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Regional Organisations and Competing Approaches to Conflict in Post-Soviet Central Asia

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Post-Soviet Central Asia has become an region in which the shape and the dynamics of a new world order are already emerging and already being contested. In the five Central Asian states the political, economic and ideational norms of diverse external actors are all competing for adoption, localisation, and integration by local elites and actors. I would like to explore this contestation of ideas, norms and discourses in relation to Regional Security Organisations (RSOs), notably the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). These two RSOs offer differing conceptions of conflict and security and diverse understandings of the most appropriate responses to security challenges; as a result, different RSOs have promoted competing approaches to particular regional security challenges and conflicts. A better understanding of different approaches to conflict management may make it easier to find common solutions to the security challenges in the region and beyond.

Many of the arguments about responding to conflict in Central Asia reflect much broader disputes about international responses to internal conflicts, often framed in academic work in terms of the 'liberal peace' and its discontents (Paris, 2010). This academic critique has been accompanied by an increasing resistance to an emerging set of liberal 'peacebuilding' norms from influential states, such as Russia and China. Such dissension emerged in 1999 over the NATO intervention in Kosovo, and only intensified in relation to emerging norms of international conflict management, such as the 'Responsibility to Protect', accentuated by the range of controversial international interventions that occurred in the early 21st century. Most recently the same divergent approaches have undermined the international response to a range of conflict situations in the Middle East and North Africa, most notably in Syria. These differences are often represented as a reflection of wider geopolitical competition, but they also reveal fundamental differences in approaches to managing internal conflict.

Central Asia offers an important opportunity to study these differences in a microcosm of the broader global dynamics of peace and security. It offers a rare case-study of a Regional Security Complex, where membership of competing regional security organisations overlaps. Five Central Asian states are members of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), along with the EU states and Russia. Four of the five (Turkmenistan is

absent) are also members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), along with Russia and China. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are members of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), along with Russia and Belarus (Uzbekistan was a member until 2012). This creates a complex political-security environment, in which these three organisations both compete and cooperate in responding to security concerns in the region.

The OSCE, the SCO and the CSTO all have both material and ideational impacts on the region, impacting on local politics through practices and discourses. The OSCE has the most comprehensive approach to security of the three organisations, combining a wide variety of functions within three 'baskets' of activity: political-security; environmental and economic; and the so-called human dimension, which includes issues such as human rights and democratisation. The SCO has organised military exercises, but its predominant focus has been political, functional and ideational, institutionalising contact among political leaders on key issues, organising cooperation among state officials of its member-states in a wide range of functional areas, and developing influential discursive understandings of conflict and security that have a material impact on the ground. The CSTO has predominantly focused on projecting joint configurations of military power, such as a Rapid Reaction Force and a joint Air Defence network, although it has also attempted to seek ways to address non-traditional security threats, such as drug trafficking. In this paper I will focus on the OSCE and the SCO, as the most interesting of the RSOs in terms of their discursive activities.

Most analyses of these organisations tend to focus on their material impacts, particularly on their ability to project force, respond to crises adequately, or act as proto-military alliances within a global, system-level competition. However, their frequent failure to respond to different conflicts in ways expected by observers and critics has tended to leave them labelled as little more than 'talking shops'. Such criticism, I suggest, is often misplaced, ignoring the extent to which talk and communication have real constitutive power in shaping meanings, agenda and thus policy (Checkel, 2004). These RSOs, in different ways, act as norm entrepreneurs, engaged in the active promotion and contestation of norms related to peace, conflict and security, and framing issues in particular ways '...by using language that names, interprets, and dramatizes them' (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, p. 897). These discursive activities are extremely important in providing meaning for events, imposing constraints on possible responses, and bolstering or undermining the security discourses and self-legitimating narratives of local Central Asian elites.

Moreover, these discursive activities are competitive. These regional organisations struggle with each other, in ways familiar from the ideas for the Copenhagen School, over securitisation and meaning-making. For example, while the OSCE claims ideas such as 'democracy' or 'human rights' (OSCE) as part of a broad, 'comprehensive' security agenda, the SCO seeks to 'desecuritize' democratisation and limit its applicability to a regional security agenda. Instead the SCO securitises issues such as 'separatism', constructing it as a fundamental, shared security threat, while the OSCE discourse permit such activism by ethnic minority groups within the sphere of 'normal politics'.

