



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Study of Russian Security Activities in Central Asia under Collective Security Treaty Organization**

**<sup>1</sup>Dr. Mumtaz Hussain <sup>2</sup>Hamna Mahrukh <sup>3</sup>Maimona Saleem**

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Govt. Graduate College Bhakkar, Punjab, Pakistan

2. MPhil, Department of International Relations, National Defence University, Islamabad, Pakistan

3. MS, Department of International Relations, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan

\*Corresponding Author: Maimonasaleemzt8@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT**

Central Asia has become a focal point for Russia due to its strategic importance and enhanced Russia's position into world politics. Aim of this research is to analyse the Russia-Central Asia political and security relations under Collective Security Treaty Organization. To regain its lost hegemony, Russia established intergovernmental organizations in which Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) plays significant role to secure Russian security interests in the region. The whole analysis reflects that Central Asia's geographical importance has not disappeared but enhanced more than before. Although Russian monopoly has been replaced by the other players in the region, like USA, China and Europe but its influences and interests are still present in political and security fields. Qualitative and content analysis method has been used to examine the research. Questions are addressed in regard to Russian military activity under the CSTO and Russian impact on the political and security situation of Central Asia.

**KEYWORDS** Central Asia, Russia, Collective Security, Russian Foreign Policy, Security Interests

**Introduction**

The countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan make up the landlocked area of Central Asia. Afghanistan, China, Iran, India, Pakistan, and Russia are all nearby. Due to the richness of natural resources across regional and trans-regional entities, its geopolitical significance expanded. It has the foremost oil reserves and is also abundant in metals including gold, silver, magnesium, and uranium, among others. Russian hegemony had been broken after disintegration of Soviet Union (1991) resultantly five states; Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan, came in to existence in Central Asia. Central Asia dependency holds all those positions which are the need of any country for its development when it is in the hands of colonial master or weak in its progress. As for as security concerns military collaboration between Russia and Central Asia is of high significance in the region. Russia deep rooted traces can be found in Central Asia culture, in fact Russian language is lingua franca in the region. Preservation of authoritarian regimes in Central Asia is politically dependent on Russia assistance. Russia has always been the supporter of authoritarian governments especially in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan cases. States knows that without Russia back their regimes survival is impossible. In turn, assistance of the Russia tends to wider in the region, obvious from the joint military exercises to combat domestic hostility instead of terrorism (Blank & Whither 2012).

**Literature Review**

Due to several benefits in Central Asia, such as how it assisted the US in arming Afghanistan during the War against Terror, Central Asia has grown to be a region of significant significance for the world's powers. The New Great Game, another contemporary

phenomenon, has increased the region's significance to the level it reached prior to the Cold War between Britain and Russia. However, there are currently a number of countries involved in conflict, including China, Pakistan, Israel, Iran, Turkey, the United Republics, and five Central Asian states. This game has increased Russia's concern about security in the region and convinced Russia to escalation its activities by indulging in treaties like CSTO. Russia tackling its neighbouring through its proactive diplomacy as compare to heavy investments on institutions. The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which is protecting its security interests in the area, is one of its main institutions that is vital in keeping Russia as a hegemon. In particular, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan are home to Russian bases. But Russia is not very much interested to curb the menace of disputes erupted from the ethnic conflict between the CSTO allies (Edward, 2003).

Organizations working in Central Asia are still not able to influence the region multilateral decision making. The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and the Collective Security Treaty Organization are just a few of the regional organisations working in Central Asia to advance Russia's interests and keep tabs on the involvement of other international actors in the region, despite the fact that Russia has not regained its pre-disintegration level of influence (CSTO). But other regional organisations, like the CIS, EAEU, and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), are active in Central Asia to achieve their objectives, with a focus on the existence of other multinational organizations in the country (Kavalski, 2010). The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is another organization working in Central Asia since 2001 but China is playing leading role in the region and it is more effective in establishing multilateral structures via SCO. In spite of less influence, Russia and Central Asia cooperation in selling military equipment is done largely by the CSTO (Oliphant, 2013).

