



CSTO Peacekeeping in Ukraine?

OE Watch Commentary: Some Russian commentators have referred to the conflict in southeastern Ukraine as a “suitcase without any handles,” suggesting that the Kremlin has helped to create a situation which will not be easily moved. The current Kremlin strategy appears to be in a holding pattern, perhaps hoping that there will be a more pliable government in Kiev after the presidential elections scheduled for March 2019. In the interim, as the accompanying excerpt from the centrist daily *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* points out, Kremlin authorities are beginning to lay the groundwork for a possible Russian-led peacekeeping operation into the Donbas region under the auspices of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

The article begins by describing that one of the training objectives for “the Enduring Brotherhood 2018 maneuvers” (which took place 30 October-2 November), included “the rehearsal of tasks on the territory of a state that is not a member of collective defense.” Although CSTO members have conducted joint training exercises for the past decade, they have never been deployed to handle a crisis within a member state (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan). Despite this lack of genuine peacekeeping experience, the article states that CSTO forces might be deployed to handle “the instability resulting from sanctions and from the economic crisis in the former USSR countries [which] may lead to a change of their political regimes.” Given that the Kremlin just recently enacted sanctions against the government in Kiev, it is clear which “former USSR country” the article is referring to. Indeed, the article specifically states that “the southeast of Ukraine” lies within “the CSTO’s zone of responsibility.”

To buttress the argument that the CSTO must be prepared for a Ukraine peacekeeping contingency, the article asserts that “Ukraine and the NATO countries now want to deploy peacekeeping forces in the conflict area in the Donets Basin.” While such an assertion might be surprising to officials in Brussels, it reflects Kremlin concerns that Western participation in a future Donbas peacekeeping mission would likely limit the Kremlin’s ability to move the Donbas “suitcase” into Russian territory. The article concludes with comments from a Russian military expert who suggests that Russia will be able “to effectively defend its geopolitical interests in the countries of the former USSR through mechanisms linked to the collective defense system.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“...in the context of attempts by the West to isolate Russia, it [Russia] is finding opportunities, as previously, to effectively defend its geopolitical interests in the countries of the former USSR through mechanisms linked to the collective defense system...”

Source: Vladimir Mukhin, “Войска ОДКБ нацелились на Кавказ и Донбасс (The CSTO Troops Have Targeted the Caucasus and the Donbas),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 30 October 2018. http://www.ng.ru/politics/2018-10-30/2_7343_odkb.html

The scenario of the Enduring Brotherhood-2018 maneuvers suggests the rehearsal of tasks on the territory of a state that is not a member of collective defense.

On Tuesday [30 October], the Enduring Brotherhood-2018 (NB-2018) peacekeeping maneuvers of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) began in the Urals. The collective defense system’s member-countries have been regularly conducting such exercises for almost 10 years. Although the CSTO peacekeeping forces have not been used in a real situation for the entire post-Soviet period. True, if one evaluates the Enduring Brotherhood-2018 scenario, they are already prepared for “an operation by the CSTO Collective Peacekeeping Forces (CPF) in the Central Asian region, under a UN Security Council resolution, on a CSTO non-member-state’s territory.”

...Such representative participation by the security structures of the Russian Federation’s allied countries suggests that, first, the CSTO leadership attaches special importance to integrated performance of missions for ensuring the internal security not only of the states that belong to the collective security system, but also of the post-Soviet space overall. And, second, it is possible that the instability resulting from sanctions and from the economic crisis in the former USSR countries may lead to a change of their political regimes. For Russia and its allies, such a scenario is unacceptable. And, evidently, for this reason a police factor is present during the rehearsal of the Enduring Brotherhood-2018 maneuvers.

The CSTO press release reports that, in the course of fulfilling the Enduring Brotherhood-2018 assignments, the troops, “in cooperation with militia (police) personnel, will rehearse CSTO CPF subunits’ operations in executing tasks for countering mass disturbances.” Such tasks -- according to the scenario of maneuvers -- will be rehearsed in a state that is “not a CSTO member.” Currently, except for Afghanistan, there are no countries in the region in which there can be mass riots and where reconciliation operations are required. However, within the CSTO’s zone of responsibility, there are many such zones in the post-Soviet space -- they are the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the southeast of Ukraine, and Transnistria.

The expert community believes that such CSTO CPF missions may be performed not only on Central Asian region territory, but also in any location within the post-Soviet space. As is known, Ukraine and the NATO countries now want to deploy peacekeeping forces in the conflict area in the Donets Basin....

...Military expert Lieutenant General Yuriy Netkachev commented to NG that “in the context of attempts by the West to isolate Russia, it [Russia] is finding opportunities, as previously, to effectively defend its geopolitical interests in the countries of the former USSR through mechanisms linked to the collective defense system and to bilateral military contacts with the Commonwealth of Independent States countries.”