In this paper I wish to focus on the ways in which each organisation frames and understands conflict through agreed and shared discourses produced and reproduced by these RSOs. Elements of these discourses are elaborated and developed, in speeches, publications and charters, while others may emerge in moments of performance and practice, in reaction to specific events. Here I want to examine the discourses of these three Regional Security Organisations in relation to two categories that capture broader, global debates within conflict management, but also demonstrate important areas of divergence among external actors in Central Asia in reacting to specific moments of conflict in the region.

Key debates in conflict management

One of the key debates in conflict studies since the 1990s has been over the causes of the types of intrastate conflicts that have been the focus of international conflict management regimes since the end of the Cold War. In its most simplistic representation, this has often been framed as a debate between 'greed' and 'grievance', between those who view conflict emerging because of ill-treatment, discrimination and violence, and those who see it in terms of the greed and political aspiration of rebel leaders and political entrepreneurs. In more recent work, scholars such as Paul Collier – who first opened up this debate in these terms - have reframed their thinking to focus on the feasibility of revolt as the key factor in predicting conflict: where there is an opportunity for rebellion, it will tend to occur, they argue, and grievances will be articulated only in a retrospective process of legitimation (Collier & Anke Hoeffler, 2009).

Grievance-based theories of conflict tend to result in the more complex, politically-oriented interventions of international organisations such as the OSCE, with their attempts to address the 'root causes of conflict' and achieve a 'resolution' of conflicts by addressing underlying political, social and economic grievances. On the other hand, Collier's framing of conflict as the result of political and economic opportunity rather than stemming from genuine grievances, accords close with some of the discursive construction of conflict that emerges

from the SCO. I suggest that these two broad approaches to understanding conflict can provide a useful framework for discussing divergent discourses among RSOs in Central Asia.

Secondly, the discussion of agency and of actors in conflict – the construction of particular actors as relevant and/or legitimate - also provides a useful device through which to understand conflict and to compare particular RSO reactions to it. In much of liberal thinking, conflict is considered the outcome of mass political activities and social movements, seeking justice, redress or political or socio-economic rights, which come into conflict with a repressive or authoritarian state. These are the social groups mobilized by grievance (civil rights, discrimination, etc) and defined by it, rather than by other social ties. Liberal theories therefore tend to view such non-state groups as legitimate actors in their responses to conflict.

The state, on the other hand, was viewed in much of Western liberal thinking in the early post-Cold War period as not only a constraint on free market economic policy but also as a source of political repression, coercive behaviour and therefore violence. Emerging norms, such as the Responsibility to Protect, downplayed the importance of state soveriegnty, and constructed the state as the source of conflict, rather than the key agent in its resolution. The downplaying of the state was accompanied by a prioritisation of non-state actors, international and local NGOs, international agencies, transnational social movements and international media. Much of the recent reaction against liberal peace initiatives has come through a reassertion of the importance of the state in conflict management, particularly by non-Western powers, and a rejection of emerging norms, such as R2P, that appear to undermine state sovereignty norms.

In both these areas, liberal notions of conflict and conflict management have been challenged, particularly by 'Rising Powers, such as China, with potentially alternative approaches to international peace and security, and by developing countries facing serious internal conflict and insurgency, such as Sri Lanka (Lewis, 2010). This has particularly been the case in Central Asia, where liberal norms on security and conflict, actively promulgated in the post-Soviet space, by institutions such as the OSCE, have been increasingly opposed by local state elites facing internal political violence. In doing so, since 2000 they have gained increasing institutional backing in the shape of two regional security organisations, the SCO and the CSTO.

Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

The OSCE has a long institutional history as an advocate of a particular set of liberal political and security norms. Indeed, Galbraith (2009) suggests that it acted as a 'security, democracy and human rights proselytiser' in Central Asia and was sometimes more akin to an NGO than an inter-governmental organisation. Certainly, it enjoys a developed discourse relating to conflict and security, dating back to the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, in which Article 7 made the first formal linkage between security and human rights. It also laid the groundwork for the OSCE's model of 'cooperative security', which proposed a shift away from the alliance-based 'balance of power' politics of the Cold War (Zagorski, 2010) to an understanding of security informed by a much broader range of liberal political norms.