Establishing a multi-polar world and rising to the top are Russia's two main foreign policy objectives. Russia claims Central Asia is a crucial territory for forging a zone of influence in order to reach this status. Since these five central Asian republics gained their independence, Russia has also worked to limit the influence of other major powers, such as China, the EU, and the United States, in the area and has resisted their attempts in the economic and security fields. But Russia has made an effort to advance its political objectives using a mix of diplomatic, economic, and security measures. Russian security policy is primarily pursued through the CSTO, which has been crucial to the country's geostrategic objectives.

Due to the financial difficulties Russia dependent organizations such as CIS and CSTO are not able to grab the region fully. Russia collaboration in military exercises has been conducted with Central Asian States to tackle the domestic security threats as well as combating terrorism. Because of the presence of other performers such as China, the United States, and Europe, Russia's dominant role has been replaced by a strong performer in the region; however, because of the region's strong cultural ties and the dire political and security conditions, Central Asian States are compelled to rely on Russia's assistance. The study's main focus is on examining Central Asia's growing significance to Russia. Russia seeks to regain its lost influence by working with Central Asian nations on security initiatives. Investigations have also been conducted on Russia's role in the Central Asian republics through the CSTO. The study's primary goal is to investigate how Russia's growing military involvement in the CSTO has an impact on the political and security environments of Central Asian republics.

### **Russia's Interest in Central Asia and Neo-Imperialism**

"Kwame Nkrumah" first used the term "neo-Imperialism" in reference to the 1960s liberation of African nations. Neo-imperialism is the idea that a state under neo-imperialist control is autonomous, but in reality, its political and economic institutions are controlled and managed from outside. This theory is based on the notion that a big unified area should

be divided into a number of minor nations that lack the resources and administrative capacity to govern themselves freely. Because of this, the growth and security of these young republics are dependent on their previous imperial power. As reported by the Nkrumah "The spirit of neo-imperialism is referred to a state which is subject to it is independent in theory and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In fact, its economic system and political policy is directed from outside." To create neo-imperial power, bases might be taken over, and armed troops could be posted there (Haag, *Mechanisms of Neo-colonialism*, 2011). In this system, the government is servile, and if a revolution is provoked, another obedient administration may be installed as the state's ruler. The neo-imperialist power, not the people's will, grants pro-neo-imperialist authorities in their region their permission. They only care about advancing their own agendas and reimbursing help received from neo-imperialist states in the form of profits; they have no interest in strengthening national capabilities. Neo-imperial lords invest in military aid, assassinate governments, and execute aspiring leaders in order to quell unrest and insurrection. Miscreants take advantage of the ideological and cultural differences among different ethnic groups to create confusion and instability in the state (Nkrumah, 1965).

The post-Cold War ties between Russia and the Central Asian republics are mostly suited to the neo-imperialism paradigm. In order to compete with other regional and trans-regional entities, Russia has created policies and employed soft power strategies to seize the area. Russian institutions like the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) support the advancement of Russian geopolitical goals. Additionally, it finds it difficult to advance its goals through cultural diplomacy. Through an alliance structure, it works primarily with China to improve its relationships with Central Asian republics in various fields.

### **Russia's Security Activities in Central Asia and Genesis of CSTO**

Russia considers it imperative to have military presence in Central Asia. Russia established the CSTO in order to protect the borders of the countries of Central Asia along with the broader post-Soviet area. In order to improve its position in Central Asia and collaboration with the countries of the region, Russia began a variety of integrative methods and processes in every sector, from political and military to economic to end with cultural and ideological ones. However, the CSTO kept enhancing Russia's position as the most powerful military force in the post-soviet republics. A multilateral political and military cooperation-based collective security treaty system was developed inside the CIS framework. The newly independent nations' broken security was unable to handle their security concerns. As a result, on May 15, 1992, Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan signed the Collective Security Treaty (CST). Later on, the CST Treaty also attracted the membership of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Belarus. On April 20, 1994, it went into effect, and on November 1, 1995, the United Nations Organization (UNO) acknowledged it. After the American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, Central Asia's security situation deteriorated to the point where Russia and the other CST members were forced to modify the organization's status from a treaty to a regional security organisation (Saat, 2005).

