

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Powerhouse or Paper Tiger?

The SCO cannot be regarded as a military alliance posing a threat for example to NATO as it does not oblige the members to collective defence and does not dispose of military forces. The organisation is still quite new and has limited economic resources at its disposal. There is a risk of bureaucratisation.

However, the organisation has shown flexibility and adaptiveness by its rapid growth, the creation of new institutions and a broadening agenda. It serves as a useful forum, where the states can promote cooperation, also bilateral, and discuss differences. It has helped to preclude conflicts among the members and to cooperate against trans-national terrorism and related problems as well as against Western-type democracy.

The organisation serves different purposes for its members. Russia and China have tried to use it as a means to keep external powers out of Central Asia. For Russia it is also a forum for checking Chinese cooperation with the Central Asian states, while maintaining its own predominance in other ways. For China, the most interested party, the SCO legitimizes ties with the Central Asian states not existing before and through which it can project its growing economic power. For the Central Asian members the SCO helps to underpin their independence by giving them an equal voice with Russia and China as well as vetoing powers, while not preventing ties with the West.

The SCO members seem unwilling to extend membership to the observers India, Pakistan and Iran, because that might involve them in external conflicts, disturb the power balance in the organisation as well as their relations with Western powers.

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The front cover shows the official SCO logo.



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Sammanfattning <p>SCO kan inte ses som en militärallians som utgör ett hot t.ex. mot Nato, eftersom organisationen inte förpliktar medlemmarna till kollektivt försvar och inte disponerar militära styrkor. Den är ännu bara fem år gammal och har begränsade ekonomiska medel till sitt förfogande.</p> <p>Men SCO har visat flexibilitet och anpassningsförmåga genom snabb tillväxt, skapande av nya institutioner och en allt bredare agenda. Organisationen tjänar som ett nyttigt forum där staterna kan befrämja samarbete, även bilateralt, och diskutera problem. Den har bidragit till att förhindra konflikter mellan medlemmarna och gynnat samarbete mot internationell terrorism.</p> <p>Ryssland och Kina har försökt använda organisationen som medel att hålla externa stater borta från Centralasien. För Ryssland är SCO även ett forum för att kontrollera Kinas samarbete med de centralasiatiska medlemmarna, samtidigt som man bevarar sin dominans på andra sätt. För Kina, den mest angelägna parten, legitimerar SCO kontakter med Centralasien som inte fanns förut och som kan användas för att projicera Kinas växande ekonomiska makt. För de centralasiatiska medlemmarna är SCO ett stöd för deras självständighet, eftersom de där har samma rösträtt som Ryssland och Kina, inklusive veto, samtidigt som kontakter med väst inte hindras.</p> <p>I varierande mån motsätter sig SCO:s medlemmar att kretsen utvidgas till Indien, Pakistan och Iran, eftersom detta skulle kunna dra in dem i externa konflikter, splittra dem och störa relationerna med väst.</p>		
Nyckelord Ryssland, Kina, Centralasien, Indien, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, USA, utrikespolitik, militärt samarbete, terrorism, energi, utvidgning		
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Map of member and observer states of the SCO



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Preface

Russia and its security political orientation have always been and remain a major concern both for its western neighbours, including Sweden, and for those in the south and east. At the beginning of the 21st century Asia appears to emerge as the most important and interesting continent in world politics for several reasons. The western part, mainly consisting of Arab and/or Muslim states, is torn by serious political, religious and economic conflicts, which also have involved many Western states, most of all the United States. The southern and eastern part of Asia, where the bulk of the world population is concentrated, is undergoing an unprecedented economic development, but there are also serious conflicts, to a growing extent over energy resources. At the Russian-Asian crossroads lie the newly independent Central Asian states, formerly constituent parts of the Soviet Union.

This report focuses precisely on this crossroads by analysing the aims and problems of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which comprises Russia, China and four Central Asian states. It has been worked out within the framework of two broad research projects at FOI, one on Russian foreign, security and defence policy (RUFS) and another concerning developments in Asia in a global context (GSU). (For a selection of recent publications, see backlist.) Both projects are commissioned by the Swedish Ministry of Defence.

Previous versions of the report have been discussed first at a seminar of the China and East Asia network (KOAN) in Stockholm on 22 February 2007, then at an international forum about the SCO, organised by the Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies at Lund University on 24-25 May 2007. I have also profited from material presented at the latter event. Finally I express my gratitude to my colleagues Robert L. Larsson and John Rydqvist, who provided written comments on the drafts.

A caveat must be made concerning the statistical data derived from the SCO states. Since they are sometimes incomplete and contradictory, they should mainly be seen as indicative of relative sizes and trends. The report covers developments until June 2007.

Introduction

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), currently consisting of China, Russia and four Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), covers more than three fifths of the Eurasian landmass and represents one quarter of the world population.¹ In that sense it is the biggest security organisation in the world next to the UN. The SCO is also the only international security organisation, where China is a member and the United States is not. As will be demonstrated below Central Asia is at the centre of the organisation both in a geographical and political sense.² If India, Pakistan and Iran, which joined the organisation in 2005 as observers (plus Mongolia in 2004) are included, the organisation represents about half the world population and contains four nuclear powers.

The SCO hit the headlines of the world press, when the 2005 summit – besides admitting the above observers – took a resolution asking the US-led coalition with forces in Afghanistan to give a deadline for how long their backup bases in Central Asia would stay. (US troops soon had to leave Uzbekistan.) The presence of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad at the next summit in June 2006 evoked alarm in the West about the emergence of an anti-American bloc in Eurasia and of a new cold war between the democratic West and the authoritarian East.³ For example the American security expert Stephen Blank queried whether it is a nascent military alliance, claiming that the SCO Charter of 2001 is a classic collective security document mandating each state to come to the aid of any of the others requesting help.⁴

At the 2006 summit Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that the organisation had become a powerful factor in ensuring stability and security in Eurasia.⁵ In this vein the Russian expert Aleksandr Lukin expects the SCO to become one of the most influential international organisations that could compete with any other (if India joins).⁶ The Hong Kong assistant professor

¹ For data on the member countries, see Table 1 in the Appendix.

² In a geographical sense, also Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Mongolia and the Chinese province Xinjiang are often included in Central Asia.

³ Richard Weitz (2006) "Shanghai summit fails to yield NATO-style defence agreement", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Aug. 2006, p. 40.

⁴ Stephen Blank, "China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization at five", *China Brief*, Vol. 6, No. 13, 21 June 2006, p. 2. This claim is disputed below.

⁵ President of Russia website, "Press statement following the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Council of Heads of State session", 15 June 2006, www.president.ru/eng/text/speeches, retrieved 23 August 2006.

⁶ Aleksandr Lukin, "Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Problems and Prospects", *International Affairs* (Moscow) No. 3, 2004, p. 39.

Chien-peng Chung talks of a quasi-military bloc,⁷ and the Kazak experts Timur Shaimerzgenov and Gulnar Tusupaeva see the appearance of an unofficial military bloc and a mature alliance.⁸ However, other analysts have been skeptical about the SCO and its potential, calling it a geopolitical bluff, a paper tiger etc.⁹

Against this background the aim of this report is to investigate the significance and orientation of the SCO by addressing the following questions: What are its main goals and how have they evolved? Which are the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation? Is it going to be enlarged? Is it or is it likely to become a threat to Western organisations? This is analysed on the basis of the official documents of the SCO, news reports and the fast growing body of research both in the SCO states and Western countries, for instance by a special project at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).¹⁰

Development and structure

The organisation first arose as a meeting mechanism in 1996 when China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, soon called the 'Shanghai Five', held a summit in Shanghai on border demarcation and confidence-building. Thereafter the heads of states held annual summits, issuing declarations, and gradually the heads of the law-enforcement bodies and security services, the ministers of defence and of foreign affairs followed suit (1999-2000).¹¹

In June 2001, after five years again meeting in Shanghai, the Shanghai Five leaders resolved to institutionalize their interaction by establishing the SCO and admitted Uzbekistan as a new member. The 2002 summit in St. Petersburg adopted a Charter, laying down the aims, principles and structure of the organisation. The working languages are Russian and Chinese, but the website also has an English version.

⁷ Chien-peng Chung, "China and the institutionalization of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization", *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 53, No. 5, 2006, p. 10.

⁸ Timur Shaimerzgenov and Gulnar Tusupaeva, "The role of the SCO in forming the Central Asian security environment: geopolitical aspects", *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 38, No. 2, 2006, pp. 12, 16.

⁹ Murat Laumulin, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization as "Geopolitical Bluff?" A view from Astana*, *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 12, July 2006, p. 1, http://www.ifri.org/files/Russie/laumullin_english.pdf, retrieved 22 febr. 2007.

¹⁰ Alyson J.K. Bailes et al. *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, SIPRI Policy Paper No. 17, May 2007, <http://www.sipri.org/contents/publications/Policypaper17.html#download>, retrieved 28 May 2007.

¹¹ Chung (2006) , pp. 6 f; Sun Zhuangzhi, "New and old regionalism: the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Sino-Central Asian relations", *The Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 3, No. 4, summer 2004, p. 600 f.

According to the Charter, membership is open to other states in the region which undertake to respect its objectives and principles, and the admission of new members is decided by the heads of state. States violating the Charter can be suspended and expelled by the Council of Heads of States through consensus minus the vote of the offender.

All members are declared to be equal, and decisions are taken by consensus. Dissenting views on concrete issues are recorded, but are no obstacle to taking the decision as a whole. Should a member state not be interested in implementing a particular cooperation project, this will not prevent the others from implementing it.¹²

The supreme decision-making body is the Council of Heads of State consisting of the respective presidents, which holds annual sessions. Below this level is the Council of Heads of governments, which approves of the organisation's budgets, and lower down are the Councils of Foreign Ministers, of Defence Ministers and of other ministries. (See chart in the appendix, page 47.) Their annual meetings are supervised by a Council of National Coordinators, which gathers three times a year.

Besides this meeting mechanism, the 2002 summit instituted two permanent bodies, a Secretariat in Beijing and a Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (unfortunately abbreviated RATS), first located in Bishkek, then moved to Tashkent. The Secretariat, which was opened in 2004, consists of 30 staff officials proportionately representing the member states. It is headed by a Secretary-General, who is appointed by the Council of the Heads of State from among nationals of the member states on a rotational basis in the Russian alphabetic order for three years. The first secretary-general became the Chinese diplomat Zhang Deguang, who in 2007 was succeeded by the Kazak diplomat Bolat Nurgaliev. There are three deputy secretaries, one for political issues, including antiterrorism and defence, one for economic issues and one for administration.¹³

In 2004 the RATS under Uzbek General V. Kasymov started its activities with 30 officials, seven each from China and Russia and 16 from the other four states. An SCO agreement on cooperation in combating illegal turnover of narcotic and psychotropic substances was concluded, and several economic agencies were established. (More on this below.) An agreement providing for mutual assistance

¹² SCO Website, Documents, "Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Charter", http://www.sectsco.org/news_detail.asp?id=96&LanguageID=2, retrieved 12 Dec. 2006.

