

Georgia & the CIS Security System

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Introduction

From the very outset of independence the new post-Soviet republics faced new challenges of independence. The intense process of "securitisation" began over the issues of territory, population and status. Despite the weakness of state institutions, the security dilemma played a significant role in strengthening the military capabilities of the newly emergent states, encouraging conflicts and wars both between and within them.

It is not difficult to imagine how weak the states were upon the establishment of a Commonwealth of independent States (CIS) between 1991 and 1993. The states were not able to ensure the security of three principal state components: its physical territory and population; popular state identity; and state institutions of legitimation.¹ With the prospect of security threats at all levels, it was hard for post-Soviet states to control their territory; ie, ideas of national identity and democracy, which were not shared by the whole population, were under threat. Moreover, government power was not strong enough to impose those institutions required to reach political consensus and reduce physical threats.

Only Russia appeared a strong military power in respect of its military capability. Aiming to strengthen its own role and importance as a leader of post-Soviet states, Russia has been the most adamant to institutionalise its political and military presence under the CIS umbrella throughout the whole region. The weakness of all post-Soviet states provided a good basis for Russia to maintain its access to and contingents of armed forces on the territories of almost all sovereign states.

However, the prospects of building a CIS common security system have dwindled since its creation, especially after a large number of failed agreements. Member states have become increasingly sceptical about the usefulness of the CIS. Documents dealing with CIS security issues consistently failed to be implemented. Almost every military co-operation had failed to reach its objective and "many hitherto adopted documents were in fact dead letters".² Newly sovereign states became increasingly unwilling to concede their newly gained independence. It has become more and more difficult for member states to accept the essence and meaning of regional organisations which "take over a broad range of state functions and accordingly become threatening to state sovereignty."³

The first attempts to create a CIS security system aimed to establish a common strategic-military space under a unified command. It took member states more than a year to agree on the final decision, rejecting the idea of a joint command and subordination to Russia in the military sphere.

During these negotiations, Azerbaijan, Ukraine and Moldova announced their plans to create their own armed forces by the beginning of 1992 and to opt out of the unified CIS command. The Central Asian states supported the idea of unified forces until Russia resolved to create its own army and began to establish its military doctrine. As a result, the leaders of six states - Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan - signed the Collective Security Treaty in

Tashkent on 15 May 1992, which stipulated that signatories would build their own armed forces under their respective national ministries and heads of states. Ukraine and Moldova had only observer status, while Azerbaijan and Belarus joined the agreement in 1993. The treaty itself came into force on 20 April 1994, with the right of extension.

However, the Russian military establishment took a lead in the development of the CIS collective security structures. Having in May 1992 declared itself the successor state to the Soviet Union in Tashkent, Russia inherited the already existing security structures and strategic weapons. According to the Tashkent agreement, Russia was also recognised as the legal appropriator of all USSR's international liabilities.

Accusing Russia of supporting Abkhazian separatists, and fearing a further development of civil war in the country, the Georgian government decided to join the CIS at the end of 1993. As a result, in a few days Russia openly helped the Georgian government to forestall a wide-scale and prolonged civil war.

Another important step in the development of the CIS security system was the adoption of the Collective Security Pact on 10 February 1995. The build-up of the collective security system was to be completed in three stages. During the first stage the member states were supposed to create their own armed forces; to work out and begin to implement a development programme in the sphere of military- and military-technical co-operation; and to develop a legislative framework. During the second stage a joint air defence system and coalition forces were to be created and their mission defined; and the creation of joint armed forces was to be discussed. The collective security system was to be completed during the third stage.

The inability of some member states to defend their borders efficiently urged them to sign the border agreement which stipulated that border troops would be under a unified command. The agreement on the protection of CIS external borders was signed on 26 May 1995 at the CIS summit of the Heads of States. Russia agreed to provide the main forces to defend external borders and thus secured its monopoly in these security structures.

