



Russian Allies: Examining Russia's Relations with CSTO Members

OE Watch Commentary: Due to coronavirus concerns, during this year's Victory Day parade on 24 June, President Putin was mostly flanked by leaders of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). While these countries (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia) are most often cited as "allies" of Russia, there are significant differences in their level of cooperation. A recent book, titled "Союзники" [Allies] written by experts at the Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, examines each of these countries as Russian allies. The book was recently reviewed in *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozreniye*, and some of the findings merit closer attention.

The review begins by explaining "after the reign of Peter I, when Russia began to play an active role in the European system of international relations, it almost always acted in the international arena as part of [a] coalition." However, after the collapse of the USSR, "the Russian Federation found itself in a unique foreign policy situation," which one author has defined "as strategic loneliness, [where] for almost the first time in its long history, our country has no real allies." The book suggests that the CSTO consists of only "formal" allies of Russia, which "are more likely consumers of security, rather than its providers." To date, other than Armenia, none of Russia's allies have helped in Syria, nor have any recognized Russia's annexation of Crimea or the "independence" of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

The review posits that Belarus is Russia's closest ally, since it "is the only country in the territory of the former USSR where Russian remains the official language," but that such support "costs a lot." Conversely, the review points out that "our much more powerful and strategically important ally - Kazakhstan - has long embarked on the eradication of all Russian," where not only has the Cyrillic alphabet [been changed] to the Latin alphabet, but that "Russian specialists are being squeezed out from all leading positions."

The review concludes on a curious note, pointing out that "Moscow traditionally treats the CSTO members condescendingly," and in return, CSTO members assume that Russia will "guarantee military assistance in the event of the activation of Islamic militants." While the review repeats the oft-quoted phrase "Russia has only two reliable allies - its army and navy," it also emphasizes, "Russia has always won from having allied relations." After the Kremlin's armed aggression against Ukraine in 2014, Russia's CSTO allies have looked at Moscow in a less favorable light. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

"Who are our allies today? What is the degree of their loyalty to Moscow?..."



Meeting of the Collective Security Council of the CSTO in Bishkek, Nov 2019.

Source: The President of Russia, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62146>, CCA 4.0 Intl



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Source: Sergey Serov, "Союзнический долг и союзнические обязанности (Allied debt and allied duties)," *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozreniye*, 25 June 2020. https://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2020-06-25/12_1097_allies.html A copy of the book can be downloaded at this link: <http://cast.ru/upload/iblock/23f/23f1ca6f13cdecf505dc27bcd93270df.pdf>

Who are our allies today? What is the degree of their loyalty to Moscow? Which of them is the most reliable and loyal? Is anyone ready today not in words but in action to stand up for a friend? After 1991, for some reason, these issues in our country were considered inconvenient for in-depth analysis....

...It seems that the first to try to understand the difficult relationship between Moscow and its official allies - Bishkek, Dushanbe, Yerevan, Minsk and Nur-Sultan (formerly Astana) were experts from the Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies. The findings were very interesting. The center prepared and published a unique book, "Allies," edited by Konstantin Makienko.... The authors focus on the fact that after the reign of Peter I, when Russia began to play an active role in the European system of international relations, it almost always acted in the international arena as part of coalitions. Moreover, in most cases, the combined potential of Russia and its allies exceeded the power of our opponents.

Even the Soviet Union, which was alien to the West, Makienko emphasizes, was not left alone in the face of the Nazi invasion. The socialist USSR fought against Hitler in alliance with the most powerful military and economic capitalist states. After World War II, Moscow led a strong military-political bloc of Eastern European countries. In addition to officially allied relations with members of the Warsaw Pact Organization, the USSR had very valuable and loyal partners — Cuba, Vietnam, Mongolia, and South Yemen.

But after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation found itself in a unique foreign policy situation, which political analyst Dmitry Trenin defined as "strategic loneliness." For almost the first time in its long history, our country has not had real allies. The paradox is that from a legal point of view this is not so. Almost immediately after the collapse of the USSR, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) was created in 1992, and the participants in this bloc - Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan - formally became Russia's military allies. Alas, it is formally.... Today, Moscow's CSTO partners, according to the authors of the book, are more likely consumers of security, rather than its providers....

Who is our most faithful ally, not only within the framework of the CSTO? Almost everyone will answer - Belarus. And he will be right. But there are nuances.... It cannot be overestimated that Belarus is the only country in the territory of the former USSR where Russian remains officially the official language. It costs a lot. In addition, Minsk always shows full solidarity with our country in the voting on anti-Russian resolutions at the UN.

But our much more powerful and strategically important ally - Kazakhstan - has long embarked on the eradication of all Russian. The apotheosis was the change of the Cyrillic alphabet to the Latin alphabet. It is a fact that squeezing out Russian specialists from all leading positions.... Moreover, Yerevan actively and publicly supported Moscow's actions in Syria and even sent its sappers to this country, who cleared mines hand in hand with the Russian military....

...Moscow traditionally treats the CSTO members condescendingly.... They are supplied with the latest weapons on soft loans. They are guaranteed military assistance in the event of the activation of Islamic militants. And the leaders of the allied states, it seems, are absolutely sure that this will always be so.

Meanwhile, the Russian Federation is absolutely self-sufficient. As Emperor Alexander III used to say, Russia has only two reliable allies - its army and navy. So it was in the past, it remains so today. By the way, if we objectively evaluate the allied relations of our country at all times - tsarist and Soviet, then Russia has always won from having allied relations.



Flag of the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

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