



# THE NEW GEOPOLITICS OF PEACE OPERATIONS: A DIALOGUE WITH EMERGING POWERS

## Central Asia Regional Dialogue

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On 5–6 November 2013 a regional dialogue meeting of the project ‘New Geopolitics of Peace Operations: A Dialogue with Emerging Powers’ took place in Astana, Kazakhstan. The meeting, which was jointly organized by SIPRI and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), brought together a range of leading experts, government officials and representatives of international organizations to discuss the future challenges for peace operations and the roles that states from Central Asia can play in their future.

### A CHANGING WORLD ORDER: CENTRAL ASIAN PERSPECTIVES

Most participants agreed that competition between China, Russia and the United States over influence in Central Asia poses a challenge to the region and exacerbates existing tensions and insecurity. While participants generally did not express concern over global threats and mostly focused on regional issues, one participant from Kazakhstan noted growing violations and double standards in the application of international law as well as armament as global challenges.

While Central Asian states share some common security threats—including water distribution, organized crime, drugs, jihadism and the potential spillover from the conflict in Afghanistan—many were sceptical about the viability of a formalized regional response. This scepticism is rooted in several factors. First, because Central Asian states only recently gained independence from the Soviet Union they are still in the process of nation building, and are therefore not yet ready to formalize greater regional cooperation. Second, internal social disputes, as well as international border disputes and a lack of trust between governments, persist within Central Asia. Some participants noted that interest in Central Asian integration is greater among outside actors than among states in the region.

Possible spillover from Afghanistan after the expected 2014 drawdown of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which is led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), was mentioned by participants as the primary threat, with particular concern about a potential spread of allegedly

\* This report summarizes the contents of each workshop session. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of SIPRI or of the majority of the participants.

### PROJECT OVERVIEW

● In the past 20 years there has been a far-reaching shift in the nature of international conflict management. Within this context, the traditional notion of peace operations has been broadened by ever more robust missions, the expansion of mandates towards peacebuilding, and by an unprecedented growth in both the number and the size of operations.

Today, many are questioning the sustainability of the paradigm of peace operations that has emerged since the cold war. It is becoming evident that shifts in international power relations as a result of rapid economic growth in parts of the Global South are calling into question the existing structures of international conflict management, including peace operations.

SIPRI has launched the ‘New Geopolitics of Peace Operations: A Dialogue with Emerging Powers’ initiative with support from the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and in partnership with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES). The initiative aims to identify potential future challenges for peace operations and new initiatives that will strengthen the legitimacy of peace operations and create greater capacity, enabling peace operations to meet these future challenges. SIPRI, in cooperation with FES, will be conducting a series of dialogue meetings around the world to support these aims.

**Agenda***Day 1, 5 November 2013*

Opening remarks

Keynote address

A changing world order: what implications for the future of peace operations?

Norms and concepts: a fragile consensus?

Day 1 wrap-up

*Day 2, 6 November 2013*

Engagement objectives: high politics and interests of stakeholders

A new peacekeeping landscape: peacekeeping 2.0?

Final reflections and closing remarks

Afghanistan-linked jihadi or extremist groups (e.g. the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement) into Central Asia, radicalization of the population, and an increase in drug trafficking. There was no clear suggestion as to how the region should address such threats, although counter-terrorism and the possibility of a peace operation to secure the border with Afghanistan were discussed.

One participant from Russia noted that Russia will support Tajikistan with equipment and training but will likely not send Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) or Russian troops to secure the border. Some participants questioned the ability of Tajik forces to control the border with their forces alone. However, most participants saw peace operations as not very relevant to peace and security within Central Asia as they cannot address the primarily non-traditional security challenges in the region. One participant suggested that the region should instead focus on promoting dialogue and engaging in preventative diplomacy.