In terms of understanding the causes of conflict, the OSCE has tended to adopt largely liberal peace notions of conflict stemming from grievance, although it has also – particularly in recent years – taken on notions of state weakness and institutions as significant factors. However, in its historical discourse, beginning with the1990 Charter of Paris and commitments made in Copenhagen in the same year, the OSCE produced a notion of 'comprehensive security', in which security was no longer to be understood primarily as the result of effective management of military competition at the state level, but also as the product of the effective resolution of political, economic, social and environmental problems in society. The OSCE also made a programmatic and foundational linkage between security and democracy in much of its discourse, resulting in a set of institutions supporting what Galbraith terms the detailed 'tool-kit for supporting democratization' (Galbraith, 2009, p. 163), including international observation of elections and programmes to promote democratic institutions. It is important to note that much of this development was cast in terms that related democratisation to conflict prevention and the enhancement of stability. A fundamental tenet of the OSCE remains its argument that:

> '...a free society allowing everyone to fully participate in public life is a safeguard against conflict and instability. For example, the exclusion of individuals or certain groups from society, sometimes on ethnic grounds, has led to tensions and sometimes even armed conflict' (OSCE/ODIHR, 2005, p. xvi)

This viewpoint highlighted political repression, ethnic discrimination and authoritarianism as causes of conflict, and shifted away from a primary focus on the state as the essential referent of security. In essence it mirrored the human security approach that had begun to gain traction in the rest of the international community in the mid-1990s (Merlingen &

Ostrauskaite 2004), although human security never became part of the institutional lexicon of the OSCE.

These approaches that highlighted the grievances underlying conflicts was already causing dissension within the OSCE in the 1990s, in relation to conflicts in Kosovo and in Chechnya, where both Serbia and Russia disputed the notion that addressing ethnically-defined grievances was an appropriate mechanism for effective conflict management. It was in relation to conflicts involving ethnic conflicts that the most dissenting opinions regarding agency in conflict also occurred. For the OSCE, a wide range of actors were legitimate actors in international affairs in relation to issues of peace and security, potentially including those advocating separatist goals. In both those conflicts, however, the relevant states delegitimised ethnically-based armed opposition (Chechen militant groups and the KLA respectively) by labelling them as terrorists and – for the most part - refusing to engage in negotiations with them or recognise them as legitimate parties to the conflict. In the most liberal peace-building models, on the other hand, all actors in a conflict had both some level of legitimacy (since they were driven by justified grievance) and by some level of equality (there was no particular bias towards the state). And in responding to conflict, the state was constructed as an equally problematic actor alongside rebels or other non-state actors.

In the OSCE, in reality, there were always limitations imposed on its legitimation of non-state actors, with many participating States anxious about recognition of non-state, separatist groups. The impact of a new discourse of international terrorism on the OSCE's approaches to conflict also increased rapidly in the post 9/11 period. Nevertheless, the OSCE's discourse continues to maintain certain limits and constraints on state sovereignty (Neimtzow, 1996), although the 1975 Final Act, in particular, also offers strong support to the concept of the sovereign state in international relations. In relation to internal conflicts, the OSCE has always emphasised the common responsibility of the Organisation to engage not only in responding to conflict but also in efforts at conflict prevention. A definition of conflict that views many of its root causes in inadequate political democratisation or ill-treatment of ethnic minorities inevitably leads to ideas of conflict prevention mechanisms that impinge on widely shared views of state sovereignty. This included – in the former Soviet Union – OSCE field offices engaged in a wide range of programming, some of which was politically controversial, along with the principle of election monitoring and other intrusive institutional mechanisms.

Other actors in conflict situations were also given political space and representation in OSCE conflict responses. There has always been a strong historical emphasis in the OSCE on the role of non-governmental organisations in political life, including those opposed by Central

Asian governments. Alongside an official OSCE Summit in Astana in December 2010, for example, the OSCE organised a parallel NGO summit, attended by a range of politically active groups, including Turkmen dissidents in exile, causing a serious rift between the OSCE and the government in Ashgabad. Where the OSCE has viewed NGOs as useful mechanisms for improving political inclusion and therefore preventing disaffected groups from resorting to violence, for many post-Soviet states, NGOs represented a potential threat to the existing political regime and therefore to stability. Far from being a solution to conflicts, NGOs and other non-state actors were potentially destabilising factors. This was particularly accentuated by the view of NGOs as mobilisers of social and political opposition during the so-called 'Colour Revolutions' in 2003-05 in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan.

