Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination in Eurasia: Comparing the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation

The phenomenon of non-Western regionalism has been studied extensively in debates on the 'new regionalism'. A novel feature, compared to the dominant earlier forms of regional organisation, was the tendency of new structures to shake off reliance on great power patrons and potentially to help world regions to better negotiate their relationships with global processes.[1] There followed a period of sustained research and policy interest in comparative regionalism in multiple variants, including in organisations tasked with the security policy coordination of their members states. A distinctive group, however, remains those macro-regional organisations, in which smaller states retain some agency and appear actively involved, but which are necessarily influenced by the agendas and outlooks of the large powers within them.

This article examines security policy coordination in two macro-regional organisations in Eurasia which include the primary non-Western powers, China and Russia, alongside smaller developing states: the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO, inaugurated in 2001 with both powers) and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO, formally launched in 2003 with one power, Russia).[2] The SCO has a less explicit security policy profile than the CSTO, which has specific defence functions, but they have significant common characteristics. These organisations present a puzzle: the regularity of their meetings at various levels for more than fifteen years, despite their difficulty in realising the various ambitious projects they proclaim, at least in multilateral formats. Given this record how can we explain the continued interest of the participant states in these organisations, including the smaller states in the absence of obvious Russian or Chinese coercion (which would point to a variant of hegemonic regionalism)? The explanation has wider significance for debates about the role of norms, power and domestic political systems in non-Western regionalism.

The continuation of SCO and CSTO meetings suggests they have offered benefits for regional leaders. This article considers that domestic political structure – nearly all the state participants have illiberal political systems - is a potentially significant variable. It hypothesises that the persistence of these bodies, despite the varying priorities of member states, can be explained to significant degree by a nexus between regime perceptions of domestic and regional security priorities. An interplay of intrastate and intraregional security concerns has formed a crucial source of bonding between regional leaders, which we characterise as *protective integration*. It is expressed in a set of statist principles privileging sovereignty, shielding against the intrusion of external values in the domestic political space and constraining any deeper regionalist impulses. We compare the SCO and CSTO by exploring key dimensions of such constrained regionalism, focusing on security policy and the means by which protective integration reaffirms and legitimates efforts to sustain regime security.

A central argument advanced is that the protective integration function, which solidified in the 2000s, has begun to unravel with Moscow's exercise of force against its CIS neighbour states. This has undermined trust in core sovereignty norms central to protective integration. Russia's deviation from its gatekeeper role as an upholder of statist norms, held alongside China, has led to tension at the heart of the SCO and CSTO. Initially in 2008 in Georgia but more explicitly since 2014 in Ukraine, Russian actions challenged a core organisational principle of the SCO and CSTO – a fervent resistance to intra-state separatism – which China remains especially insistent on. For China anti-terrorism and anti-separatism were the key driving forces behind the establishment of the SCO and they remain a shared preoccupation with Central Asian leaders.

These pressures have also helped expose underlying rivalries between Central Asian states, as well as between Uzbekistan and Russia, which reflected continued efforts to forge national identities and

substantiate sovereignty. In addition, the functional goals of the SCO have been outflanked by new Chinese projects for regional economic and infrastructure development, which no longer depend on the multilateral veneer the SCO sought to offer, while the latest expansion of SCO membership to India and Pakistan introduces further challenges for organisational cohesion and purpose. All this weakens the prospects for sustaining an effective, non-Western variant of regionalism in Eurasia, except in a more coercive format in Russia's zone of influence. It also reveals the vulnerability of regional structures which depend on normative congruence around statist principles to self-interested policies by great power member states which challenge that normative consensus.

The two case studies of the SCO and CSTO for this study are chosen not only by default as the primary non-Western macro-regional organisations in Eurasia. They have important characteristics in common, but also sufficient difference to offer explanatory traction to the notion of protective integration. They share much of their *membership:* Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan - as well as Uzbekistan during certain years. The SCO, however, adds the weight of China as well as India and Pakistan since 2017. The CSTO includes Belarus and Armenia, but no state outside the former Soviet Union. They have rather similar *regional* focus. The CSTO has been largely focused on the CIS Central Asian region, although CSTO officials refer expansively to the 'CSTO zone of responsibility', a broader zone formed of the territory of its member states. The SCO is heavily concerned with Central Asia (including the Xinjiang Autonomous Region), but reflects wider Chinese concerns in Asia and even aspects of global policy.

Their *formal responsibilities* might appear to diverge. The CSTO is tasked directly with security and defence policy, indeed on paper is a mutual defence pact against external attack, whereas the SCO has more diffuse formal security tasks and has explored plans for economic, financial and energy cooperation. However, as we show, a focus on regional security threats and the interaction of these with regime security is integral to both bodies. The *power relationships* in both the SCO and CSTO are supposedly managed by consensus decision-making. Yet in practice Russia has primacy in the CSTO. In the SCO, arguably China has the greatest weight, but power is shared with Russia, enabling smaller member states more agency and room for manoeuvre, while the inclusion of India and Pakistan foreshadows still more fluidity.

This research relies on an interpretivist approach to international politics and texts to identify the priorities and preoccupations of the member states of the SCO and CSTO. Meaningful patterns are sought in the statements, discourse and documents issued by officials of these bodies and their member states. This analysis forms the empirical contribution of the research. Special attention is paid to the decade 2008-18 during which the centralized political structure of the member states became more prominent, but the issue of separatism in Eurasia also became more contentious.

We seek to discern the protective integration function of these organisations in three bodies of evidence. First in the meta-discourse - the broad normative pronouncements and narratives of the SCO and CSTO since their inception in policy documents, communiques and speeches. Second, in the definition and description of various non-traditional security threats and the initiatives to address them, especially through examining two primary inter-related activities: countering terrorism and extremism, and opposing threats to 'information security'. Here we also rely on the opinion of well-informed specialists. Third, in the stated ambitions of the SCO and CSTO for the foreign policy coordination of their members. However, we recognise that another level of analysis, which is only briefly considered for lack of space, is the actual expression and implementation of initiatives in counter-terrorism or information security in domestic policies (serving to bolster regime security).

The structure of the article is as follows. The first section presents the theoretical context to the argument in different theories of regionalism, especially those applied to security cooperation among developing and separately among Asian countries. Secondly, we review interpretations of the SCO and CSTO in the scholarly literature to date and their evaluation of possible security policy cooperation. Thirdly, the core empirical analysis of protective integration is offered in three forms of cooperation and coordination offered by the SCO and CSTO: on counterterrorism, on information security and on foreign policy. Sections follow on the challenges of intra-state crises and Russian positions on separatism for these organisations, as well as the potential implications of membership enlargement. The concluding section assesses the influence of developments in recent Chinese policy towards Central Asia and of post-2104 tensions in Russian-Western relations. Some effects of the contradictions identified in Russian policy towards protective integration are assessed and the overall implications of our findings for regionalism and the processes driving it are summarised.

Theoretical context

The argument in this article connects with and in some respects contributes to three broad theoretical debates on regionalism in International Relations. First *neo-realist* scholarship on the role of structural power has strongly influenced the analysis of the security policy dimensions of regionalism. This is especially the case when major powers take part in regional structures. Secondly, a *liberal* perspective, drawing from the literature on comparative regionalism among developing countries, shifts the definition of security policy towards political structure and regime interests. This provides the essential theoretical framework for our analysis. Thirdly, we consider the role of *norm diffusion*, not as a bottom up process of soft regionalism, but through efforts by leaders to reinforce statist principles. Constructivist scholarship may offer certain insights here also.

Neo-realist interpretations were commonly applied to the first wave of regionalism in the 1960s in the developing world, which often had to contend with the strategic agendas of powerful states. In this period, as analyzed by Tow, 'subregional security' actors were relatively small or undeveloped nations, often susceptible to external power intimidation or manipulation.[3] This resembles the condition of smaller Eurasian states in the 1990s, subject to efforts by regional powers to sustain or increase regional predominance.

The development of the second wave, or 'new regionalism', beginning in the 1980s, included efforts by many regional units to create a security consensus in a given area without the backing of a major power. For the new post-Soviet Eurasian states, however, security coordination with at least one dominant power continued to be more common. In this context a neo-realist focus on the exigencies of power suggested that Russia's influence as a regional hegemon, especially in Central Asia would constrain regionalism, except as a form of sponsored or *hegemonic regionalism*.[4] This could express the superpower 'overlay' of the Cold War period, which could endure for decades. For neo-realists in principle a hegemon or 'stabiliser' state could stimulate the emergence of regional cooperation and regional institutions in various ways.[5] The CIS and later the CSTO could be viewed from this perspective. Meanwhile, from the standpoint of smaller states, regional institution building would reflect an effort at balancing or bandwagoning with the local strong power.[6]

Realist would note however, that the power balance was not static. If Russia exerted primacy in Central Asia in the 1990s, American power increasingly shaped the regional order here after 2001 for the first half of the 2000s, partially displacing Russia and reinforcing competitive dynamics between Moscow and Washington.[7] In a third stage, through the 2000s and increasingly in the 2010s China

has adopted this second power role through a carefully calibrated engagement with the region, partly in coordination with Russia. However, whatever the balance of regional influence between Russia and China, neo-realist thinking would suggest that the development of a dominant-state regionalism would not lead to any significant shift of power or decision-making authority from states to regional structures. By their very nature, hegemons could be expected to avoid deep commitments to institutions that limit their freedom of action. Therefore, these major powers would do little to promote processes deepening regionalism.

Even setting aside the phenomenon of hegemonic regionalism, it is difficult to disregard the effects of power within world regions. From an English School perspective, it has been noted that outside Europe 'power dynamics play a central role inside many regions – as in Asia'. One interesting expression of this is 'soft forms of security multilateralism', such as ASEAN, promoted 'as a means of managing the rise of Chinese power and of working against a tightening of the broader balance of power in the region'.[8] However, regional projects and frameworks may also provide a power platform for smaller states. An example could be in Central Asia through regional projects mooted respectively by Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in the early 2000s, the Eurasian Economic Community and the Central Asian Cooperation Organisation. The cooperation which occurs is likely to be determined then by the pursuit of power and security and ultimately also limited by the local states' abiding preoccupation with sovereignty.[9]

Sovereignty is at the heart of important findings from the substantial literature on comparative regionalism, concerned with the new regionalism among non-Western states.[10] This shifts the level of analysis to political structure and regime security. It goes beyond the outside-in approach of neo-realism and has also sought to move beyond the Eurocentrism of much of the earlier theoretical apparatus applied to regional integration. It keeps the question open whether agreement can be reached on a 'set of theories and concepts that can be meaningfully employed across regions for systematic comparisons and coherent explanations'.[11]

However, considerable attention has been devoted to deconstructing the Asian region. Scholars have used a plethora of adjectives to qualify Asian regionalism especially in East Asia. For some this suggests that process overwhelms substance, that regionalism has been a discursive smokescreen disguising changing approaches to multilateralism.[12] In general IR scholars have argued, however, that the effort should not be to develop a theory about Asian regionalism *per se*, but to situate Asian regionalism within a more general theoretical and comparative discussion.[13]

In this respect the work by Amitav Acharya and Alastair Iain Johnson with colleagues on institutions in a variety of other world regions is highly revealing. A core conclusion, based on detailed studies of regional institutions in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America, is that the most important common factor shaping institutional design in all cases is domestic politics. Moreover, 'in Asia, and much of the Third World, the primary domestic issue is of one of regime survival and legitimacy', which has led 'to a tendency among actors to be highly protective of their sovereignty, which in turn creates the basis for consensus-based institutional designs'.[14] Securing regime legitimacy was an especially strong compulsion for the Organization of African Unity and the Arab League.

