

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Its Implications for Eurasian Security: A New Dimension of “Partnership” after the Post-Cold War Period

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Introduction

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), consisting of China and the Former Soviet Republics (Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan), was formed in June 2001 and its charter was adopted by the six participating states in St. Petersburg on June 7, 2002. The SCO secretariat is to be based in Beijing, with Zhang Deguang, then Chinese ambassador to Russia, appointed as its first head at the Moscow Summit on May 29.¹ The SCO will function with formal international legal status from the beginning of January 2004.

The SCO, as well as the Russo-Chinese “strategic partnership,” are sometimes described as tools to foster the concept of a “multi-polar world” intended to offset perceived US global domination. At the SCO’s extraordinary Foreign Ministry’s meeting in Beijing in January 2002, member states declared their concern regarding the hegemony over Afghanistan and the world. Some watchers are very anxious about the preference for an “anti-American” orientation shown by the SCO and the Russo-Chinese “partnership.”² However, this viewpoint lacks persuasive reasons

1 *The Japan Times*, 8 June 2002.

2 See Menges, 2001; Gill, 2001. We also know many criticisms of this misleading “anti-American” explanation for the Russo-Chinese “partnership,” but most of them have a weak point: they hardly followed the concrete contents of the most difficult issue between Russia and China, i.e. border

and shows an adherence to the stereotype of the “Cold War.” The SCO should be seen in a different angle after a more realistic review.

First, the SCO was formed as a result of prolonged border negotiations between China and the Former Soviet Republics. The basic aim of the SCO was and is even now to maintain its member states’ border stability. One of the main tasks under the SCO Charter is to cooperate against “international terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism” particularly within the member states.³ All of the SCO members face their own serious ethnic challenges against their central governments. We should interpret the *raison d’etre* of the SCO in its internal context and define it as a kind of organization that mutually guarantees each member’s security and national integrity.

Second, the SCO has a complex double structure: the great power’s bipolarity (Russia and China) and an asymmetric Central Asian influence (middle power Uzbekistan versus Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan). The SCO is far from united against the US presence over Central Asia and the world. All of the SCO member states seek only their own interests. Any cooperation of the SCO in itself vis-à-vis surrounding states has been limited to diplomatic words, regardless of “9.11.” In reverse, discrepancy within the SCO has seemed to widen since then, as Uzbekistan has shown a cool attitude towards the SCO.

Nevertheless, we should not underestimate the formation of the SCO and its undoubted results in guaranteeing security among the participating states. With many real difficulties within and around the SCO, it seems to be preparing for a new image of security for Eurasian states after the Cold War. This paper aims to make clear the nature of the SCO and its implications for Eurasian security, objectively analyzing these two contradictory trends, i.e. the need for mutual security versus the differentiation of member states’ interests within the SCO, and then identifying a

negotiations. One of the few attempts to focus on the Russo-Chinese border problems was made by the author. See Iwashita, 2000, pp. 92-96; Iwashita, 2001, pp. 1-10; Iwashita, 2003.

3 *Xinhua Online* (Chinese), 7 June 2002.

hint suggested by the SCO experience for future interrelations in Eurasia.

In the first section of the paper, I focus on the origin of the SCO and Russo-Sino-Central Asian relations in mutual border demarcation and security issues. Then, I will outline the process of the formation of the SCO and how it has been successful in guaranteeing the former Soviet-Chinese border. Second, I will analyze a recent challenge to the SCO, namely, the impact of “9.11” and the Iraq War. Third, I will draw metaphorical meaning from the SCO in the post-Cold War era and refer to it in a Eurasian security context.

1. Formation of the SCO

1-1. The Origin of the “Shanghai Five”

The SCO’s predecessor, the so-called “Shanghai Five,” was born as a forum to discuss CBM and the demarcation issue in the former Soviet-Chinese border region under a Russo-Chinese co-initiative. The border issue is a historic one, dating back centuries. The Soviet-Chinese border, consisting of a 4300-kilometer eastern section from the eastern edge of Mongolia to the Tumen River of North Korea and a 3200-kilometer western section from the western edge of Mongolia to the Tajik-Afghanistan border junction, was delineated mainly by the Russian empire and the Qing dynasty in the late 19th century.

The Chinese claimed a loss of over one and a half million square kilometers of its “own territories” on the basis of “unequal treaties” between Russia and China in the 19th century, which later caused Soviet-Chinese military conflicts such as the Damanskii Incident in 1969. In the late 1980s, when Soviet-Chinese reconciliation was brought about by Gorbachev’s “new thinking” initiatives, both sides agreed to build measures to prevent would-be military conflicts and resolve territorial issues in the border area. The former led to an agreement on the leading principles of arms reduction and confidence-building in the military field on the border in April 1990, the latter to an agreement between the

Soviet Union and China on the eastern sector of their state border on May 16, 1991.⁴