¹³ Henry Plater-Zyberk, *Who is afraid of the SCO?*, Conflict Studies Research Centre, Sandhurst, March 2007, pp. 2 f; Chung (2006), p. 5.

in case of natural disasters and other emergencies was signed in 2005.¹⁴ Also cultural and scientific exchange is fostered.

The SCO budget is financed by the members states in proportion to their ability, thus Russia and China contribute 24 per cent each, Kazakhstan 21 per cent, Uzbekistan 15, Kyrgyzstan 10 and Tajikistan 9 per cent.¹⁵

As mentioned the SCO in 2004-2005 admitted Mongolia, India, Pakistan and Iran as observers to the organisation. It also took pride in the fact that other states showed an interest in becoming observers, for example Japan, Afghanistan, Turkey, Israel, Belarus and the United States. One conclusion from the above topics is that the SCO has developed considerably since its inception as the Shanghai Five eleven years ago and broadened its agenda.

¹⁴ Plater-Zyberk (2006), pp. 2f; Weitz (2006) p. 41.

¹⁵ Vladimir Portyakov, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Achievements, problems, prospects", paper presented at an international forum of the Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, Lund university, 24-25 May 2007, p. 10.

The Aims and Strengths of the SCO

Mutual security

A basic aim of the SCO is to avoid conflicts among the members. The obvious reasons for this are, firstly, the strained relations between the Soviet Union and China since the 1960s, which led to a massive buildup of military forces on both sides, secondly, the uncertainties resulting from the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the emergence of independent Central Asian states with ill-defined borders.

As mentioned the SCO arose from the Shanghai Five, which developed through a series of border security negotiations starting in 1992. At a meeting in Shanghai in April 1996, the five heads of states (not including Uzbekistan) signed a treaty on border demarcation and confidence-building measures, and a later agreement imposed restrictions on military activities in a 100 km zone along the 7000 km long common boundaries. In 1997 the states agreed on a set of maximum levels for offensive weapons in the border zone and pledged not to use or threaten with violence against each other.¹⁶

The main aim of the SCO as proclaimed in its Charter of 2002 is to strengthen mutual trust, friendship, and good-neighbourliness between the member states. They are to adhere to the principles of mutual respect of sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, non-aggression, non-interference into internal affairs, non-use of force or threat thereof, and no seeking of unilateral military advantage.

These principles were brought a step further by the fifth-anniversary declaration in 2006. This proclaimed that the member states would never be enemies, nor would they join any alliance or international organisation undermining the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of the others or allow their territories to be used in such a way. In case of emergency, the member states would have immediate consultations on effective response. Lastly, an interest was expressed in signing a multilateral treaty of good-neighbourliness and creating a regional conflict mechanism.¹⁷ This proclamation indeed reminded of an alliance or pact.

Relevant in this context is also the 2006 treaty of the five Central Asian states (in this case including Turkmenistan) on creating a nuclear weapons-free zone.

¹⁶ Weitz (2006), p. 40; Plater-Zyberk (2006), p. 1.

¹⁷ SCO Website, "Declaration on fifth anniversary of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation", sectsco.org/502.html, retrieved 12 Dec. 2006.

In this treaty the members pledged not to produce, acquire or deploy nuclear weapons or components for such weapons. The fact that treaty was endorsed by the SCO, including the nuclear powers Russia and China, can be seen as a confidence-building measure.¹⁸

Fighting three evils

The second most important common aim of the SCO members is to promote regional security and internal stability by fighting the "three evils" of terrorism, separatism and extremism. These problems and the associated problems of illicit narcotics and arms trafficking were addressed already at the Shanghai Five summits in 1998 and later. In 2001, when the SCO was founded—already before 9/11—a special Convention against Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism was adopted, in which the definitions of these terms were very wide. Counteracting these threats "in all their manifestations" was included among the main goals in the SCO Charter.¹⁹

Thus the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure in Tashkent was created with the task to arrange studies of regional terrorist movements and coordinate exercises. The RATS director in 2006 informed that the structure had adopted unspecified "early-warning and prevention measures... to help keep the overall security situation of the member states stable". A Russian spokesman claimed that hundreds of attempted terrorist attacks had already been averted thanks to RATS information—without providing evidence.²⁰ At a RATS Council meeting in 2006 the members agreed on a list of terrorist, separatist and extremist organisations, whose activity is prohibited on the territory of the SCO member states, as well as a list of 400 individuals wanted by the special services and police forces for having committed or being suspected for such crimes.²¹ This is

¹⁸ Michael Steen, "Central Asia declares nuclear free zone", 8 Sept. 2006, Reuters, www.news.scotsman.com, retrieved 22 Febr. 2007; Scott Parrish, "Central Asian states achieve breakthrough on nuclear weapon-free zone treaty", 30 Sept. 2002, Center for Nonproliferation Studies, www.mii.edu/pubs/week/020930.htm, retrieved 22 Febr. 2007.

¹⁹ Alexander Shlyndov (2006) "Certain aspects of Russian-Chinese collaboration in the international arena". *Far Eastern Affairs*, Vol 34, No. 2, p. 69; Alyson J.K. Bailes & Pál Dunay, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a regional security institution", in Bailes et al pp. 23 f, SCO Website, "Charter" article 1.

²⁰ Weitz (2006) p. 40, Ruslan Maksutov, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: a Central Asian perspective*, SIPRI, Stockholm, August 2006, <http://www.sipri.org/contents/worldsec/Ruslan.SCO.pdf/download>, retrieved 22 Febr. 2007 p. 13.

²¹ Mikhail Troitskiy, "A Russian perspective on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization", in Bailes et al. (2007) pp. 37f.

something which Russia has sought approval for at the United Nations in the war on terrorism, but which the West did not accept.²²

In order mainly to fight terrorism the SCO member states have held several military exercises, both multilateral and bilateral.²³ The first large-scale Russian-Chinese exercise (*Mirnaia missiia-2005* (Peace mission)) which mainly took place on the Chinese eastern coast, was held under the aegis of the SCO and only observers from the SCO were admitted.²⁴ The next large-scale multilateral SCO exercise will take place in Russia in July 2007 in the presence of all the presidents as well as observers from the SCO observer states and the CSTO. The defence ministers have held regular meetings.²⁵

The declared motives for the above-mentioned military cooperation are obvious. All the SCO member states fear separatism among their ethnic minorities, which are divided by the borders. China is faced with separatist strivings among its Muslim Uighur minority in Xinjiang (about eight million), who have ties with Uighurs abroad, mainly in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (one million). In the 1990s they stepped up their activity striving for the creation of an East Turkestan state.²⁶ Special forces from Kazakhstan and China acting under an SCO mandate have been credited for tracking down Uighur separatist leaders in 2001. Further, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which is said to contain Uzbeks, Uighurs, Tajiks, Kyrgyzes and Chechens, in 1999-2000 was seen as a major threat also in Russia and China after it made raids from Tajikistan into Uzbekistan.²⁷ Also the fundamentalist Hizb-ut-Tahrir organisation, which has

²² Ingmar Oldberg (2006) *The War on Terrorism in Russian Foreign Policy*, FOI-R—2155—SE 2006, pp. 15 f.

²³ The multilateral exercises include *Sotrudnichestvo 2003* by all except Uzbekistan in Kazakhstan and China, *Vostok Anti-terror 2006* in Uzbekistan, and *Atom Anti-Terror 2006* and *Issyk Kul Anti-Terror-2007*, both in Kyrgyzstan together with the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). Bilateral exercises have been held by China and Kyrgyzstan in 2002, *Tianshan 2006* in China and Kazakhstan and *Cooperation 2006* by China and Tajikistan in Tajikistan. (Plater-Zyberk (2006) p. 4; *Eurasia Daily Monitor* (EDM) Vol. 4, No. 109, 5 June 2007.)

²⁴ The exercise had an antiterrorist scenario, even though long-range aviation, air defence and submarines were used.

²⁵ Viktor Litovkin, "Kitaiskaia intriga 'Mirnoi missii-2007'", *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, No. 17, 2007.

²⁶ Kevin Sheives, "China turns west: Beijing's contemporary strategy towards Central Asia", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 2, 2006, 208 ff; Niklas Swanström, "China and Central Asia: a new Great Game or traditional vassal relations?" *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 45, No. 14, 2005, pp. 571 f.

²⁷ Anatoly Klimenko (2005) "Russia and China as Strategic Partners in Central Asia", *Far Eastern Affairs*, Vol. 33, No. 2, p. 9 f.

spread across Central Asia, is seen as a terrorist organisation, even though it renounces violence.²⁸

Russia became obsessed with international terrorism as a result of the Chechen wars. Vladimir Putin started the second Chechen war in 1999, when he was prime minister, and this war was instrumental in his election as president in the following year. Russian authorities stressed the support that the Chechens received from Arab terrorists and the Taliban in Afghanistan, and claims were even made that the Chechen rebels had mercenaries from China in their ranks.²⁹

It should be noted that the SCO members in the war on terrorism also found common ground with Western states. In 2001 the SCO heads of governments published a statement condemning the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001 and expressed determination to work together with the world community against terrorism.

Withstanding Western-type democracy

Another important common interest among the SCO members, which is intertwined with the previous one, is to secure the stability of the more or less authoritarian regimes from Western-type democratic upheavals. Especially after the so-called colour revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine in 2003-2004, which brought Western-oriented democrats to power, the SCO leaders have feared that something similar will happen in for example Central Asia. Already the words in the SCO Charter (and other declarations) about non-interference in internal affairs have an edge against Western export of democracy, e.g. as proclaimed by US President George W. Bush. Democracy (even though it can be defined very differently) is only mentioned in the Charter as a goal in *international* relations, the promotion of human rights appears only far down the list of goals and then conditioned by national legislation, and non-governmental organisations are not mentioned at all.³⁰ The 2006 SCO declaration made a point of stressing that “differences in cultural traditions, political and social systems...should not be taken as pretexts to interfere in other countries’ internal affairs. Models of social development should not be ‘exported’”.³¹

To consolidate the regimes the SCO – following the model of the CIS – has formed its own cadre of election observers, who since their début in Kyrgyzstan in February 2005 have endorsed every election held in a member state—in contrast to monitors from the OSCE and Western organisations. When the

²⁸ Lena Jonson, *Vladimir Putin and Central Asia. The Shaping of Russian Foreign Policy*, I.B. Tauris, London-New York, p. 155.