After being ratified, the CSTO charter went into effect on September 18, 2003, in an effort to combat terrorism, drug trafficking, and illegal immigration. The Council on Collective Security (CCS), the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (CMFA), the Council of Ministers of Defense (CMD), the Committee of Secretaries of the Security Council (CSSC), the Permanent Council (PC), and the Parliamentary Assembly are some of the organisations that make up the CSTO (PA). The heads of the member nations oversee the combined activities under the direction of CCS. The following is a description of how these organs work;

- The CMFA has twice-yearly meetings and is in charge of establishing cooperation in the field of foreign policy.

- The CMD's duties include developing a combined force and debating military strategies and directives pertaining to member-state military-technical cooperation.
- The CSSC's responsibility is to protect the member states' national security and give organisations the information they need to effectively carry out their assigned activities.
- To implement CSC policies and decisions, the PC must develop member state coordination. The member nations' foreign policies and military-political situations are also covered.
- PA made development-related ideas. For politics, international cooperation, socioeconomic issues, and defence, the PA has permanent committees.

### **CSTO Activities in Central Asia**

The CSTO's inaugural drill was carried out by Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia. The first of its two phases occurred in Kyrgyzstan, and the second in Kazakhstan. Operational counterterrorism was its primary objective (Dermott, 2004). In 2004, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan staged a joint military exercise dubbed "Rubezh" (Frontier) in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. It was held in Tajikistan in 2005, 2007, 2010, 2012, and 2014, Kazakhstan in 2006, and Kyrgyzstan in 2016. These anti-terrorist operations and joint drills sought to destroy a terrorist organisation through an all-out assault, manage logistical problems, and uphold regional stability, particularly along the Afghan-Tajik border (Hass, 2016). "Channel 2006," a counter-drug operation carried out by the CSTO in Russia, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and the countries of Russia, Belarus, and Armenia. The Drug Control Agency (DCA) of Tajikistan was able to seize 441 kilogrammes of drugs as a result of this operation, including 125 kilogrammes of heroin, 207 kilogrammes of opium, 110 kilogrammes of cannabis, 243 kilogrammes of unprocessed opium, and 92 kilogrammes of marijuana.

Additionally, 105 drug-related crimes in Tajikistan were found and the offenders were imprisoned (Hamroboyeva, 2006). A group called the Collective Quick Response Force (CQRF) was founded in 2009 with the goal of combating terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking, and organised crime. According to the CSTO charter, they held annual meetings, but there was no attempt to carry out these threats, as shown by the ethnic unrest that broke out in Kyrgyzstan in 2005, the confrontations in south Kyrgyzstan in 2010, the mass protest in Kazakhstan in 2011, and the conflicts in Gorno-Badakhshan in Tajikistan in 2012. (Nikitina, 2013)

In southern Kazakhstan, as part of "Cooperation 2009," Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan took part in a second anti-terrorist drill. Then, same experiment was carried out in Russia and Kazakhstan under the CRRF in 2010 and 2014, respectively. Belarus and Armenia also took part in this activity. The exercise's primary goal was to destroy separatist movements and ethnic conflicts, notably in neighbouring non-member nations (Stein, 2017).

Cobalt is a series of anti-drug trafficking operations. It took place in 2010 at the Russian training facility for the Kadamovsky District. Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan were among the nations that took part. This exercise was carried out by the Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) of the CSTO Special Forces. Its objective was to stop terrorists from exploiting it to transport drugs and weapons (Hass, 2016). Following that, a meeting to supervise the member countries' border security and put an end to a terrorist attack involving those same member states was held in Russia in 2013. The CSTO's Collective Operation Reaction Force executed it (CORF). These drills also included special troops from the "Zubr" and "Rys" sections of the Russian Interior Ministry (Zainetdinov, Vladimir, 2013). Grom, a 2012 anti-drug trafficking exercise, was conducted by the CSTO. A combined drill including Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan was held in the Geodiziya neighbourhood of Moscow. "Thunder" from the Russian federal drug enforcement agency, "Bison and Lynx," and "Hawk," a specialised aviation unit from the interior ministry, were

the contributing units. Additional special purpose Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan drug control organizations participated as well (Stein, 2017).