Dealing with geopolitical interests was seen as ultimately more important when it comes to regional security than establishing peace operations. However, some participants viewed the unresolved issue of Afghanistan as a concrete area for future cooperation. If a CSTO mission on the Afghan border was perceived as successful, it would increase confidence among member states and also bolster regional interest in contributing to peace missions outside the region. On possible models for resolving conflicts within the CSTO region, one participant from Tajikistan highlighted the success of the United Nations Observer Mission in Tajikistan (UNMOT), which from 1994 to 2000 monitored the Tajik cease-fire and later the peace agreement ending the 1992–97 civil war. The success of the mission was attributed to its narrow and specific mandate and to proactive cooperation with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

The roles and responsibilities of the CSTO in addressing regional threats were also debated, with some stating that the organization should expand its mandate to address conflicts within the CSTO region in addition to protecting member states from external threats. One participant from Kyrgyzstan criticized the CSTO's refusal to intervene in Kyrgyzstan in 2010, when a



political dispute and ethnic tensions between Uzbek and Kyrgyz civilians escalated into violence. Another participant from Tajikistan mentioned the water dispute between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as a potential area where the CSTO could play a more proactive role. Given the relative inaction of the CSTO on these conflicts, some felt that the organization is largely symbolic and used by Russia primarily to legitimize its influence in Central Asia.

It was also noted that the CSTO lacks the capacity to engage in internal peace operations and is internally divided into three separate groups—namely Russia and Belarus, Russia and Armenia, and Russia and Central Asia—with at times divergent interests. Responding to the debate, a participant from Russia expressed Russia's willingness to provide peace- and state-building assistance as well as post-conflict reconstruction aid. However Russia—and, by extension, the CSTO—is not likely to interfere in internal conflicts in the region. In order for Russia to intervene in any conflict in the region its national interests must be at stake. When this is not the case, Russia will likely oppose any type of intervention in the region. One participant from Uzbekistan also voiced disapproval of the potential inward shift in the CSTO's mandate, although the CSTO's lack of response to the conflict in Kyrgyzstan challenges this assumption. Uzbekistan recently revoked its CSTO membership and will likely focus on internal priorities and bilateral diplomacy.

### **NORMS AND CONCEPTS: INTEREST-BASED 'ARMED INTERVENTION' VERSUS 'PEACE OPERATIONS'**

Participants did not express fundamental theoretical disagreement with UN peacekeeping norms and concepts and did not dispute the legitimacy of the UN. The region is primarily responsive towards international norms, although a minority of participants suggested using traditional and local alternatives for conflict resolution. While the primacy or legitimacy of the UN was not disputed, some perceived UN decision-making bodies as no longer representative of the new global power dynamics and called for further democratization. Rich countries would be controlling the agenda and holding all high positions while troop-contributing countries would have little say. While reforming the UN Security Council would help address this inequality, expanding membership could also increase the amount of competing interests on the Security Council.

The terms 'armed intervention' and 'peace operation' were often used interchangeably in the discussion as armed intervention was seen as a type of peace operation. Some participants felt that UN peace operations do not have the capacity to protect peacekeepers, let alone civilians, and that therefore the scope of the concept of protection of civilians (POC) should be re-evaluated in mandates. Some viewed stability as a realistic goal for peace operations when liberal peace is not feasible.

One participant from Russia noted that in many cases the process of democratization is unrealistic or counterproductive in the long term and that it would be more practical to slowly build on existing systems—even when they are authoritarian. The same participant stressed that in the process of state building, states should be allowed to make mistakes and fail to a certain



degree because sometimes conflicts need to follow their natural course in order to end. While this process might be cruel, in the long term it is likely to benefit both the governance system and civilians.

On military intervention within the context of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), participants expressed an overall ambivalence on how such interventions can balance safeguarding sovereignty and protecting civilians. While sovereignty should always be respected, military action is sometimes needed in order to save the lives of populations at risk. Some saw R2P as part of a Western imperialist agenda, while others viewed the resistance to the concept as part of Russian geopolitical interests and imperialism.

Overall, most participants argued that a decision on whether or not to intervene is always interest based. However, it was also argued that such scepticism might change if Western states set a good example and present positive outcomes— particularly in Afghanistan, where it was perceived that there is a lack of realistic exit strategy.

Sovereignty and non-interference are the guiding normative principles within the CSTO region. As Central Asian states do not currently draw a distinction between peace operations and armed interventions, and since any discussion of regional operations is viewed suspiciously, decisions are largely made on an ad hoc basis. At the same time, participants raised questions on the reason for the CSTO's refusal to assist in the 2010 Kyrgyz–Uzbek ethnic conflict despite the fact that officials in the interim Kyrgyz Government urged the CSTO to assist. Some questioned the legitimacy of the request since it was not a formal request but rather a point of view, while others believed that civilians should be allowed to request CSTO's assistance under R2P.