In the case of the Arab League, for example, 'the clear imperative of regime survival…led Arab leaders to prefer weak regional institutions'.[15] This confirms previous research on security cooperation within the Gulf Cooperation Council, explaining why the GCC has focused on internal security rather than external defence. In the Gulf, as with smaller Central Asian states analyzed below, arguably authoritarian rulers have feared that structures for regional cooperation may resemble structures for regional intervention. Concerned about the implications of this for their own

control, they have deprived such structures of any institutional solidity.[16] Indeed, intervention may be perceived by ruling elites to take various form. Interestingly, of all regions studied in the volume by Acharya and Johnston, Asian institutions are positioned at one end of the spectrum, in being least prone to domestic intrusion.[17] Acharya has argued that, despite some variation in domestic political structures in ASEAN (as in the case of CSTO we proceed to study), the authoritarian domestic politics in ASEAN were 'incorporated into ASEAN's domestic prior', that 'the non-interference norm was to a large extent geared towards authoritarian regime maintenance'.[18]

This article advances regional case studies which contribute to this research agenda on comparative regionalism, as well as to previous literature on the SCO and CSTO. It confirms the salience of comparison with other major non-Western regional organisations, such as ASEAN, the League of Arab States or the African Union. In particular the proposition that for the leaders and national elites membership in such organisations is heavily influenced by the priority of regime security. The design of such bodies, as Acharya and Johnson emphasise, correlates significantly with domestic politics. Political leaders who preside over strongly centralized political systems, who are disinclined to share political power and decision-making authority more widely domestically, equally oppose sharing power regionally through transferring functions or decision-making to regional organisations. This is true both for major power and less powerful states. For regionalism this results in stasis at the top: a tendency for illiberal leaders to coalesce in presidentially defined regional formats and to seek ways to enhance their legitimacy through regional coordination.

This emphasis on the role of regime security also engages theoretical claims about the role of norms and norm diffusion for regionalism. It has been argued that the priority of sustaining incumbent leaderships results in the elevation of certain shared norms, which define the institutional design and diplomatic practice of regional organisations, such as non-interference in domestic affairs as well as an unwillingness to delegate sovereignty to the supranational level.[19] We draw attention to conservative norms and principles, which reflect this priority and are associated with the regional organisations studied. Secondly, the national leaderships in many developing states, as with China and the CIS states studied, preoccupied with their political stability, place great emphasis on the hard shell of state sovereignty. In Eurasia this is reflected in the responses of the SCO and CSTO to the perceived dissemination of 'colour revolutions', as well as divisive controversies over separatist movements. We draw on an emerging literature which points to active coordination in regional bodies to resist liberal agendas and principles or certain emerging transnational norms.[20]

This discussion of norms also points to possible insights derived from social constructivism. Collective identities might develop to some extent through the socialization of state leaders and senior officials, who regularly convene in regional bodies and bond over 'statist', sovereignty-focused norms. Such talking clubs also reinforce and legitimize such norms through this frequent interaction. This creates value for the participants, even if accompanied by a weak record of functional implementation of the formal missions of such regional organisations.[21]

Literature review

Much of the analysis of the two case studies, the SCO and CSTO, is in the form of policy-oriented publications in Russia, China and the other Eurasian states from institutes and centres linked to official structures. These tend to reflect official claims about the multilateral achievements of these bodies.[22] Academics on the other hand have been much more inclined to point to the low levels of integration achieved by the SCO and CSTO, the limited transfer of sovereignty between member

states and the deficit of collective-action problem solving. They offer different explanations for this, including ones which reflect wider theoretical debates on regionalism and constraints on regional institutions, as noted above. Substantially more attention is devoted to the SCO than the CSTO.

Scholars frequently point to the difficulty the SCO has in implementing what is written in agreements and the inactivity of the CSTO in any real operations as a function of power relationships. In the case of the SCO it is the input and interaction of the two principal powers which many view as the critical impediment. For the Chinese scholar Weiqing Song Moscow is at fault: 'Russia treats the SCO more as a regime of dialog between the leaders of the member states rather than an executive body with practical power'. But the core problem identified is *hegemonic competition* between Russia and China in Central Asia, so the SCO cannot make progress when 'the two hegemons diverge in their calculation of interests'.[23] The design of the CSTO differs, however, with only one large power within it. Realist analysis in this case points to smaller states bandwagoning with Russia and Moscow overseeing a process of sponsored or hegemonic regionalism. But this only goes so far since the smaller states remain reluctant to accept supranational CSTO structures or mandates.[24]

It is not only realists who argue that the competitive power politics in Eurasia is inherently unlikely to be transformed into high levels of coordination or multilateral integration.[25] Some point to the core structural reality of the two large powers in the SCO which prevent it from becoming a more comprehensive regional organisation and hinder the overall regionalization of Central Asia.[26] One specialist suggests that progress might require a tacit deal over a 'division of labour' for leadership of the organization, China leading the economic dimension and Russia the security dimension.[27] Others claims that the Russia-China internal balance might allow smaller Central Asian states more agency in the SCO, although they have been wary of efforts by Moscow and Beijing, to use the SCO as a macro-regional balancing mechanism against the United States.[28]

Such realist perspectives contrast to scholars who focus on the constraints imposed on the SCO and CSTO by domestic political structure and the priority given by leaders to the consolidation of regime security. These conform to the wider theoretical claims reviewed above. A particular argument, focused on Central Asia, is that economic regionalism has failed to progress since it adversely affects vested interests which support 'patrimonial' leaders, whereas some forms of security regionalism have proceeded since they bolster patrimonial regimes.[29] Beyond the issue of patrimonial rule, it has been claimed, that Central Asian authoritarian political elites use SCO membership to evade Western pressure for democratisation.[30] This general proposition has developed into a substantial literature arguing that the SCO has become part of a strategy of active promotion of authoritarian norms in Central Asia, indeed that regional contestation has developed between SCO and OSCE sets of international norms.[31]

An extension of this argument is that shared security norms in the form of 'statist multilateralism', promoted by the SCO and CSTO, have created a trans-regional security complex reaching from Russia through Central Asia to China.[32] The notion of statism links back to domestic political order in the countries of this complex, but it also points to identity formation in this macro-region. In this respect a Central Asian scholar has cautioned that Central Asian perceptions of China limit the prospect of the SCO developing beyond functionalist ambitions towards an SCO identity based on values and norms.[33] Nevertheless, some scholars have explored further whether the SCO (to which we might add the CSTO) has sought to advance a discursive geopolitical collective identity.[34]

Besides these arguments about power relations, domestic politics and norms some scholars simply refer to the capacities and sheer variation between the Eurasian states to explain their poor record in implementing agreements and projects in large regional structures. One Chinese scholar, for

example, blames this on resource limitations, the diversity of interests of member states and the SCO's uncertain identity.[35] Certainly divergent national conditions and stages of development may contribute to an unwillingness to transfer sovereignty to regional bodies. However, this fails to explain why SCO and CSTO states continue to invest such effort in these organisations.

'Protective integration', statist norms and regime legitimation

The first part of the puzzle we address is that the SCO and CSTO share an important quality: their regionalism is more virtual than substantive, judged by how far their priority projects are realised in a multilateral setting.

Both display much top-down political fanfare, declarations of policy intent and claims of achievements. The functionality of the CSTO and SCO is talked up in official discourse. Specialists also sometimes note that in principle the SCO offers China a forum to exercise leadership in a multilateral organization, that it has maintained regularized high-level consultations and engaged in some institutional development. However, 'despite the many declarations, signed agreements, and proposed projects, actual implementation is constrained'.[36] The SCO appears essentially as an intergovernmental network. Surprisingly little has materialised over the years from formal SCO and CSTO multilateral processes which did not pre-exist in bilateral relations or most probably would not have occurred anyway through bilateral channels or other regional initiatives.[37] This is obscured by China's reference 'to its bilateral engagements with the Central Asian states as "SCO" projects or initiatives', even on issues where the organisation has not defined any common policy or adopted Beijing's proposals.[38] A multilateral stamp, therefore, is placed on output generated outside the SCO framework.

This contrasts with the important achievements negotiated during 1996-7 by the precursor to the SCO, the Shanghai Five framework, in confidence-building and demilitarisation of border regions between Russia/Central Asia and China. Indeed, the SCO's authority is still derived heavily from these real foundational accomplishments on border management over twenty years ago.[39]

The CSTO in turn acts as '"a club" of countries in bilateral military-political relationships with Russia rather than with each other'. Different 'axes' in the CSTO, Moscow-Minsk, Moscow-Yerevan, and Moscow-Central Asia, operate rather independently from each other and focus on their individual problems.[40] Central Asian states are sometimes blunt about this. The President of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon, speaking to state leaders at the CSTO's Collective Security Council at the end of 2012, admitted that 'there are still no practical results of the agreements, programmes and other documents that have already been signed on collective security'.[41] A leading Uzbek specialist, writing in 2012, after Uzbekistan suspended its membership in the CSTO, similarly condemned the CSTO for inactivity ever since the Tashkent Security Treaty of 1992. He confirmed that 'bilateral military and political interaction between Uzbekistan and CSTO member states can be settled faster and more effectively in the present situation, without coordination with the CSTO'.[42]

Given this lack of achievement in developing regional projects according to formal plans, it is puzzling why leaders of the member states have expended so much political and diplomatic capital on publicizing these organisations and their meetings. This article builds on previous studies by Acharya and others to argue that the role played by both the SCO and CSTO in bolstering regime security through regional coordination is at the core of this puzzle.

The most valued form of cooperation the SCO and CSTO offer is what is characterised here as *protective integration*. This activity is inter-governmental, rather than supra-national. It lacks the content of substantive regional integration; it seeks to reinforce, but not pool sovereignty, it validates rather than transforms state policies. In essence, the gap between the formal, expansive objectives and the limited output of the SCO and CSTO in these terms, as well as their lack of any deeper regionalist impulse, may be explained by the dominant political function they embody: the consolidation of regime security and legitimacy, conceived of as upholding state sovereignty and stability, which has priority over security, economic or trade goals.[43]

Protective integration expresses a culture of interaction and normative bonding, of collective political solidarity, which assists substantially like-minded centralized leaderships on two levels. First, at the unit level, to better justify and legitimate their domestic political practices, structures and legislative frameworks. Secondly, at the macro-regional level, to sustain a conservative sovereignty-focused normative framework. This serves to resist alternative normative pressures from liberal actors in the wider international system, especially Western states and international organisations.[44] Russia and China act as the primary shapers and custodians of this normative framework in the Eurasian region, but share sensitivity over state sovereignty with all SCO and CSTO leaders. Indeed the reification of sovereignty understood in this way also connects with the outlook of many large ex-colonial states and centralized state leaderships further afield.

