

CIS STATES CONFRONT QUESTIONS CONCERNING STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Taras Kuzio: 7/01/02

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For the last few weeks, Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council has been working to upgrade cooperation with NATO, based on the 1997 Charter to a Membership Action Plan (MAP). Ukraine is the first CIS country to work on an individually tailored MAP for a country. The question that some strategic analysts are asking is: what other CIS states, namely those in the Caucasus and Central Asia, will start working on MAPs in the near future?

In the post-September 11 geopolitical environment, Russia and the United States have drawn closer than ever before. Yet, even as Washington and Moscow profess to share the same aims in the global fight against terrorism, the two states remain competitors for influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia. This dichotomy raises many questions about the future strategic alignment of states in the region.

The May US-Russian summit in Moscow opened the door for further American involvement in CIS security affairs the CIS. A **joint declaration** by US President George W. Bush and Russian leader Vladimir Putin stated: "In Central Asia and the South Caucasus, we recognize our common interest in promoting the stability, sovereignty and territorial integrity of all the nations in this region."

In addition, the upgrade of Russia's relationship with NATO to the 19 plus one format – 19 members plus Russia – in a newly established NATO-Russia Council has lessened Moscow's objections to NATO expansion plans. And on a more practical level, the introduction of US and other Western troops into Central Asia, along with the presence of US military advisers in Georgia, has eroded the concept of Russia possessing a "near-abroad."

At no point does the Bush-Putin joint declaration mention the CIS, CIS 'peacekeeping,' the CIS 'Anti-Terrorism Centre,' or the CIS Collective Security Organization (CSO). This seems anomalous as Putin orchestrated the transformation of the Collective Security Treaty into the CSO a week before the US-Russian summit. In addition to Russia, five CIS states – Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – are members of the CSO. At the same time, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have developed close strategic ties with the United States.

Some analysts are focusing on what the CIS states outside the CSO will do. Ukraine is so far the only state to have unreservedly announced its intention to seek NATO membership. Several other members of GUUAM – a regional cooperation organization still struggling to establish a viable identity [[for background see the Eurasia Insight archive](#)] – may follow Ukraine's example.

Established in 1998, GUUAM has always tilted towards NATO. This enabled Georgia, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan to expand bilateral security ties with individual NATO members, including the United States. It also enhanced their ability to participate in NATO's [Partnership for Peace](#) (PfP) program.

Georgia and Azerbaijan have been the most outspoken in seeking NATO membership, and are therefore likely to follow Ukraine in creating a MAP. Dr. Jennifer Moroney, a Washington-based defense consultant, said that following September 11, NATO's attractiveness to many CIS states has increased. She points out that Tajikistan opted to join the PfP in February this year, while other states have expanded cooperation, moving to the Planning and Review Process (PARP), which can serve as a stepping stone to inclusion in a MAP.

Both Azerbaijan and Georgia began agitating for NATO membership as they joined GUUAM. Since September 1999, Azerbaijani troops have participated in NATO peacekeeping forces in Kosovo within the Turkish Battalion. Last year, Azerbaijan took part in 250 NATO events, including the 'Cooperative Determination 2001' exercise which it hosted. Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister, Vilayat Guliev, told NATO's Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council as early as December 2000 that it sought to establish a MAP as a step towards its 'progressive integration' with NATO.

According to Moroney, the remaining GUUAM members are not as enthused about the prospects of NATO membership. In particular, Uzbekistan, which has emerged as an important US strategic partner in Central Asia, seems unlikely to vigorously pursue NATO membership. Moroney noted that Uzbekistan has largely been an unenthusiastic PfP participant.

Uzbekistan considers its involvement in PfP "as a way of strengthening its own independence and sovereignty, acquiring modern military technology and training highly-qualified national military personnel,"

Moroney said. She added that the Uzbeks "prefer to seek assistance from countries on a bilateral basis."

Uzbekistan has often behaved in a fickle manner when interacting in multilateral organizations, including the CIS, Shanghai Cooperation Organization and GUUAM. For example, Uzbekistan declined to participate in mid-June NATO exercises in Georgia, citing "technical reasons." Tashkent also had yet to confirm its participation in a session of GUUAM foreign ministers, scheduled for July 2 in Azerbaijan. On June 25, an Uzbek Foreign Ministry spokesman said that Uzbekistan had suspended its participation in GUUAM, clarifying an **earlier report** that Tashkent had quit the organization altogether.

As for the other former Soviet states, Moldova appears a likely candidate to drift back into a close relationship with Moscow. Meanwhile, Turkmenistan, which clings to its neutral status, is the only state not expected to make an effort to join either the CSO or NATO.

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