²⁹ Klimenko (2005) p. 9; Oldberg (2006) passim.

³⁰ SCO Website, “Charter”, articles 1 and 2.

³¹ SCO Website, “Declaration on fifth anniversary”, section III.

authoritarian Karimov regime in Uzbekistan suppressed a riot at Andijan in May 2005, claiming it was a terrorist uprising with support from the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the West questioned Karimov's methods, the SCO supported Karimov. It asked the Western states for a deadline for their military presence in Central Asia, claiming that the active military phase of their Afghanistan operation was nearing completion.

Relevant in this connection is also the common SCO statement on international information security adopted in June 2006. The statement warned that modern information and communication technologies could be used to interfere in internal affairs for criminal, terrorist, military and political purposes, which might "cause a catastrophe for the entire world tantamount to that from the use of weapons of mass destruction". The summit called on the UN to take collective action to eliminate these threats and decided to form an expert group to develop a detailed action within the SCO framework. Even before this, Western observers have upbraided SCO members like China, Uzbekistan and Russia for their measures to control the internet.³²

Foreign policy coordination

As shown by declarations and actual policy the SCO further aspires to coordinate foreign policy and to become an actor on the international arena. According to the Charter the aim is to search for common positions on foreign policy issues of common interest, to maintain relations with other states and international organisations and to cooperate for the prevention of international conflicts.

In line with the ambition to establish itself as an international actor, the SCO in 2004-2005 established contacts with the CIS and its EURASEC (Eurasian Economic Community) and the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organisation), with the ASEAN, the OSCE, and the EU. It also got observer status at the UN. The SCO evinced a special interest in the developments in Afghanistan, e.g. by creating a special contact group for Afghanistan, reportedly to support its anti-drug efforts and stabilize the socio-economic situation. In February 2006 it held the first meeting with Afghan officials, and Afghan President Hamid Karzai met the SCO secretary-general at the 2006 summit in Shanghai.³³

However, as with regard to domestic policy there is an anti-Western and anti-US edge to this proclaimed foreign policy coordination. The United States have

³² SCO Website, "Statement of heads of SCO member states on international information security", Documents, retrieved 12 Dec. 2006; Weitz (2006), p. 42.

³³ SCO website, "Interview of SCO Secretary-General Bolat Nurgaliev", 22 Jan. 2007.

repeatedly been denied observer status in the organisation.³⁴ Already the Shanghai Five upheld the Russian position concerning the war in terrorism in Chechnya and China's right to reunification with Taiwan.³⁵ As just mentioned the 2005 summit asked for a deadline for the presence of the US-led coalition forces in Central Asia. The SCO contacts with Afghanistan can be seen as reflecting an ambition to show an alternative to Western policy there. Likewise, the military cooperation and antiterrorist exercises among the SCO states serve to preclude such cooperation with the West. Concerning the Central Asian nuclear-free zone mentioned above, it is noteworthy that the three Western nuclear powers did not pledge to respect it as they usually do in the United Nations, because the treaty text did not question the terms of the states' collective security treaty with Russia. This was seen as a loophole allowing Russia to transport nuclear weapons across the countries.³⁶

Further evidence of bias can be found in the SCO summit declaration of 2006, which praised the increasing multipolarisation in the world and the establishment of a new international order. It held the United Nations to be the most authoritative international organisation and called for a Security Council reform with a more equitable distribution of seats. The declaration also advocated a new global security architecture of mutual trust and benefit, equality and respect based on international law, while "double standards" were discarded. This sounded very much like official Russian and Chinese criticism of Western, especially US policy.

Economic cooperation

Aside from security issues the SCO has also increasingly broadened its agenda to include regional cooperation with regard to trade, environment, science, technology and culture. According to article one of the Charter, the aim is to achieve balanced economic growth, social and cultural development for the purpose of raising the living standards and conditions. Therefore, the organisation in 2003 adopted a programme of multilateral trade and cooperation, followed by an action plan on its execution in 2005. The Tashkent declaration of 2004 considered progressive economic development and satisfaction of the population's essential needs a guarantee of their stability and security. The SCO declared the goal of realizing the free flow of goods, services, capital and technology within a time frame of 20 years, starting in 2005. The 2006 Shanghai summit designated energy, information technology and transport as priority areas. The SCO also initiated a great number of projects and established an SCO Development Fund, a sort of investment bank for joint projects, further a Business Council to promote private-sector involvement and an Interbank

³⁴ Maksutov (2006) p. 9;

³⁵ Plater-Zyberk (2007), p. 1.

³⁶ Steen (2006), Scott Parrish (2002).

Association. Several large economic forums have been held. In the scientific field an SCO Forum consisting of the national strategic research centres was set up to promote research and organize conferences.³⁷

In recent years energy issues have become very important at SCO meetings. In 2006 Russia launched the idea of creating an “energy club” of SCO members, which could be perceived as a warning to NATO and EU members.³⁸

One conclusion from the above is that the SCO has developed on the basis on many common aims and ambitions, ranging from mutual security, fighting terrorism and separatism, defending the regimes from West-inspired upheavals to economic cooperation. One may indeed get the impression of an emerging alliance and a powerful factor in world politics. On the other hand, the SCO also has several weaknesses as an organisation as well as conflicting aims and interests among the member states. We must now turn to these before a final judgement can be made.

³⁷ Chung (2006), p. 10, Maksutov (2006) pp. 19 f, Pan Guang, “A Chinese perspective on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization”, in Bailes et al. (2007) pp. 52 f.

³⁸ Maksutov (2006) p. 21.

Weaknesses and Problems

Organisational constraints

Obviously, the SCO is quite a young entity, which only calls itself ‘organisation’ so far. Its predecessor the Shanghai Five was only a meeting mechanism. The leaders of the member states as well as most commentators consistently deny that the SCO is anything as binding as a union, a military alliance or a pact. An often repeated principle is that the organisation is open and not directed against other states or organisations. The 2005 declaration about emergencies prescribed prior *consultations* on effective responses, not consultations and compulsory collective defence, if a member is attacked as is the case with NATO and the CSTO. Indeed, it would be sensational if Russia and China guaranteed each other’s far-flung territory, including e.g. North Caucasus and Tibet.³⁹

As for the military cooperation in the SCO, it should be observed that even if it grows, there are no common military forces, no joint command or even a combined planning staff.⁴⁰ Some Russian analysts hence point out that this difference between the SCO and the CSTO hampers cooperation between the organisations.⁴¹

The fact that the SCO did not oppose the establishment of NATO bases in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in 2001 to fight terrorism in Afghanistan, which helped to stabilize the situation in the Ferghana valley, can be seen as evidence that the organisation and its members, at that time, did not by themselves cope with the terrorist threat.

Another problem is the clause that decisions taken by the SCO bodies must be implemented in accordance with the procedures of their national legislation. As a result, the implementation of many agreements has been slow, and there is a gap between declarations and actions. Only in May 2006 did the governments inaugurate annual meetings of the leaders of the national parliaments in order to speed up the harmonisation of their laws. So far, there is no permanent inter-parliamentary body like NATO’s North Atlantic Assembly.⁴²

Thus, the popular, democratic basis of the SCO is also weak. As observed by the SIPRI project the SCO proceedings take place on an exclusively state-to-state

³⁹ Bailes & Dunay (2007) p. 22.

⁴⁰ Weitz (2006) p. 42; Plater-Zyberk (2007) pp. 4 f.

⁴¹ Viktor Litovkin, ”Poka ne srastaiutsia”, *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, No. 12, 2007.

⁴² Weitz (2006) p. 41.

mode with minimal transparency and no significant means of democratic control. The SCO website provides little information.⁴³

The SCO activities are also hampered by the limited financial resources allocated to the common institutions. The combined 2005-2006 budgets for both the secretariat and RATS merely amounted to 3.2 million USD, so the central institutions are small and dispersed.⁴⁴ The RATS had a budget of one million dollars in 2005 and the Development Fund only has a budget of 20 million USD for over 100 projects.⁴⁵ At the same time, there is a risk that the diversification of forms of cooperation results in a multiplication of official-bureaucratic bodies. The Russian analyst Vladimir Portyakov notes that there are 15 types of conferences.⁴⁶ Bureaucratisation is a well-known problem in all SCO states, not least in Russia and China.

Related general problems reside in the fact that the great number of topics in the organisation may lead to a loss of focus and that some aims may clash with each other, for example trans-national threats with non-interference, and political control with economic development. Thus trade among the SCO member states is hampered by the absence of a free trade zone, excessive customs duties, various visa restrictions and corrupt border officials.

An additional common weakness in the SCO is the fact that many agreements taken under its auspices mainly consist of bilateral deals, reached at the bigger meetings.⁴⁷ Similarly, most of the SCO military exercises are actually bilateral. Outside powers like the United States have avoided to deal with Central Asian states through the multilateral SCO, which is not quite institutionalised and might be legitimized by such interaction. They have instead preferred more traditional and efficient bilateral ties with the individual states and governments.⁴⁸

It finally deserves to be mentioned that the organisation so far does not have any mechanism for settling disputes over the interpretation or the application of the Charter, which only prescribes consultations and negotiations. This is remarkable, because there are many conflicting interests among the members as will be shown below.

⁴³ Bailes & Dunay (2007) pp. 1, 9.

⁴⁴ Bailes & Dunay (2007) p. 5 f; Chung (2006), p. 7.

⁴⁵ Weitz (2006) p. 41, Portyakov, (2007) p. 10.

⁴⁶ Portyakov (2007) p. 10.

⁴⁷ Weitz (2006) p. 41.

⁴⁸ Sheives (2006) p. 207, Richard Weitz (2006a), "Averting a new Great Game in Central Asia, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 3, p. 162.

Structural problems

The fact that all the SCO states are more or less authoritarian means that they are inherently unstable. As recognised by the Russian diplomat Stanislav Chernyavsky they all have more or less underdeveloped and inefficient political structures, serious problems with human rights and high levels of corruption in government organisations. These factors—coupled with widespread poverty and unequal distribution of wealth—may bring about social explosions, which if supported from outside, may lead to revolutionary situations, he warns. In order to meet these problems Chernyavsky recommends that also Russia should support non-governmental institutions of civil society in Central Asia and promote the real development of democracy and the protection of human rights like Western states do.⁴⁹ Unfortunately Russian policy goes against such advice. The suppression of information and criticism in the name of non-interference also means that serious problems may remain unattended.