The Soviet-Chinese border changed when the Soviet Union collapsed at the end of 1991. The western part was divided into four sections – the 50-kilometer Russo-Chinese border, the 1700-kilometer Kazakh-Chinese border, the 1000-kilometer Kyrgyz-Chinese border, and the 430-kilometer Tajik-Chinese border, while the eastern part was totally succeeded by the Russo-Chinese border. At that time, these newly independent Central Asian states that had not until then recognized the existence of the territorial issue and had rejected its negotiation with China, agreed to sit at a table to discuss it through the mediation of Russia.⁵ The “4 (Russia+ three Central Asian states) + 1 (China)” negotiation formula was created by the Russo-Chinese “partnership” in due observance of the Russo-Chinese border agreements. After 1993, the “4+1” formula served for two regular committees, for confidence-building and arms reduction and for joint boundary demarcation, which later became the bodies of the so-called “Shanghai Five.”⁶

The first fruit borne by the committee for confidence-building and arms reduction was the Shanghai agreement on confidence building in the military field in the border area during 1996. All concerned states agreed to stabilize their border areas by establishing non-military zones and promising the exchange of military information. This was a dubious but effective symbol of peace on the former Soviet-Chinese border, which had been historically plagued by severe military conflicts and deep-rooted mutual distrust.⁷ Since then, “Shanghai” has acquired the special meaning of “stability and trust” for the five countries. In February 1997, when the leaders of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan joined Moscow and signed the agreement on mutual reduction of armed forces in the border area, the level of “stability and trust” between the concerned parties was up-

4 Liu et al., 1996, pp. 52, 161-162.

5 Ibid., p. 180.

6 Sun, 1999, pp. 204-206.

7 *Krasnaia zvezda*, 30 April 1996.

graded by the agreement for the limitation of arms and personnel within both the 100-kilometer zone of the former Soviet-Chinese border and its mutual inspection.⁸ The name “Shanghai Five” became popular just after this second summit.

The “4+1” formula advanced the progress of border demarcation on the western border. In 1994, the Russo-Chinese 50-kilometer border and the Kazakh-Chinese border were agreed upon, with two small sectors of the latter border undecided. In 1998, when the third “Shanghai Five” summit was held in Almaty, the Kazakh-Chinese supplemental agreement was finally resolved.⁹ Kyrgyz-Chinese border negotiations had begun in 1992, and at that time, it had had five disputed sectors, four of which were resolved in the 1996 agreement. The remaining one, the western point near Mt. Khantengri, was demarcated in 1999, when the Kyrgyz-Chinese supplemental agreement was signed at the time of the fourth summit of the “Shanghai Five” held in Bishkek.¹⁰

In contrast, Tajik-Chinese border negotiations had been in deadlock for a long time. Because the disputed area claimed by China is more than twenty thousand square kilometers, or one-seventh of all Tajikistan territories, both governments seemed to have little room to compromise. The only section they agreed on at the Dushanbe summit of the “Shanghai Five” in 2000 was the Kyrgyz-Tajik-Chinese joint border point. A real story always goes beyond specialists’ minds, however. Zhang Zemin and Rakhmonov signed a supplementary agreement on the border issues between China and Tajikistan on May 17 2002. According to the *People’s Daily*, “China and Tajikistan both highly appreciate the agreement reached on border issues, saying this signifies the **comprehensive resolution** of border issues between the two countries left (emphasis by A. I.)”¹¹ The Tajikistan Central News Agency reported that Tajikistan agreed to turn about 3.5% of the disputed territory back to China, which amounts to ap-

8 *Sbornik: Rossiisko-Kitaiskikh dogovorov*, 1999, pp. 385-392.

9 *Inside Central Asia*, 8-14 March 1999.

10 *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 27 August 1999.

11 *People’s Daily Online*, 18 May 2002.

proximately 1,000 square kilometers, in order to end the border dispute between China and Tajikistan.¹² It is difficult to confirm the actual content of the agreement because none of the Tajik and Chinese media reported it. There are even a few Chinese and Tajik specialists who suggest that the territory handed over to China was not 1,000 but 4,000-square kilometers.¹³ Nevertheless, all concerned specialists coincide with the conclusion that the territorial issue between Tajikistan and China is already finished.

1-2. The Development of the “Shanghai Five”

The cooperation of the “Shanghai Five” developed through the border arrangement has doubtlessly contributed to the great success in regional security, particularly in Russo-Chinese security, which has yet to be declared a political problem.¹⁴ The “Shanghai Five” entered a new phase at the Almaty summit in 1998 in terms of both quality and quantity. The summit began to be held regularly every year and broadened the scope of cooperation between the member states. The “Shanghai Five” put a new item, “combating separatism, religious extremism and international terrorism,” on their agenda of mutual security.¹⁵ At the Bishkek summit in 1999, the leaders all recognized the threat of “Islamic fundamentalism” and declared their criticism of the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia as “humanitarian interference” from the outside in domestic matters. This trend was accelerated mainly by Russia and China; both states needed support for each government’s policy of repressing its “domestic minority problem,” i.e. Chechnya and Uigur. Since the end of 1997, when Namangani’s “Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan” developed in Central Asia, Central Asian states have also held serious concerns regarding “Islamic fundamentalism,” which is seen as a common

12 *BBC Monitoring*, 21 May 2002.

