

Russian Military Involvement in Afghanistan: U.N. Recognises Russia-Led Bloc

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A Russia-led defence bloc of ex-Soviet states signed a cooperation pact with the United Nations that is likely to pave the way for the alliance's greater involvement in Afghanistan.

U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon signed the document in Moscow on Thursday along with General Nikolai Bordyuzha, head of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). The CSTO includes Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

The agreement amounts to a recognition of the CSTO as a full-fledged international security organisation. Two years ago the U.N. signed a similar pact with NATO. The Atlantic Alliance has consistently refused to sign a cooperation agreement with CSTO, which is often described as a counterbalance to NATO in Central Asia.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said he hoped the agreement would lead to practical cooperation between the U.N. and CSTO in Afghanistan.

"We are interested in closer cooperation between the U.N. and CSTO on the burning problem of Afghanistan in view of the threats emanating from its territory," said Mr. Lavrov at the signing ceremony. "Drug trafficking from Afghanistan has emerged as a threat to peace and security, not only in the region, but throughout the world."

General Bordyuzha said CSTO could make available its rapid-reaction forces for U.N. peacekeeping operations outside the former Soviet Union.

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