The agreement was supplemented by a number of bilateral agreements between Russia and some other CIS states, including Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Over time, however, some of these states imposed restrictions on Russian frontier guards operating on their borders. The Ukraine and Azerbaijan had not permitted Russian troops to protect their borders from the outset.

Soon after the CIS external border agreement had been signed, the Georgian government refused to co-finance Russian border guards on its territory and insisted on its national right to defend its own frontiers. The three fundamental documents which encapsulated this position were the Georgian Constitution, the law on state frontiers and the UN frontier convention. By 1999 the Russian Federal Frontier Service had fully withdrawn its units from Georgia. Some analysts ascribed Russia's inability to safeguard CIS external borders to Russia's poor financial situation.

Quite recently, after the escalation of the war in Chechnya, Russia proposed to the Georgian government that its troops be allowed to pass through Georgian territory to defend the Chechen sector of the Russian-Georgian border. Georgia declined the

proposal, refusing to lose control over its borders and appealed to the UN and OSCE in December 1999 to deploy international observers at the Chechen sector of the Russian-Georgian border.

Russia's failure to co-ordinate the CIS customs and frontier legislation placed another obstacle in the development of the principles of CIS external frontier defence. Member states are anxious to control their own export/import operations and do not wish to relinquish these rights to Russia.

The CIS Agreement on the Integrated Air Defence System was signed on 10 February 1995 by all member states, save Moldova and Azerbaijan. Turkmenistan and Ukraine insisted on some additional provisions. Russia took responsibility for the creation of national air defence systems in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. However, financial constraints prevented these projects from getting off the ground.

According to independent experts, the Russian military-industrial complex is more interested in selling its production to foreign countries rather than to the CIS states, even though the joint air defence system represents the linchpin of the CIS security system. Consequently, Georgia's air defence system has not yet been completed. In his interview of 3 September 1998, the Commander of the Georgian Air Force and Air Defence Troops stated that any aircraft would be able to bomb Tbilisi as the Georgian air defence system was unable to halt air strikes. By 1992, Russia had pulled out of Georgia \$149 m worth of ground control equipment. As a result, Air Defence Troops are now able to monitor flights over Georgia but cannot halt enemy aircraft.

As an alternative way of improving air control and management the U.S. government has offered East European states the possibility of participating in the Regional Airspace Initiative proposed by the US in 1994. Ukraine and Georgia received this offer recently and both expressed an interest in this initiative as a way of neutralising their lack of a national air defence system.

President of Georgia Shevardnadze announced a National Security Council decision to modernize the country's air defence system with Western support. On his radio interview on June 28 1999, following intrusions into Georgian airspace by Russian military aircraft transferring military hardware to the military base in Armenia, he said that air piracy must be ended and that Georgian air space should be defended strictly and reliably: "Our friends and allies are helping us in this respect. We consider them our friends and allies because they have never treated Georgia's dignity and sovereignty in such a cavalier manner", he stated.⁴

Russia regards "dual" membership (ie the act of being involved in two initiatives simultaneously) as an illegal action contradicting the CIS Joint Air Defence agreement, but at the same time it is reluctant to provide military support to build up the military capabilities of Georgia.⁵ However, Georgia is determined not to give up its intentions which are aimed at developing its own security systems without any further reliance on Russian support.

Weapons' procurement poses an increasing number of problems for CIS states which are currently unable to satisfy their need for military hardware, equipment and spare parts, and to dispose of outdated armaments. The CIS was considered the most profitable and cheap means for the development of their security system. But Russia - the main producer of military hardware in the former Soviet space -

appears to lack the political will as well as the economic ability to satisfy the CIS procurement demands for all states.

CIS member states have grown impatient to secure military and security assistance from non-CIS countries. On August 6 1996, the US administration lifted the embargo on the imports of armaments into Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia, thus making western weapons available.