13 Interviews with the Director of Research Center (SHARQ), Dushanbe, 25 February 2003; Interviews with a senior researcher of the Institute of Russia, East Europe and Central Asia CASS, Beijing, 8 April 2003.

14 See “Na granitse u Rossii i Kitaia net problem, est’ tol’ko nereshennye voprosy,” *Strana. Ru* (on line), 16 July 2001.

15 *People’s Daily Online* (Chinese), 4 July 1998.

threat to the security of the “Shanghai Five.” In addition, they began to pay attention to economic cooperation, such as “the revival of the Silk Road.”¹⁶

In 2000, the Fifth Summit in Dushanbe pushed these new items forward. First, the “Shanghai Five” decided to establish an international organization for regional security and cooperation, which would be open to surrounding states. Second, Uzbekistan, which was considered a top candidate for the next full member of the planned organization, attended this summit as an observer.¹⁷

The “Shanghai Five” often declares itself to be a new model of regional cooperation, which aims to produce good neighbor relations, mutual trust, equality and common development and is neither allied with nor antagonistic to third parties. Its basic idea is to preserve the integrity of its member states, which share common interests for combating “separatist” movements within their states and preventing outside interference, mainly by “Islamic fundamentalism.” This also means that the concerned parties never support their own “minorities” in other member states. In this context, Uzbekistan’s position was very important for the “Shanghai Five,” because future security and member state integrity in the region would not be guaranteed without Uzbekistan’s commitment to the partnership.

As is well known, Russian influence on Uzbekistan has lessened since the end of 1993 and it left the CIS collective security treaty in 1999. Nevertheless, Uzbekistan policy makers felt the need to cooperate with neighboring states against the “Islamic fundamentalist” movement that fought against the “Karimov dictatorship” in Uzbekistan. The “Shanghai Five” is a balanced forum between Russia and China suitable for Uzbek interests, which have always been cautious about Russian dominance over this region.¹⁸

16 *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 26 August 1999.

17 Dushanbe Statement of the Heads of State of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People’s Republic of China, the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Tajikistan, July 5, 2000. See *Tajikistan Daily Digest*, 7 July 2000.

18 See Ahmed, 2000.

China fully supported possible cooperation with Uzbekistan because of its lack of fear of Uzbek presence and potential geopolitical conflict, namely, its shared border in the region. Russia hoped to find some clues for bringing Uzbekistan back into the regional security cooperation and for involving Uzbekistan in a new organization expanding the “Shanghai Five,” which would be a second alternative to the CIS security treaty regime where Russian dominance was clear. Therefore, China eagerly invited Uzbekistan into the “Shanghai Five” and Russia finally agreed.¹⁹

The problem with inviting Uzbekistan into the “Shanghai Five” remained in the three states of Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan exercised more caution regarding Uzbekistan’s recently expanded role and pressure in the region. Kazakhstan was conscious of its rivalry and collision of interests in this region. This was because the Chinese proposal for inviting Uzbekistan into the “Five” was resisted by the former two and Kazakhstan was siding with them at that time. Why did the three Central Asian states keep their stance when the two giants in the “Five” agreed on the inclusion? At last, the three Central Asian states recognized Uzbekistan’s role in the planned organization; they hoped for the two giants’ presence over Uzbekistan in this region and for the increased effectiveness of the organization against “Islamic fundamentalism” brought about by Uzbek involvement. Kazakhstan supported Kyrgyz initiatives for creating an anti-terrorist center in the new organization and made Kazak-Kyrgyz inner cooperation within this organization a counterbalance against Uzbekistan as a regional power.²⁰

In June 2001, the leaders of the “Shanghai Five” and the Uzbek president got together in Shanghai, declared the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and signed the

19 Interviews with a senior researcher of the Institute of Russia, East Europe and Central Asia CASS, Beijing, 13 May 2002.

20 Interviews with senior researchers of the Central Asia Agency of Political Research, Almaty, 15 February 2002 and of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Bishkek, 22 February, 2002. See *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 4 July 2000; *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 7 July 2000; *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 7 July 2000.

convention for combating “terrorism, separatism and extremism,”²¹ which included the establishment of a regional anti-terrorist structure in the SCO with its headquarters in Bishkek. A month later, Russia and China signed a landmark treaty on good-neighborliness, friendship and cooperation, appealing for cemented Russo-Chinese border stability and intensive cooperation.

2. Challenges for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: “9.11” and Its Aftermath

2-1. “9.11” and Its Impact

Three months after the creation of the SCO, it faced both a fair wind and a challenge caused by the events of “9.11” in the United States. Russia and China immediately criticized the “terrorist attack” and expressed their support for the American position, although it was not clear at that point how the US would react against it. The four Central Asian member-states of the SCO followed and the six premiers of the SCO issued an urgent statement that they were prepared to cooperate with any state and international organization to combat global terrorist action.²² The SCO became one of the front-runner “anti-terrorist” organizations.

