinjiang appeared to be the primary justification for the 2003 military manoeuvres. As such, member states involved in the exercises were not only building stronger military ties with their neighbours, but also demonstrating shared security concerns. For instance, Kazakhstan, which retains the largest Uighur diaspora outside China of approximately 200,000 people, was able to reaffirm its support for China's counter-separatist campaign in its west.

After positive evaluations of the SCO's 2003 drills by the organisation's member states, the CSTO's CRRF conducted two-stage exercises, dubbed Rubezh 2004 (Frontier 2004), in Kyrgyzstan in mid-2004. Given the CRRF's focus on counter-terrorism, in particular the perceived threat of Islamist insurgents in the Ferghana Valley, the main task of Rubezh 2004 was to disband non-state armed actors by means of air attacks. Russia was the main supplier of aviation technologies, with approximately 1,700 CRRF troops out of the organisation's total of 4,500 involved in the exercises.

Both the Coalition 2003 and Rubezh 2004 drills represented milestones in regional co-operation activities on security. However, they were also a sign of intensifying competition between Russia and China over their influence in Central Asia.

In 2005 and 2006, the scope of the CSTO's Rubezh counter-terrorism exercises was expanded, with Russia willing to invest greater resources into the Central Asian militaries. Approximately 3,000-4,500 troops were involved in each joint military manoeuvre.

In October 2006, Kyrgyzstan and Russia conducted separate joint CSTO exercises in Osh, southern Kyrgyzstan. Dubbed South 2006, the Kyrgyz-Russian drills involved approximately 350 special forces troops, as well as Mi-8 Hip multirole helicopters, Su-25 multirole aircraft and various armoured vehicles.

## **Peace Mission**

Perhaps most dramatic of all the exercises conducted under the guise of either organisation and the zenith of co-operation came in August 2005 when Russia and China conducted joint military exercises on China's Shandong peninsula and near Vladivostok in Russia within the SCO framework. The Peace Mission 2005 exercises were the first bilateral military manoeuvres between both states, and by far the largest drills undertaken by either the SCO or the CSTO. China provided 7,000 of its military personnel, while Russia supplied 1,800. The drills involved assault ships, submarines and strategic aviation.

In mid-2007, another Peace Mission joint exercise will be undertaken, this time focused on nuclear terrorism and expected to take place in Russia's Povolzhsk-Uralsk military district. Initially, the exercises had been conceived as a joint CSTO-SCO Rubezh Peace Mission 2007 drill, with CSTO officials arguing that since both organisations' goals and memberships converge, organising military drills jointly would reduce costs and facilitate the exchange of experience. However, Beijing insisted that the two organisations lack legal grounds for conducting collective military manoeuvres, and therefore the exercises will take place under the aegis of the SCO alone.

Despite this lack of inter-organisation co-operation, the number of states involved in the exercises has expanded. With Moscow looking to provide 2,000 troops and China 1,600, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan will also provide 100 personnel each and Kyrgyzstan 30. Although the latter contributions are minor, it represents a further enlarging of the scope of the Peace Mission exercises, now becoming the primary regional military co-operation event. Armenia and Belarus, both members of the CSTO, are invited to the SCO exercises as observers.

The Peace Mission 2007 exercises will feature exclusively Russian and Chinese military technologies, including Chinese Chengdu J-10 multirole aircraft, infantry fighting vehicles and tanks and Russian Il-76MF strategic transport aircraft. Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Hu Jintao will attend the drills.

Such large-scale collective military manoeuvres and the technology involved does not appear to fit well with both

organisations' goals of fighting transnational threats such as drug trafficking, organised crime and ethnic separatism that require smaller-scale military and policing operations. Indeed, the previous experience of multilateral exercises demonstrates that the SCO and CSTO member states have preferred to utilise their conventional military equipment and tri-service personnel, rather than developing skills in police activities or intelligence exchange.

This was particularly true of Peace Mission 2005, the aim of which was to target 'terrorists in control of territory', although the use of amphibious vehicles, Tu-22M3 strategic bombers and A-50 early warning aircraft suggested that the potential scenarios of either an invasion of Taiwan or intervention in an unstable Korean peninsula were more likely aims of the exercises. This focus, combined with the mooted, but abandoned, integration of the CSTO's Rubezh exercises with the SCO's Peace Mission exercises, strengthens the theory that the SCO and CSTO are looking to form an Asian collective defence organisation.

### **Future co-operation**

Despite these fears, there are a number of factors that hamper the possibility of greater integration between and among the SCO and the CSTO, and the formation of such an organisation similar to NATO. Owing to the unequal scale of economic development among SCO and CSTO member states, with China, Russia and Kazakhstan representing considerably stronger economies than Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, there is little scope for the member states to contribute equally to the organisations. As such, the SCO remains dominated by China and Russia, while the CSTO is almost entirely Russo-led. Although the SCO promotes trade between China and the Central Asian states, in the near future Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan can only offer small-scale shuttle trade and small exports of electricity.

Also, the agreements unite culturally divergent countries and are far from being based on common cultural or political identities. To some extent, Russia, China and the Central Asian states can be identified as belonging to three or four different civilisations, while the political systems of all the countries differ. NATO suffered from similar problems at its creation in April 1949, with the democracies of Western Europe and North America combining with the dictatorship of Portugal. Similarly, NATO's expansion in 1952 to include culturally and religiously separate Turkey could have been another obstacle. However, the cultural and political fissures in NATO at its inception were less significant than those affecting the CSTO and SCO.