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

The SCO displays important differences in its discourses of security and conflict from the OSCE in these two categories of understanding conflict and identifying legitimate agency in conflict. In the first place, much of the discourse of the organisation has a narrow view of what constitutes potential causes of conflict and insecurity. Indeed, one notable distinction from the OSCE is an emphasis on security threats rather than on conflict more broadly. Security threats are further narrowed into the well-known SCO discourse of the so-called 'Three Evils', within which security threats in Central Asia have largely been defined.

The 2005 'Concept of cooperation between SCO member states in combating terrorism, separatism and extremism' asserts that: 'terrorism, separatism and extremism constitute a threat to international peace and security and impede the development of friendly relations between states and the enjoyment of fundamental human rights and freedoms' and 'threaten the territorial integrity and security of SCO member states and their political, economic and social stability'. This construction of the 'three evils' as the sources of conflict is clearly derivative of Chinese internal security policy, but it also coincides with Russian discourses of conflict management in the North Caucasus, where similar concerns about separatism and Islamic extremism fuelled a largely security-led response. To a large extent this framing also overlaps with local elite discourses. In reality, the threat of separatism has been in abeyance since the early 1990s in Central Asia, but concerns remain in several countries about possible threats to territorial integrity in the future.

Western critics of the SCO have particularly emphasised the significance of the 'Three Evils' doctrine, claiming that its broad definitions of security threats are used by China in domestic policy as a means to suppress legitimate protest and 'normal' political activity, particularly in relation to the Uighur ethnic minority in Xinjiang (HRIC, 2011; Ambrosio, 2008). 'Three Evils'

certainly does much ideological work for the SCO in any discourse relating to conflict: it offers an alternative way both of understanding conflict and of managing conflict to that proposed by the OSCE. Where the OSCE discourse emphasises the suppression of human rights or the denial of group rights for particular ethnic groups as potential causes of conflict, the SCO framework underplays these grievances and suggests instead that conflicts are directly caused by particular agents (extremists or terrorists), acting in contexts where they manufacture or manipulate grievances for their own political ends. In this sense, the 'Three Evils', in the official view, are not symptoms of a deeper, underlying conflict, but more often the direct causes of violent conflict.

In particular, in the SCO discourse, the idea of separatism is discursively constructed not as a permissible political goal that may sometimes resolve conflicts (as is sometimes seen in the OSCE's discourse and practice) but as a threat to international peace and security. Far from being a response to abuses of human rights, separatism is highly securitised and cast as an impediment to the enjoyment of human rights by all peoples. Any ethnic-based grievances tend to be downplayed in this discourse, and instead policy focuses on particular actors ('forces') who may take advantage of popular discontent to promote narrow, ethnic and separatist agendas. As Aris sums it up, in the SCO 'the emphasis is on addressing the threat of the so-called 'three-evils', terrorism, extremism and separatism, which are largely conceptualised as stemming from amorphous, trans-border, non-state and nongeographically defined actors' (Aris, 2012, p. 6). These actors are emphasised as primary, while grievances over issues of ethnic self-determination, religious freedom or human rights are viewed as largely constructed. This emphasis on the constructed nature of grievance fits neatly with Collier's theories on the sources of conflict, and contrasts strongly with the OSCE's Comprehensive Security approach, with its emphasis on a range of potential causes of conflict, rooted in political, economic and social injustices.

This is not to suggest that the SCO does not seek to address or recognise wider social and economic problems as contributing to instability. In 2005 former SCO Secretary-General Zhang Deguang noted that ' the Central Asian region is now encountering a number of problems arising in the process of socio-political and economic development, including problems such as poverty, corruption and discord between political forces in their countries'.[1] However, these are constructed in SCO discourse not as direct causes of conflict, but as factors that enable 'agents of conflict' or the 'Three Evils' to take advantage of discontent. In the same interview, Zhang Deguang went on to say that 'It is necessary to keep a close

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[1] "Shanghai Body Chief Urges Close Watch on "Extremists" in Central Asia." ITAR-TASS, 5 June 2005, via BBC Monitoring Central Asia,18 June, 2005.

watch that extremist and terrorist forces do not take advantage of the situation in Central Asia to 'catch fish in troubled water'.'[2] Thus while socio-economic factors are clearly important and should be addressed through economic investment, improved infrastructure and active government-led policies, the immediate drivers of conflicts are particular actors attempting to take advantage of complex processes of state-building and modernisation.

