

Collective Security and Unilateral Decisions – Security Prospects for the post-Soviet Space

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Unlike anywhere else within the international community, the post-Soviet space (pSs) is unique since the states within it are bound together not only because of common history and culture, but also due to political geography and largely uniform self-perceptions. The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) – the cultural, political, economic and security successor of the USSR – has important and even a strategic advantage over comparable organizations such as: Le Francophonie, the Commonwealth of Nations, and the Iberian Union. These associations of states are not geographically proximate leading to different international relations and geopolitical orientations. Indeed, the aforementioned owe their existence to naval power in the colonial period and the ability of ‘home’ countries to project political and military power to distant lands. This resulted in a lack of geographic integrity. Therefore, post-colonial organizations are characterized by the remoteness of their constituent parts and a disparity in world-views. For instance, the Commonwealth of Nations includes India, South Africa and Australia. These three states can hardly be said to share a similar, let alone homogeneous, international relations outlook. Such geopolitical diffusion waters down such associations and renders them useful only in advancing certain cultural and political activities. In contrast, the states in the pSs are geographically continuous, a fact that may expedite the construction and utilisation of a common economic space, customs union, and a free trade area that may facilitate the free movement of capital, labour, goods and services.

While heterogeneous political evolutions occurred among the states in the pSs they do share a common foundation; the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Paradoxically however, the pSs currently appears on the international scene as a unique socio-political structure. Despite its omission from political and geopolitical maps, the post-Soviet political skeleton binds independent states

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that were once a part of the Soviet system with energy resources and transport corridors, established markets, commercial and economic relationships. Also, the states of the pSs share specific state administrative systems, collective remains the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.

Today the CIS forms the bedrock of an established pSs framework that may be utilised as a starting point for an array of additional integration projects in areas as varied as security, economics, diplomacy, enviro- and energy politics. Cooperation within the CIS structure has for example ripened into the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC) – perhaps the two most promising long-term projects in the pSs to date.

The initial stages of state formation among the newly independent pSs states is largely complete, edging them towards a crossroads where, on the one hand, they may choose to evolve into parts of a larger integration project to, for example, establish a Eurasian Union on a mutually beneficial basis and thus replicating the model of the EU. On the other hand, these states may opt to construct new barriers in an attempt to become parts of integration structures rooted outside the pSs. This latter option carries the threat of an intensification of international tensions and could prove to challenge the basic configuration of the current international system. Both scenarios are equally possible and are in sync with international trends of states ceding some of their sovereignty in favour of economic, political and military cooperation with others.

Alliance Formation in the Post-Soviet Space

The geopolitical role of the pSs is increasing tremendously. The theory of *the* pivot point of international power relations being geographically rooted in Eurasia was proposed by Sir Halford John Mackinder as far back as 1904. This theory has taken on renewed importance in the expanses of the modern pSs. According to Mackinder's theory, the Eurasian heartland holds the key to those seeking international geopolitical dominance. As the so-called 'Great Game' between the UK and Russia in the 19th century illustrated that the region bears importance to states not geographically proximate, justifying Mackinder's assessment.

But how do states acquire a dominant role in the context of international relations? Often states seeking to enhance their relative power positions are challenged by others leading to war. If war is to be avoided, and yet power distribution altered, other means of exercising control over other actors must be utilised. Since wars remain relatively rare, it is safe to assume that most states are either satisfied with their power position in international relations or have found alternative ways of enhancing their power without triggering a conflict. Alliances seem to be one way for states to alter their power position without resorting directly to war, though there is a body of alliance literature which

attributes the war-proneness of states and regions to alliance formation. For the foreseeable future it seems that state objectives in the pSs will be achieved through the construction and maintenance of alliances in military, political and economic affairs.

While traditional alliances in Eurasia were largely hierarchical and relied on force in order to maintain cohesion, a shift has occurred since the collapse of the USSR and, at present, regional cooperation does not imply the aggressive behaviour of more powerful states vis-à-vis the more vulnerable. As in other regions, participation in an alliance may provide smaller pSs states with opportunities to exercise a degree of influence in the decisions of more powerful partners. For small states, participation in pSs alliances is a reliable way of increasing their political weight and influence over international decision-making; as part of powerful association. More influential pSs (re: Russia) states enjoy stable and constructive participation and active promotion of their interests in regional and international politics more easily through an enduring alliance framework. Finally, pSs alliances tend to be flexible and may act to resolve conflict situations by providing optimal multi-layered solutions including acting as a forum for negotiations and dialogue, able to bring conflicting parties – regional and non-regional actors – to the negotiating table more easily.