Macro-regional organisations in Eurasia boost regime legitimacy for member states in domestic and international spheres through various practices. First, it can be done without any substantive policy coordination or functional integration of their members through particular rhetoric and normative argumentation, which improves the standing of leaders among domestic elites and the public in member states. This may address imperfect local elections or domestic security actions. Secondly, it might be expressed through continued interaction with leaders who are ostracised by the Western community of states. Thirdly, legitimacy may be boosted through promotion of an explicit ideology or just by seeking to raise the value of sovereignty.[45] Fourth, regime security may be advanced by the SCO or CSTO though the transfer of governance, associated with membership requirements, such as anti-extremism provisions contained in the documents or regulations of the organisation.[46] Though the inverse may apply equally, as noted above: the legislative procedures or practices on internal security may simply be validated by the expressed security norms of the organisation.

This allows us to address the puzzle of why little progress is registered in meeting the proclaimed objectives of the SCO and CSTO. We can shift focus to the performative function of the SCO and CSTO, to what they actually do, especially their role as conveyors and legitimators of statist norms. In this sense protective integration is not just reactive but has been developed by state leaders as a proactive form of collective political solidarity directed against unwelcome international political processes and agendas, especially since the challenge of 'coloured revolutions' during 2003-5 in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, reinforced by the Arab Spring uprisings from 2011.

These leaders affirm the statist principle of 'constitutional order' and associated norms. They oppose these to a perceived interventionist agenda of democracy-promotion by Western states, international organisations and donor agencies. Russian and Chinese leaders and elites share a tendency with their Central Asian counterparts to rally against those parts of the neo-liberal reform agenda, especially of Western-defined governance – establishing institutions, ensuring accountability, transparency and democratic participation – which could undermine their domestic political role. This effort coexists with the nominal existence of democratic institutions, which actually exert little influence on major political decisions, especially foreign policy which is firmly controlled by presidents and the top leadership. In this way political bandwagoning by smaller

Central Asian states with Russia, and also with China in the SCO, in macro-regional formats, is expressed as resistance to the imposition or export into the region of 'external' or alien values.[47] This is supported in domestic discourses by fervent support for the principle of national sovereignty.

The two major Eurasian states have proactively advanced this collective position. A growing literature, to which we referred above, describes the prominence of Russia and China, especially since the later 2000s, in developing not only a strategy of resistance to democratization in the regions they influence, but of active support for principles sustaining illiberal rule. The diffusion of statist norms, such authors argue, counteracts processes of democratic diffusion. The SCO and CSTO have both played a significant part in this activity and Russia, as a member of both organisations, has been especially assertive.[48] As its own political system became more illiberal, Moscow reinforced this effort, using the discourse of state order and evolution to bond with leaders in China and Central Asia, especially since the late 2000s. The function is revealed, for example, in a Russian Foreign Ministry foreign policy review in 2007, which issued an appeal to activate the potential of the SCO and CSTO in Central Asia so that 'our neighbours should associate with Russia their future, the possibility of an evolutionary transformation without upheavals, and the prospects for stabilising their social and economic position'.[49]

Turning to the explicit discursive role of the organizations, in the case of the SCO foundational principles and norms evidently have played an important regime-legitimation function. For the Central Asian states, lying between the large power patrons of the SCO (Russia and China), the role is one of 'encoding' of various 'alternative norms in the texts and written rules of an international organization'. These contest norms associated with the OSCE and a wider set of Western actors. Alongside negotiated summit declarations, speeches and interviews, such texts offer valuable legitimation for local leaderships. SCO meetings, therefore, serve both to inculcate such norms through a process of socialisation and to disseminate them regionally.[50]

The SCO does not claim that such norms, especially embodied in its 'Shanghai spirit', represent an ideology. But the language has an ideological tenor, expressing as it does the need to maintain a diversity of cultures, civilizations and political and economic models within its organisation, non-alignment or a non-bloc approach, as well as the principles of non-interference in domestic affairs and territorial integrity. Notably, from its inception the SCO dedicated itself to combat the 'three evils' of 'terrorism, separatism and extremism'.[51] Since these challenges are left undefined, member states can decide which domestic order problems are attributed to which 'evil'. The SCO Charter pointedly refrains from referring to democracy as a goal in domestic politics, or to the self-determination of peoples. Also it contains no reference to the potential rights of non-state actors or more direct representation of citizens. This encourages a permissive environment for SCO state action against various forms of domestic political opposition.

The CSTO makes no claim to represent any 'spirit' and has been accused of lacking an ideology and mission specifying both its internal and external functions.[52] Its normative support for regime-legitimation, compared to the SCO, is less pronounced in formal documents. However, it emerges from various statements and the way it interprets the task of sustaining regional stability. The CSTO Charter refers rather vaguely to the need to ensure 'the collective defence of the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of members'.[53] CSTO statements selectively support or contest Euro-Atlantic political principles and values in a region which CSTO officials refer to as the 'zone of CSTO responsibilities'. Despite this pick and mix approach, the CSTO associates itself with the notion of 'Eurasianism', which assumes an affinity of Russian and East Asian civilizations, with an emphasis on collectivism and statism. Moreover, the CSTO engages in a security discourse similar to the SCO reflecting aspects of a broadly shared political culture. This emphasises the hard shell of sovereignty

and non-intervention, territorial border protection, state stability and domestic order. All this is underwritten by the privileging of regime security, from which necessarily follows a firm rejection of liberal claims for intervention at the expense of sovereignty to protect individual human rights.[54]

The CSTO Parliamentary Assembly is an institutional embodiment of the effort at shared political culture in the CSTO. The CSTO Secretary-General has hyped this body as playing 'a significant role in ensuring coordinated approaches to the harmonization of laws and bringing the legal fields of its member states closer together'. It is 'an important mechanism for political activity both within the member states and in the foreign policy area'.[55] However, in fact the Assembly has maintained quite a low profile, perhaps since this kind of institution raises nervousness over sovereignty.

Political legitimacy for incumbent regimes has been more directly conveyed through the practice of election observation. The CSTO defers to the CIS Election Monitoring Organization in this activity. However, SCO 'election monitors' have supported their CIS partners in refuting criticism by the OSCE's missions of the conduct of a number of elections in illiberal Central Asian states. This activity confirms alternative rules and practices for democratization and election monitoring to those of the OSCE and buttresses the credibility of local leaderships. Indeed Russia itself has also received an SCO stamp of approval for its presidential elections.[56]

We should also note the broad socialising function of regularized top level SCO and CSTO consultations, from annual summits to ministerial meetings, which must generate over time a certain culture of group interaction. Constructivist scholars suggest that communication and discourse express constitutive power in forming meanings, agendas and the parameters of policy, which in turn shapes normative frameworks.[57] The ensuing analysis points to ways in which the SCO and CSTO at least underwrite statist norms, despite mounting competitive tensions between member states since 2014.

Counterterrorism: regional and domestic state functions

The single field of activity which best expresses the protective integration function of the SCO and CSTO is counterterrorism policy and legislation. In the documents of the two organisations terrorism is conflated with extremism and separatism, although we argue later that the rhetorical association with separatism has become increasingly contentious, even divisive.

The SCO, given the participation of China, became the locus of the broadest Eurasian normative consensus in this field after it approved the SCO Convention of Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism in June 2001. This undertook to help establish a 'framework …for the prevention, identification and suppression of such acts'.[58] Conformity to this perceived grand merger of threats became a matter of both rhetorical and operational practice over the next decade. In 2005 a Concept of Cooperation between SCO Member States in Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism was adopted. By June 2009 a SCO Anti-Terrorism Treaty was signed in Ekaterinburg. A senior Kazakh official claimed this document 'fixes the socio-political understanding of terrorism, establishes the limits of jurisdiction, fixes the norms regarding the protection of sovereignty, gives an approximate list of interstate measures to prevent terrorism'.[59] In fact, despite a multilateralist veneer, this charter appears to reaffirm and so legitimate basic pre-existing shared perspectives as well as domestic rules over counter-terrorism. State sovereignty remain paramount. Therefore the Convention did not represent a multilaterally developed doctrine or set of practices.

The institutional core of SCO counterterrorism has been formed by the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), based in Tashkent since 2004, which affirms security commitments between the SCO member states.[60] However, RATS, which formally has a Council and Executive Committee, has been a mechanism only to share limited security information in relation to terrorist suspects and banned groups. The ability of RATS to expedite a genuine pooling of intelligence remains open to doubt, since Russia and China are disinclined to share core intelligence beyond some details on local operations, such as on counter-narcotics, and lists of terrorist suspects. Besides the limited interaction of RATS 'it is unclear what level of multilateral intelligence sharing occurs, if any'.[61] State counterterrorist structures continue to act largely autonomously. At the SCO summit in Dushanbe in September 2014, President Nazarbayev appealed to improve the activity of RATS, but noted 'this process must be comprehensively thought out and the interests of all sides must be taken into account'. This sounded like a task required for SCO members at some stage before the formal establishment of RATS, not more than a decade into its working practices.[62]

SCO members, especially Russia, have sought to promote joint military counter-terrorist exercises. These were initially modelled around a bilateral Russian-Chinese prototype conducted under the SCO banner in 2003 with a focus on military forces. But over the next decade they moved away from this kind of larger combined-arms exercise to a model which rather better suited the supposed core counter-terrorist objective. However, they still seemed to merge into and express the conventional military operational planning of the states involved. Uzbekistan, in explaining its persistent refusal to participate, has complained that the heavy equipment and strategic bombers used contradicted official claims that such exercises responded to a counter-terrorist scenario.[63]

However, neither the operation of RATS nor these periodic exercises have encouraged SCO states collectively to address the central problem - the intersection of terrorism, insurgency and organised crime in the region. SCO counterterrorist efforts instead mostly appear as an exercise in political bonding accompanied by exhortations for greater coordination of national policies. They 'have been confined to expressions of political support for member-state counterterrorist measures and drafting programmatic documents expressing the need and intent to coordinate military and political steps'.[64]

In this vein, the June 2012 Beijing SCO summit discussed a broad programme of cooperation against terrorism, separatism and extremism for 2013-15. This was difficult to codify. At the September 2014 SCO summit in Dushanbe President Xi Jinping was still urging agreement on a SCO convention against extremism.[65] SCO leaders at their May 2016 summit in Tashkent collectively reaffirmed their support for closer counterterrorism cooperation, referring now to the rising influence of the Taliban and ISIS in Afghanistan. A Cooperation Programme for Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism for 2016-18 was formally adopted. However, all this was infused by domestic order priorities. For example, in urging 'comprehensive and coordinated measures' against the 'three evils' at the 2014 summit, Xi Jinping defined it as necessary 'at present…to focus on the fight against religious extremism and cyber terrorism'.[66] A Convention on Countering Extremism was finally signed in Astana in June 2017, though as before individual SCO states would determine when and how to act against extremism in their national jurisdictions.