Under the charter of the SCO, the six leaders agreed to set up a joint regional antiterrorism structure headquartered in Kyrgyzstan on July 7, 2002.²³ Putin described it as a “contribution to global anti-terrorist efforts.” The leaders also urged India and Pakistan, both of which criticized the other as “terrorists,” to “resume political dialogue in order to ease tension.” The six declared their satisfaction at the SCO’s major role in anti-terrorist activities.²⁴

21 See Text of the Convention, *Moskovskii zhurnal mezhdunarodnogo prava*, 4, 2001, pp. 233-243.

22 *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 15 September 2001.

23 See Text of the SCO Charter, *Moskovskii zhurnal mezhdunarodnogo prava*, 1, 2003, pp. 272-284. However, a SCO Foreign Minister meeting suddenly decided to set it not in Bishkek but in Tashkent on September 5 (*RFE/RL NEWSLINE*, 8 September 2003).

24 *The Japan Times*, 8 July 2002; *Xinhua Online* (Chinese), 7 June 2002.

However, aside from the mutual guarantee for the border areas and state integrity for the SCO member states, the national interests of each were clearly different. It is easy to point out potential contradictions between Russia and China in international issues. We have already illustrated some examples that highlight the differences between Russian and Chinese interests in the “partnership.”²⁵ Chinese colleagues honestly admitted that Russo-Chinese relations were a second axis that was easily influenced by Russo-US or Sino-US ones. The better the latter become, the worse the former, and vice versa.²⁶

America’s harsh revenge and concrete operations against Afghanistan brought about a problem which have led member states’ interests to become more differentiated. Russian President Putin did not miss this chance to improve Russo-US relations. He accepted the US military presence in Central Asia and expressed his desire that the US understand Russian battles against “terrorist” action in Chechnya. Putin diligently conducted his reconciliation policy towards the West, i.e., the setting up of the NATO-Russian Council on May 28 and the signing of the treaty for the Reduction of Weapons of Mass Destruction with the US. But some politicians, such as Russian Duma Speaker Seleznev,

25 “Take first the Russo-Chinese reaction to the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 – Russia and China cooperated to criticize NATO’s action and appealed to the world to prevent a ‘polar world order’ dominated by the U.S., but in fact, Russia left China alone in the end, taking a positive role in the Köln summit in June and achieving financial assistance from the West, thus leaving China feeling isolated and powerless at a global level. Another clear example is the Anti-Ballistic Missile system. Russia and China jointly ‘protested’ against the U.S. initiatives of TMD and NMD. It is clear that Russia is mainly concerned with NMD while China with TMD. If START II’s ratification by Russia leads to a compromise on the modification of the ABM treaty between Russia and the U.S., inconsistencies in the common front China and Russia have taken against this issue may arise. Of course, Russia is somewhat concerned about TMD, which would be deployed in Japan and Taiwan. But this was a level of ‘understanding’ in a diplomatic sense, as quoted by Prof. E. P. Bazhanov, Vice President of the Diplomatic Academy in Moscow. Who believes Russia would back up China with anything more than words if a military conflict occurred in the Taiwan straits?” (Iwashita, 2001, pp. 1-2).

26 *Dongou Zhongya Yanjiu*, 1Q, 2000, pp. 86-87.

began to criticize Putin's "pro-American" policy implicitly,²⁷ thus it seems unclear how long the Russo-US cooperation can be prolonged. It is true that when the US one-sidedly developed its Missile Defense Plan, keeping its military presence for a long time, suspending Russian entry into the WTO, etc., few could be convinced of its future. Nevertheless, the Russo-Chinese "partnership" for international issues is less interesting for the world since "9.11."²⁸

In contrast with Russia, China faces a more serious situation: the US has not changed its position of expressing concern over China's policy towards the Uigurs. The US presence in Central Asia and the possible eastward enlargement of NATO directly presses west China (the Xinjiang Uigur Autonomous region), and a Russian compromise in the Missile Defense negotiations would do devastating damage to China's nuclear deterrence against a supposed US first nuclear attack. After "9.11," Russian and Chinese coordination in foreign policy has become more difficult than before.²⁹

Differentiation of the Central Asian states of the SCO should also be noted, particularly Uzbekistan's passive attitude regarding further cooperation in the SCO framework. This was mainly caused by "9.11" and the following American proposal to deploy its military presence in Central Asia. Uzbekistan immediately welcomed this and lessened its commitment to the SCO. Uzbekistan sent its deputy minister to the meeting of Foreign Ministers in Moscow on April 26,³⁰ but did not send a delegation to the meeting of chief border guards of the SCO member states and explained its absence with its lack of a shared border with Russia or China. It also did not participate at the Moscow meeting of the Defense Military on May 15, or at the Astana meeting of heads of law enforcement agencies and special services of the SCO mem-

27 *BBC Monitoring*, 24 January 2002.

28 Some Chinese specialists reject a view of less important Russo-Chinese relations after 9.11. They see the formation of a new Russo-Sino-US triangle of interaction. See Ni, 2003, pp. 6-15.