There are, however, nuances surrounding alliance formation in the pSs. The basic reasons for alliances in the pSs are usually associated to potential economic benefits and as additional guarantees of state interest defence and promotion. Importantly, successful alliances in the pSs specifically, and in international relations more generally, tend to be rooted on a single issue or project. Such issues or projects may include: increasing energy security including its transportation (shared pipelines, port facilities, expeditions and research), collective security arrangements (against a commonly recognised actual or potential challenge such as religious terrorism) and/or economic cooperation (for example, free-trade areas, lowered or removed tariffs, visa waivers on labour). Without the existence of common reference points it is likely that the alliance will lack cohesion, not be effective and disintegrate in the face of an existing challenge or when a more beneficial alliance is formed.

To be sure, the pSs is an offspring of the Soviet system. The eventual fragmentation of the Soviet state into separate, independent republics hampered their autonomous existence. As a result, states in the current pSs continue to have territorial disputes, conflicting ownership claims over natural resources and cannot yet constructively develop in isolation of each other, as the large number of developmental processes are deeply interconnected.

Relations in the post-Soviet space can relatively be broken down into several levels. The first level concerns the relations between pSs states and Russia, the largest, wealthiest, most internationally influential and powerful of the pSs states. There are four subtypes of such relations: a balancing relationship. This

implies that two or more pSs states seek to balance against the interests of the EU, US, Russia, China and/or other players in the pSs; friendly/strategic relations with Russia (usually positive) maintaining political and economic distance from Russia (often with negative connotations); and neutrality (neither supportive of or opposed to Russia).

The second level is in regards to Russia's relations with the republics of the CIS. This level mainly consists of three sublevels: recognition and development of relations with friendly but failed (or unrecognised) states such as, Abkhazia, South Ossetia or Transdnistria; development of relations with the EU, whereas the pSs is given secondary importance; the pursuit of a more confident integration policy with other post-Soviet republics.

The third level characterizes the specific relations between pSs republics themselves. The sublevels include: developmental projects through enhanced bilateral relations and participation in alliances. As a side note, the recent recognition by Russia of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent republics breaks with traditional pSs regional practises. These recognitions represent the first time since the collapse of the USSR that a wave of new states has appeared. This fact adds a new sublevel determining the relations between pSs republics.

Enforcing Alliances

Until the eruption of armed violence between Georgia and Russia (August 2008) – the first large-scale conflict *between* states in the pSp – CSTO had several possible directions in which it could develop though seemed to be moving towards greater harmonisation with its members in the areas of interstate military and humanitarian policies. As neither of these fields requires bold initiatives or sweeping changes, the CSTO never appeared to seriously manifest itself internationally.

To be sure, there were many collective projects within the CSTO such as: annual military exercises; the establishment of a “Rubezh,” a joint command post exercise which plays the *key* role in the CSTO system of operational and combat training; programmes for military modernization and development of humanitarian components in state of emergency situations; and combating drug trafficking had been the primary focus of CSTO activities. However, the 2008 Caucasus crisis has altered the security fabric of the pSs. The CSTO has become one of the main regional actors in the aftermath of war, gaining increments of influence and international clout as a *real* political-military alliance.

The first and most obvious point to become evident immediately following the outbreak of hostilities in Georgia, was the silence maintained by the traditional CIS allies of Russia. Neither Belarus nor Kazakhstan (the biggest investor in Georgia's economy) – not to mention the rest of CSTO allies – issued

clear political statements. The statements that were made amounted to nothing more than mundane comments on low governmental levels.

Policies of ‘wait and see’ run counter to the CSTO Charter which implies that allies must provide support to a belligerent member state.² The only state in the whole pSs to clearly and timely state its position was Ukraine.