One participant suggested that a rapid reaction force would help mitigate geopolitical deadlocks within the UN. Several participants agreed that a rapid reaction force would help improve efficiency, and that NATO and the European Union (EU) have the greatest capacity to rapidly deploy forces. In the end it was concluded that in order for Russia and China to agree to such an arrangement, clear guidelines and limitations for such a force would be essential.

#### **OBJECTIVES OF ENGAGEMENT: POTENTIAL FOR GROWTH**

Central Asian states' commitment to peace operations is still in its infancy. However, several factors suggest that this may change in the future, including Ukraine's long-standing participation in and experience with contributing to peace operations, and Kazakhstan's increasing international engagement as demonstrated by its establishment of a dedicated Kazakh peacekeeping battalion (KAZBAT) in line with NATO's Operational Capabilities Concept Programme as well as a nascent larger peacekeeping brigade (KAZBRIG). While there seem to be few incentives to contribute to missions within the CSTO region, both individual countries and the CSTO itself may increase engagement in external missions over time.

In general, countries in the region may be motivated to participate in peace operations because of economic incentives (e.g. reimbursement) as well as opportunities to improve international exposure and image, and to modernize and train their military forces. However, states' willingness to contribute



troops seems to be strongly linked to the perceived risk of casualties. Furthermore, it was argued that Central Asian states pursue a pragmatic and neutral approach. Finally, it was pointed out that engagement objectives are not only limited to states, with private contractors also contributing to various peace operations.

### **Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan**

Participants from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan stressed that while their countries have begun to develop peacekeeping capabilities in recent years, they are unlikely to make major contributions to peace operations in the near future and will focus instead on national challenges. Currently, each country provides approximately 25 personnel to UN missions. In order to increase their contributions both countries would need further assistance with training and modernizing their armed forces. Putting aside their lack of capacity, one participant suggested that these countries do not have sufficient autonomy and sovereignty to make their own decisions on the nature of their contributions, as they are heavily dependent on Russia.

While Tajikistan is very much focused on the post-2014 threat from Afghanistan, one participant from Tajikistan noted that there is an interest in contributing to diplomatic and political missions in which Tajikistan can build on its own experiences as a host country of UN and CIS operations. It has begun training its own peacekeeping battalion with the help of the USA and Russia, with the goal of being able to protect its border with Afghanistan. Tajikistan also views participation in peace operations as a way to improve its regional and geostrategic standing through the CIS, and to gain operational experience and prestige for its military. It also sees contributing to peace operations as a potential way to influence regional and national security.

Kyrgyzstan, which still faces internal instability, does not currently have the capacity to contribute in a traditional way but also hopes to build on its own experience in conflict by contributing to soft or civilian elements of peace operations such as mediation and dialogue.

### **Kazakhstan**

In Kazakhstan there is political will to deploy troops to peace operations but public opinion remains a challenge. In 2011 the Kazakh Government wanted to send four officers to ISAF, but was denied in the Senate because of public concerns about risking the officers' lives. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan is preparing to deploy KAZBAT to UN missions in the near future, and is currently working on the legal framework and training requirements for such a deployment. The military doctrine of the Kazakh armed forces already defines participation in peace operations as a priority. Kazakhstan is striving to establish its image and its regional and global standing as a responsible member of the international community, much as it has in its approach to non-proliferation issues. To this end, Kazakhstan has been working alongside the UN to create a regional UN hub in the former Kazakh capital, Almaty, which it hopes will become a platform for Central Asian cooperation. Kazakhstan aspires to create a critical capacity of UN agencies in Almaty that will enable



the region to swiftly respond to common threats such as potential instability in Afghanistan.

Aside from establishing itself as a regional power, Kazakhstan hopes that its contributions would help it better integrate with the world community and act as the bridge between Asia and Europe. The country is also currently working on legislative support for KAZAID, which will provide humanitarian assistance and technical support to developing countries, and aims to bolster Kazakhstan's image internationally as a donor country. One participant noted that Kazakhstan would like to provide humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan after 2014. Kazakhstan also hopes that its contributions will lead to greater international economic opportunities, and strengthen its bid for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council in 2017–18.

### **Uzbekistan**

In Uzbekistan there is great scepticism about the effectiveness and efficiency of peace operations and political elites view the military component of peace operations as interventionist. While it was not clear from the dialogue meeting whether there are any motivating factors for Uzbekistan's future participation in UN peace operations, such participation is not very likely in the near future. One participant from Uzbekistan suggested that it is difficult to predict whether the country will choose to participate, as it does not want to commit itself to particular policies or regional organizations. However, it seems likely that the short-term trend of isolationism in Uzbekistan will continue.