Another characteristic of the SCO member states, especially of the Central Asian regimes, is that they are highly personalised and based on regional clans. According to the British researcher Alexander White this signifies that interstate relationships are often conducted on the basis of personal understandings between the leaders. It was no coincidence that Kazakh President Nazarbaev's daughter was married to the son of former Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev.⁵⁰ However, since any regime changes are likely to be violent, the departure of any leader could also bring the country out of the SCO, as the new leader seeks new bases of support.⁵¹

For example, when after the Rose Revolution in Georgia and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine widespread popular protests in March 2005 forced Kyrgyz President Akaev to leave his post, the other SCO members were very concerned. However, they could not agree on taking action, with China reportedly favouring and Russia opposing military intervention.⁵² Any such action would clearly violate the principle of non-interference as stated in the Charter. As it turned out, there was no real revolution in Kyrgyzstan. To the relief of the other SCO members, the new regime under Kurmanbek Bakiev only performed a reshuffle at the top and did not change the foreign policy line, but the situation in the country has remained unstable ever since.

⁴⁹ Stanislav Chernyavsky, "Central Asia in an Era of Change", *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 1, 2006, pp. 3 ff.

⁵⁰ Troitskiy (2007) p. 37.

⁵¹ Alexander White, "Guiding the 'near abroad' – Russia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization", in *The SCO at One, CEF Quarterly*, July 2005, p. 32.

⁵² Weitz (2006), p. 42.

Conflicting Interests

Russian aims and means

Cooperation in the SCO is inevitably hampered by the fact that the member states are quite different with divergent interests. China and Russia are traditional great powers, members of the UN Security Council with nuclear weapons, and they both wish to play key roles in world politics. The four Central Asian states, by comparison, are relatively new and small states with regard to population, military capacity and economic strength. Among these Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are clearly stronger than Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and competing for influence. The formula 2+2+2 encapsulates the three categories of states.

Russia clearly has more influence in these Central Asian states than any other external state for the simple reason that they were integral parts of the Tsarist and Soviet empires since the 19th century and many ties remain (see below).

Obviously, Russia finds a common interest with China in keeping the expansive United States and NATO out of the area by means of the SCO, even though the organisation formally is not directed against third states.⁵³ Calling each other strategic partners, Russia and China signed a treaty on friendship and cooperation in the same year as the SCO was created, and they have a common interest in fighting terrorism and separatism.⁵⁴ At the SCO summit in October 2005 President Putin thus stated that security issues and the fight against terrorism must remain a top priority of the SCO.⁵⁵ As noted both states have backed the Central Asian governments in their cracking down on Western-inspired civil rights movements and reducing US/NATO influence in the region. When the United States established an air base at Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan in 2001, Russia formed one of its own nearby and pressured the Kyrgyz government to reject a US request to station AWACS aircraft at its base.⁵⁶ Russia and China endorsed the SCO resolution in 2005 asking NATO for a deadline for its presence and hailed the subsequent US withdrawal from Uzbekistan.⁵⁷ Russian researchers mention the possibility of accepting new

⁵³ Klimenko (2005) p. 9.

⁵⁴ More on this in Ingmar Oldberg, "Towards alliance? Russia's relations with China in an international context", in Kiesow (ed.) *From Taiwan to Taliban: Two Danger Zones in Asia*, FOI-R—0393—SE, Febr. 2002 p. 25 ff.

⁵⁵ Shlyndov (2006) p. 69.

⁵⁶ Weitz (2006a) p. 158. EDM, No. 228, 11 Dec. 2006.

⁵⁷ .Maksutov (2006) p.7.

members, if external powers attempt to change the geopolitical format in Central Asia in their favour, as according to the US concept of Greater Central Asia.⁵⁸

Interestingly, some China-oriented Russian military analysts would like to intensify military cooperation in the SCO. Anatoly Klimenko at the Institute for Far Eastern Studies has proposed the creation of joint peacekeeping forces, involving police and special forces patterned on the NATO counterterrorist campaign in Afghanistan. Each SCO country should allocate forces under a permanent staff committee alongside the Council of Defence Ministers or the Council of the General Staff chiefs on the basis of RATS. The operations should not be pursued against any SCO regime but in cooperation with them and could be extended to Afghanistan and Pakistan, if they join the SCO, Klimenko proposes.⁵⁹ This indeed sounds ambitious.

Russia also advocates SCO cooperation with other organisations. Thus Putin has cautioned against duplicating activities, unnecessary competition or closed clubs.⁶⁰ In line with this the head of the Russian General Staff Yurii Baluevskii has proposed to hold the 2007 SCO exercise in Russia together with the CSTO.⁶¹ Researchers point out that China respects Russia's strategic role in Central Asia and the CSTO, where Russia plays the leading role.⁶² In the economic field Russian trade with China has increased rapidly in recent years, making it Russia's third largest partner in 2006. Most of Russian exports consist of raw materials, especially oil.⁶³

On the other hand, Russia worries about China's growing influence for obvious reasons. As noted above Russia and China have been in serious conflict in the past. China is the most populous country in the world, bordering on Russian regions in Siberia and the Far East with little and decreasing population. The presence of many Chinese traders in these regions scare the local population.⁶⁴ China's steady growth has made its economy stronger than that of Russia, and the Chinese economy may soon be biggest in the world after the American one. Some Russian analysts have openly warned that a genuine alliance with China

⁵⁸ Portyakov (2007) pp. 8 f., EDM, No. 103, 25 May 2007.

⁵⁹ Klimenko (2005) pp. 17 ff.

⁶⁰ President of Russia website, "Press statement".

⁶¹ Litovkin; NVO, No. 17.

⁶² Portyakov (2007) p. 12.

⁶³ Vladimir Paramonov & Aleksey Stokov, *Russian-Chinese Relations: Past, Present & Future*, Conflict Studies Research Centre, Sandhurst, Sept. 2006, pp. 9 ff with tables, Sergey Dmitriyev, "Putin welcomes year of China", *The Moscow News*, No. 12, 2007; Dmitry Trenin (2005) "Russia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: A difficult match", CEF Quarterly, p. 26.

⁶⁴ Oldberg (2002) pp. 32 ff; Bailes & Dunay (2007) p. 9.

would assign Russia to a subordinate position in Asia.⁶⁵ A Chinese offer of low-interest credits to SCO states to the tune of 900 million dollars has been seen as expression of its geopolitical ambition to be the leader in Central Asia.⁶⁶

In 2004 a Russian deputy foreign minister openly stated that Russia opposes extra-regional military presence in Central Asia, including Chinese. After the 2005 meeting of the G8 (where China is not a member) Putin excluded the possibility of military operations and common defence under SCO auspices, restricting its security role to political support and information exchange.⁶⁷ Some Russian military analysts are also afraid of closer cooperation between the SCO and the CSTO because of growing Chinese influence in the SCO, and others in favour of developing the CSTO have complained of parallel military structures, which sometimes may put members before contradictory obligations.⁶⁸

Russia can therefore accept a measure of American and European presence in Central Asia as counterweights to Chinese influence. Indeed, Russia has generally aimed to develop its relations with NATO, e.g. by creating the NATO-Russia Council in 2002, where antiterrorism is a prominent issue. Economically, Russia is most dependent on trade with EU states. Contrary to the advice of the Russian military and many others President Putin in 2001 did accept a limited and temporary US and NATO presence in Central Asia, when the terrorist threat from Afghanistan had grown. It should be noted that the SCO did not call for *immediate* US pullout in 2005.⁶⁹

Some Russian analysts have even suggested that the SCO should admit the United States as an observer, since it cannot be excluded from region-wide discussions. Moreover, the war in Afghanistan is far from over, and China could not be expected to take on the US role there, these analysts say.⁷⁰ Pressing too hard for US withdrawal could furthermore disturb Russian relations with the USA on a general level. Thus the SCO serves as a means for Russia to cooperate with China against external interference as well as to keep its activities in Central Asia under control, in the worst case using its veto.

⁶⁵ Troitskiy (2007) p. 39 f, Stephen Blank (2005) "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Post-mortem or prophecy", *CFE Quarterly*, p. 15 quoting Dmitry Trenin and Sergei Karaganov.

⁶⁶ Portyakov (2007) p. 10, quoting K. L. Syroezhkin.

⁶⁷ Trenin (2005) p. 26, Blank (2005) p. 14; Bailes & Dunay (2007) p. 11.

⁶⁸ Litovkin, NVO No. 12, 2007; A. L. Rekuta, "Organizatsiia Dogovora o kollektivnoi bezopasnosti: problemy i puti razvitiia", *Voennaia mysl*, No. 1, 2006, p. 6.

⁶⁹ White (2005) p. 41. After Andijan, Russian foreign minister Lavrov assured that the SCO had not become an anti-orange block and called for an (official) investigation. (EDM, 7 June, 2005, No. 110.

⁷⁰ Trenin (2005), p. 26 f.

Moreover, Russia disposes of other means besides the SCO to keep its influence in Central Asia, for example the multilateral organisations, in which neither China nor the United States are members. In the military sphere Russia clearly stakes on the aforementioned CSTO, which besides the four Central Asian states and Russia includes Armenia and Belarus. This is a real defence alliance, where the members are committed to defend each other against external aggression. This organisation is presented by Russia as an eastern counterpart to and partner of NATO. Building on former Soviet military structures, the CSTO has tighter military cooperation than the SCO with frequent exercises, a 4 000 men strong rapid deployment force and an emergent collective peacekeeping force.⁷¹ The Russian air base in Kyrgyzstan is now a CSTO base assigned to its rapid deployment force, which clearly more operational than the SCO antiterrorist centre in Tashkent. Due to its traditional ties with the Central Asian states, Russia certainly expects support from them in the SCO meetings with China.⁷²

Russia further has strong bilateral military ties with the four Central Asian states, in which it naturally is the dominant party. After Uzbekistan evicted the American base and rejoined the CSTO in 2005, Russia intensified military cooperation with it and a Treaty on Allied Relations, including mutual assistance in case of aggression, was signed. Russia also has similar treaties with Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. In Tajikistan the Russian infantry division, which had supported the government in the civil war 1992—1998, was transformed into a permanent base in 2004, and a year later Russia deployed a new air base there.⁷³

In the economic sphere Russia maintains its influence in Central Asia through the EURASEC, which besides the four Central Asian states also includes Belarus. Russia joined the Central Asian Cooperation Organisation in 2004 and then pressed through a merger with the EURASEC with the argument that duplicated functions were eliminated. The EURASEC already has a free trade zone and is working on a customs union, which thus excludes China. Simultaneously Russia has blocked the proposal of making the SCO a free-trade area, which China has been pressing for in order to gain better access, and only supported common projects in some areas like energy and transport where Russia stands to gain.⁷⁴

Russia further keeps its position as the leading trading partner of the Central Asian states.⁷⁵ Strengthened by the recent surge of world market energy prices in

⁷¹ Weitz (2006) p. 42, Plater-Zyberk (2007) p. 3; EDM 25 May 2008, No. 103.