This SCO approach to counterterrorism runs parallel to CSTO activities. The various counterterrorism and anti-narcotics exercises of the two bodies are planned separately and seem uncoordinated. CSTO military exercises, under Russian guidance, are specific and have more diverse purposes. Designated CSTO peacekeeping forces have been tested in a scenario of a crisis in a Central Asian state resulting from inter-ethnic conflict, where peacekeepers have the role of separating the conflicting sides, but they were inactive in the major crisis in Kyrgyzstan in 2010. CSTO rapid reaction

forces in turn, which have never been used in combat, have been integrated into Russian defence planning, partly concerned with the implications of the drawdown of US troops in Afghanistan from 2014 for regional stability. However, the narrative of counter-terrorism is used for some CSTO exercise scenarios. In addition certain CSTO documents clearly specify measures to counteract international terrorism (with rising concerns over ISIS) and extremism, such as those adopted at a CSTO meeting in October 2016. [67]

A core problem for broader CSTO (as well as SCO) security cooperation is that real collective security responses of the member states are constrained by the significant divergent interests of the member states – and the fact that Uzbekistan for much of the CSTO's history and Turkmenistan have been outside the organisation. Regional leaders view such cooperation as a means for national and international self-assertion and their interest is in regional projects which 'shore up their power and divert attention from domestic sources of regional security concerns' (such as terrorism-criminal connections).[68] This reflects the priorities of regime security.

It is unsurprising, therefore, that CSTO coordination over counterterrorism has dovetailed with domestic narratives around core statist principles and even the explicit protection of beleaguered CIS state regimes. In September 2013, for example, a joint exercise between CSTO rapid reaction forces and the Regional Group of Forces of Russia and Belarus conducted operations 'against imagined foreign extremists aiming to carry out terrorist attacks and destabilize the situation in Belarus'.[69] Another exercise in August 2015 was represented as a collective intervention not only to 'localise' an armed conflict, but to 'preserve the sovereignty, protect the constitutional order and restore the territorial integrity of a notional CSTO member state'.[70]

The October 2016 CSTO meeting established a joint crisis response centre to exchange information on common threats, including terrorism. It also resolved to draft finally a unified list of terrorist organisations among member countries, a database which had been envisaged by the CSTO Secretariat for years.[71] Such coordination of data collection would be significant and it is presented as having a regional, transnational purpose. But it is intended primarily for domestic political management, as a comparison with comparable SCO practices suggests.

RATS under the SCO has developed its own watchlist of regional 'extremist' individuals and organisations, which increased rapidly from 15 organizations in 2006 to 43 organisations and over 1100 individuals in 2010. Cooley points out that there may be a practice whereby 'each country lists its own regime threats in exchange for agreeing to other countries' designations'. The result is to pool terrorist entities, as defined by each SCO state according to its individual assessment, without meaningful oversight.[72] The principle of mutual recognition of those identified by one member state as terrorist, separatism or extremist prevents individuals seeking asylum in SCO countries, since their suspected involvement in such prohibited activities will automatically trigger extradition to their state of origin.

Moreover, the 2008 SCO Anti-Terrorism Treaty, alongside existing CIS and emerging CSTO extradition agreements, permits great flexibility in transferring suspects among member states. Aris points out in this context that the definition of what constitutes a terrorist act in the original 2001 Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism' is very broad, while definitions of separatism and extremism allow for 'the regimes to act pre-emptively to nullify any threat to the integrity of their states'.[73] Perhaps the most vivid, and for Western states polarising, expression of this in the 2000s was the Uzbek government's suppression of unrest, deemed to be a terrorist uprising, in the town of Andijan in 2005. Despite strong criticism of this action by major

Western states, the 2005 SCO summit exonerated Tashkent. It even called for the withdrawal of NATO forces and bases from SCO state territory, in an apparent riposte to Western critics.[74]

This makes it important to unpack the nexus of SCO/CSTO regional policies and regime security – how norms of the regional bodies relate to the domestic legislation of the member states. It is argued here that this is primarily a one-way process: the various SCO treaties on the 'Three Evils' adopted in the 2000s endorse and legitimate practices and judicial procedures in member states. An alternative suggestion is that these regional documents help incorporate the 'Three Evils Doctrine into national frameworks through the harmonization of domestic legislative structures'. A point of evidence is the principle of mutual recognition in the 2005 Concept, that is the requirement that member state reciprocally acknowledge an act of terrorism, separatism or extremism 'regardless of whether the legislation of SCO member states includes a corresponding act in the same category of crimes or whether the act is described using the very same terms' (Article 3).[75] But in fact there is no mechanism for the implementation or enforcement of SCO treaty language and it remains entirely at the local leaderships' discretion on how to act, according to their own interpretation of domestic order, sovereignty and public order.[76] In other words SCO documents may be instrumentalized by these leaders, but given the top-down political structures of the member states, there is little evidence that SCO materials act as a means to socialise member states into a security culture or normative framework not previously shared by the SCO leaders.

The domestic preoccupation of the security discourse in SCO states means that there was limited common ground between the approaches of the SCO and the US-led 'War on Terror' as it developed after 2001, besides accepting the salience of tackling terrorism. The SCO did not try to coordinate its actions or programmes with other states or organisations working under the aegis of the global 'War on Terror' in the 2000s, though some dialogue with the UN has since developed and some common language with the CSTO has been publicised. By contrast there has been much similarity in approach to terrorism among the perceptions of the governments in the SCO states.[77]

In this context the SCO, as well as the CSTO, have been drawn into dispute about state-citizen relations and norms over international human rights – more specifically how these organisations help validate controversial state practices. Already in the mid-2000s bodies monitoring international human rights rebuked the SCO, noting that the vague definition of the 'three evils' within the SCO, which offers much leeway in interpreting what constitutes a terrorist act or even the intention to assist such an act, provides justification for actions by its member states with an agenda other than terrorism.[78] The basis of this critique is that national and regional counter-terrorism strategies fail to include human rights and rule of law guarantees. The tenor of this is rejected by SCO officials, who view such claims as part of wider resistance by states outside the region to statist norms. Yet the controversy has led to some criticism of the UN readiness to engage with the SCO. This occurs since the UN is acting alongside the SCO, CSTO and other organisations to implement the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. However, the latter does envisage measures that would provide guarantees for human rights and the rule of law.[79]

The institutional framework of the SCO reinforces the sense that there exists a legitimate regional legal culture around the 'three evils' discourse, although this is better understood as a composite of the priorities and outlooks of local regimes. Meetings are held under the SCO Council of Heads of Government at the level of General Public Prosecutors. These are frequent; a meeting in Almaty in August 2015 was already the 13th session of SCO prosecutor-generals.[80] There have been several gatherings of justice ministers of the SCO states, which consider not just domestic concerns. For example, at their third meeting in August 2015 issues of regional security and matters of mutual interest were discussed.[81] Regular meetings also take place between SCO secretaries of security

councils, ministers of internal affairs and public security, supposedly to coordinate action against cross-border criminal activity, as well as illegal migration.

The CSTO structure is less well represented in this juridical/security nexus, since the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) still acts as an overarching framework for many such meetings. For example, the 2015 SCO prosecutor-generals' meeting was held sequentially with the 25th session the CIS Prosecutor-Generals' Coordination Council. A Council of Interior Minister of CIS states also meets quite regularly. In addition there exists a Committee of the Security Council Secretaries of the CSTO, which considered at the end of 2015, for example, how to prevent CSTO state citizens from being recruited to support terrorist organisations in armed conflicts.[82] As with SCO structures, this body validates rather than challenges state definitions of terrorism. But there is also a common SCO/CSTO effort to use discussion between the heads of various state structures to develop a counter-terrorism security belt around Afghanistan.

Information security

'Information security' and especially the control of cyberspace is a specific field, which became securitised in both SCO and CSTO discourse, rapidly expanded as an agenda issue for both organisations and was incorporated into counter-terrorist strategy. This has been internalised as part of the core regime security outlook of regional leaders, and became especially prominent in their thinking in the aftermath of the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011. The SCO and CSTO have served as venues for airing concerns and proposing responses in this field which may appear to be transnational, but are considered foremost as threats to domestic state cohesion.

After the 'colour revolutions' in CIS states the SCO initiated plans to develop 'an international legal framework and practical mechanisms for cooperation aimed at ensuring international information security'. In calling for this in the late 2000s the SCO still accepted that efforts to prevent the spread of terrorist ideology should tap the potential of civil society, the business community, media and NGOs.[83] After 2008, however, this role for non-state domestic actors was omitted in SCO summit declarations. By 2012 the emphasis had shifted. The SCO issued a new refrain that year in Beijing: opposing 'the use of information and communications technology for the purpose of undermining political, economic, and social security of the member states'.[84] In the following years SCO leaders resolved to elaborate a 'universal code of rules, principles and standards' of responsible behaviour in information space, to form a 'comprehensive information space security system'. This code was expected to be one respectful of national sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries.[85] The 2017 Astana Declaration continued these themes, linking them to efforts against the spread of terrorist ideology and propaganda and against the radicalisation of society, now a core part of the collective discourse of the SCO.[86]

The CSTO has defined information security similarly as a core collective undertaking. Indeed, under Russian guidance, CSTO officials have gone further to try to propagate a distinct image of the organisation itself in member states. In 2009 a CSTO official discussed plans to set up information and propaganda centres in all CSTO states, 'to shape an ally image in the population of organisation member states' and 'to combine information efforts to counter attacks aimed a discrediting individual members states as well as the CSTO itself'. Interagency centres could bring together representatives of defence and foreign ministries, but also other structures such as law-enforcement.[87] However, this effort to control the narrative in the domestic arena of CSTO states has not progressed so far, perhaps since it infringed state sovereignty. CSTO states have focused

instead on bonding against the perceived challenge of the Arab Spring uprisings since 2011 to CIS regional and domestic order.

Responding to the Arab Spring, the leaders of CSTO states agreed to create a unified preventive strategy for cyberspace and to regulate regional information space.[88] President Nazarbayev, who assumed the chairmanship of the CSTO for Kazakhstan at the end of 2011, described his first priority as 'the protection of the organisation's information space'.[89] Particular concern was aired in CSTO meetings over the role of social media in the Arab Spring uprisings and ways to control such new media were discussed.

The CSTO Secretary General Nikolai Bordyuzha presented a forceful Russian narrative in these discussions, which found a ready reception – that the primary and renewed threat was that of new 'colour revolutions', 'aimed at the full or partial disintegration of the country, at changing its domestic or foreign policy, replacing its government with a more loyal line up, installing external control'. Bordyuzha characterised such colour revolutions as 'a type of coup d'état staged using political, information, communication, moral and psychological' methods, with the organisers receiving 'external information support'.[90] With this scenario, fusing earlier CIS colour revolutions with the Arab Spring (and soon also the Maidan uprising in Kiev), Bordyuzha tried to rally CSTO states with illiberal regimes against the supposed political designs of Western states. This impulse was reflected also in efforts in the SCO and CSTO at foreign policy coordination around statist principles.