While the actors instigating conflict are highlighted but seldom defined in the discourse, the identity of appropriate actors to manage conflict is much clearer. The Charter of the SCO, signed in 2001, insists on the 'mutual respect of sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity of states, and inviolability of state borders, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, non-use of force or threat of its use in international relations'. Above all, the discourse places the concept of state sovereignty at the heart of the SCO's norm set and emphasises the role of the state, in economic policy and political development, but also in the key role of conflict management. Unlike the OSCE, non-governmental bodies are not viewed as useful actors in the promotion of conflict resolution, but - as in Central Asian elite discourses – are often viewed as potential threats to stability.

Andijan, June 2005

Two cases of conflict in Central Asia – in Andijan in 2005 and in Osh in 2010 - stand out as useful examples of these divergent approaches from the OSCE and the SCO. In May 2005 in Andijan, in Eastern Uzbekistan, government troops killed hundreds of protestors, after the imprisonment of local businesspeople sparked demonstrations and a group of armed men stormed a local prison. The government claimed that it was responding to a terrorist attack, orchestrated by international terrorist organisations, while many NGOs and Western governments suggested that the government had used disproportionate force against a largely unarmed crowd of demonstrators.

For the SCO the construction of this conflict fitted clearly within the 'Three Evils' discourse. Zhang Deguang, secretary general of the SCO, was reported as saying:

> I want to say as clear as I can, it was a terror attack carried out by armed extremists aimed at creating trouble for the government of Uzbekistan and establishing an extremist religious state.[3]

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[22] "Shanghai Body Chief Urges Close Watch on "Extremists" in Central Asia." ITAR-TASS, 5 June 2005, via BBC Monitoring Central Asia,18 June, 2005.
[3] Alexa Olesen, 'Central Asian security bloc reaffirms stance that Uzbek unrest was terrorist plot', *Associated Press*, 1 July 2005.

These statements – which legitimated the meaning given to these events by the government in Tashent, were followed by strong diplomatic and political support extended to President Karimov from both Moscow and Beijing, in the face of significant criticism from Western partners and other international organisations, including the OSCE.

The OSCE's response made use of its multiple institutions to produce a multilevel response. At a political level, the Chairman-in-Office called for an independent investigation into the events, but relied heavily on a report issued by the permanent secretariat in ODIHR, which published a detailed investigation into what had occurred on the day of the violence in Andijan.

While the SCO public response constructed a rather narrow, descriptive version of events ('a terror attack'), the OSCE report provided a very different view of events (OSCE/ODIHR, 2005). Above all it focused on grievances as the key ingredient of protests and conflict:

> 'The gathering on Babur Square quickly developed into a manifestation of long-standing **public frustration** and discontent with **economic policies, poverty and perceived injustice**, and it soon developed its own momentum…. (OSCE/ODIHR, 2005, p. 22)

> 'Many of the participants at the square claim to have been **victims of unfair trials, unemployment and excessive bureaucracy negatively affecting private enterprise**, and as such they represent the general feeling of disenfranchisement and marginalization of the population of the Ferghana Valley. The meeting on Babur Square can be seen as an outlet where people voiced their opinions in this regard.' (OSCE/ODIHR, 2005, p. 24)

Note here the emphasis on voicing opinions in the public square. While for Uzbekistan, the square had been seized by 'terrorists', in the liberal discourse, political space – the agora – was a potential route to conflict resolution through dialogue and self-expression. These competing conceptions of space also inform the divergence between these approaches to conflict.

In terms of key actors, there is again an importance distinction between the two RSOs. While the SCO echoed government assertions that the key conflict actors were 'armed extremists', the OSCE argued that among refugees that it interviewed in Kyrgyzstan, 'there is no indication that the refugees include people who could be described as religious fanatics or extremists.' (OSCE/ODIHR, 2005, p. 23). The performative aspects of the SCO response, which included official visits to Beijing and Moscow in the aftermath of the violence, provided

legitimation to the state as key respondent to the violence. The OSCE, on the other hand, continued to call for an 'independent investigation', a clear attempt to introduce external actors that would investigate all actors in the violence on an equal level, including state institutions and forces. Here again we see the construction of the state as not only a party to the conflict but potentially a prime cause of the conflict in the OSCE discourse, while for the SCO the state remains the key actor in conflict management, and does not require external, non-state or supranational actors to intervene in its internal affairs.