In April 2016, the Magob and Lyaur mountains in Tajikistan hosted the "Poisk" (search) multinational exercise with Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Russia. The practise, which was based on a search operation, featured 1500 soldiers, including an air mobile unit from Russia and a "Ilbirs" unit from Kyrgyzstan. In order to search for terrorist hideouts in the Highlands, further signals intelligence and surveillance equipment were used (Demert, 2016).

### **Analysis of CSTO in Central Asia**

The CSTO is an important instrument that Russia uses to defend its regional integration agenda and resist the military and political challenges in the area. The worry of Russia and the Central Asian governments' borders being secure was developing as a result of the terrorist threat. A robust and well-equipped military was needed to block the expansion of terrorist activities, and after performing military drills and missions in the area, all member governments managed to do so to various extent. The advancement of peace and regional development, however, are still goals that need to be accomplished. Through the CSTO, Russia carried out several security operations in Central Asian nations and established its dominance inside the organisation.

On the other side, due to the CSTO charter's prohibition on participation in interethnic disputes or fights, Russian influence in Central Asia also decreased during this time. Three Central Asian governments, with the exception of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, are active members of the CSTO and greatly value their connections with Russia, which goes hand in hand with their concern over Russian hegemony. After Russia, Kazakhstan is the CSTO's second-largest donor. Due to their precarious political and economic situations, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan must intensify their defense cooperation with Russia. In addition, Tajikistan may strengthen its political and military capabilities by participating in the CSTO. Due to the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan as a result of the terrorist actions of the Islamic State (IS) and Al-Qaeda, Russia gave Tajikistan the assurance that it may strengthen its military capacity. Russia had a dominant position since it possessed the majority of the CSTO's expanses. The ability to participate in the CSTO's international operations was made possible by Russian military assistance and training for Central Asian governments. Additionally, Russia has been responsible for paying for the member nations' financial obligations for things like personnel training and education in Russian training complex.

Since 2005, the CSTO has served as a conduit for the military industrial complexes of Russia and Central Asia. Russia believed that the CSTO was the ideal military structure for monitoring American military operations in Central Asian nations. Additionally, Russia described the CSTO as a crucial weapon for protecting the area from insecurity. On the other hand, due to member states' unwillingness to submit to Russian rule, Russian influence has somewhat decreased. Uzbekistan is a prime illustration. It refused to sign the CORF agreement and denied Russia permission to set up a facility at Osh, which is closer to the Uzbek border.

According to Uzbekistan, CORF was established in order to meddle in the internal matters of the post-Soviet republics. Additionally, member nations joined this group in order to receive political support from Russia in order to put an end to conflicts and opponents that threatened the governments of member states. The Russian military forces have carried out most missions with highly developed technology. Russia is therefore the organization's main force. Russian military are skilled and seasoned. However, Russia's limited financial capacity prevented it from helping these member nations. Furthermore, the CSTO potential was destroyed by Turkmenistan's neutrality and Uzbekistan's exit. The desire of Russia to turn around and reclaim its Soviet leadership over the Central Asian area gave rise to

mistrust among member nations. The increasing military budgets of Central Asian states preferred to purchase Russian weapon. Since 2005, the CSTO has served as a conduit for the military industrial sites in Russia and Central Asia. In order to retain hegemony, Russia has been focused and gave priority to the CSTO military exercises as compare to the SCO military exercise. According to Russian leadership view, CSTO is the best military organization to weaken the American military domination in the Central Asian states. In addition, Russia also assisted Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan's militaries with billion dollars.

On the other hand, where Russia being a strong military-political power was gaining strength its influence also declined to some extent. In October 2011, Russian Parliament voted to modify the Charter of CSTO to allow the states to take quick action against breakout of violence in member-states. But the member states resisted bowing to Russian dominance. The prime example is Uzbekistan, which didn't sign the CORF agreement but was nonetheless prohibited from allowing Russia to set up a facility in Osh, which is near to the country's border. According to Uzbekistan, CORF was established in order to meddle in the internal matters of the post-Soviet republics. States joined this group in an effort to obtain political support from Russia in order to put an end to conflicts that threatened the governments of member states.