The initial attempts by Russia to mobilize its allies in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) to support its actions in the Caucasus did not reach Moscow’s expectations. The SCO members did not directly mention ‘Georgian aggression’ – the phrase diplomats from the Kremlin were lobbying for – in their final declaration.³ Also, Chinese reluctance to damage its relations with the West in favour of open support to Russia played an important role in the SCO’s final declaration. However, in preparation to the subsequent CSTO summit on 05 September the Russian leadership was engaged in meeting CSTO members’ presidents personally in order to persuade them to support Moscow’s position in its confrontation with Georgia, especially after the SCO summit held on 28 August in Dushanbe (Tajikistan), which left Russia without essential diplomatic support. The SCO summit’s final declaration only expressed the commitment of its members to the principle of maintaining the territorial integrity of states in international affairs.⁴

Moscow – left alarmingly alone in its decision to recognise South Ossetia and Abkhazia – needed strong support for its actions, whereas its CIS partners kept silence. In the lead-up to the CSTO’s Council on Collective Security meeting, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in a meeting with his Armenian counterpart Serzh Sargsyan (Armenia would have been taking over chairmanship of the alliance) on 02 September 2008 announced that Moscow awaited the development of a common position among its allies. The summit had been transferred to Moscow although it was scheduled to be held in Bishkek, as Kyrgyzstan was, at the time, chairing the CSTO.

Work on the CSTO statement did not proceed smoothly. Not all of Russia’s partners in the alliance were ready to undermine their relations with the West over the situation in Georgia. While most members were ready to speak in support of Russia’s peacekeeping role, they were tempted to omit the fact of the actual confrontation between Russia and Georgia and wanted to water-down the main issues the conflict raised.⁵ Moscow, for its part, wanted its allies to fully denounce Georgian actions while accepting Russian actions as legitimate.

² The CSTO member states shall give their support to another belligerent member of the alliance or to a member state which is a target of belligerency. For details please see the CSTO Charter’s articles 3, 9 and 22.

³ See *Dushanbe Declaration of Heads of SCO Member States*, 28 August, 2008.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *CSTO is Being Set Against Georgia*, Vladimir Soloviev, Natalia Grib, Kommersant Newspaper, 03 September, 2008.

Perhaps Medvedev's meeting with his Byelorussia counterpart Alexander Lukashenka on 20 August 2008, where Russia agreed to reduce gas prices and allocate the postponed long-term \$2 billion stabilization credit; and Putin's visit to Tashkent on 02 September 2008 where the purchase price for Uzbek gas supplied to Gazprom was increased to \$300 (per 1000 cubic meters), were rewards in exchange for the support of Russia's position at the 05 September 2008 summit.

Bribery in international relations is common practise; it is not unique to the pSs. To draw a parallel, the relations between NATO members – where the US plays a dominant role – policies are not arrived at 'free of charge.' One recent example is the US missile defence system designed for Central Europe. Poland, has agreed to host elements of the system for political and economic benefits from the US.

The Moscow Declaration: A Move towards Real Alignment?

Presently, the absence of operational instruments of mutual cooperation in the military and political spheres within the CSTO is obvious. Until and during the Russo-Georgian conflict, Russia's was the most important voice in the CSTO and its interests reflected more than the others. Additionally, Russia is, for all intents and purposes, the guarantor of security in the pSs and has been the most ready to use military power if it deems it necessary.

Given the current state of affairs in the pSp, the question of what are the prospects for developing the CSTO following the Russo-Georgian war and its resulting establishment of two new states, is central to understanding the alliance's future. This question has been partially answered by the so-called, 'Declaration of the Moscow Session of the Collective Security Council,' the outcome of the CSTO summit held on 05 September 2008. This Declaration is not merely a document outlining an allied assessment of the situation in South Ossetia; it is also the first real consolidated position of the alliance, a view on international politics and the place of CSTO in it.⁶

Contained in the document is a statement of open support for Russia's position on NATO's eastward expansion; a warning on the potential consequences of the deployment of new missile defence facilities near the borders of CSTO members and voices concern regarding Georgia's attempt to militarily resolve its territorial dispute which resulted in a humanitarian crisis.⁷ For the first time since the CSTO's establishment there appears consolidated political support of the Collective Security Council – the highest decision making body in the

⁶ See *Declaration of the Moscow Session of the Collective Security Council of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, Moscow, 05 September, 2008.*

⁷ Ibid.

CSTO – on an actual international security issue. Although the CSTO’s reaction was belated, and mobilized by Russia, the fact that a consolidated position emerged is more important than how such a position was reached.

The Moscow session of the Collective Security Council, like no other in its history, allowed Moscow to consolidate allies in the pSs under a unified structure. One of the significant outcomes of the summit was the decision to hold all subsequent CSTO heads of state summits in Moscow irrespective of which country holds the rotating chairmanship of the alliance. There is no doubt that Russia dominates the CSTO. And, following the Russo-Georgian conflict Russia’s status, in the pSs, has drastically changed. Moscow demonstrated its military power and willingness to deploy such instruments to enhance its security and/or achieve its international relations goals. Despite the fact the deploying military force caused much consternation in the West, it has added more credibility to the CSTO as a military bloc *under* Moscow’s leadership.