The CIS reacted immediately to this decision. The CIS Military-Technical Committee was established in November 1996 to ensure a collective policy towards the outside suppliers of military equipment. Quite predictably the committee has been unable to influence outside purchases. This means that the above republics stand a reasonable chance of developing their own procurement policies and using western assistance in a responsible manner. The economically weak states have considerable possibilities to build up their military strength even by purchasing second-hand weapons in Eastern Europe and other countries. It calls into question the efficiency of further military co-operation within the CIS.

On the other hand, the CIS still offers the benefits of a huge and relatively cheap informal armaments market. But the very existence of such a market threatens every CIS republic as it encourages secessionist movements as well. It is especially dangerous given the weakness of the security structures of the CIS member states. Throughout its history as a regional organisation, the CIS has failed to develop effective arms control mechanisms which could have helped the weak CIS states avoid the threats posed by illegal conventional and light arms trade.

The failure of the CIS, as an organisation aiming to provide assistance in strengthening the national security of members states without violating their security interests, has nurtured scepticism toward regional organisations by member states.

The emergence of an alternative grouping of CIS member states without Russia, such as Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova (GUUAM) demonstrated the will of some CIS states to seek closer political, economic and security links with each other and the West. GUUAM, unofficially called "the group of four", emerged on May 15 1997 at the Vienna summit, when the group's participants found common positions regarding CFE Treaty flank limits. According to some sources, an informal alignment of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine had existed since late 1996.⁶ Somewhat later Uzbekistan became the fifth country to join the group. Russia looks on with irritation and considers GUUAM an anti-Russian axis and "a means of pressurising Russia."⁷

In 1999, Georgia further distanced itself from the CIS security system. In April 1999, just before the NATO Washington summit, three of the GUUAM countries - Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan - quit the CIS Collective Security Treaty. The treaty expired on 20 April 1999 for these countries that did not sign a prolongation of the treaty. The three countries declined to attend the Moscow meeting and are now officially outside the framework of the treaty.

In 1999, Georgia made painstaking efforts to negotiate the withdrawal of Russian forces from its territory, thus making it known that Russian forces represent a national security threat. The Istanbul OSCE summit on 19 November 1999 represented a step forward in this direction. Joint statements by Russia and

Georgia in the Final Act of the Conference of the States' parties to the Treaty on the CFE placed the onus on Russia to start negotiations on the withdrawal of its armed forces from Georgia. According to the statement two bases out of four should be disbanded by July 2001. The two sides noted the willingness of OSCE member states to provide financial support for this process.

Turkey's proposal at the same Istanbul OSCE summit - to create a Stability Pact in the South Caucasus - was supported by all regional states, even by Armenia, previously considered a principal Russian ally in the South Caucasus. The Pact would require foreign (ie Russian) troops to withdraw from the region. The pact would include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, Russia and the United States. Azerbaijan, Turkey and Georgia have already held several mini-summits and bilateral meetings during January-February 2000 on the details of such a Caucasus Stability Pact.

The CIS' failure to deal with member states' security problems increases the importance of western security assistance for the former USSR states. The development of the CIS security system is hampered by member states' weaknesses, and economic difficulties. The states needed and still need strong security assistance to develop their security strategy, defence policy and to build up military strength properly. The urgency of the problem makes the CIS member states understand that not every regional organisation is an effective umbrella for ensuring their national security.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear*, 1991.

² V Baranovski "Russia: conflicts and peaceful settlement of disputes" in *SIPRI Yearbook: 1997 Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford University Press, 1998, p120.)

³ Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear*, 1991.

⁴ "Sakartvelos Respublika", No 171, June 29 1999, p1, 2.

⁵ The same could not be applied to the other CIS members. In April 1998 the Russian-Armenian air defence system was inaugurated, authorised by CIS documents and governed by CIS decisions. For today Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are parties to the CIS joint air defence system, which consists of bilateral agreements between Russia and each participating state.

⁶ V Baranovski "Russia: conflicts and peaceful settlement of disputes" in *SIPRI Yearbook: 1998 Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p138.

⁷ V Baranovski "Russia: conflicts and peaceful settlement of disputes" in *SIPRI Yearbook: 1998 Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford University Press, 1999), p138.

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