29 See Ching, 2002; Zheng, 2002.

30 *Xinhua Online* (Chinese), 1 June 2002.

ber states.³¹ One Chinese specialist was worried about the possibility that Uzbekistan might not even join the Charter of the SCO, though Karimov finally signed and agreed to its regional antiterrorist structure.³²

Even Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan agreed to the American presence in their own territories. Russia understood Tajikistan's position close to Afghanistan but seemed shocked to hear that Kyrgyzstan unilaterally accepted the US proposal.³³ Russia then felt uneasy about the next domino of Kazakhstan favoring the US.³⁴ Such pro-American policy, conducted by supposedly Russian-dominated states in Central Asia, illustrates how deeply the national interests of countries within the SCO collide with each other. This is a serious problem that could lead the SCO into an inferior position as a nominal organization like the CIS, i.e. the Commonwealth of the former Soviet Republics except the three Baltic States. In short, "9.11" has weakened the internal need for the security of the SCO itself, and the "anti-terrorist" orientation of the SCO has been greatly influenced by "environmental" factors mainly caused by the US.

2-2. The "No Show" of the SCO: The Iraq War and the St. Petersburg "Festival"

After the Afghanistan war was finished, US president G. W. Bush expressed a strong will to tackle the Iraq issue, which his father had left unresolved ten years previously. He proclaimed an "axis of evil" of Iraq as well as Iran and North Korea, and harshly criticized not only Saddam Hussein's passive attitude toward the UN inspection of weapons of mass destruction but also Iraq's un-

31 *Kommersant*, 24 May 2002. This tendency continues. Uzbekistan ignored maneuvers conducted by other SCO members twice on June and July of 2003.

32 *RFE/RL NEWSLINE*, 5 January 2001. Karimov took a positive attitude toward the Structure and invited it for Tashkent after the SCO summit held in May 29 of 2003, keeping its cautious eyes on the SCO as a whole (*RFE/RL NEWSLINE*, 3 June 2003).

33 Interviews with a senior staff member of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Moscow, 8 February 2002.

34 *BBC Monitoring*, 23 February 2002.

democratic regime, human rights abuses, and even support for the “terrorist” group al Qaeda.³⁵ While the possibility of an American unilateral attack on Iraq was enhanced in late 2002, Russia and China, in a joint effort with France and Germany, tried to give as much time as possible to the UN weapons inspectors in Iraq and to prevent the war from beginning in the foreseeable future. At the first round of negotiations among the great powers, mainly presided over by the UNSC, Russia proposed the most indulgent draft to Iraq while China supported the French “middle” position between Russia and the US. Then, Russia followed the French-Chinese draft and the French-Russo-Chinese “triangle” successfully revised to an extent a US – UK proposed draft that suggested direct and immediate sanctions in the case of Iraq’s breaching its promise to disarm weapons of mass destruction, as required by cease-fire agreements in 1991. The US accepted the revision that the UNSC should receive a report from the inspectors about Iraqi weapons before the next action was put on its agenda, and UN Resolution 1441, which calls for “serious consequences” if Iraq fails to prove that it has disarmed, was finally adopted by all the UNSC members even without absentees on October 8, 2002.³⁶ The US seemed to have failed in taking a free hand in attacking Iraq at that time.

The second round of the Iraq issue faced a different situation in early 2003. With weapons inspectors asking for more time, the Bush administration planned to pressure UNSC member nations to enforce Resolution 1441. The US-UK coalition, using the Resolution in its own favor and cautiously bypassing the UN channels, declared a unilateral decision to attack Iraq.³⁷ While Russia and France reiterated the importance of peaceful resolution of the Iraq issue and announced their preparations for using a veto on the UNSC and, interestingly, China kept its stance calm and took a wait-and-see position, the US-UK coalition prudently called for Italy, Japan and other countries to unite and fight against Saddam’s “terrorist” regime and annulled the opposition’s

35 *Washington Times*, 28 January 2003.

36 UN Doc S/RES/1441 (2002); *UN New Service*, 8 November 2002.

37 See *Text of Bush Speech on Iraq*, Washington, 17 March 2003.

resistance against the UN military operation. When the US victory over Saddam was clear without doubt, France and Russia faced severe reactions not only from the US but also from its domestic political rivals and public opinion. Russian president Putin sent a warm message to President Bush and tried to restore Russo-US relations on post-Iraq war affairs quickly. On June 1, 2003 just after the ceremony for the 300th anniversary of St. Petersburg, the two presidents declared that a different approach to the Iraq issue would not have any influence on the Russo-US strategic partnership and signed papers marking the ratification of the treaty for the Reduction of Weapons of Mass Destruction signed in May 2002.³⁸