The CSTO has gained relevance, to the point that NATO – the premier example of a collective defence alliance – cannot afford to ignore it as it had previously. The realisation in NATO that the CSTO is an alliance to be taken seriously comes as the security situation in Afghanistan – under NATO auspices – deteriorates. CSTO members form a ring around northern Afghanistan and have been essential in keeping NATO forces supplied (overland) without the constant fear of ambushes similar to the supply lines coming from Pakistan. The geographic proximity of the CSTO has raised its importance among NATO planners, just as the presence of NATO personnel in Central Asia has got the CSTO to review its region and international role with caution. For instance, the CSTO – re: Declaration of the Moscow Session of the Collective Security Council – is positioning itself as an international security organisation that has prioritised the fight against terrorism; drug trafficking; illegal migration; and the reinforcement of borderland security for its members. Thus the CSTO and NATO may, for the time being, share many of the same basic interests. In fact, the CSTO indicated in its Moscow Declaration, a readiness to establish a cooperative relationship with NATO to combat the narco-terrorist threat emanating from Afghanistan and generally stabilise that country.⁸ This is not the first CSTO attempt to cooperate with NATO, though previous efforts were largely unsuccessful due to NATO’s relative power and the CSTO’s relative weakness. In the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks against the US, and the declaration of a ‘war-on-terror,’ the CSTO emerged as a natural partner to NATO. Since then, there has been movement to recognising common goals in their security policies, though these may not be as harmonious as first envisioned. Despite occasional differences, NATO and the CSTO do

⁸ See *Declaration of the Moscow Session of the Collective Security Council of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, Moscow, 05 September, 2008.*

have interrelated regional and international security concerns in the Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern Europe.

Military cooperation within the framework of the CSTO has been intensifying. In the aftermath of the 2008 Russo-Georgian conflict the leadership of the CSTO re-launched the idea of developing a five-sided military force for political containment in the Central Asian region. According to Nikolai Bordyuzha (Secretary General of the CSTO) the forces will include full units and divisions.⁹ The military group of the CSTO is being designed with a primary mission to politically and militarily contain the situation in Afghanistan from spreading to other Central Asian states. However, according to Bordyuzha, this military group should be ready to confront any challenge to the sovereignty of the CSTO members. Presumably the military group would have up to 11000 well-trained personnel. The core of the force will be collective forces, deployable as a rapid reaction to emergency situations. The 'five sides' envisioned in this project are: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Russia.

In a competitive world, superpowers tend to believe in establishing buffer zones to protect regional interests – an area where the interests of competing powers cannot prevail – and spheres of influence. Russia considers the pSs as being in its vital strategic interests.¹⁰ While the realisation of Russian goals in the pSs could trigger a regional and international scramble for influence, it seems that Russia's greatest geopolitical challengers are also its most important trading partners namely the EU and NATO states. For the time being however, Western rhetoric (and actions) points away from the resurrection of the strategic rivalry, characterised as the *Great Game*, in the twenty first century.

The EU, for example, projects its non-military interests by advancing more normative standards in various fields of cooperation with the CIS states, resulting in a proliferation of influence without sparking an arms race or intensifying a strategic struggle. This approach, while broadly underpinning Western efforts, is not typically adhered to by the US. Instead, the US is more strategically assertive and the US has often instructed its diplomatic core to openly challenge Russian geopolitical ambitions – in the pSs and beyond – and has criticised Russia on a range of issue stretching from human rights abuses to instigating a new cold war with the West. It should be noted that the two aforementioned 'Western' approaches to Russia and the pSs differ greatly from the other worldly power geographically connected to the region; China. The Chinese approach is more conciliatory towards Russia as they share interests and geopolitical outlooks within the SCO, and China promotes its interests in the pSs, mostly in Central Asia, without much hindrance from Russia, other CSTO members or Western states.

⁹ *Interfax News Agency Newslines*, 12 September, 2008.

¹⁰ See National Security Concept of the Russian Federation for more details.