Moreover, in contrast to NATO, which was formed in reaction to a threat perceived unanimously among its members as immediate and significant, namely the Soviet Union and the Berlin blockade from June 1948, the CSTO and SCO share the perceived threat of non-state armed groups but differ on other strategic issues such as Kyrgyzstan's lease of the Manas air base to the US. Sino-Russian rivalry and disagreements, such as Moscow's fears of a resurgent China and migration of Chinese to the Far East region, also detract from effective inter- and intra-organisational co-operation.

A further difficulty in the future will be the membership of the organisations. Currently, the six-member SCO and seven-member CSTO involve the economically and internationally weak Central Asian states, undermining the groups' importance. Future expansion may be viewed as necessary to create a significant military grouping, but inherent problems exist.

CSTO expansion is limited by the poor relations between Russia and other CIS states, particularly Georgia, Azerbaijan and Ukraine. SCO expansion would most likely involve its observer members or Afghanistan. However, Mongolia may be seen as too distant from Central Asia to warrant inclusion, while Russia has vetoed Afghanistan's inclusion until its internal situation stabilises.

India's interest in the Central Asian region, as well as military co-operation with Russia and China, has been increasing in the past few years and, therefore, ensures it remains a possible candidate for full SCO membership. Russia certainly favours Indian membership, as it is eager to expand the trilateral relationship between Moscow, New Delhi and Beijing. However, China favours Pakistan, its primary ally in South Asia. Indeed, India's observer status is likely to have been offered in 2006 owing to Pakistan's inclusion. This highlights the difficulty; including either India or Pakistan without the other would be seen as a diplomatic slight, and therefore neither is likely to receive membership status.

The possibility of Iranian membership in the SCO is also a controversial issue. SCO members are attracted to Iran's energy resources and Russia enjoys a profitable arms trade with Tehran. However, by accepting Iran the SCO would risk involving the organisation in the diplomatic difficulties of the country's nuclear programme, along with its tension with Israel.

As such, future expansion of the CSTO or SCO is improbable and the organisations are more likely to concentrate on consolidation. At the June 2006 summit in Shanghai dedicated to the SCO's fifth anniversary, the organisation

announced a moratorium on further expansion. Instead, the SCO will stage partnership dialogues with individual states, with Afghanistan becoming the first state to participate in these dialogues.

The possibility of an Asian NATO is therefore slim. Collaboration between the CSTO and the SCO is possible, but as Chinese insistence on the Peace Mission 2007 exercises being under the aegis of the SCO reflects, Beijing's preference for the Shanghai organisation could scupper further integration, at least in the short term. The Kremlin, meanwhile, will not abandon the CSTO as an organisation, as it allows co-operation with former Soviet states such as Armenia and Belarus, currently excluded from the SCO by its different geographical focus. Indeed, to some extent the CSTO is a counter-balance not only to Western influence in the former Soviet space, but also to China's presence in Central Asia and the South Caucasus.

A merger of the two organisations is therefore improbable. Both the SCO and the CSTO will remain competitive structures that will consolidate primarily around Russian and Chinese interests. Further, expansion of either organisation is unlikely, while the shift in the SCO's focus from military co-operation to collective defence is unthinkable for Beijing, which fears being drawn into conflicts or disagreements in which it has no vested interest. Although both the SCO and the CSTO will continue to increase joint exercises and military co-operation, an Asian NATO is inconceivable in the short term, and would rely on a more easily identifiable common security threat for Asian countries to foster such an organisation in the long term. n

### Energy motivations

One of the reasons for Russian and Chinese interest in Central Asia is energy. China's interest in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan's energy resources is just such an example. The 988 km long Atasu-Alashankou oil pipeline between Kazakhstan and Xinjiang in China was built in record time in 2004-2005 and significantly strengthened Kazakh-Chinese security co-operation. In 2006, 2.5 million tonnes of crude oil were transferred from Kazakhstan to China through the Atasu-Alashankou pipeline. In the future, the pipeline is aiming to transfer up to 20 million tonnes every year. Chinese overall import of crude oil is expected to reach 120 million tonnes in 2010 and 240 million tonnes by 2020. Kazakhstan, therefore, will export up to 25 per cent of Chinese crude oil in the future. Chinese-Kazakh security relations are likely to strengthen on the basis of both countries' growing economic ties.

### Membership overlap

The Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO) and Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), formed in 2001 and 2002 respectively, embrace a significant part of Eurasia and their memberships overlap. SCO members include China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan; while India, Iran, Mongolia, and Pakistan hold observer status. CSTO members are Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan; while Azerbaijan and Georgia are former members.



*China provided 7,000 of its military personnel for the Peace Mission 2005 exercise.*  
(PA Photos)  
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*The Russian Souvremenny-class missile destroyer, Burny, takes part in an exercise during the Sino-Russian Peace Mission 2005 exercises.*  
(PA Photos)  
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*Members of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation meet in Yekaterininsky Hall in Moscow's Kremlin.*

*(PA Photos)*  
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*Leaders, including Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Hu Jintao, attended the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation summit in 2006.*

*(PA Photos)*  
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*The Sino-Russian Peace Mission 2005 signalled the first bilateral military drills between the two states.*

*(PA Photos)*  
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