Foreign policy coordination and the wider international system

The interests of China and Russia as major powers in the international system frequently have left their imprint on the positions adopted by and discourse of the SCO and CSTO over the high politics of foreign and security policy. In addition the CSTO as an organisation expresses a pronounced power hierarchy: joint declarations on international security invariably support Moscow's position, although sometimes they may favour particular interests of the smaller member states. Yet despite such power dynamics in the operation of the SCO and CSTO, these bodies have been influential proponents of international principles and precepts which underpin and legitimate the regime security preoccupation of regional leaders'. Coordination over such norms and principles is an important expression of the protective integration function of the SCO and CSTO. This is also discernable in the stances adopted on certain foreign and security policy issues.

Previous research records how the external narrative of the SCO developed a 'distinct intraregional focus on the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs, aimed at supporting the preservation of existing regimes in Central Asia and directed against intrusion by actors external to the region'.[91] This is highly appreciated by Central Asian leaderships. It co-exists, however, with a less pronounced but fairly consistent narrative directed at the global international system, driven by Russia and China. At various times there has been uneasy tension between the intra-regional focus and an aspiration of Russia, and to a lesser extent China, to engage in extra-regional geopolitical grandstanding with the publicity and symbolism of the 'global weight' of the SCO.

The principle of non-interference in domestic affairs of other states, and affiliated statist norms, have been central to the SCO's interpretation of the Shanghai Spirit and a rallying call against extra-regional pressure for democratic processes and good governance. President Karimov presented it most bluntly at the Beijing SCO Summit in 2006 that 'we have common aims to counter resolutely external attempts to impose Western methods of democratisation and public development on our

countries'.[92] This followed the SCO's careful avoidance of any criticism of the Uzbek government after its crackdown in Andijan the previous year. SCO statist principles were expressed in consistent opposition to efforts to develop 'external standards' of political legitimacy for states, such as 'democratic legitimacy', especially if this created expectations of transformation of political structures. Russia in particular, found common cause with other SCO states in its dominant narrative on 'colour revolutions'. Along with this, SCO leaders have coalesced around a firm resistance to broad Western and UN efforts to entrench human security into the global script, to gain increasing acceptance for humans as objects of international law, which qualifies more restrictive understandings on state sovereignty.

A central SCO norm at the global level is multipolarity. At times this appears to be prescriptive - about the desirable trajectory of power relations. But increasingly since the late 2000s multipolarity has been used by the big SCO states to describe the existing state of global relations. It serves as a discursive foil to 'hegemonic' policies led by the US, as well as a call for a more just system of global governance which takes better account of the interests of the non-Western world.[93] In essence it appears as a soft form of power play between Russia and China on the one hand (with Russia more vociferously asserting the claim) and the leading Western powers on the other hand. However, the smaller Central Asian states are anxious to avoid the regional-level focus of SCO norms being displaced by such a polarising anti-hegemonic great power contest, which is also at odds with the multi-vector foreign policy strategies they prefer to adopt.

Despite their apparent normative congruence in the SCO, Russia and China have not shared the same fervour to instrumentalize the SCO on the global stage. Beijing may have had greater interest in developing 'a viable regional organisation infused with Chinese-orientated values, which could in the future be replicated elsewhere'.[94] This practical goal could be impeded by Russia's repeated efforts to pump up the global image of the organisation, to make maximal use of the SCO to claim that global structural power has shifted in favour of the 'non-West' and a levelling of Western power has been achieved. This was done even when the Russian economy slumped sharply, initially in 2011 and then again in 2014, and a gulf appeared between the economic trajectory and potentials of China and Russia. China prefers a more oblique, gradual and less confrontational approach to revising the Western-inspired international order, an order which it decries like Russia. Beijing's wish to avoid being railroaded into a vociferous Moscow-driven campaign against Western states, in or beyond the SCO, has strengthened since 2014 (see below).

The internal dynamics of the CSTO are different, since it lacks the balancing potential of the two big powers in the SCO. Therefore, on foreign and security policy issues it is appreciably more difficult for the smaller Central Asian states, as well as Belarus and Armenia in this case, to exert agency on formal CSTO positions adopted. Armenia has tried at times to co-opt CSTO support in its conflict with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region. However, Central Asian states have avoided this kind of contentious lobbying. When CSTO officials (who are mostly Russian) refer to the 'CSTO zone of responsibility', this expresses a Russian entitlement to influence, one that aspires to be exclusive, while other CSTO states do not wish to downplay the roles of various other bodies in their vicinity such as the SCO and OSCE. Overall, therefore, the collective positions of the CSTO, whether on regional policy or extra-regional concerns (such as missile defence, Iran or Syria) tend to magnify Russian narratives and priorities.

The CSTO not only validates the application of statist norms in the CIS region, as we have described, but also the extra-regional application of principles underpinning regime security. The discourse is of upholding constitutional order, clearly repudiating the notion of democratic legitimacy. Since the overthrow of the Libyan regime the major crisis of contention in this respect has been Syria. In

September 2013 a CSTO statement condemned any international intervention in Syria bypassing the UN Security Council as unacceptable and illegal and also opposed 'illegal activities aimed at the further militarization of the internal conflict in Syria'.[95] Support for President Assad in Syria, backing an incumbent ruler, foregrounds regime security concerns. By contrast, as considered below, the crisis in Ukraine since 2014 has been a normative challenge for CSTO coherence.

It is ironic, therefore, that since the onset of the Ukraine crisis, Russia has spurred its earlier efforts to raise the profile of the CSTO Foreign Policy Council and develop common CSTO 'bloc' positions for the agenda of UN General Assembly sessions.[96] The coordination of member states' foreign policy positions on international and regional security issues is provided for by Article 9 of the CSTO's Charter, but it had been a dormant role.[97] In autumn 2013 CSTO Secretary-General Bordyuzha still admitted that 'we are not NATO, which positions itself as a global player; we are a regional organisation that ensures security on the territory of the CSTO member states'.[98] However, in April 2014, following a session of the CSTO Foreign Policy Council, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov announced CSTO approval for a plan of consultations on foreign policy, security and defence issues up to mid-2015, which would generate a list of topics for joint statements of the CSTO member states in the UN, the OSCE and other forums. Statements on Afghanistan and the situation in north-west Syria had already been approved.[99]

This resurgent effort at foreign policy coordination by Moscow appears not to reflect a greater coalescence of CSTO state foreign policy perspectives. In other words it does not express a true multilateral impulse and involves some reluctant compliance by smaller CSTO states to Russian preferences. The other CSTO states have drawn a line at appearing aligned to Russian military policies on conflicts beyond the 'CSTO space'. Even regional aspects of the Syria crisis have proved to be divisive. In autumn 2015 no CSTO state supported the Russian statement on Turkey after the downing of the Russian Su-24 bomber by a Turkish jet. Moscow failed to obtain a consensus in condemning the Turkish action at an emergency meeting of the CSTO Permanent Council. It took another month for a CSTO statement of more solidarity with Russia to appear, and this was framed around the core issue of normative congruence, terrorism. It noted 'the move was not conducive to the consolidation of international efforts aimed at combating international terrorism'.[100] In summer 2017 Russia also failed to persuade Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to deploy their servicemen as CSTO peacekeepers in Syria. Kazakhstan along with other CSTO states did not wish to subsume the regional mandate of the CSTO to wider Russian geostrategic interests.[101]

Responses to intrastate crises

A core dimension of protective integration from the inception of the SCO and CSTO has been the readiness of these organisations to adopt flexible definitions of extremism and terrorism which are consistent with the interpretations applied by the leaderships in Russia, China and Central Asian states in their domestic affairs. This approach is underpinned by the foundational principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. However, in principle intra-state conflicts or periods of political destabilisation may give rise to serious challenges to regime security and the potential role of the SCO and especially the CSTO in providing support to local leaderships in such crises has been controversial. This scenario has become more divisive since interpretations of another core principle of regime security, resistance to separatism, have diverged. This has weakened the overall cohesion and collective purpose of both macro-regional Eurasian organisations.

The debate over the engagement of Eurasian organisations in intra-state crises has centred on the CSTO rather than the SCO, firstly since the former has the stronger focus on local tensions in Central Asian states - the most likely location of such crises - and secondly since Russia has been driving the formation of various CSTO force structures, including its Collective Rapid Reaction Forces as well as peacekeeping forces, which could be earmarked for such an involvement. However, the CSTO had to overcome restrictions on its original Charter mandate, which focus on security challenges and threats external to CSTO states. There has also been the thorny issue of how such activation of the organisation could express solidarity and mutual consent rather than an 'Illegitimate intervention' by essentially Russian forces, of the kind decried in Western foreign policy in other regions.[102]

Uzbekistan suspended its membership of the CSTO in June 2012 partly out of frustration over Russian efforts to revise the consensus principle (Article 12 of the CSTO Charter) and to shift the orientation of the organisation from external defence to intra-state crises. The other CSTO member states were persuaded to consider this revision already by the end of 2010 and eventually agreed to it, subject to the principle of host government consent for any intervention. Yet Uzbekistan has not been the only sovereignty-fixated CSTO state alive to the risk of Moscow using the organisation to validate its own self-interested military actions in Central Asia. Nor can local leaders fully trust that Moscow would necessarily take their side in potential major political crises of authority in their states.[103] There have remained serious doubts about what kind of effort if any at political stabilisation and security provision in Central Asia the CSTO might be viewed as appropriate for.

This uncertainty was reflected in the palpable inactivity of Moscow and the CSTO in the major interethnic crisis in Kyrgyzstan in June 2010. The legal constraint of the CSTO Charter was a factor, but regardless of that Uzbekistan mistrusted any Russian involvement under a CSTO flag in this conflict in its 'near-abroad', and Kazakhstan was also opposed. Indeed, Moscow itself displayed little political will to become embroiled in this kind of complex ethnic conflagration.[104]

Another case at the time more explicitly challenged regime security - the overthrow of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev in Kyrgyzstan in April 2010. The CSTO viewed this in general as 'unconstitutional' and Central Asian leaders were reluctant to offer external legitimisation of 'regime change' in their backyard. Nevertheless, the organisation remained passive. A factor was that Russian relations with Bakiyev had deteriorated and Moscow was apparently not displeased at his departure. But this raised further questions about the relevance of the CSTO for political stabilisation. Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko (who gave sanctuary to Bakiyev) complained openly: 'What sort of organisation is this, if there is bloodshed in one of our member states and an unconstitutional coup d'etat takes place and this body keeps silent?'.[105]

However, in this case other CSTO states were cautious not to take their support for incumbent regimes too far and tensions remained during the following years over any scenario of Russia-led CSTO involvement in local political crises. Nikolay Bordyuzha felt compelled early in 2014 to specify that the CSTO 'will not intervene in political life, political fight and political actions within states, and it will not be used for solving some political tasks'.[106] This appeared to mark the limits of CSTO support for regime security. However, it also referred indirectly to the growing controversy over Russian involvement in separatist conflicts elsewhere in the CIS region.