It is interesting that Russia and China basically criticized the US unilateral action against Iraq though they had a different approach toward it at each round, as mentioned above. Hu Jintao, the new President of China, and Putin called for a central United Nations role in rebuilding Iraq and made customary reference to the “multipolar world” – the nominal term they use to describe their will to offset US global power – in a joint declaration on strategic partnership on the eve of the 300th St. Petersburg ceremony on May 30, 2003. They also showed concern about the next would-be target of the US – North Korea – and pushed for a peaceful settlement of the standoff between the United States and North Korea, urging Pyongyang not to develop nuclear weapons and calling for the security guarantees sought by North Korea. “Any scenarios of forceful pressure or use of force for solving the existing problems are unacceptable,” the two leaders said.³⁹ Meanwhile, the Chinese leader, as well as the Russian, also tried to mend fences with the US and Bush reacted with a warm welcome to Hu Jintao’s presence at the G8 Evian summit.⁴⁰ In con-

38 Yefimova, 2003.

39 See Text of *Sovmestnaia deklaratsiia RF i KNR*, Moscow, 27 May 2003. A different nuance between the Russian and the Chinese text can be noted: A strong-arm scenario or the use of force to resolve the problems of the Korean Peninsula is “unacceptable (nepriemlemy)” in Russian but “not agreed (bu zancheng)” in Chinese (*Xinghua Online* [Chinese], 28 May 2003).

40 *People’s Daily Online*, 2 June 2003.

trast, Bush took a cool attitude toward Jacques Chirac and departed from the Summit before the final ceremony.

The Russo-Chinese “strategic partnership” has not functioned so well on the Iraq issue, but we can easily trace its interaction from late 2002 to early 2003. What, in contrast, was the SCO doing? We have rarely heard news about the SCO, besides information on some member meetings at various levels (they sometimes occur, without Uzbekistan, as mentioned before). This is in striking contrast to the previous SCO. Before Uzbekistan joined, the SCO basically echoed Russo-Chinese declarations in international issues, and even after “9.11” the SCO has kept the same line on the “terrorist” issue and, if only officially and nominally, backed up the Russo-Chinese message against (US) unipolar domination. The SCO was almost silent on the Iraq war and could not issue any official statement.

A famous Chinese scholar suggests that Uzbekistan resistance stopped any action by the SCO against the US unilateral action against Iraq.⁴¹ The SCO seems no longer as dependent on Russo-Chinese relations than it was before. It is true that the SCO declaration, described as “a landmark event” by the participants themselves, was issued on May 29, 2003 in Moscow just after the Russo-Chinese joint declaration. The declaration states that recognition of the important role of the UN and the UNSC in solving major international problems is of fundamental importance and appraises that, since its foundation, the SCO has actively pursued a policy of cooperation with respect to international affairs. The declaration, however, contains only one paragraph on Iraqi reconstruction (not the war itself) and contains no phrase that might suggest an anti-American orientation except the vague words calling “for democratic world order” in the last paragraph. Considerable mention was made of the SCO structural issue, the secretary and secretariat in Beijing, the anti-terrorist center in Bishkek and its financial problems, as well as its appeal for an anti-terrorist mission to the world.⁴² Interest-

41 Interviews with a senior researcher of the Institute of Russia, East Europe and Central Asia CASS, Beijing, 8 April 2003.

42 See Text of *Deklaratsiia glav gosudarstv-chlenov ShOS*, 29 May 2003.

ingly, only China and Tajikistan had finished the declaration before the SCO summit and even the Upper House in Russia only ratified the SCO charter on May 28.⁴³

The challenges facing the SCO when dealing with international issues have increased since 9.11. It is not difficult to conclude that there is no future for the SCO from the realistic review mentioned above. Should we then bring the SCO to a nihilistic conclusion and throw away the SCO process and experience as a white elephant?

3. The SCO Implications for Post-Cold War Eurasian Security

3-1. An End to “Friend-Enemy” Relations

The process of SCO formation was deeply connected with the creation of the “strategic partnership” between Russia and China in the late 1990s, as mentioned above. The signing of the Shanghai agreement in 1996 came just after a declaration of Russo-Chinese “strategic partnership” in Moscow. It is well known that the declaration was born through the troublesome negotiations for demarcating the Russo-Chinese eastern border. The SCO and the Russo-Chinese “strategic partnership” was brought about as a “gift” of the prolonged border negotiations.⁴⁴

The concept of a “partnership” necessarily originated from Russo-Chinese relations. In the Russian foreign policy context, it seems to have been first used vis-à-vis NATO as the “partnership for peace” in 1994. This phrase was proposed by the Clinton administration in the US, which was concerned about a negative reaction from a newly independent Russia but was not prepared to invite Eastern Europe into NATO then.⁴⁵ It was meant as a “peaceful buffer” between Russia and NATO, but this buffer did not function well because the US had changed its cautious policy toward NATO and Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary rushed

43 Alekseev, 2003; “Sovet Federatsii ratifitsiroval Partii ShOS,” *Strana. Ru* (on line), 28 April 2003.

44 See Iwashita, 2001, pp. 1-10.

45 See Zhurkin, 1997, pp. 151-158.

to participate in the NATO camp. Russia argued this eastward enlargement would cause a new Cold War in Europe.⁴⁶ In short, the formation of the “partnership” between Russia and NATO was part of a power game just as during the Cold War.