⁷² Trenin (2005) p. 26.

⁷³ Weitz (2006a) pp. 157 f; Ivan Iniutin (2006), “Russian strategy in Central Asia”, *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol 38, No. 2, pp. 28 ff.

⁷⁴ Troitskiy (2007) p. 43; Iniutin (2006) p. 34 f; Trenin (2005) p. 26; Blank (2005), p. 26.

⁷⁵ Except Kyrgyzstan in 2006 according to Portyakov (2007) p. 12. See Appendix, table 2.

recent years, Russian business groups, often state-dominated, have invested heavily in Central Asian oil, gas and electricity production and transportation and try to keep companies of other countries like China and the United States out. Russia makes every effort to defend its monopoly on pipelines for exporting Central Asian oil and gas to the West, e.g. by blocking the construction of alternative pipelines, e.g. across the Caspian Sea or to the south, which could weaken its position. It has concluded long-term agreements for buying Central Asian oil and gas at low prices, commodities which are then resold to the West at higher prices. In May 2007 Putin persuaded the presidents of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan (and Turkmenistan) into modernizing and enlarging the network of gas pipelines to Russia and send growing volumes of gas for export to or via Russia.⁷⁶ Russia takes most of Kazakhstan's oil export and also offers to build a nuclear reactor.⁷⁷ In Uzbekistan Russia has joined a non-Western consortium on exploiting the rich oil and gas resources in its part of the Aral Sea.⁷⁸

The Central Asian states are also dependent on remittances from millions of workers, who have migrated to Russia in search of jobs. Finally there are sizable Russian minorities in Central Asia, especially in Kazakhstan (40 per cent of the population including Ukrainians). Moscow is interested in protecting their civil rights and in strengthening the status of the Russian language there, but on the other hand it refrains from talking about discrimination of them (as compared with Estonia and Latvia) in the name of non-interference.⁷⁹

Russia hence has strong interests to defend in Central Asia, which lead to both cooperation and conflict with China and the other SCO member states. Since Russian great power ambitions have grown as a result of its economic recovery in recent years, it certainly is not willing to yield its dominant position in Central Asia. The SCO is only one and not the most important means at Russia's disposal to this end.

Chinese interests

China is often said to play the leading role in the SCO nowadays, not least by the Chinese themselves. The organisation's name links it with China, the secretariat is placed in Beijing and is mainly staffed by Chinese. For China, the SCO has become a tool for gaining access to and enhance influence in Central Asia, where it previously had neither. Being multilateral, this organisation serves to assuage fears about Chinese ascension as a global and Asian power.⁸⁰ According to Pan Guang, head of the SCO Studies Center in Shanghai, the

⁷⁶ EDM, 4 April, No. 66, 31 May 2007, No. 106.

⁷⁷ EDM, 4 April 2007, No. 66, 14 May, No. 94,

⁷⁸ Vasilina Vasilyeva, "The Aral Sea's buried treasure", *The Moscow News*, No. 23 2007.

⁷⁹ Weitz (2006a) p. 157; Iniutin (2006) p. 27.

⁸⁰ Sheives (2006) pp. 213 f.

border treaties signed among the Shanghai Five are a model for solving China's other border problems.⁸¹ The SCO became a model for increasing Chinese involvement in multilateral organisations and helped it to play a growing role in global security cooperation.⁸² Following the Russian example, China has also concluded bilateral friendship and cooperation treaties with the Central Asian SCO members in the 2000s.⁸³

As mentioned both China and Russia have a common interest in multipolarity in world politics and have acted to keep Western powers out of Central Asia, but there are differences in degrees. Since China has fewer ties with the West than Russia has, it did not join the anti-terror alliance with the United States after 9/11 and was probably more worried about the US and NATO bases than Russia, because they were placed close to its borders and were seen as part of the US encirclement of China. China apparently was a driving force for establishing the SCO antiterrorist centre and placing it in Tashkent as well in the appeal for US withdrawal in 2005.

Further, unlike Russia, China does not pretend to be a Western-type democracy. It wholeheartedly backed the Uzbek government's massacre of "separatists and terrorists" in Andijan in 2005 and reportedly advocated a military intervention in Kyrgyzstan in 2005, whereas Russia opposed it.⁸⁴ Sometimes Western democracy is equated as a threat with terrorism.⁸⁵

However, not only Russia but also China had to tolerate the presence of US/NATO bases in Central Asia for the time being. Also China could appreciate that the Americans attacked the Taliban in Afghanistan, who are viewed as allies of Uighur separatists in Xinjiang, nor is China is not able to take over the US role at once.⁸⁶ China is mainly concerned about stability in the region, and on a general level China too wants good relations with the United States, where most of its trade goes.

A Chinese foreign policy expert has expressed the belief that American pressure in the region will help insure Sino-Russian unity and cooperation in the region, and that the Central Asian states will not completely accept US values. On the

⁸¹ For more on the model, which means dividing disputed areas by half, and its application, see Akihiro Iwashita, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: experience of the regional border cooperation", paper presented at Lund forum, 25 May 2007, pp. 3 ff.

⁸² Pan Guang, "A Chinese perspective on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization", in Bailes et al. (2007), p. 47 f.

⁸³ Sun (2004) p. 609.

⁸⁴ Chung (2006), pp. 10 f; Weitz (2006a) p. 159; Sheives (2006) pp. 210 ff.

⁸⁵ Pan (2007) p. 53.

⁸⁶ Pan (2007) p. 57.

other hand, he thought the United States also needs support from China, Russia and the SCO in order to win the war on terrorism.⁸⁷

With regard to military cooperation, the SCO further serves the purpose of legitimizing Chinese multilateral and bilateral exercises with the Central Asian states along with Russia. Even if China recognises Russia's dominating military power in Central Asia and in the CSTO, and supports contacts between the SCO and the CSTO, there are limits to this. In 2007 China rejected a Russia proposal of arranging the planned SCO exercise in conjunction with the CSTO. According to Russian analysts, China was afraid of losing its dominating influence in the SCO.⁸⁸ According to a Chinese expert, there is a power vacuum and no dominant power in Central Asia. The SCO has meant an expanded strategic space for China, but it does not seek confrontation.⁸⁹ China can also use the SCO more offensively, judging from a proposal to resolve the issue of Russian military bases e.g. in Kyrgyzstan through "coordination" in the SCO framework.⁹⁰ Another advantage with the SCO is that it does not prevent China from exporting weapons and equipment for law enforcement and border services to the states on a bilateral basis, sales which compete with Russian and American arms deals.⁹¹

Notwithstanding China's concern about security issues in the SCO and Central Asia, its main interest there obviously is to increase economic cooperation, which reflects China's overall policy of "peaceful rise" and its tremendous economic achievements since the 1980s.⁹² A Swedish researcher thus holds that China is seeking dominance in Central Asia through trade.⁹³ As evidence of this one may mention the fact that China has pushed for a free trade agreement in the SCO that would open up markets for its products. China also contributes more than any other state to common projects as exemplified by the offer of low interest credits amounting to 900 million USD.⁹⁴ Further, Chinese analysts have proposed investments in the Ferghana valley to combat the deep poverty there

⁸⁷ Sun (2006) p. 611.

⁸⁸ Litovkin, "Kitaiskaia intriga".

⁸⁹ Chinese speaker at Lund forum, 25 May 2007.

⁹⁰ Pan (2007) p. 57.

⁹¹ Swanström (2005) pp. 581 ff; Maksutov (2006), p. 16.

⁹² Sun, p. 605 ff; Ingolf Kiesow, *Kina i ett tjugoårsperspektiv*, FOI-R—1927—SE, Febr. 2006, pp. 24 f.

⁹³ Swanström (2005) p. 579.

⁹⁴ Pan Guang (2007) p. 49; Chung (200) p. 11.

and endorsed using the SCO to solve the crucial water management problems in Central Asia.⁹⁵

In relations with the Central Asian countries China presents itself as a leading third world state, which could help strengthen their independence, at the same time as being a successful economic model for them. Chinese researchers point out that the economies are complementary in that the Central Asian states can provide natural resources, while China can provide labour-intensive commodities and also technology and capital in the future, which they need. China can offer the land-locked Central Asian states the most reliable route to the Pacific, while Central Asia opens the way for Chinese trade to Europe, which means in circumvention of Russia. They claim that China and Central Asia have had 2 000 years of friendly relations and trade along the Silk Road, which brought prosperity to Central Asia. By contrast, the Russian-led integration process is said not to be very successful in the region and that Russia is more interested in consolidating its own benefits through the SCO.⁹⁶

In line with this, Chinese trade with the individual Central Asian countries, especially Kazakhstan, has expanded rapidly since the early nineties, when their Russian trade slumped.⁹⁷ (See Table 3 in the Appendix) Chinese products are often of better quality than Russian and cheaper than American and Japanese, and imports have been supported by Chinese state loans. At least 600 000 Central Asian traders go to Xinjiang every year and as many Chinese businessmen visit Central Asia.

China is also investing heavily in Central Asian infrastructure. Back in 1996 China and Pakistan signed an agreement with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan on road connections to the Indian Ocean. China, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are also preparing to build a railway between the countries.⁹⁸

A major problem for China is that its rapid economic growth has especially boosted the demand on energy. Since its own oil resources, mainly in the north and northwest are being depleted, China has become the second most energy-

⁹⁵ Li Lifan and Liu Jingqian (2005), "Central Asian water resources and the future of the SCO", CEF Quarterly, p. 35. Pan Guang (2007a), "China and Central Asia, event summary", Jamestown Foundation, 5 Febr. www.pubs@jamestown.org, retrieved 3 March 2007.

⁹⁶ Sun, pp. 606 ff., Swanström (2006) pp. 576 f, chimes in by claiming that Chinese-Central Asian trade has always been crucial and favoured by both sides.