Osh, June 2010

Both organisations faced a particularly challenging period of political violence in 2010 in Osh, when hundreds of people died in inter-ethnic clashes between Kyrgyz and Uzbek residents of the city. Both the OSCE and the SCO were subsequently criticised for failing to react adequately to the situation in Osh (Aris, 2012). The OSCE agreed to send a police mission to attempt to stem the violence, but this was eventually rejected by the Kyrgyz authorities. In the end, it dispatched a much more modest police mentoring mission, the Community Security Initiative. The SCO's response was even less notable, restricted by its non-interference principles to the supply of limited humanitarian aid and diplomatic support for the government.

However, a key determinant of the SCO's response was also the inadequacy of the discursive constructs within which the SCO operates. The focus exclusively on the 'Three Evils' made it difficult to find an adequate grammar in which to respond to the conflict in Osh. The SCO issued an official declaration, which noted that:

> the SCO member states are appealing for an end to the rampant crime, chaos and lawless actions being instigated by the forces that aim to provoke a confrontation between nationalities and ethnicities who have for centuries been living side by side in Kyrgyzstan in a spirit of friendship and understanding[4]

It is interesting that the notion of separatism was not invoked in the SCO response, although it was a frequent accusation by Kyrgyz officials against Uzbek leaders in Osh and Jalalabad (although denied by the latter). Clearly the situation was too complex for such discursive framing, particularly given the attitude of Uzbekistan, which was extremely concerned about events in Osh. This raises interesting questions about the viability of 'separatism' as a broader regional or global securitised concept. More immediately, we again see the concept of particular 'forces' manipulating social events, removing agency from the masses who

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[4]SCO, Chronicle of Events in 2010. Available at: http://www.sectsco.org/EN123/show.asp?id=255

'have been living … in a spirit of friendship and understanding'. Thus there is no mass articulation of grievance or identity that might be addressed through political action: any response should seek to counteract the destructive activities of these unidentified 'forces'. Any conflict management response, as suggested by the non-interference principle and the diplomatic support by the SCO for the Kyrgyz government at this point, should come from the central state and its security institutions.

While the discursive limitations of the 'Three Evils' led to some difficulty in constructing an adequate response for the conflict for the SCO, in the OSCE, on the other hand, there was almost too much readiness to respond, and the discursive frameworks were already available, many of them well-worn templates from the OSCE's considerable experience in ethnic conflicts in the Balkans. Not surprisingly, grievance was again central to the OSCE analysis. Therefore OSCE institutional responses to the violence proposed increased representation of Uzbeks in parliament, more protection for Uzbek cultural rights, moves to end discrimination against minorities, and equal treatment for Uzbek and Kyrgyz perpetrators of violence in the post-conflict courts.[5] These were all classic liberal responses to ethnic violence, offering political space for ethnic minorities and democratic channels for them to express grievances. They were augmented by an emphasis on the lack of adequate police and security forces in the South. Therefore the OSCE proposed a police mission, which could both substitute for weak policing structures and respond to the grievances of ethnic minorities, offering what appeared to be the ideal response to what it viewed as primarily an ethnic clash. However, the OSCE's focus on grievance – and on ethnicity as the key factor in the conflict - inevitably led them into conflict with local and national politicians in Kyrgyzstan, and they faced considerable opposition in the aftermath of the conflict. Local protestors held banners rejecting an OSCE presence, and suggesting that it would lead to 'another Kosovo', a reference to the OSCE's perceived support for ethnic minorities, including support for separatist movements.

For the SCO, then, the strait-jacket of the Three Evils left it with inadequate discursive capacity to respond adequately to a complex conflict, which mixed political, economic, social and identity issues as causes of conflict. The concept of non-interference and state sovereignty was also a major obstacle to taking any significant steps in response to the crisis. On the other hand, for the OSCE, the readiness to impose existing analytical frameworks and approaches to conflict, based largely on ethnic grievance, provoked a counter-discourse in which they were portrayed as supporting separatism and therefore

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[5] Statement by Knut Vollebaek, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, to the 837th Plenary Meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council, Vienna, 18 November 2010. [http://www.osce.org/hcnm/66055]

challenging Kyrgyz sovereignty. As a result, they were equally unable to implement effective conflict mitigation measures because of fears that their presence would undermine the sovereignty of the Kyrgyz state. Thus although the two organisations maintained divergent discursive constructions of events in Osh and differed in their understanding of the appropriate response, they were both unable to respond adequately, reemphasising the agency of local and national authorities even in the face of regional hegemons and powerful international organisations.