Following the Moscow summit, the CSTO received a boost for deeper military commitments between members and the development of elements of coordinated foreign and military policy to guide political and military decisions. There are two essential aspects to unifying the military and foreign policies of CSTO members: constructing a modern, high-tech and efficient CSTO military and streamlining collective decisions in a unified control, command and communications (C3) intra-alliance network. Since Russia is the most influential member of the CSTO it stands to reason that such militarisation stems from Russia's adoption of a tougher line in its relations to its (CSTO) partners, possibly due to an exchange of policy support within the CSTO for internal and international security (military, energy and economic) enhancements. Ultimately, Russia's geopolitical interests are being fulfilled by a group of other pSs states – the CSTO allies. Such military developments within the CSTO may trigger severe Western reactions, particularly if NATO begins to identify a militarising CSTO as a strategic threat rather than a strategic partner. Western reactions will probably be directed to the economic realm and the adoption of a 'containment' policy deploying economic or political, rather than military tools of coercion. Such Western 'interference' is likely to cause a deterioration in relations between NATO and the EU on the one hand, and Russia on the other. In the event that NATO begins to view the CSTO as a strategic challenge, and takes action to alter the behaviour of some members of the CSTO, crises and confrontations in Central Asia may become a norm.

Returning to the idea of a militarising CSTO, it is prudent to identify and discuss which states will contribute and what their contributions may consist of. Before turning to the specifics, two states: Armenia and Belarus, have not signalled their participation in the political containment force. Neither of these countries have permanent, vested interests in Central Asia so, presumably, their contribution to the joint military force will be negligible and confined to political support within CSTO and international relations chambers.

Three CSTO members border on Afghanistan, namely: Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Kyrgyzstan, which besides hosting a CSTO military base, is also home to a US base, does not possess high-quality armed forces which would be effective for collective defence. Uzbekistan maintains the largest armed forces in Central Asia. However waging a large-scale military campaign against Afghan Islamists is beyond its capacity. Finally, Tajikistan cannot field any serious military resources, and for a long time (since the 1990's) Russia's 201st division has secured the largest part of the Tajik border with Afghanistan and has assisted in the stabilization of the country following its civil war.

In contrast to the other Central Asian republics, Kazakhstan does not share a border with Afghanistan and thus has not experienced any large scale clashes with internal Islamic extremism supported by Afghan or Arab insurgents. Kazakhstan may boast being one of the most developed countries in the pSs region

(besides Russia). Kazakhstan is a net oil and gas exporter with massive state coffers that have been, in part, going to constructing modern military forces.

Despite the fact that Kazakhstan (the richest and wealthiest Central Asian state) and Uzbekistan (the most populous Central Asian state) have a competitive relationship – both view themselves as *the* natural regional leader – in reality, Russia has taken a leadership initiative. Thus the establishment of CSTO military forces should be viewed as an extension of Russian influence in Central Asia. This connection between a regionally assertive Russia and the militarisation of the CSTO can be clearly seen in a key outcome of the 2008 confrontation between Russia Georgia. On 03 September 2008 the Interfax-AVN military news agency reported that Rosoboronexport (the state agency for Russia's export of defence-related and dual use products – technologies and services) is ready to prioritise CSTO orders and supply them with state-of-the-art weapons systems.¹¹ This military face-lift comes at a time when the full scope of military supplies from NATO members to Georgia prior to and following hostilities has been revealed. Russia is interested in balancing against the US and NATO in the pSs. It is through the expansion of and depth of military cooperation within the CSTO that Russia hopes to do so. Whether Moscow will be successful in such an ambitious security programme is unclear. However, as Russia gains international and regional confidence it will endeavour to carve out a geopolitical niche whether that comes at a cost to NATO or not.

Territorial Fragmentation in the pSs

The pSs may serve as an important reflection of international relations more generally. Many of the changes underway within the pSs, such as: alliance formation, state modernisation, technological modernisation and the processes of both territorial fragmentation as well as globalisation, provides a snap-shot of wider international relations trends. Just before turning to the conclusion of this research, it is necessary to review one of the most acute challenges occurring within the pSs – territorial fragmentation – which is relevant for the direction of 21st century international relations. To provide an account of such fragmentation a presentation of the summer 2008 Russo-Georgian conflict will be explored.