⁹⁷ From 500 million USD in 1992 to 8.5 billion in 2005—a 14-fold increase (Pan (2007a). See Table 3 in the Appendix. Swanström (2006, pp. 582 ff) draws the curious conclusion that Russia cannot meet the Chinese challenge and sees the emergence of a new Great Game between China and the United States.

⁹⁸ Sun (2006) p. 608; Kamil Mamatov, "The Eastern threat", *Moscow News*, No. 12, 30 March-5 April 2007.

consuming nation in the world after the USA and the third biggest oil importer. Most imports come from the Middle East, but the obvious problem is that this region is unstable and the sea transport lanes are long and vulnerable.⁹⁹ In order to diversify its imports China has therefore stepped up oil and electricity imports from its SCO partner Russia. It plans to invest in projects on Sakhalin and elsewhere, and has for several years called for an oil pipeline from Angarsk west of Lake Baikal to Manchuria. The construction of this pipeline has started, but the crux for China is this it will take several years and that Russia only sees it as a branch of a line that will continue to the Pacific coast, from where oil will be exported by sea also to other big consumers such as Japan.

China is therefore particularly interested in the energy resources of Central Asia, especially in Kazakhstan, which has the biggest reserves.¹⁰⁰ Already in the mid-1990s Chinese companies started to buy up Kazakh companies and oil fields in western Kazakhstan and built a pipeline. After an agreement between the presidents at an SCO summit in 2005 this was extended to China, linking up with the recently finished pipeline from Xinjiang to the eastern provinces. This is now China's first international pipeline. Especially after Andijan China has also signed agreements on investing in gas and oil companies in Uzbekistan, and in May 2007 a deal was signed on importing a major share of its gas production. There are plans to link a gas pipeline to Almaty with a Chinese line leading to the coast. China is also interested in hydroelectric projects in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which could help to diversify China's energy consumption.¹⁰¹

Beyond the SCO China is vying for the energy resources of Turkmenistan. In 2006 the presidents signed an agreement on and gas exports and the construction by 2009 of a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to China across Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, a project which has already started.¹⁰² More significantly, China has invested heavily in the oil sector of Iran, from where it imports a good deal of its oil by sea. There are plans to build an oil pipeline from Iran to China, which would cross Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, apparently linking up with the existing pipeline there and creating alternatives to exports by sea for Iran and to transit through Russia for Central Asian states.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Kiesow (2006) pp. 27, 50 f; Kristina Sandklef, *Energy in China: Coping with increasing demand*, FOI-R—1435—SE, Nov. 2004, pp. 5 ff.

¹⁰⁰ Swanström (2006) pp. 579 f.

¹⁰¹ Sheives (2006) pp. 225 ff, Maksutov (2006) pp. 20 ff; Ingolf Kiesow, *China's Quest for Energy: Impact upon Foreign and Security Policy*, FOI—1371—SE, Nov. 2004, p. 17 ff, EDM, 11 May 2007, No. 93.

¹⁰² EDM, No. 63, 10 April 2006.

¹⁰³ Swanström (2005), p. 578, Kiesow (2004), pp. 14 f, Jens Westlund, "Det stora spelet i Centralasien" (The Great Game in Central Asia), *Bulletin*, Sällskapet för studier av

However, even if China's energy imports from Central Asia have grown significantly, they started from nil and still make up a small share of total energy imports, and the pipeline from Kazakhstan initially may carry transit oil from Russia.¹⁰⁴ China may also be overrating the size of the Central Asian energy resources, which are estimated by the International Energy Agency at 1.5 % of the world's oil proven oil reserves and 5 % of the gas reserves. Another problem is that China meets tough competition for these reserves not only from Russia, which so far has a dominating position as noted, but also from Western companies and from India, the other Asian giant which in recent years also has shown a keen interest in Central Asian and Iranian energy.¹⁰⁵ The Western pressure on Iran on account of its nuclear programme has induced China to reduce its reliance on Iran and reinforced its interest in the energy resources of Central Asia, Russia and Africa farther away.

One may conclude that China can profit from the SCO as a forum for cooperation with Russia against Western inroads and for fighting international terrorism as well as a new means of gaining influence in the Central Asian member states. At the same time, the SCO does not preclude and may indeed promote bilateral cooperation, where China like Russia has more leverage. China is mainly interested in the Central Asian energy resources, and this interest will grow, if Russia holds back on exporting energy to China.

Central Asian interests

The central function of the SCO for its four Central Asian member states is to buttress their newly-won independence, and independence is also mentioned as a goal in the Charter. The organisation enables them to participate in regional cooperation with two major powers on an equal basis and with vetoing rights. By contrast, the OSCE, in which they were also members, is dominated by Western states and more geared to European interests, and its concern for democracy is seen as a problem in the more or less authoritarian Central Asian countries.¹⁰⁶ These states in 1994 formed their own economic community, which in 2002 was transformed into the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO), but the organisation failed to stimulate economic cooperation.¹⁰⁷ In 2001 they also joined the EURASEC together with Russia and Belarus. After

Ryssland, No. 4, 2006, pp. 10 ff. Iran has the world's second largest gas reserves next to Russia and is the fourth largest oil producer.

¹⁰⁴ 1 % of the total in 2003 according to Shieves (2006) pp. 217 f, 10 % by February 2005 according to Weitz (2006a), p. 160.

¹⁰⁵ Kiesow (2004) p. 20 f; Kiesow, *India's Quest for Energy Security*, FOI Memo 2003, Febr. 2007, 30 ff.

¹⁰⁶ Maksutov (2006) p. 4.

¹⁰⁷ Martha Brill Olcott (2005) *Central Asia's Second Chance*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C., p. 10.

Russia was allowed to join the CACO and Uzbekistan joined the EURASEC, the two organisations were merged in 2006.¹⁰⁸

Of course, since the Central Asian states are different, they also have conflicting interests among themselves. Uzbekistan, which is the most populous and important country and has no borders on Russia or China, aspires to a leading role, especially with regard to its smaller neighbours Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The three states are closely intertwined and numerous disputes occur, especially in the poor and densely settled Ferghana valley. The placing of the SCO RATS headquarters in Tashkent instead of Bishkek and the appointment of an Uzbek general as its head can be seen as a recognition of Uzbekistan's influence and its key role in fighting terrorism. Uzbekistan's leadership ambitions are contested by the other big country Kazakhstan, which however has its centre farther east and is more oriented towards Russia. The states also have unsolved border issues, e.g. in the Aral Sea, where there are rich oil and gas resources.¹⁰⁹

As mentioned above the four states are heavily dependent on Russia in many respects. The political elites have in general received their education in Russia and Russian remains the *lingua franca* in the region. They need Russian backing in order to maintain security and build up their counties, as their military forces are weak and the economies more or less undeveloped. Russia has attracted millions of migrants from Central Asia, whose remittances contribute a great deal to the economies at home.¹¹⁰

True, the four states try to balance the Russian domination with cooperation with China bilaterally and in the SCO framework, so as to extract favours from both. China is more than willing to offer assistance and accepts their balancing act. Especially Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan cultivate military and economic relations with China, and Uzbekistan has also improved ties with China after Andijan. Many Central Asian leaders probably enjoy that with the presence of the Chinese and four observer states at the SCO meetings, the Russians are induced to treat them better.¹¹¹ However, just like the Russians or perhaps even more, the Central Asian nations are afraid of the growing Chinese economic strength, for instance with regard to opening their markets to cheap consumer

¹⁰⁸ Laumulin (2006) p. 12, Iniutin (2006) p. 35.

¹⁰⁹ Vasilyeva (2007), *The Moscow News*, No. 23 2007; EDM, No. 167, 12 Sept. 2006.

¹¹⁰ Weitz (2006a) p. 156 f.

¹¹¹ Olcott (2005) p. 198 f; Uwe Halbach, *Usbekistan als Herausforderung für westliche Zentralasienpolitik*, SWP-Studie, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin, Sept. 2006, p. 26.

goods and labour, and therefore they have opposed the Chinese wish for free trade.¹¹² Also they give priority to the CSTO for their security.¹¹³

To buttress their independence the four states also seek support from the West, which the SCO Charter does not obviate. To the displeasure of both Russia and China they all participate in NATO's Partnership for Peace programmes, including exercises, and welcome the growing EU interest in Central Asia.

Comparing the Central Asian balancing acts, Uzbekistan's policy has oscillated more sharply than the others. In the mid-1990s Uzbekistan started to distance itself from Russia and its multilateral organisations. In April 1999 it left the CSTO and joined the GUAM group of West-oriented states inside the CIS. True, Uzbekistan joined the SCO in 2001, but in the same year it took the initiative to let NATO establish bases in the country and then signed a declaration on strategic partnership with the United States, which included US aid to its military forces.¹¹⁴ However, when the United States criticised the Andijan massacre in 2005, Uzbekistan went further than the SCO deadline by asking them to close their base. It left the GUAM, rejoined the CSTO and signed a mutual assistance treaty with Russia. Americans were even accused of having fomented the Andijan "uprising".¹¹⁵

Turning to Kazakhstan, the other great Central Asian country, it has to consider its very long border on Russia, tight economic relations and the large Russian minority. Consequently it probably is Russia's closest ally in the region with a treaty on eternal friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance besides being a loyal member of the Russian-led CIS organisations and the CSTO.¹¹⁶ On the other hand, also this country has made efforts to conduct an independent multivector foreign policy. In 1992 President Nazarbaev in the UN proposed a Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building in Asia (CICA), which in 1996 held a summit in Almaty (and another in 2002). This all-Asian security forum, which has similar goals as the SCO but comprises 16 states ranging from South Korea to Egypt and with six observers including the USA and Ukraine, can be seen as a broader alternative to the SCO.¹¹⁷ Kazakhstan has also

¹¹² Sun (2006) p. 605; Maksutov (2006) p. 20 ff; Laumulin (2006) pp. 8, 17 f; Mamonov (2007) on Kyrgyz fears of a Chinese railway.

¹¹³ EDM, 25 May 2007, No. 103.

¹¹⁴ Jonson (2004) p. 45 f, 70 f.

¹¹⁵ Gregory Gleason, "The Uzbek expulsion of U.S. forces and realignment in Central Asia", *Problems of Post-Communism*, No. 2, 2006, pp. 50 f, *The Moscow News*, 16-22 Nov. 2005. Germany is still allowed to use an airfield near the Afghan border (Halbach (2006) pp. 25 f.)

¹¹⁶ Iniutin (2006) pp. 28 f.

