

CSTO Is Dead

By [Alexander Golts](#)

August 30, 2010



Practically every hospital-themed television show has an episode in which doctors attempt to revive a dying patient without noticing that the person is already dead. Something similar happened at the Collective Security Treaty Organization summit held this month in Yerevan. Even noting that the meeting was riddled with disagreements would not go far enough to describe the confusion that reigns in the CSTO today.

The Kremlin took offense at Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko, who received several hundred million dollars of Russian loans for agreeing to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon decided that Russia was not paying enough for its military base in Tajikistan and began making frivolous demands. Uzbek President Islam Karimov, who sees attempts to create a collective rapid reaction force as an infringement of his authority at home, ignored the summit altogether. More important, in June, the CSTO ignored desperate pleas from the interim Kyrgyz government for help in ending ethnic conflict there.

In effect, the treaty organization has proved itself completely incapable of carrying out its mandate of ensuring the security of its member states through collective efforts. The claim

that those states only agreed to help one another in the event of external aggression — and not in response to internal disorder — does not stand up under serious scrutiny. Obviously, any outside interference in Central Asian countries would have to begin with internal disorder and crises. As it stands now, even if a conflict were in full swing in a member state, the other CSTO countries would sit by and wonder whether external aggression was playing a role.

The pitfalls of the CSTO were evident from the moment it came into existence. The main problem is that member states do not have a common understanding of threats and of how to deal with them. In fact, the threats faced by Armenia strongly differ from those faced by Belarus. What's more, the Central Asian member states often view one another's policies as threats. Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have numerous territorial claims against one another.

In reality, the CSTO is not so much a multilateral agreement between states as it is a forced bundling of bilateral treaties signed between each state and Russia. The only useful thing to come of the organization has been to periodically demonstrate that Moscow, at least ostensibly, possesses allies. Twice a year, the leaders of Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan must bow obsequiously to the Kremlin in the role of obedient younger brothers. In return, they receive various economic benefits such as subsidized energy prices and Russian military equipment. But that delicate balance was broken the moment member states began placing unrealistic demands on one another. That is exactly what has been happening in recent months.

That is also why the main question at the Yerevan summit was how to respond to situations like that in Kyrgyzstan. Discussions dragged on, but the participants could not come to any agreement. Attempting to explain the impasse, President Dmitry Medvedev strung together one phrase after another, saying: "We discussed steps that will contribute to the formation of an organized Kyrgyz state. There are many problems in this regard. ... A decision has been made to amend the CSTO statutory documents by the next CSTO summit in Moscow in December 2010 so that the organization can have a more effective influence on the crisis."

It is clear that member states not threatened by internal strife are not going to take on any extra responsibility. For this reason, Russia has been unable to create a collective rapid reaction force — the one instrument that could suppress warfare in its early stages. It is one thing to feign respect for Medvedev through clenched teeth, but quite another to send your own soldiers to a distant land. The CSTO essentially fell apart the moment it had to make even the slightest degree of serious commitment.

In this situation, those who believe that they face real military threats tend to try to squeeze as much benefit as possible from their bilateral relations with Russia. And the Kremlin, wanting to maintain at least the semblance of allied relations, is forced to concede. That is the only way to explain how, in a new protocol for the Russian military base in Gyumri, Yerevan won the commitment that "the Russian side assumes responsibility for jointly ensuring the military security of the Republic of Armenia and for facilitating the equipping of its armed forces with modern types of weapons."

For many years, Moscow had carefully avoided making such a commitment, understanding how it could aggravate relations with Azerbaijan, which periodically threatens to resolve a

conflict with Armenia through military means. Even though Yerevan achieved a remarkable diplomatic success, there is no guarantee that Moscow would intervene on Yerevan's behalf in the event of a military conflict. As the relationships among CSTO member states have already shown, in emergencies, the former Soviet republics are in no rush to fulfill their obligations. Regardless of whatever amendments are made to the charter, CSTO leaders now know that if a situation were to get seriously out of hand, they would be on their own. That means an alliance that not long ago was hailed as being comparable to NATO is finally dead.

Alexander Golts is deputy editor of the online newspaper Yezhednevny Zhurnal.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2010/08/30/csto-is-dead-a1012>