Conclusions

According to Aris, the Osh events suggest that 'there was and is a degree of confusion about the idea of, and mandate for, regional security management within the SCO.' (Aris, 2012, p. 470). Tajik president, Emomali Rakhmon, stated that 'what happened [in Kyrgyzstan] once again proves the necessity to create effective SCO response mechanisms', and other critics also suggested that the SCO had been sidelined by events. Some of the challenges faced by the SCO are institutional and material. The scope of SCO military exercises tends to envisage large-scale insurgency-type events rather than the kind of conflict seen in Osh. The SCO's institutions are also poorly prepared for such events. In contrast to the OSCE's relatively well-staffed Secretariat, with its Centre for Conflict Prevention, the SCO's main body for regional security management is the Regional Counter-Terrorism Structure, based in Tashkent. As its name suggests, RATS focuses primarily on a relatively narrow range of tasks related to information sharing in the areas covered by the 'Three Evils'. This lack of analytical and planning capacity is clearly limiting for the SCO, but of more interest for this paper is the discursive limits imposed by the SCO's reliance on the 'Three Evils' as the main focus for its conflict analysis. A discursive shift to move beyond the Three Evils to analyse conflict and insecurity in a more multi-causal and multilevel analysis will be required if the SCO is to move beyond its present role as primarily a performative and discursive actor in the region. Alongside such as shift, it may also need to develop new approaches to the non-interference maxim have been mooted as important steps towards the SCO becoming a fully-fledged regional security actor (Hajun, 2011). However, any such shifts risk undermining the identity of the SCO as an actor that institutionalises a particular set of norms (including state sovereignty and non-interference) that are attractive to local elites, and also serve to legitimise and multilateralise the presence of both China and Russia in the region.

The failure of the OSCE to achieve its goals in Osh also led to some rethinking in Vienna about the appropriate response to such conflicts. Since 2007-8, the discourse of the OSCE has been gradually shifting, taking on board some aspects of the SCO's attention to states

as actors, and developing more scepticism towards grievance-based responses to conflict. (Lewis, Who's Socialising Whom? Regional Organisations and Contested Norms in Central Asia, 2012). This has been evident in the greater OSCE programmatic support for the security sector in Central Asian states and the partial downplaying of human rights and democratisation discourse. Under pressure from Uzbekistan, the OSCE presence in Tashkent changed its mandate to 'assist the Government of Uzbekistan in its efforts to ensure security and stability, including fighting against terrorism, violent extremism, illegal drug trafficking and other transnational threats and challenges'. This shift demonstrates the extent to which the OSCE seeks to find common ground with other regional organisations, including the SCO, in tackling what it terms transnational security threats, such as narcotics-trafficking and terrorism. In doing so, there may be opportunities to find areas of shared discourse and practice between the OSCE and the SCO. Similarly, a shared concern with economic development in the region and its link to instability might offer the basis for cooperation. However, if the OSCE attempts to move too far from its original conception of security and its understanding of conflict, it risks confusing and undermining its own identity, both in the region and more broadly in the OSCE space.

The complex political, social and economic challenges of Central Asia pose significant challenges to the effectiveness of the OSCE and the SCO as regional security organisations. Neither of these organisations is in a position to mount UN-mandated peacekeeping operations in the manner of other regional organisations, such as the African Union, or even to provide significant security assistance to governments during complex periods of instability. For the most part, they will continue to operate primarily in the sphere of performance and discourse, legitimising or constraining the actions of local elites, governments and other non-state actors, and projecting into the global arena their own notions of acceptable norms in international conflict management. This should not be dismissed as irrelevant since in these discursive actions, new ideas, norms and practices may emerge, as the two organisations continue to compete in this battle of ideas about how best to deal with conflict. Central Asia will continue to be a testing-ground for these contested ideas of security and conflict management, but it could also offer some initial areas of shared discourse and international cooperation towards stability and security in the region.

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