¹¹⁷ Embassy of Kazakhstan to the United States and Canada homepage, "Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia", <http://www.kazakhembus.com/CICA.html>, retrieved 25 March 2007.

concluded a strategic partnership with China as well as economic agreements as shown above.¹¹⁸

The fact that a Kazakh became Secretary-General of the SCO may temporarily boost its interest in this organisation. President Nazarbaev recently stated that even though the CSTO is more focused on military matters while the SCO deals with wider issues, he thought the organisations could cooperate more, for instance in countering drug trafficking.¹¹⁹

Further, Kazakhstan has cultivated its relations with the West to balance those with Russia and China. In 2001 it offered the United States access rights to three airfields in its war on terror in Afghanistan and sent a small peacekeeping battalion to Iraq to help the occupying forces there, clearly in opposition to Russia and China. In exchange, the United States has provided military assistance, kept quiet about democracy in Kazakhstan, and there has even been talk of strategic partnership. In 2006 Kazakhstan went farther than its neighbours by signing an Individual Partnership Action Plan with NATO.¹²⁰ Not surprisingly Kazakhstan also takes advantage of the attention that its rich energy resources have attracted from the United States and Europe. The United States has accounted for one-third of total investments and backed Kazakhstan's efforts to join the WTO.¹²¹ President Nazarbaev recently summed up his multi-vector policy by declaring that "our cooperation with the United States never runs counter to Russian interests. By working together with Russia or China, we never go against the USA or Europe."¹²²

Concerning the weakest Central Asian states, Kyrgyzstan, even though supporting the SCO declaration asking the US-led coalition for a deadline, did not follow Uzbekistan's example by closing the US air base at Bishkek, and even let the Americans transfer aircraft to it from the Uzbek base. In 2006 a new base agreement was signed. However, the Kyrgyz government took the opportunity to raise the rent drastically, while Russia did not have to pay for its base.¹²³ The Kyrgyz leaders are under strong pressure from Russia and China to close the US base, especially as they are hosting the SCO summit in 2007, a matter of much prestige.¹²⁴ As mentioned Tajikistan is the weakest and the poorest of the SCO member states and the most dependent on Russian military

¹¹⁸ Chung (2006) pp. 11 f.

¹¹⁹ SCO website, "Interview of SCO Secretary-General Bolat Nurgaliev", 22 Jan, <http://www.sectsco.org/html/01201.html>, 15 Febr. 2007, EDM, 12 June 2007, No. 114.

¹²⁰ Olcott (2005) pp. 182 f; Maksutov (2006) p. 7; EDM, No 187, 11 Oct. 2006; No. 219, 28 Nov. 2006.

¹²¹ EDM, No. 185, 6 Oct. 2006.

¹²² EDM, 18 April 2007, No. 76.

¹²³ Maksutov (2006) p. 7. The rent amounted to 60 per cent of Kyrgyzstan's national budget.

¹²⁴ EDM, 8 March, No. 47, 24 May, No. 102, 4 June, No. 108, 2007.

and economic assistance, but even this state has allowed NATO to use its territory for the war on terrorism in Afghanistan and made attempts to improve its international status. For instance it has granted India an airbase in the country – in conjunction with Russia.¹²⁵

Thus the SCO gave the Central Asian countries a forum for mutual cooperation and for balancing the big neighbours against each other and it did not hinder them from also developing relations with Western powers. But, as a Kazakh researcher has complained, the many priorities proposed or imposed by Russia and/or Beijing could become a burden to the others, and the organisation cannot solve any bilateral problems.¹²⁶ The Central Asian states most of all want economic assistance through the SCO, but they fear becoming dependent on China.

¹²⁵ Olcott (2005) p. 185; Jonson (2004) p. 107 f; Lena Jonson, *Tajikistan in the New Central Asia*, London-New York 2006, p. 57 ff; EDM 24 May, No. 102, 19 June, No. 119 2007; “China to the rescue of President Rakhmonov?” *Central Asia & Caspian Intelligence*, No. 6, 2 March 2007.

¹²⁶ Laumulin (2006), p. 18.

The Problem of Enlargement

The question about the orientation and potential of the SCO to a large extent hinges on whether and how it will be enlarged. As mentioned the issue was raised when India, Pakistan and Iran became observers in 2005.¹²⁷ If these states became members, the organisation would contain about half the world population and four nuclear powers and a quarter of the global energy reserves. The combination of some of the world's leading oil and gas exporters (Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Iran) with major consumer countries (China, India) could radically transform the global energy market.¹²⁸

Formally, membership is declared to be open to states in the region, which accept the rules, and in 2006 declarations were made to this effect. However, there are many problems involved and the member states hold different views on the issue.

The least controversial candidate is Mongolia, which became an observer in 2004. It seems eager to break out of its geographical isolation and has good relations with its neighbours Russia and China as well as with the four Central Asian members. The only problem could be that due to its small economy and population, Mongolia cannot contribute so much either.

Concerning India and Pakistan their entry into the SCO as observers apparently was a compromise, in which Russia advocated its long-time strategic partner India, whereas China, which has had tense relations with India at least since the border war in 1962, supported Pakistan, India's arch-enemy. Especially India could be interested in SCO membership in order to further its economic interests in Central Asia, to widen its geopolitical engagement, to use this forum for handling problems of border issues, terrorism and separatism, and finally as a multilateral framework to handle the global rise of China. As argued by SIPRI China may be more inclined to widen the organisation than Russia because this would reinforce the economic agenda of the SCO and its own interest in creating a 'Greater Asia'.

However, China could worry about the influence that India's more democratic practices and its Western links might have on the other members, and India could also disturb the power balance in the organisation.¹²⁹ Both China and Russia are concerned lest the fast-growing India gets more deeply involved in

¹²⁷ This status, which was not provided for by the Charter, was instituted by a special regulation in 2004. (Pan 2007) p. 51.

¹²⁸ Weitz (2006) p. 41.

¹²⁹ Bailes & Dunay (2007) p. 18, 20.

the race for Central Asian energy resources.¹³⁰ Both states are aware of the problem that if India and/or Pakistan became members, the SCO could be involved and split concerning their deep conflict over Kashmir.¹³¹ Another problem, especially for Russia with its nuclear agreements with the United States, is the fact that India and Pakistan are de facto nuclear states which have not signed the Non-proliferation treaty.¹³² Thus, even though there are protagonists, most Russian analysts for these reasons reject the inclusion of India and Pakistan into the SCO.¹³³ Also the Central Asian states are opposed to admitting India and Pakistan as members because that would dwarf their influence in the organisation. In the words of a Kazakh researcher Central Asia could be reduced to a transit territory for the economic undertakings of other states.¹³⁴

The most eager but also the most difficult candidate for SCO membership is probably Iran. The country apparently hopes for support against US pressure and it has pointed out the benefits that Russia and China could derive from Iran in the energy sector. At the 2006 SCO summit President Ahmadinejad offered to host a conference for the energy ministers in Tehran. Indeed, both Russia and China have developed relations with Iran in many fields. On the other hand, Ahmadinejad's calls to annihilate Israel clash with the SCO's anti-extremist principles and Iran's nuclear programme has brought it into a conflict with the United States and the EU, resulting in tightening sanctions on Iran. Admitting Iran would hence disturb the relations of the SCO and its members with the West. Especially the Central Asian states would see their multivector policy damaged.¹³⁵

As for admitting other states in the region, which have not become observers, the SCO has paid much attention to Afghanistan, created a special contact group and invited its president to meetings as mentioned above. However, this country is more torn by internal strife and terrorism than Central Asia, and the United States and NATO have troops there to support the government. The SCO and its members are obviously neither willing nor able to compete with the West here and take over responsibilities, and the Afghan government probably does not expect that to happen either.

¹³⁰ Chung (2006) p. 12; Troitskiy (2007) p. 41

¹³¹ Farkhad Tolipov (2005) "East vs. West? Some geopolitical questions and observations for the SCO", CEF Quarterly, p. 21; Pan Guang (2005), "The New SCO Observers", *ibidem*, p. 19. Plater-Zyberk (2007) pp. 6 f;

¹³² Troitskiy (2007) p. 40.

¹³³ For examples, see *ibidem*, p. 41.

¹³⁴ Maksutov (2006) p. 26.

¹³⁵ Plater-Zyberk (2007) p. 7, Maksutov (2006) 26 f.

Turkmenistan, finally, long stood aloof from the SCO in accordance with its policy of permanent neutrality, and President Niyazov's dictatorship was so extreme that it could best be compared to that of North Korea. If the country now under its new president Berdimukhammedov would be willing to revise this policy, its Central Asian neighbours, Russia and China would likely recommend it to join the SCO, at least as an observer. These states (and Western ones) have already made overtures in order to improve relations with the new Turkmen regime. As shown above, there are common interests in fighting terrorism and securing internal stability, in economic cooperation, particularly with regard to energy, and not more conflicts with SCO members than among these themselves. Not surprisingly Kyrgyzstan thus invited the Turkmen leader to attend the next summit in Bishkek.

It therefore seems that both Russia, China and the Central Asian states on various grounds are reluctant to enlarge the SCO for the time being and more bent on strengthening the organisation by making it more efficient and attractive. In early 2007 the SCO General Secretary Nurgaliev stressed that the criteria of full membership need to be defined before any new members are admitted. But he also pointed out that the observers—plus Afghanistan—are invited to all meetings of the governing body and are expected to be represented at the same level.¹³⁶ Another idea is to institute a third category of partnerships modelled on NATO's Partnership for Peace, which focus on specific tasks, e.g. fighting terrorism and drug trafficking. Afghanistan already is an example of this.¹³⁷ The EU and Japan might be interested in getting some kind of guest status.¹³⁸ In that way the distinctions between members, observers and others are blurred, which may ease the problem.

¹³⁶ SCO, "Interview", 22 Jan 2007; Weitz (2006) p. 43. The observer states also monitored an SCO exercise in May 2007 (EDM, 5 June 2007, No. 109).

¹³⁷ Pan (2007) p. 58.

¹³⁸ According to Pal Dunay and Iwashita at Lund seminar, 25 May 2007.

A Balance-sheet

The above analysis indicates that contrary to Western apprehensions and some hopes inside the organisation, the SCO cannot be regarded as a military alliance or a block posing a threat for example to NATO. It does not oblige the members to collective defence and it does not dispose of military forces. According to all official statements, the organisation is not directed against third parties and seeks cooperation with others. The organisation is still quite new and has limited economic resources at its disposal.

To varying extents the SCO members are opposed to extending membership to India, Pakistan and Iran, because that might involve the organisation in external conflicts, split it and disturb relations with Western powers. Including such a growing giant like India could heighten competition for energy in Central Asia and disturb the delicate power balance inside the organisation.