Russia found a new target to be used in the concept of “partnership” as its foreign policy shifted from an “Atlantic” to a well-balanced, West-East orientation in the mid-1990s. This new target was China. President Yel’tsin issued a “constructive partnership” in 1994 and developed it into the “strategic partnership” with Zhang Zemin in 1996. Russia and China were the primary foes of each other in Asia during the last part of the Cold War, and thus the concept of a “partnership” as a kind of “buffer” – in a realistic context not an enemy but not a friend – was most applicable to Russo-Chinese relations in Asia as well as Russo-NATO relations in Europe. Then, the two parties declared their “partnership” as non-union and non-bloc against the third.⁴⁷

Fortunately, the Russo-Chinese “partnership” has not waned, but has been sustained despite many difficulties. Russo-Chinese relations are not too intimate because of the existence of their long common border areas and the mutual distrust in their history, but those relations are not broken because of both countries’ need for border stability, mutual security guarantees, and, partly, their tactical counteraction against a US-dominant world order. In a sense, the concept of a “partnership” – non-enemy and non-friend – has served well for Russo-Chinese relations during the post-Cold War period.

3-2. A Multilateral Partnership against a “New Threat”

The partnership as a “peaceful buffer” is notable for Russo-Chinese relations but not necessarily a new concept for the post-Cold War. We have some Cold War experiences of similar attempts such as the non-alliance movement in Asian and African countries in the 1950s and the OSCE in the 1970s. These attempts were basically applied to inter-state relations, but the new

46 See Williams, 1997, pp. 221-232.

47 See Text of Russo-Chinese Joint Declaration or Statement in *Sbornik: Rossiisko-Kitaiskikh dogovorov*, 1999, pp. 271, 334, 384, 408, 453.

concept paid much more attention to non-state or trans-state factors which could infringe sovereignty from inside/outside the state, e.g. nuclear smuggling, ecological catastrophe, terrorism, migration, economic weakness, and so on. “New threats” loomed in the late 1990s: many threats were discussed “around,” “within” and “over” the state.⁴⁸

President Putin admits that the true difficulty for Russian security comes not out of, but within the border.⁴⁹ Not China’s presence but the Russian Far East’s weaknesses in demography and economy are considered as the real threats for Russia’s territorial integrity.⁵⁰ Some Russian specialists suggest that the true challenge for Russia comes not from a gigantic developed China but from a divided and chaotic China.⁵¹ The Chinese side has also proposed a new security concept that provides an additional item of “neighbor countries,” including Russia plus the two Koreas, Japan, Southeast and South Asia, and puts emphasis on stability with these countries for China’s state integrity and peaceful development.⁵²

The SCO, whose core is based on the Russo-Chinese partnership, naturally has turned into a multilateral partnership coping with a “new threat” in the SCO border areas. The SCO is showing openness towards other countries that have a stake in “common interests” with the SCO.⁵³ This also originates from the concept of a Russo-Chinese “partnership” for guaranteeing their mutual security. In 1996, Russian diplomacy already appealed for this “strategic partnership” as a model for the 21st century, which could overcome the historic antagonism between countries with a long-shared border and suggested its desire for the enlargement of the “partnership,” for example, between China

48 Concerning the new threat to the Russian Far East, see Rozman et al., 1999, pp. 179-214.

49 *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 18 January 2000.

50 *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 22 July 2000; *Vladivostok*, 12 July 2000.

51 See *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn'*, 8, 1995, pp. 27-36.

52 About China’s new security concept, see text of Zhang Zemin’s speech in Geneva, 26 March 1999 (*People’s Daily Online* (Chinese), 4 July 1998).

53 See Declaration on the establishment of the SCO, Shanghai, 15 June 2001.

and India, which share a 2000-kilometer border.⁵⁴

At the time, China was very cautious of using the term “partnership.” However, it declared its position with the US in 1997 and has already developed the “partnership” network. In particular, China is acquiring confidence in its role in multilateral organizations such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and the WTO. In a sense, the SCO is a kind of symbol of Chinese multilateral diplomacy since 1996 and China hopes to appeal to and widen the SCO, whose name originates from a Chinese city. Sino-Indian relations, which hit rock bottom after India’s atomic bomb test in 1998, are much improved with the recent intensive bilateral contacts, and Russia and China naturally look to the South in developing the security framework of the SCO.

When the “Shanghai Five” planned to upgrade itself to an international organization at the beginning of 2001, the first to apply to join was not Uzbekistan but Pakistan. Pakistan tried to become a member of the SCO as an observer, but Tajikistan immediately and strongly rejected its proposal due to Pakistan’s responsibility for the Taliban, or “Islamic fundamentalism.”⁵⁵ China, an old ally of Pakistan, backed up its position, but Russia wanted to invite India simultaneously with Pakistan.⁵⁶ In the end, all concerned parties of the “Shanghai Five” did not agree to invite any country other than Uzbekistan and finally decided to widen the forum slowly and cautiously.