Intra-states crises might appear to be a major preoccupation of the SCO in turn. After all the organisation's focus on the 'three evils' suggests that a crisis triggering its involvement would evolve out of domestic terrorism or insurgency. SCO exercises have been held officially to promote joint action against extremism, terrorism and separatism, to promote the interoperability of forces and to showcase the organisation's potential capabilities to act in regional crises.[107] However, here again

the limits to the objectives of supporting regime security and political stabilisation are exposed. Not only Central Asian SCO members, but also Russia, have viewed an explicit military dimension for the SCO in intra-state crises as inappropriate. SCO leaders have avoided airing the option of a SCO mandate to authorise regional military deployment.

This stance reflects particular sensitivities over sovereignty by the other SCO members, given China's strong presence in the SCO, for historical and cultural reasons. For all SCO states including China, however, this response has been also an important expression of the central role played by the principle of non-intervention and non-interference in domestic affairs in the organisational identity of the SCO.[108] Therefore the SCO has not considered any mechanism for potential intervention by SCO states themselves in each other's internal affairs. In the case of the CSTO the issue has been blurred in the CSTO by different power dynamics - Russian dominance in the organisation and its operational control of earmarked rapid deployment and peacekeeping forces. However, the SCO's response to regional intra-state crises is bonding through consultations. This is reflected in the joint communiqué of the SCO summit in June 2006 in the aftermath of the shocks of Uzbekistan's crackdown in Andijan and the 'Tulip Revolution' in Kyrgyzstan. It suggested that member states should seek immediate consultation when and if developments were to take place that threaten regional peace, stability and security so as to protect their common interests.[109]

Therefore there was no likelihood of SCO involvement on the ground in the inter-ethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan in June 2010.[110] Conflict prevention and resolution remains a legitimate SCO concern and President Nazarbayev proposed a council for resolving territorial and regional conflicts in the 'SCO's area of responsibility' at the Astana SCO summit in June 2011.[111] However, even this weak initiative has not been developed. There is no evidence that the SCO leaders collectively have contemplated badging a military operation in a future internal conflict or political crisis (even if assistance is invited by the incumbent government) as SCO conflict prevention.

To conclude, the inability of the SCO and CSTO to address intrastate crises, especially ones of political authority, more directly is explained to a significant extent by the dominance of the statist norms we have discussed. It also reflects multiple cross-cutting interests and local disputes among the member states as well as the geopolitical dynamics in the SCO of two major powers tactfully seeking a form of co-existence in the Central Asian region. However, it also reflects the growth of tensions over a foundational principle in the identity of both the SCO and CSTO - resistance to separatism.

The separatist challenge to protective integration

The SCO and CSTO charters both define separatism as a threat. It is one of the 'three evils' of the ideology of the Shanghai Spirit. Article 1 of the 2001 SCO Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism determined that separatism means 'any act intended to violate territorial integrity of a State including by annexation of any part of its territory or to disintegrate a State, committed in a violent manner, as well as planning and preparing and abetting such act'.[112] Numerous CSTO documents securitised separatism similarly.

The domestic impulses shaping this perception of threat have been compelling. Russia prosecuted a lengthy and bitter struggle to suppress and insulate separatism in Chechnya, as well as wider separatism currents in other North Caucasus republics. Although Moscow assisted separatist forces in early post-Cold War conflicts in the South Caucasus and Transdniestria region, it showed no interest before the war with Georgia in 2008 in recognising the breakaway regions. Kazakhstan has

had serious uneasiness about the commitment of its northern regions to Kazakhstani citizenship. Uzbekistan has worried over its western region of Karakalpakstan (former Karakalpak Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic). Tajikistan has faced separatist unrest in the Tajik Autonomous Province of Gorno-Badakhshan, while ethnic communities such as Uzbeks in the southern Ferghana Valley regions, have been divided by numerous post-1991 Central Asian borders. China in turn has struggled to minimise what it terms 'splittism' by Uighur groups in its Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region and to avert criticism of its policy in Tibet and over Taiwan. For China anti-separatism was a key impulse in establishing the SCO in the first place. The SCO became 'a critical part of Chinese efforts to stem and eradicate external links to domestic separatist and terrorist cells'.[113]

As with responses to terrorism and extremism, the primary SCO and CSTO role was in legitimating sovereign state responses to perceived separatism, not forceful collective intervention itself in conflicts. For example, Tajikistan did not request CSTO assistance to deal with armed internal opposition in the Tajik autonomous province of Gorno-Badakhshan in July 2012. Bordyuzha noted that the situation 'fully concerns Tajikistan's domestic life and does not require the mobilisation of collective forces'.[114] In a higher profile case, in 2008 the SCO issued a statement of strong support, though no more, for measures taken by China 'to prevent unlawful actions and normalise the situation' in Tibet and affirmed that the settlement of the situation there is an internal affair of China.[115]

Up to this point a Russian-Chinese axis of principled opposition to separatism seemed to have formed in the SCO around Chinese solidarity with Moscow over Chechnya and Russian solidarity with Beijing over Taiwan and Tibet. With their UN Security Council veto rights these powers had strongly influenced the wider diplomatic discourse on these regions. Moreover, the SCO and CSTO perspective of separatism as a domestic and some extent transnational regional challenge (with Armenia as a dissenter, out of its commitment to the Nagorno-Karabakh region) had been translated into a normative stance in the wider international context. No SCO state, for example, recognised Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence from Serbia in February 2008.

The first major shock to this collective stance was the extensive Russian military support for the separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the war with Georgia in 2008 and especially Russia's formal recognition of the independence of these breakaway territories. This represented an empowerment of separatism, which had direct implications for the ethno-territorial cohesion of all SCO and CSTO states with separatist concerns.

To Russia's frustration, Moscow failed to obtain an endorsement for its military actions in Georgia at the SCO summit in August 2008. The summit declaration took a neutral stand. The presidents actually reaffirmed their commitment to 'efforts aimed at preserving the unity of a state and its territorial integrity', with implied support for Georgia as an integral state.[116] Notably no SCO state subsequently recognised South Ossetia or Abkhazia. China appears to have been the key state at the SCO summit unprepared to accept Russia's U-turn over resistance to separatism and its violation of Georgian sovereignty. It may also have reflected a very consistent Chinese position as the only major modern power which has not sent troops to interfere in intrastate wars.[117] China's stance shielded the response of weaker Central Asian SCO members. For the other SCO states Russia's offence was all the more noticeable when contrasted with the rapid and unequivocal SCO support given to China's efforts to restore order after ethnic violence between ethnic Uighurs and Han in Xinjiang in July 2009.[118]

Given this SCO response, it was all the more important for Russia to garner political support over the Georgia crisis from the CSTO, where Chinese influence was absent. A meeting of CSTO foreign

ministers in September 2008 did indeed condemn Georgian 'aggression' and approved Russia's 'peacekeeping efforts' in the campaign in Georgia, but glaringly failed to mention the recognition of the secessionist territories.[119] Foreign Minister Lavrov, putting a brave face on this, claimed the ministers had agreed to act in a coordinated way on the basis of the declaration in international organisations where the theme of Georgian action against South Ossetia arose.[120] But it was telling that the CSTO had played no role in the active phase of the crisis, even for consultations.

What remained was enduring evidence of open Russian support for secessionism in Georgia, its instigation of the breakup of a state and apparent interest for a time in September 2008 even in overthrowing the incumbent Georgian president. The reverberations for the organisational and normative cohesion of both the SCO and CSTO were significant. For smaller states in these bodies, an appeal for Russian assistance in the event of domestic political challenges or local insurgencies more obviously appeared now as a double-edged sword. Fractures had appeared in the political solidarity underlying the protective integration function of the SCO and CSTO. Russia's revisionist approach to separatism threw into question the prevailing international order and concept of statehood in the Eurasian territory of the former USSR, according to which only former Union republics' border could be recognised as state borders.

These fundamental concerns were papered over during the following years. More attention was devoted in the SCO and CSTO to other dimensions of protective integration and exploring means to counteract the phenomenon of the Arab Spring which reinforced concerns about what was defined as 'extremism'. In 2012 SCO leaders affirmed explicitly that 'the member states support one another in maintaining domestic stability'.[121] The need to prevent the internet from promoting 'ideologies of terrorism, extremism and separatism' became a standard exhortation.[122]

The divisions over separatism re-emerged with a vengeance in 2014, however, with Russia's rapid annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and its subsequent 'deniable' support for separatist movements in eastern Ukraine. The other SCO state leaders were inclined to bond with Russia in deploring the Maidan Revolution in Ukraine as illegitimate and extra-constitutional 'extremism'. However, the Russian actions which followed struck at the normative core of the Shanghai Spirit. They cast a shadow over the 2013-15 cooperation programme for combating terrorism, separatism and extremism. At the Dushanbe SCO summit in September 2014 Chinese President Xi Jinping had to accept that among the 'three evils' 'it is necessary *at present to focus* on the fight against religious extremism and cyber terrorism' (author's emphasis).[123] The summit declaration still outlawed separatism, but effectively diluted this and the other two 'evils' by expanding the blacklist to include the ideologies of 'radicalism, fascism and chauvinism', apparently reflecting Russia's discourse on the crisis in Ukraine.[124] This genuflection to Russian thinking was toned down next year to the generic notion of 'other radical ideas'; at subsequent summits the ritual reference to the 'three evils' resumed.

This could not conceal that Russian claims about resisting separatism in its neighbourhood now appeared hollow. SCO declarations pointedly avoided any support for Russian claims over Ukraine. As with almost all other states in the international community, no SCO (or CSTO) state (besides Russia itself) recognised Crimea as part of Russia. In their official national responses on the issue, China was elliptical, but was aware that Moscow's promotion of pro-Russian separatism on its borders 'implicitly undermines China's efforts to contain separatists in Tibet, Xinjiang and, most importantly, Taiwan'.[125] Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan hedged their language to avoid confronting Russia, but the Kazakh leadership in particular was clearly nervous once again over Russian attitudes to the ethnic Russian populated regions of their state. Uzbekistan in response openly deplored actions 'that contradict the UN Charter and international norms', specifying 'sovereignty, territorial

integrity and political independence of a country'.[126] Belarus, not only a core CSTO state but a partner in the 'Russia-Belarus Union State', avoided all language implying any 'understanding' of Russian actions in Crimea.[127]

Not surprisingly, therefore, the CSTO could issue no intelligible response to this crisis. Its military committee met on 5 March just after Russia occupied Crimea and discussed 'the situation in Ukraine', but revealed no more.[128] A worry in other CSTO states as fighting erupted in eastern Ukraine, as aired by a member of the Kyrgyz parliament, was whether they might be pulled into having to fight on the Russian side, through the use of CSTO collective rapid reaction forces, in the event of an open war between Russia and Ukraine. The CSTO secretariat felt obliged to state formally that this could not happen since Ukraine was not a member of the CSTO and so it was not possible to use the organisation's rapid reaction forces in its territory.[129] However, later in 2014 Bordyuzha claimed that hypothetically CSTO peacekeeping forces could be deployed in Ukraine as 'they can be deployed inside CSTO members and beyond their borders'.[130] Airing this scenario could only keep uncertainty about the Russian approach to separatism simmering among other CSTO leaders.