According to Abkhazia's President Sergei Bagapsh, the priority for newly independent Abkhazia is to amalgamate into the Union State of Russia and Belarus and later join CIS and the CSTO. Such ambitions raise a problematic: in order to grant full CSTO membership to Abkhazia, all members must recognize it as an independent state, decisions likely to spark the ire of the US, EU and NATO. This problematic is compounded due to the tight-rope many CSTO members walk in terms of their own territorial disputes and domestic secession

¹¹ *Interfax-AVN Military News Agency Newslines*, 03 September, 2008.

movements. For example, Armenia has a frozen conflict with Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh, and it will not recognize the independence of Abkhazia until Nagorno-Karabakh is recognized. This position was unambiguously declared by the Armenian president on 03 September 2008.¹² Central Asian members of the CSTO have large ethnic minorities and unresolved territorial disputes, particularly over the control and use of increasingly scarce water resources.

It is not so much a question of which states will recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia within the CIS. Instead, it is a question of how the international relations situation – vis-à-vis the US, EU and NATO – can prompt the post-Soviet republics to recognize the independence of these two states, and what they will gain in exchange for such recognition from Russia, the leading proponent of their entry into the CIS. Only through answering the above can researchers hope to address a more central concern namely; whether Abkhazia will join the CSTO. Abkhazia is singled out here because it seems that South Ossetia cannot yet emerge as a viable independent state, despite Russia's recognition. Instead, South Ossetia is likely to remain a footnote in the transformation of the larger regional political configuration: an example of a failing pSs state whose importance is linked to its geopolitical position rather than its socio-political and economic potential.

Ossetia is sandwiched between the predominantly Muslim populated Kabardino-Balkaria and Ingushetia. It is viewed by Moscow as a reliable Russian outpost in the Caucasus, a bridge to Christian Georgia. Russia has yet dismissed the possible inclusion of South Ossetia into the Russian Federation as the territory is regarded as a playing chip in political manoeuvres with Georgia and its Western allies. In the event that the succeeding Georgian government will adopt a more loyal stance towards Kremlin, negotiations over the possible re-confederation of Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia may emerge as determining relations between Moscow and Tbilisi. In fact, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, has not precluded such an arrangement in the future. Also worth mentioning is the potential of new Islamist-separatist movements emerging in the region and Russia's view that additional, Russian-friendly territories in the Caucasus will assist it in projecting its power.

At present, Russia maintains security obligations on the basis of bilateral agreements over specific deployments of Russian military forces. There are solid grounds for further development of this model over the short-term. Treaties of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between Moscow, Tskhinvali (capitol of South Ossetia) and Sukhumi (capitol of Abkhazia) are constructed on the basis of a ten year period with the option of renewal over the next five years with the consent of relevant parties. The borders of the newly independent states will be guarded in cooperation with Russian regular troops. Incidentally, the CSTO Caucasus Region of Collective Security traces its roots

¹² *Interfax News Agency Newslines*, 03 September, 2008.

back to the joint patrolling of Armenian and Russian forces of the Armenian-Turkish border, a parallel that may help researchers understand the longer-term magnitude the 2008 remapping of the region bears.

Perhaps then, one of the most important outcomes of the 2008 Russo-Georgian conflict is the level and depth of the security obligations Russia advanced separate from the alliance framework of the CSTO, a policy inspired by US's fulfilment of its foreign policy goals in Iraq without the clear support of its NATO allies. The question of whether Russia will avoid including South Ossetia and Abkhazia into the CSTO Caucasus Region of Collective Security and if this will encourage further alliance expansion, emerges as integral.

In the final Declaration of the Moscow Session of the Collective Security Council members supported actions to ensure the security of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, the possible membership of Abkhazia and/or South Ossetia in the CSTO will require additional guarantees of security for the republics by others in addition to Russia. These guarantees will extend beyond rhetoric and probably include multilateral CSTO forces being stationed in the newly independent states. For this to occur CSTO members will have to assess their ability, willingness and readiness to be involved in potentially contagious military actions on regional and international levels. This leaves CSTO members with stark choices to make as, since the collapse of the USSR, Abkhazia has been a military flash point no less than three times. The assessment of CSTO members must also include the acknowledgement that a NATO Membership Action Plan for Georgia is in the works implying that a repeat of the 2008 conflict will likely have a spillover effect. If NATO absorbs and extends its security guarantees to Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia will be rushed into the CSTO, ensuring that any conflict over the territories will involve NATO. While Russia seems content with the post-conflict status quo in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the other members of the CSTO will have to make weighty decisions over how far they are willing to go to achieve their foreign policy goals. Such decisions will not be made rashly. Instead, the coming months and even years will reveal much about the efficiency of the CSTO and whether it adequately represents the security and international relations interests of its members.