Their decision was prudent because while hasty enlargement of the SCO might increase the popularity of the organization in the world, it would also bring about more serious contradictions among member states,⁵⁷ such as the irreconcilable relations between India and Pakistan. The India-Pakistan problem is beyond SCO handling. President Putin mediated between President Musharraf and Premier Vajpayee at the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-

54 *Krasnaia zvezda*, 30 April 1996.

55 *RFE/RL NEWSLINE*, 8 January 2001; 25 April 2001.

56 Luzianin, 2001, p. 74. See, Askari, 2001.

57 The St. Petersburg summit in June 2002 reconfirmed the SCO’s future enlargement but did not discuss this issue concretely (*Prime-TASS News Wire*, 7 June 2002).

Building Measures in Asia in Almaty on June 4, just before the SCO summit in St. Petersburg, but failed to set up direct talks between them.⁵⁸ Talks were finally realized by an even looser forum, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, in January 2002.

The SCO has already faced difficulties in keeping the consistency of the organization's effectiveness and enlargement policy such as with Uzbekistan's block of the statement about the US war with Iraq, as mentioned above. Interestingly, Uzbekistan, in turn, does not hope for the quick enlargement of the SCO because its voice might be offset by an incoming big constituent power.⁵⁹

Despite challenges to a realistic review, an enlargement policy is unavoidable for an SCO that would be open for any state hoping to guarantee its mutual security and combat "terrorism." India has not hesitated to join the SCO as an observer and the Kazakh President actively invites it.⁶⁰ Iran and other countries are said to express their interest in the SCO. Russia and China agree in substance that the top candidate for the SCO is Mongolia, and Mongolia has de facto joined an SCO working committee as an observer.⁶¹ The Kazakh President, Nazarbaev, noted that the SCO should work out rules for the admission of new members, including three stages for the integration of new states into the SCO: dialogue partner, observer and fully-fledged member.⁶² The SCO Charter, adopted in 2002, gives details about observer status and cooperation with other states and international organizations.⁶³ The mission of the SCO should be interpreted as a kind of attempt for creating and developing a multilateral "peaceful buffer" in the Eurasian world.

58 Liu et al., 1996, p. 180.

59 *BBC Monitoring*, 28 May 2003.

60 Bakshi, 2001; *Panorama*, 15 February 2002.

61 Interviews with a senior researcher of the Institute of Russia, East Europe and Central Asia CASS, Beijing, 13 May 2002.

62 *BBC Monitoring*, 7 June 2002.

63 See Articles 13 and 14 of the SCO Charter.

Conclusion

Realistically, considering the basic character of and many challenges to the SCO, it is clearly implausible to view the nature of the SCO as “anti-American” and to overestimate the SCO’s presence in regional security. This is a common sense conclusion, but we should reconfirm this thesis and focus on the second stage of the question: what implications does the SCO have for Eurasian security?

We should not ignore one major achievement of the SCO, that it has a weight that almost resolved the most challenging issues between the Former Soviet Union and China: CBM and demarcation in the border areas. Concerning the “terrorist issue,” the SCO is doubtless one of the organizations which could coordinate its activities within the member states, and could assist in – or check against – any action for “eliminating terrorism” by other organizations and states. The SCO has served as and will continue to function as a subsistent organ, even if limited to regional security and stability. This is the second conclusion that we emphasize.

We could look for another dimension of the SCO in post-Cold War Eurasia. The multilateral concept that has formed and developed in the SCO experience for more than ten years should be positioned in a more comprehensive and long-term context of the post-Cold War. It is natural that the open character of the SCO presents a dilemma for the SCO and its future from a realist calculation: the effectiveness of the organization is zero-sum regarding increased prestige by its enlargement if Russia and China cannot jointly dominate others. Even now, the existence of Uzbekistan within the SCO blocks rapid and flexible reaction by the SCO. Russia and China could never control great powers such as India, and then the SCO might become a nominal organization.

Nevertheless, from a metaphorical assessment, we should not underestimate the meaning of the SCO and its role for the future of the Eurasian community. The SCO has a goal of creating a multilateral “partnership” between formerly antagonistic countries of the post-Cold War period. Though many challenges can

be seen, we could draw some lessons from the experience of the border issue: fix the status quo of the disputed border, defuse military tension by developing confidence-building measures, and keep up an unbreakable dialogue and interaction. Such ideas have become widespread; on the eve of the SCO summit in St. Petersburg in 2002, the Conference of Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia was held in Almaty. Sixteen states, including not only India and Pakistan, but also Israel and Palestine, got together with ten observers including the US, Japan and South Korea.⁶⁴ The SCO proposes its own experience for defusing tension between the two Koreas, in India-Pakistan relations, and in the Middle East. The SCO members also support the creation of nuclear arms free zones in Central Asia and emphasize their respect for Mongolia's non-nuclear status. It is only a first trial for the distant goal of creating a Eurasian version of the OSCE, but nowhere can be reached without taking the first small step.

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⁶⁴ See *Times of India*, 5 June 2002.

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