Overall, ever since the annexation of Crimea Moscow seems to wish to downplay or even expunge discussion of separatism in the CSTO. In an extensive interview about the CSTO in spring 2017 President Putin portrayed it as addressing 'today's threats', which he listed 'in order of importance: terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking, and trans-border crime'.[131] Next year Foreign Minister Lavrov defined CSTO member state commitments as supressing threats of terrorism and organised crime, as well as (the regime security mission) to 'ensure the inviolability of the constitutional order in our respective states'.[132] In short, the challenge of separatism, absent from these lists, has become a source of dissension in both CSTO and SCO rather than a rationale for protective integration.

Implications of enlargement

What are the implications of membership enlargement for the functionality of the SCO and CSTO and the role of protective integration? Could this reinvigorate or further weaken these organisations? On one level, enlarging the outer framework of these bodies, especially the SCO, has some function both in strengthening the legitimacy of the domestic regimes of SCO states and in expanding recognition of the statist and multipolar international order they prize. This may ensue from the high-level access to SCO meetings enjoyed by Afghanistan, India, Iran, Mongolia and Pakistan as 'observers', while Belarus, Sri Lanka and Turkey have been dialogue partners. However, full membership enlargement is much more problematic.

In the case of the CSTO this complicating development is rather unlikely. Uzbekistan's absence from CSTO meetings is set to continue under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who replaced President Islam Karimov at his death in 2007. After Mirziyoyev's visit to Moscow in July 2017, Tashkent was categorical that the issue of resuming membership in the CSTO had not been discussed and 'there are no plans to discuss or review this issue in the future'.[133] In contrast, Turkmenistan's addition to the CSTO (still not in prospect) would not assist much. The inclusion of a Russia-leaning Ukraine under President Yanukovych before his ouster in 2014 could have expanded the CSTO's regional profile, although at the expense of refocusing it from the Central Asian geographic zone. Yet even under Yanukovych, Ukraine was not an obvious candidate to bond around the regime security norms we have discussed and CSTO membership is inconceivable for post-Maidan Ukraine.

In the case of the SCO, the effect of enlargement on functionality has become an acute issue since agreement on the accession of India and Pakistan has shifted the balance of the macro-region of the SCO towards South Asia (with its own fractures) and away from Central Asia where numerous conflictual dynamics remain unresolved. An alternative limited change, which might improve SCO cohesion, would have been the acceptance of Turkmenistan and Mongolia as full members. This is not planned, but would not be controversial for the current membership, would not change much the normative or political balance of the organisation and would not require any shift from the domestic security functions we have discussed.

The case of Turkey (currently a SCO 'dialogue partner') is more controversial. In May 2017 China's ambassador in Ankara noted that China is 'ready for Turkey's membership' and Russia seems keen on this as a means of integrating Turkey into a Eurasian order.[134] President Erdogan has claimed that in previous discussions with President Putin he has mooted that Turkey be included in the SCO. Asked whether the SCO is an alternative to the EU, Erdogan even claimed 'the SCO is better and more powerful, and we have common values with them'.[135] With his increasingly authoritarian rule, especially since the coup attempt against him in July 2016, Erdogan could seek legitimacy and support for regime security in SCO norms. However, Erdogan's regional policy complicates this. His views on extremism and terrorism only partially overlap with current SCO state perspectives, given Turkey's support for groups in Syria and Russian strategy here. SCO norms appear consistent with the Turkish preoccupation with Kurdish separatism, but the value of this aspect of the Shanghai Spirit is now limited by divisions over Russia's support for separatism in Ukraine and some ambivalence in Moscow over Syrian Kurdistan.

Still greater complexity for the SCO, as well as a new Middle East orientation, is suggested by prospective Iranian membership (Iran has SCO observer status). President Xi Jinping expressed approval for this when he visited Tehran in 2016 and in June 2017 Beijing confirmed that 'China welcomes and supports Iran's wish to become a formal member of the SCO'.[136]

The focus of discussion on SCO enlargement, however, has long been on a joint inclusion of India and Pakistan (balancing respectively Russian and Chinese regional partnerships). The Tashkent SCO summit in June 2016 finally adopted a memorandum on the terms of accession of the two states. The realisation of this notable step brings to the fore the question whether the SCO is likely to become less coherent and more diffuse as form increasingly determines function rather than the other way around. The inclusion of India and Pakistan now makes it likely that the SCO will limit its spheres of operation to 'political sub-state security', to the extent that agreement is achievable here, and economic programmes, eschewing the deeper cooperation that a narrower membership might aspire to. This reflects the need to balance the more complex political dynamics of the new SCO constellation, perhaps leading to an SCO 'more like a regular summit meeting than a genuine regional organisation'.[137]

Both the Uzbek and Kazakh presidents have alluded to the enlargement to South Asia as likely to make the SCO more cumbersome and dysfunctional (and transform its internal balance, with the combined population of India and Pakistan being twenty times larger than the five Central Asian countries).[138] These leaders and their counterparts in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan may reasonably wonder if an effort to unite major Asian powers under the SCO, which seems to be driven especially by Russia, will result in Central Asian voices and the regional agenda of Central Asian concerns being subsumed under broad geopolitical posturing. The further challenge is the introduction into the SCO of the deep political and security policy differences between India and Pakistan, which have been much commented on. Finally, there is the effect on upholding regime security, on the organisation's protective integration function.

As regards this function, two divisive consequences of bringing India and Pakistan into the SCO deserve particular attention. First, defining terrorist groups. This is partly clarified by RATS, but SCO states like CSTO states have had latitude over how to implement counterterrorism in their sovereign jurisdictions and have managed quite well to avoid open disagreements weakening the collective image of the organisations. However, the future of the enlarged SCO was indicated at a summit of BRICS states in Xiamen, China, in September 2017, where a scarcely veiled spat between China and India exposed the deeper animosities between India and Pakistan over terrorism. Beforehand China signalled it would object to India raising any discussion about Pakistan's role in sheltering terrorists. Pakistan was described as 'at the forefront of counter terror efforts'.[139] Yet, at the insistence of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Xiamen declaration condemned anti-India organisations based in Pakistan such as Laskar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed.[140] This was contrary to previous BRICS documents and suggests terrorism may become an incendiary issue between India and Pakistan in the SCO. It is difficult to conceive the two states sharing intelligence on terrorist organisations. In this way the risk is that the weaknesses and tensions of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) come to be imported into the SCO.

Secondly, we have argued that Russian empowerment of separatism in Ukraine has caused deep concern among other SCO states. India, with its longstanding struggle with separatism in Kashmir, with territorial disputes with both China and Pakistan who claim historical, ethnic or religious linkages with groups in India, has a similar reaction. India shared a general SCO disapproval of US and EU actions prior to and during the protests in Ukraine during 2013-14, reflecting an opposition to external actors becoming involved in other country's domestic political affairs. It shared a SCO concern at the overthrow of a government (which it also noted was constitutionally elected), however unpopular, by street protests. But its disapproval of external political intervention as it saw it, has been outweighed by its disapproval of military intervention (by Russia), especially in support of separatism.[141]

India has been muted in direct criticism of Russia over Ukraine, but in this context 'emphasised the consistent position India has taken on the issues of unity and territorial integrity of countries'.[142] New Delhi enters the SCO with uneasiness over Russia's policies on separatism and their implications for Pakistan's claims on Kashimir. It is true India like its new SCO partner states supports the non-interference principle and upholding national sovereignty. However, India will find it awkward to bond around strategies to reinforce regime security while it has a political system which prizes the diversity and turnover associated with democratic political practices. India and Pakistan hope to gain new economic relationships in Central Asia from SCO membership. But the overall cohesion and normative bonds of the SCO are likely to weaken with this enlargement.

Conclusion: Persistent challenges to macro-regionalism in Eurasia

This article investigates two Eurasian macro-regional organisations, the SCO and the CSTO, which include in common at least one major power and represent a certain type of non-Western regionalism. They are centred on Central Asia, but have a wider regional influence. There exist various explanations for the low levels of effective integration and the 'soft institutionalism' among the member states of these organisations, including the role of internal power dynamics. However, this article, which is primarily concerned with security policy coordination, provides evidence to confirm a crucial, understudied function of these bodies. This function also helps explain the continued activity and formal profile of the SCO and CSTO, despite their weakness in collective-action problem solving. This is their role in legitimizing forms and practices of local rule, supported

by regional coordination to resist alternative 'external' normative agendas on the grounds of sovereign responsibility. We argue that this function, which we describe as 'protective integration', and the normative consensus it expresses within the SCO and CSTO, have been important for the leaders of member states. But we claim that Russia's controversial stance on separatism has undermined the bonds of such protective integration.

As such this study, alongside other scholars on Asian regionalism, contributes to the comparative debate on non-Western regionalism. It is important to note that the two organisations studied have some specific features, especially great power membership, which influence their functioning and design. Nevertheless, the findings support a set of propositions advanced by Acharya and Johnston in their much broader 2007 study of regional institutions in the developing world. These include first that 'regime insecurity and concern for survival is a stronger force than external threat in explaining regional institutional design'; second that this design 'has been more consistently sovereignty-preserving than sovereignty-eroding' and is 'geared to upholding the core norms of sovereignty'; and third, significantly, that 'functional imperatives are less important than ideational and normative considerations' in shaping this design.[143] The category of protective integration maps onto these claims and builds on them by revealing how the organisations studied seek to enhance the legitimacy of member states, including even the major powers China and Russia.

These conclusions emphasise the role of norms and normative contestation in sustaining regional coordination among SCO and CSTO member states. However, since these organisations include China and Russia realists may point to the risk of them overseeing a form of hegemonic regionalism sponsored by China or Russia. This would be a scenario of a major power claiming hierarchical primacy and the legitimacy to define the regional agenda and the norms which shape this.[144] This would subtract from the effort at sovereignty preservation referred to above. In the case of the SCO the power balance between Beijing and Moscow has averted this outcome. However, it remains a possibility for smaller CSTO states; a tension seems to exist between hierarchy and sovereignty-related legitimacy in intra-CSTO relations.