Turkmenistan decided to remain neutral and neither joined any organization nor allowed states to establish military bases on its territory. Besides the management of security issues CSTO also develop unity among the member-states which has not achieved yet and not attained good neighbour relations. Tensions are obvious among Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan on the matters of border, water and energy related disputes. Russia offered Tajikistan to launch security operations along the Tajik-Afghan border upon situation became worse in kunduz, Afghanistan in 2015. At that time Tajikistan only asked for technological help under the CSTO legal framework. In April 2015, Russia helped Tajikistan by deploying 9,000 armed forces at Tajikistan border and provided military equipment.

Though, CSTO did not become active to provide collective security to the Central Asian region due to the limited number of troops. With highly developed technology, the Russian armed forces had carried out the majority of the missions. Russia is therefore the organization's main force. Russian military are skilled and seasoned. Russia was unable to help these member nations due to its limited financial capacity. In fact, Russia refused to allocate budget for Federal Drug Control Service in May 2016.

Currently CSTO is mainly running on Russian support. Russia's territorial security is on risk because of military reform where troops have become less in number. In such situation how Russia can have stationed forces on the CSTO member-states border. Furthermore, the CSTO capability was destroyed by Turkmenistan's neutrality and Uzbekistan's exit. The desire of Russia to go back and re-establish its Soviet leadership over the Central Asian region caused mistrust among the member nations. CSTO efficiency becomes weak when member-states uses sovereignty clause according to the CSTO charter as a result of which state organized crime is continued.

According to Russian analyst A. Hramchihin stated that CSTO allies considers Russia as a nuclear "security umbrella" and offered CSTO member-states to join military academy on the Russian expanses. Although CSTO is not effective due to lack of single threat and Russia's neo-imperial standing among the member-states. CSTO regards as a Russia's tool to influence and regain its power. Russia conducted consistent military exercises through CSTO. They are conventional warfare, peacekeeping, anti-narcotics, counterterrorism and disaster relief exercises to enhance military capabilities of weak states especially Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Russia also secures its status as a military might to combat internal and external threat in Central Asian region.

## **Conclusion**

Following findings have been reached based on research and theoretical underpinnings, indicating that international powers are drawn to the Central Asian area because of its geopolitical relevance. Russia no longer cares about the regional political events in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Later, the administration of Vladimir Putin realized the role of the Central Asian area and developed a successful foreign strategy to maintain relations with the Central Asian republics based on shared interests. A tighter relationship between the main powers and the Central Asian governments resulted from their shared geopolitical and economic interests in the region. To retain its long-standing hegemony, Russia expanded its attempts and founded institutions under the aegis of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

In order to promote peace and prosperity, Russia and Central Asian nations must work together. Russia and the Central Asian republics that require to strengthen it may work together effectively through the CSTO. Further research must be built on this study. Through the CSTO, Russia carried out several security operations in Central Asian nations and established its dominance inside the organisation. Due to the CSTO's lack of participation in internal ethnic tensions or skirmishes, Russia's impact in Central Asia has somewhat decreased. Three Central Asian nations, with the exception of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, are active members of the CSTO and strongly value their connections with Russia, which goes hand in hand with their concern over Russian hegemony. Following Russia, Kazakhstan is the CSTO's second-largest donor. The majority of the CSTO's expenses were owned by Russia, giving it a dominant position. The ability to participate in the CSTO's international operations was made possible by Russian military assistance and training for Central Asian governments. Additionally, Russia is responsible for covering the cost of the member nations' expenses for things like staff training and education in Russian training facilities.

The CSTO is a crucial instrument for Russia in defending its regional cooperation programme and fending off military and political insurrections in the area. The worry of Russia and the Central Asian republics' borders being secure is developing as a result of the terrorist threat. A well-trained and powerful military is necessary to stem the expansion of terrorist activities, and this goal has been partially met thanks to regional military drills and missions. As a result, goals like promoting peace and regional development have not yet been met.

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