

Russian-Led Military Alliance in Central Asia Weakening Amid Quagmire in Ukraine

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

The excerpted article from the Moscow-based, Russian-language newspaper *Kommersant* discusses deepening fissures within the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) military alliance in Central Asia. First, the ongoing border conflict between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan resulted in Kyrgyzstan withdrawing from the CSTO's upcoming exercises in Tajikistan, which have a collective defense scenario.¹ Moreover, according to the article, Kyrgyzstan postponed the exercises that are scheduled to take place in Kyrgyzstan next year, arguing that not taking part is within its rights as a CSTO member-state. However, the article notes that Russia appreciated that Kyrgyzstan requested that Russia mediate its conflict with Tajikistan because it preserved Russia's central role in the CSTO and Central Asian affairs generally. The article emphasizes how this role is especially important for Russia because the war in Ukraine has placed it in a difficult situation geopolitically and the CSTO remains Russia's Central Asian security linchpin considering growing competition in the region over the past two decades from the United States, Turkey, and China.²

Finally, the article asserts that countries like Tajikistan can now take advantage of Russia's vulnerable position resulting from the war in Ukraine. For example, in a recent speech at the Russia-Central Asia Summit, Tajikistani President Emomali Rahmon placed subtle demands on Russia



Main Cathedral CSTO Summit 02.

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to support Tajikistan. Tajikistan could, like Kyrgyzstan, decrease engagement with the CSTO and seek closer ties with China or other countries.

In particular, it directly hits the unity within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), as a result of which the Indestructible Brotherhood exercises in Kyrgyzstan were canceled...

Source: Киргизия и Таджикистан громко ссорятся (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan Fight Loudly),” *kommersant.ru* (Moscow-based Russian-language daily focusing on business and politics), 17 October 2022. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5619937>

The conflict between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which developed for many years, but previously concerned only the residents of the border regions of the two countries, became an important factor for the entire post-Soviet space. In particular, it directly effects the unity in the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which resulted in the Indestructible Brotherhood exercises in Kyrgyzstan being canceled, and the Frontier-2022 maneuvers that began today in Tajikistan taking place without the Kyrgyz military. In this context, the statement of the President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon that Moscow allegedly does not respect its partners in the region sounded as strong as possible.

The Kyrgyz side formally stated that it would not participate in the [exercises], which is completely within its rights. As for the exercises that were supposed to take place in Kyrgyzstan, it was requested in Bishkek for them
continue on 24

Continued: Rationales for Russia's Return to the Black Sea Grain Deal

Source Continued: Киргизия и Таджикистан громко ссорятся (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan Fight Loudly),” *kommersant.ru* (Moscow-based Russian-language daily focusing on business and politics), 17 October 2022. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5619937>

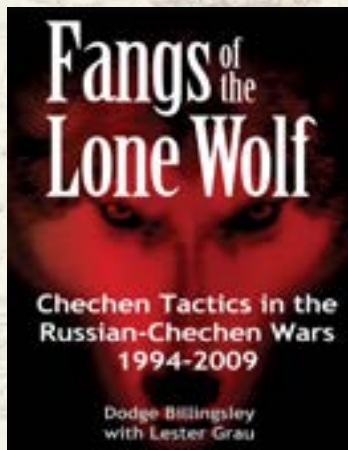
to be postponed to the next year.... Moscow liked that Bishkek was ready to see it as a mediator in resolving the conflict, while Dushanbe strongly demanded on a bilateral format.

According to a Kyrgyz source of Kommersant, the President of Tajikistan made a somewhat harsh speech at the “Russia-Central Asia Summit....” He recalled that the Russian language is being studied in the republic “from kindergarten” and a Russian military base is located there.

Notes:

[1] Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have had several intermittent clashes related to each country's territorial exclaves within the other's borders, creating competition regarding issues such as boundary demarcation and water and electricity use. Although these clashes often begin with local villagers using improvised weapons, in recent years the national armies have become involved, raising the risk that one of these localized clashes will eventually spiral into a national-level conflict. For more, see Matthew Stein, “Resolution to Kyrgyz-Tajik Border Problems?,” *OE Watch*, Issue 3, March 2019. <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/oe-watch-articles-2-singular-format/353586>

[2] Turkey's assistance to Azerbaijan during its 2020 military victory against Armenia over disputed territories in Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as its military performance in Syria and Libya in the years prior, has resulted in Central Asian states, such as Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, seeking Turkish support for their military modernization programs, especially related to unmanned aerial vehicles.



FANGS OF THE LONE WOLF

by Dodge Billingsley with Lester Grau

Fangs of the Lone Wolf is about combat experience in urban, mountain and fairly open terrain. It is not a comprehensive history of conflict. This book is a series of snapshots — of vignettes — describing the difficulty, the hardship, the victories and the defeats of the participants. It is an examination of the raw data of combat in a foreign land, and is aimed to advance the professional military study of conflict.