This leaves several wider policy-related questions about the post-2014 tensions over protective integration. First, what implications related to the SCO arise for Russian-Chinese relations? As tensions in the SCO mounted, potential cooperation in this framework relied ever more on Chinese and Russian active interest in so doing and a healthy balance of interests between these powers. However, since 2014 China's reliance on the SCO in its wider foreign and economic policy priorities has been displaced by commitment to the 'belt and road initiative', BRI (the macro-project, earlier termed 'one belt one road', OBOR)?[145] This concept 'serves as a format for multilateral cooperation and as an umbrella for a network of bilateral relations' and with its 'loose construction of normative underpinnings allows China to retain flexibility'.[146] It signifies declining interest in the future trajectory of the SCO, perhaps even an acknowledgement by Beijing that having failed to advance its preferred goals by working within the organisation it has selected to bypass it. The normative bonds we have discussed seem no longer sufficient sustain Chinese regional focus on the SCO.

China was frustrated, for example, by a perception of routine Russian resistance to its attempts to establish a SCO Development Bank, as well as a regional free trade zone. Russia, aware that China would be the country with the largest investment share in the bank, felt this could contribute to Moscow's relative marginalization in the region. Overall, Chinese geo-economic interests are much more effectively advanced now through infrastructure development programmes directly with Central Asian states in the BRI framework than through the SCO structure, with its consensus decision-making process. This shift has been accompanied by still greater Chinese reliance on bilateral channels in regional security discussions with Central Asian states.

This explains Beijing's readiness to concede the expansion of the SCO to South Asia, perhaps even to the Middle East in future. China seems less ready to view the SCO as a serious high-level platform for publicising normative congruity with Russia, beyond summit formalities, although the importance of seeking common positions over extremism and terrorism (with Xinjiang in mind) remains. Overall, the SCO has begun to stagnate between the cross currents of Chinese economic and Russian military/geopolitical interests.

Secondly, what further steps might Russia take as contradictions in its foreign policy over protective integration continue? For one matter Moscow may rely less on bonding around regime security with SCO and CSTO partners, a form of soft alignment, and seek firmer interstate commitments.

In this context, with the sharp increase of confrontational rhetoric between Russia and Western states after 2014, Russia has tried to institutionalize the military profile of the SCO, as an adjunct to or extension of the CSTO, beyond the regime security functions discussed, and to draw the SCO into a more specific non- (or anti-) Western alignment. At a meeting of SCO defence chiefs in June 2015 the Russian Defence Minister proposed a SCO national military advisers staff. This could recommend a greater use of the SCO countries' military capabilities for maintaining security. Since then Russian officers have floated the idea of the SCO acquiring permanent executive responsibilities for different aspects of defence cooperation and of creating a military Cooperation Coordinating Committee.[147] The SCO, it is argued, should frustrate direct aggression against a member state, counter non-traditional threats, as well as prevent Central Asia from becoming 'a foothold for outsiders intent on destabilizing the life in the countries of the region by committing acts of subversion and stage-managing Color Revolutions'.[148]

This goes too far for other SCO states, however, since it would fuse the regime security functions of protective integration, skating over the controversy with separatism, with defence alignment. A meeting of SCO defence ministers in June 2016 agreed instead to improve coordination and consultative mechanisms for ensuring security among the defence ministries to counteract threats in areas immediately adjacent to 'SCO borders'. But this was implicitly approved in the context of the ISIS threat from Afghanistan. It excluded the loaded language of acting against 'outsiders' orchestrating Colour Revolutions and set no SCO executive responsibilities for defence.[149] China for one will continue to oppose such a profile of alignment for the SCO.

Russia's ability to persuade the SCO or the CSTO states to sidestep the separatist controversy and to harden security and defence coordination is also constrained by Moscow's new narrative on Russia's civilizational entitlements, which jars with a UN-Charter focused restrictive view of sovereignty. Moscow has used this *inter alia* to justify the annexation of Crimea. It overlaps with earlier discourse of the SCO and the Chinese state, commending a 'dialogue of civilisations', which envisions an emerging multi-normative global order. But at the regional level a new emphasis on the prominence of the 'Russian world', the rights of Russian 'compatriots' and the role of 'historic justice' detracts from the regime security of smaller SCO and STO states and qualifies the cherished principle of non-interference. It is true that a discussion has emerged among analysts within China over the sustainability of the non-interference principle, reflecting debates on how to relate to the Western-led international society and the profile China should adopt in global affairs (including with neighbouring states).[150] But new Chinese concepts in this debate, such as 'creative involvement' in other states, remain a far cry from Russian claims over Ukraine and the example of Russian intervention in certain (non-SCO or CSTO) neighbour states.

These concerns of Russia's SCO partners mean that rising global tensions between the United States and Russia or China, are unlikely to result in a transformation of protective integration into a new

form of substantial SCO Eurasian security integration on an anti-Western platform, even if a Russian-Chinese bilateral axis in international diplomacy assumes more substance. The divisive effects of SCO enlargement, including India and Pakistan, reinforce this point. Deeper CSTO security integration cannot be excluded, given the hierarchy within this organisation. But like the SCO this body remains constrained by persistent intra-regional tensions, papered over by the formality of regular meetings, and the key state for Central Asian security, Uzbekistan, remains outside the CSTO.

Indeed political bandwagoning around statist principles and norms of domestic order in regional settings has been insufficient to overcome the serious rivalries and disputes among Central Asian states and to a lesser extent between them and Russia and China respectively. This appears, for example, in the call by Kazakh President Nazarbayev at the 2014 SCO summit for SCO members to sign 'agreements on cooperation and collaboration on border issues', to strengthen trust in border areas, a proposal echoed by Kyrgyz President Atambayev.[151] It took to the end of 2013 to physically demarcate the Kazakh-Uzbek border. These deep seated rivalries, which for the CSTO have been expressed in Uzbekistan remaining outside the organisation for many years, reflect continuing efforts to forge new national identities and substantiate state sovereignty viz-a-viz neighbours.

A proactive regional policy by President Mirziyoyev of Uzbekistan since 2016 to build bridges to his neighbour states, including support for a new inter-governmental regional dialogue, excluding Russia and China, may represent a way to strengthen regime stability without reliance to the same extent on regional bodies strongly influenced by Moscow or Beijing. It may mitigate the risk of hegemonic regionalism, given the enduring proximity of major powers. Meanwhile, however, the normative bonds of the SCO and the CSTO are likely to continue to fray in response to assertive unilateral policies by Russia and China's growing confidence in its capacity to influence regional processes in Central Asia though other means.

[1] In the large literature see, for example, Louise Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell, eds, *Regionalism in World Politics: Regional Organization and International Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Fredrik Söderbaum and Timothy M. Shaw, *Theories of New Regionalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003).
[2] For an argument that in their wider approaches, beyond security policy concerns, Russia and China are developing distinct non-western visions of regionalism see Marcin Kaczmarski, 'Non-Western Visions of Regionalism: China's New Silk Road and Russia's Eurasian Economic Union', *International Affairs* (London), Vol. 93, No. 6, 2017, pp. 1357-1376.
[3] William Tow, *Subregional Security Cooperation in the Third World* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 1990), pp. 4-5, 20-22.
[4] The notion of hegemonic regionalism has been applied more to American conduct than Russian, but applies equally. See James Mittelman and Richard Falk, 'Global Hegemony and Regionalism', in Stephen Calleya, ed., *Regionalism in the Post-Cold War World* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 3-20.
[5] Andrew Hurrell, 'Regionalism in Theoretical Perspective', in Louise Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell, *Regionalism in World Politics*, pp. 51-3.
[6] Roy Allison, 'Regionalism, Regional Structures and Security Management in Central Asia', *International Affairs* (Moscow), Vol. 89, No. 2 (2004), pp. 473-83.
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[8] Andrew Hurrell, 'One World? Many Worlds The Place of Regions in the Study of International Society', *International Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 1 (2007), p. 140.
[9] Sean Kay 'Geopolitical Constraints and Institutional Innovation: the Dynamics of Multilateralism in Eurasia', in James Sperling, Sean Kay and S. Victor Papacosma, *Limiting Institutions? The Challenge of Eurasian Security Governance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 125-43.
[10] See especially, Louise Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell, *Regionalism in World Politics*; Björn Hettne, András Inotal and Osvaldo Sunkel, eds., *Comparing Regionalisms: Implications for Global Development* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001); Fred H. Lawson, *Comparative Regionalism* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).
[11] Amitav Acharya, 'Comparative Regionalism; A Field Whose Time has Come', *The International Spectator*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (March 2013), pp. 12-13.
[12] David Camroux, 'Regionalism in Asia as Disguised Multilateralism', *The International Spectator*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (September 2012), pp. 97-100.
[13] Fredrik Söderbaum, 'Theories of Regionalism', in Mark Beeson and Richard Stubbs, eds, *The Routledge Handbook of Asian Regionalism* (Oxford: Routledge, 2012)
[14] Amitav Acharya and Alastair Iain Johnston, 'Conclusion: Institutional Features, Cooperation Effects, and the Agenda for Further Research on Comparative Regionalism', in Amitav Acharya and Alastair I. Johnston, *Crafting Cooperation: Regional Institutions in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 259.
[15] Michael Barnett and Etel Solingen, 'Designed to Fail or Failure of Design? The Origins and Legacy of the Arab League', in *ibid*, p. 181.
[16] Charles Tripp, 'Regional Organizations in the Arab Middle East', in Louise Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell, *Regionalism in World Politics*, pp. 250-83.
[17] Amitav Acharya and Alastair I. Johnston, 'Conclusion', pp. 245-6, 252.
[18] Amitav Acharya, 'How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism', *International Organization*, Vol. 58 (Spring 2004), p. 268. For different perspectives, see Hiro Katsumata, 'Mimetic Adoption and Norm Diffusion: 'Western' Security Cooperation in Southeast Asia', *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 37 (2011), pp. 557-576; Kei Koga, 'ASEAN's Evolving Institutional Strategy: Managing Great Power Politics in South China Sea Disputes', *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2018), pp. 49-80.
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[20] Anastassia Obydenkova and Alexander Libman, eds, *Autocratic and Democratic External Influences in Post-Soviet Eurasia* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015); Thomas Ambrosio, 'Catching the "Shanghai Spirit": How the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Promotes Authoritarian Norms in Central Asia', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 60, No. 8, 2008, pp. 1321-1344; Nicole J, Jackson, 'Trans-Regional Security Organisations and Statist Multilateralism in Eurasia', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 66, No. 2, 2014, pp. 181-203. David Lewis, 'Who's Socialising Whom?

Regional Organisations and Contested Norms in Central Asia', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 64, No. 7, 2012, p. 1219-1237.

[21] Amitav Acharya and Alastair I. Johnston, 'Conclusion', pp. 255-68.

[22] This optimistic view is especially present in the accounts of Russian specialists. For example, see A. F. Klimenko, ed., *Rossiya i Kitay v Shankhayskoy Organizatsii Sotrudnichestva* (Moscow: Institute of Far Eastern Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, 2006); N. V. Serebryakova, *Shankhayskaya Organizatsiya Sotrudnichestva: Mnogostoronniy Kompromiss v Tsentral'noy Asii* (Mosocw: InforRos, 2011); Z. A. Kokoshina, *Shankhayskaya Organizatsiya Sotrudnichestva i Interesy Natsional'noy Bezopasnosti Rossii* (Moscow: LENAND, 2016).

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