Security Cooperation and Stability in the Post-Soviet Space

In 1907 the Anglo-Russian Convention delimited spheres of influence between the competing British and Russian Empires in Asia and brought an end to the so-called, *Great Game*. However, peoples locked into the resulting spheres of influence – bound to their respective empires through techniques of co-option, social level deterrence, and coercion – end up losing more than their political autonomy. Often, cultural and religious diffusions accompanied such geopolitical carvings. In the contemporary world it is no longer acceptable

and hence the *Great Game* of the 19th and early 20th century cannot be fully replicated. However, there are two lessons which that era produced which may give pause for thought.

Firstly, for developments in the pSs to be constructive and on par with most other parts of the international community it is essential to diffuse the strength of influence that accompanies competing great powers so that no single state may gain regional hegemony. Since there is no way to eliminate the interests of great powers in the pSs, a balance of power system must be worked out to prevent wanton actions that might destabilise the region and with it, the rest of the international community. Secondly, more than a century since the Anglo-Russian Convention and the structure of international relations facilitates the actualisation of the individual interests of all states including those in the pSs. Also, nearly all states in the pSs wish to maintain their independence and not succumb to a new *Great Game* whereby they lose their political and cultural identity for enhanced security within an empire-*esq* entity. Instead, the majority of pSs states want to belong to security and economic unions as equals with each other and larger worldly powers. To defend themselves from actual and/or perceived challenges states – in this case pSs states – look to military power as a means of producing security and stability. The problem is that when this occurs in many bordering states in close spatial proximity, security and stability are usually the first victims of an ensuing conflict spiral. Negative militarisation brings real threats to security and stability in the pSs and threatens – because of contagion – adjoining regions such as the EU, the South Asian Subcontinent, the Middle East and East Asia.

Until now, there is no agreement on whether or how to control the militarisation of the pSs, an issue that should be prioritised by all responsible powers and the international community at large.

One interim measure could be the creation of an international forum (for example a Forum of Eurasian Cooperation) to provide a neutral venue that facilitates dialogue and respectful interactions between post-Soviet Republics (including Russia), the EU, the US and China, with the option of extending participation to other interested parties. Such a forum could, at this historical junction, serve as a compromise in the relations between Russia, the EU and the US so that constructive and progressive developments occur in the pSs. Such a forum could help resolve outstanding tensions and encourage reconciliation over competing regional interests.

Just as the SCO has successfully helped Russia and China recognise each others individual and shared interests in Central Asia, resolve political, economic and strategic disagreements and develop regional infrastructure, a Forum of Eurasian Cooperation could extend such work to identify the competing interests within the pSs and assist in finding ways to overcome them. To be sure, the pSs is replete with shared challenges. Even if the main regional and international protagonists refuse to cooperate, actual and/or potential WMD

proliferation, drug trafficking, religious inspired terrorism, separatism, environmental and water issues, are and will continue to stymie progress. In order to overcome such challenges regional cooperation must be prioritised.

A positive step in this direction was Medvedev's initiative to establish a European Security Treaty that would include the EU together with pSs countries with the purpose of addressing shared challenges and opening (and keeping open) the channels of cooperation so that misunderstandings and crises may be averted. This initiative was well received in the CSTO, a fact shown by the unanimous approval the initiative received as it was incorporated in the final draft of the Declaration of the Moscow Session of the Collective Security Council.

It remains uncertain as to whether Medvedev's initiative will bear fruit over a short or long time-frame. However, as competing alliances are being formed, nurtured and extending into the pSs, it is becoming increasingly evident that dialogue and negotiations are needed to avoid the return of a *Great Game*, where cycles of political violence and instability plagued both the Russian and British Empires in the 19th century. If the international community learns from past mistakes, then the current situation in the pSs needs to be dealt with diplomatically, and quickly, or else the risk of confrontation could again loom within and beyond the region.

While the research presented in this work sought to answer the problematic of alliances in the pSs, it stands to conclude by highlighting the fact that alliances may be tools for both increasing and decreasing the security of their members. In the case of the pSs, where states are relatively young, insecure and prone to great power bullying, alliances should be developed that assist in providing recourse for inter-state grievances and to ensure the survival of alliance members. To do so, pSs alliances must be open and responsible and act to reinforce cooperation rather than be self-fulfilling.