The basic common aim of the SCO (and its predecessor the Shanghai Five) has naturally been to preclude conflicts and build confidence among the member states, and in this it seems to have been successful. Instead the fight against terrorism, separatism, extremism and related problems has emerged as the most urgent and important tasks for cooperation, since these problems are trans-national and threatening stability in the Central Asian region, which also Russia and China are concerned about. Therefore the anti-terrorist centre in Tashkent tasked to gather and exchange information is likely to develop most successfully.¹³⁹

In recent years economic cooperation, especially in the energy field, has become more important in the SCO and several institutions been created, but it remains to be seen what the results will be.

The SCO of course performs different functions for the member states. Russia and China have used it as a means of keeping other powers, especially the United States, the world's strongest military and economic power, off the Central Asian region. On the other hand they both distrust each other for historic reasons and are both more dependent on trade with the West than on each other. They can use the SCO to keep each other from forging too strong ties with the West but also as a way to extract favours from the West.

Russia can also utilize the SCO as a means to control Chinese cooperation with the Central Asian states at the same time as it is engages in strategic partnerships

¹³⁹ Plater-Zyberk (2007) p. 9.

with both NATO and the EU. Russia also maintains its strong influence in Central Asia through the traditional bilateral channels and through other, more important organisations, the CSTO in the military field and the EURASEC in the economic field, where China is not a member. As pointed out by the Russian expert Mikhail Troitskii, Russia faces the dilemma that if it works for the SCO to become more militarized, it might overshadow the CSTO and confuse the Central Asian members. If it prioritises a soft security and economic agenda, China may gain the upper hand and penetrate Central Asia, thus eclipsing the EURASEC.¹⁴⁰

China clearly is the country most interested and engaged in the SCO, as it gets legitimate ties with the Central Asian states not existing before. In this multilateral organisation China can make sure that separatists/terrorists in Xinjiang do not link up with their kin in Central Asia, and under its cover it can carry out military exercises with the neighbours. On the strength of its formidable economic growth China can use the SCO to push for free trade and investments in Central Asia. The SCO does not prevent but rather help China to develop bilateral ties with the Central Asian states, especially in the energy field. Yet, the Chinese expansion in Central Asia meets resistance from the other members. China itself is by tradition more oriented towards East and Southeast Asia, most of its trade is with the West and Japan and it chiefly relies on energy imports from the Middle East and Africa.

For the Muslim Central Asian states, which are the junior members of the SCO, the organisation serves to underpin their independence by giving them an equal voice with Russia and China as well as veto powers. In the SCO the regimes can mobilise support for themselves against purported terrorists, separatists and extremists as well as Western democrats. Nowadays economic development probably is the most important topic for these states. They remain most dependent on Russia and fear Chinese dominance, probably even more than Russia does, but they can use the SCO to play these countries off against each other and so extract favours from them. Moreover, the SCO does not hinder the Central Asian members, particularly Kazakhstan, from developing contacts with the USA, NATO, and the EU in order to boost their independence.

Comparing the SCO with other organisations, one can agree with SIPRI that it is not a hegemonic or coerced organisation, containing as it does two balancing great powers.¹⁴¹ In that sense it resembles the OSCE with the difference that the latter has many more members and great powers. The SCO has shown flexibility and adaptiveness by its rapid growth, the creation of new institutions and networks, and a broadening agenda. No doubt, the SCO (and its predecessor the

¹⁴⁰ Troitskiy (2007) p. 35.

¹⁴¹ Bailes & Dunay (2007) p. 28.

Shanghai Five) has served as a useful forum, where the states can promote cooperation, even if it is bilateral, and discuss differences. However, there is a risk that the organisation aims to tackle more issues than it can handle with the limited resources at its disposal. There is a tendency towards issuing declarations and proclamations, which are not followed up by deeds, and to push differences under the carpet. A concomitant problem is the one of bureaucratisation which haunts so many Communist and ex-Soviet states and organisations.

Concerning the question of cohesion the SCO most of all rests on a good relationship between Russia and China. Thus if these states were to run into conflict with each other for some reason, the SCO would surely suffer. Democratic upheavals or growing terrorist activities in one state may put the authoritarian regimes to a difficult test whether to interfere in violation of the Charter, thus jeopardizing cohesion. Cohesion would probably be strengthened as a result of external threats or crises in the neighbourhood, for instance if the United States would attack Iran.

Appendix

Table 1. Basic data for the member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2005

State	Area (km ²)	Population (m.)	GDP (US\$ b.)	GDP per capita (US\$)	Mil expenditure (US\$m)
China	9 572 900	1 315.8	2 244	1 715	44 300
Kazakhstan	2 724 900	14.8	57	3 786	592
Kyrgyzstan	199 900	5.3	2	477	76
Russia	17 075 400	143.5	764	5 323	31 100
Tajikistan	143 100	6.5	2	364	..
Uzbekistan	447 400	26.6	14	521	..

.. = Figure not available; GDP = gross domestic product.

Compiled by: Bailes, A. J. K., Dunay, P., Pan Guang and Troitskiy, M., *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, SIPRI Policy Paper no. 17 (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute: May 2007) <http://www.sipri.org>

Table 2. Trade of Russia and China with Central Asian member-states of the SCO in 2006 (million USD.)

	Russia			China		
	Turnover	Export	Import	Turnover	Export	Import
Kazakhstan	12 808	8 969	3 839	8 358	4 751	3 607
Kyrgyzstan	754	560.5	193.5	2 226	211.3	113
Tajikistan	502	377	125	324	306	18
Uzbekistan	2 375	1 086	1 289	972	406	566

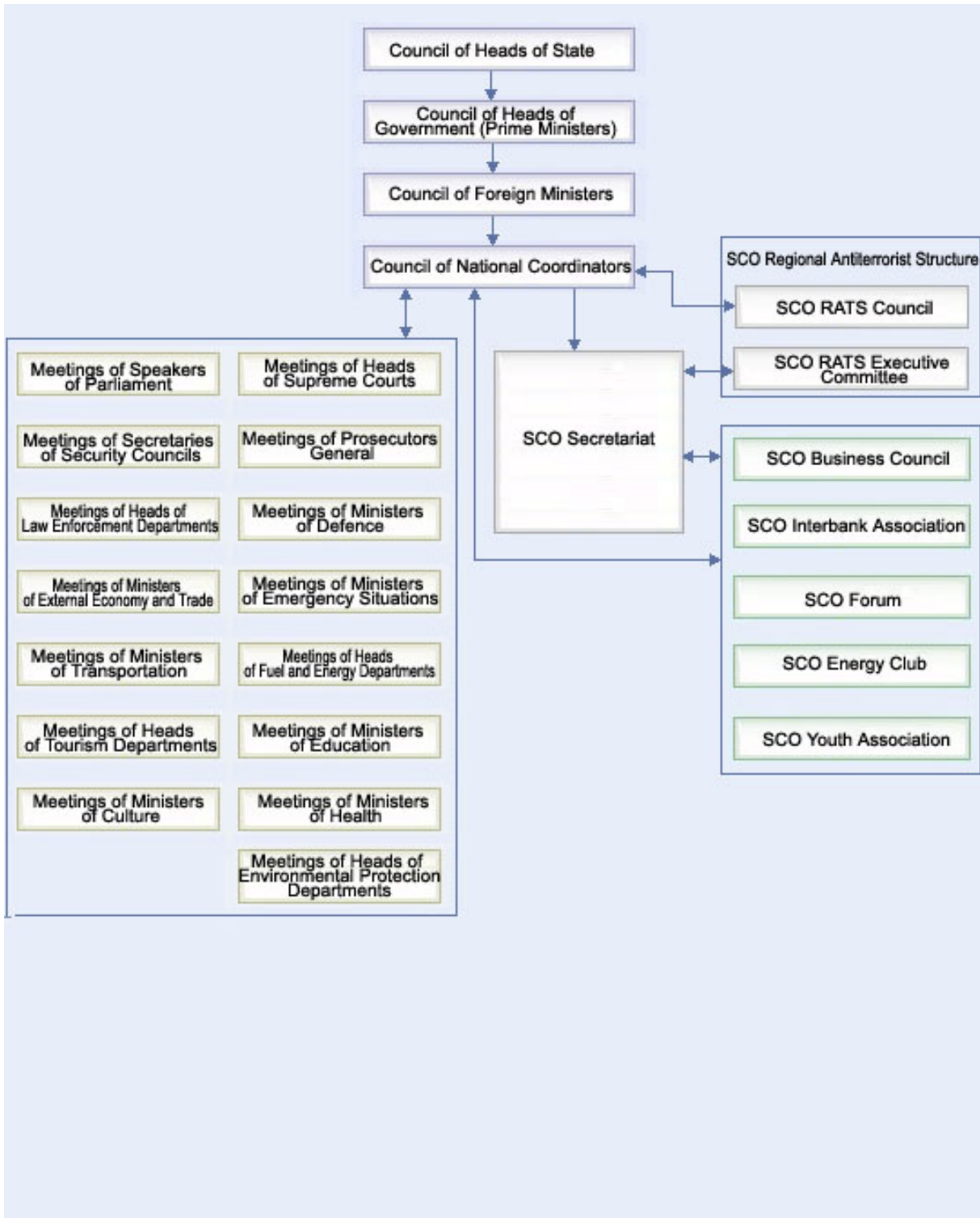
Compiled by Vladimir Portyakov from Foreign Trade of Russia in 2006. Bulletin of Foreign Commercial Information. Moscow. VNIKI. 2007 20 February, p.3; Haiguan Tongji (Customs Office Statistics). Beijing 2006, No. 12. p. 3.

**Table 3. Total trade volume between China and Central Asian countries
1992-2006 (million USD)**

<i>Country</i>	<i>1992</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2005</i>
Kazakhstan	369.1	1 557	6 810
Kyrgyzstan	35.48	177.61	972
Tajikistan	2.75	17.17	158
Turkmenistan	4.5	16.16	110
Uzbekistan	47.52	51.47	680
Total:	459.35	1 819.41	8 730

Compiled by Guo Xuetang from the Department of European and Central Asian Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, update on Sept. 21, 2006, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn>.

Chart of the organisation (from the SCO website)



Pictures from the SCO summit in Shanghai, 2006



Russian President Vladimir Putin (R, front) talks with Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev while touring the Huangpu River in Shanghai on June 14, 2006, the eve of the summit.(Xinhua Photo)



Afghan President Hamid Karzai (L, front), Mongolian President Nambaryn Enkhbayar (C, front) and Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf. (Xinhua Photo)



Tajik President Emomali Rakhmonov talks with his wife. (Xinhua Photo)

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