### **Russia**

Russia's contributions to UN operations, which currently stand at just over 100 personnel, are not likely to increase in the near future. A participant noted that it is not in Russia's political or other interests to contribute more troops to UN operations, but that the country does have some personnel in most missions that allow it to have insight and inform its decisions within the UN Security Council. Russia's position in the Security Council provides it with alternative means to play a great role in global politics, and it will continue to participate in political settlements and international diplomacy where it has an advantage based on its strong links with political elites around the world.

Russia will also continue to provide financial contributions to UN operations, as well as development assistance, training, air capacity and emergency response. One participant suggested that Russia does not actually gain anything from its contributions to the CSTO. The participant also noted that at the time of the collapse of the former Soviet Union, when a number of conflicts broke out in Central Asia, many Russian bases and troops were already in place throughout the region as part of the Soviet Army and Russia was therefore drawn into establishing peacekeeping missions.





## Ukraine

Ukraine's motivations for participation in peace operations have evolved since its initial engagement in the 1990s. According to one participant, while economic motivations used to be the primary factor for Ukraine's contributions, today political motivations such as advancing its international standing have become more significant. Since Ukraine's economy has improved in recent years and its military is now contracted rather than conscripted, economic incentives and maintenance of military surplus have become secondary motivations for contribution.

Today, Ukraine is more focused on gaining greater influence within the UN and improving its relations with the USA and the EU. A participant from Ukraine also noted that, on a normative level, the country is committed to contributing to international peace and security, and is proud to be one of the original 51 member states that joined the UN in 1945. Finally, Ukraine views participation in peace operations as a way to share and maintain its existing military proficiency by providing combat experience and training to its troops. A participant from Ukraine suggested that the country's experience in peace operations can serve as a point of reference for Central Asian states looking to instigate or expand their own participation.

## CONCLUSIONS: PEACE OPERATIONS 2.0

The discussion in the final session focused primarily on how and whether Central Asian states will increase their engagement in and contribution to peace operations in the future. A participant from the UN suggested that perhaps two or three countries from the region could start the process by creating a joint training exercise outside the formal framework of the CSTO, as a first step towards consolidating a broader Central Asian strategy for engagement within the UN. It would also be helpful if Central Asian countries could find a 'niche' for participation that would allow them to specialize.

However, regional fragmentation still poses a challenge for regional cooperation. The possibility of joint training and deployment, such as the reestablishment of a Central Asian Battalion (CENTRASBAT), is currently regarded as unlikely. A joint policy on peace operations or common lobbying at the UN is also seen as unrealistic. One participant reinforced this perception by asserting that Central Asia should not be seen as a single unit. Moreover, although some countries have specific high-demand capabilities (e.g. aerial or demining expertise), these were not put forward as potential Central Asian niches.

Participants suggested that, when deciding upon the organization around which states in the region could consolidate, the responsibility, legitimacy and capacity of different organizations should be closely considered. For example, NATO does not have direct interests in the region and would probably receive strong opposition from Russia. However, NATO's Partnership for Peace is the only security structure of which all countries in the region are members. The CSTO does have some legitimacy but would likely be unable to deploy within the region due to sensitivities over the role of Russia and the Soviet past, the fact that two states from the region are currently

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not CSTO members, and Russia's general unwillingness to deploy soldiers to Central Asia.

With regards to engagement in peace operations outside Central Asia, participants questioned whether the CSTO has sufficient capacity in the short term. However, it was noted that operations in the context of the CSTO, and especially in out-of-area missions, might lead to an increase in familiarity with peace operations, and help create greater political will to contribute. Some argued that such a regional approach for future participation would also make sense due to individual states' incapacity to contribute to missions on a larger scale. One participant noted that partnering with NATO would be more practical than partnering with the CSTO since NATO would be able to provide more appropriate training. Others disagreed, stating that regional cooperation on participation would not be possible in the short-term, and that Russia would be unlikely to allow cooperation with NATO.

Ultimately there are more perceived obstacles in the short term for increased Central Asian engagement than there are perceived opportunities. One participant stated that despite the rhetoric on Afghanistan, high-intensity conflict is unlikely in the region and therefore states are more focused on internal and regime security. Finally, one of the participants suggested that partnering with established troop contributing countries and deploying as part of their contingents would be a good way to increase engagement.

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