

Politics of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

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ABSTRACT: Established in 2001, the SCO remained one of the slightest acknowledged and analyzed multilateral groups. The analytical aspect of the SCO deals with the issues which matter for its members and the rest of the world. The SCO has developed self-descriptive dynamics and the impact on bordering states that certainly indicates the winning regional initiatives. It has shown the remarkable speed of growth considering its informal precursor in "shanghai five", established in 1996. Today the SCO steers the fascinating aspects and themes of Asian security. It sheds light on Chinese and Russian vision about Central Asia and how the engagement of the U.S in the particular region is happening. The SCO like other contemporary multilateral organizations focuses on direct impact on security and had to choose its interest over widely extended other issues. The SCO has implemented a typically 21st century agenda with shared struggle against non-state perils with the strong significance of security of infrastructure, communication and equilibrium of economic power.

Keywords: SCO, Russia, China, CIS, Regional organization

Introduction:

The choices of SCO reveal the negotiations with other regional organizations, providing for debates on how the modes of cooperation between multilateral organizations cater or cannot cater to the requirements of modern-day multidimensional security. The SCO has marked a fair progress from its beginning to become a relatively important regional player, with the widely held global discussions about its significance. Since its establishment in 2001, the SCO model has unified a normative structure based on the theory of combating three evils. After five years of the formation, it has outlined a new norm of international relations centered on ensuring equal rights for all countries. The new norm, that came in the form of a proposal "*a new global security architecture*"

is based on *Shanghai Spirit*" acknowledging equality, pursuing the common development, mutual trust, respect for multi-civilizations and consultation. The norm is critical to the international community's quest for a new and better position of international relations. According to the SCO's declaration this recent model gives away the cold war mentality and transcends the ideological differences and aspires for the democratization of international relations.

Background of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO):

The SCO's beginning goes back to the long tension between the People's Republic of China and the Former Soviet Union over their shared borders. This shared security regime led to the formation of "shanghai five", the first multilateral bond. Bilateral agreements have normalized the relation among SCO countries. The SCO countries and Uzbekistan further combined their relation by establishing the "shanghai cooperation organization" as an institution, with its charter explaining the objectives.

These arguments can be summarized as an avoidance of conflict; SCO and its forerunner have managed to decrease the risk of open conflict among six participants. The continuation of the SCO as an institution has consolidated and shaped channels for addressing or for reduction in intra-regional state to state tensions through dialogue. The doctrine of non-interference suggests that the military role of the SCO was not liked by its leaders in Afghanistan. The work of the SCO has primarily been to enlarge the activities to combat "new threats" i.e. from separatism, terrorism and extremism to drug trafficking, WMD proliferation and cyber sabotage. The uncertainty prevails about militarized approach to combat these new threats as projected by the SCO members through their anti-terrorist exercises using military forces.

Economic Cooperation:

The SCO's economic agenda is budding more than its security cooperation. The linkage between bilateral economic relations and economic cooperation among its members is also gaining the regional multilateral dimension. Trade ties are getting strong, and generation of funds for investment in development projects like roads and railways is being facilitated. Simple procedures amongst members for banking operations were also set in motion. In 2003, trade connecting the members of the SCO was \$20 billion. But it has grown rapidly in 2006, Chinese-Russian trade alone was \$25 billion and few economists suppose it to reach \$80 billion by 2010. Each year, the economies have grown at more than 6 percent with Kazakhstan and China performing very well.

The SCO has also set up a working group on energy and information and communication technology so that development of joint investment projects can be realized. Economic cooperation has developed gradually within the SCO in 2003; it adopted a program of economic cooperation and trade. The objectives set within this program are to be realized by 2020 and include creating the trade ties which allows free movements of goods, capital, technology and services. Herein, greater emphasis is laid on road and railway as well as communication.

The SCO places equivalent significance on traditional hard power economic security. In 2003, the SCO established a program of economic cooperation and multilateral trade with 120 projects including energy and transportation cooperation. For this, the organization created an organizational structure to link banks and business. The SCO acts as an umbrella under which the member states can work to have deeper economic relations. Economic cooperation is important for the SCO because it ensures concrete benefits to the participants. Economic cooperation ensures a strong foundation for the organization whereby the economic motives of the member states are also created. The trade ties have been exchanged, different trade routes, projects etc have been agreed to be implemented. Such projects will enhance transit, trade and tourism. The economic collaboration among the member states has helped in the gradual growth of the organization. The SCO's members are aware of the importance of economic factors for security. Pragmatic cooperation has reached a new level among the member states, categorized by the following features:

- Firstly, gradually the trade connections among members have enhanced the growth of foreign trade; for instance, the trade between China and Russia and other SCO members has increased by 9.1 percent.
- Secondly, since 2003, the program on economic cooperation and mutual trade of the SCO members has expanded. Direct investments and long-term goals, external support and equity are also growing.
- Thirdly, in the context of the economic zone, it has renewed in the form of economic cooperation followed by Russia and China. In December 2011, Kazakhstan and China recognized the Horgos international border cooperation center, which was the earliest cross border cooperation with the SCO. Even agricultural cooperation demonstration zones will be formed in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.
- Fourthly, in financial sectors, cooperation has been strengthened, playing a significant role

in promoting economic and trade cooperation. For instance, China has signed a currency settlement agreement with Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Russia.

Over the period of the last ten years, economic cooperation has grown among the SCO members. The developments in the field of trade, investment and projects have been significant. The development of mutual trust among the SCO members is noteworthy, the involvement of all the member states and the response of the global players is positive. The movement of goods, capital, technology and services are easier and more frequent. The individual motives of the member states are also being served. The SCO has ensured a platform that is catering to the needs of the states. Economic cooperation has given a new foundation to the organization. However, there is a need to strengthen the connection between communication and transport. A greater number of agreements should be proposed and implemented for protecting investment to provide a basis for assistance and conditions for the "silk road economic zone". As a multi-functional organization, the SCO has covered the different dimensions of cooperation from political level to the economic level. The further strengthening of the economic cooperation will promise the growth of the organization. The performance of the organization in the realm of economic cooperation is remarkable. Gradually it has evolved and has reached levels of great success. The two-way trade between its members has upgraded trade liberalization and infrastructural development. Statistics showed that 10 trillion U.S dollars has been the total output for 2012, while foreign trade accounts for 5 trillion dollars. To lift economic integration, the SCO members will have to work together and with better cooperation.

The SCO and the Russian motive:

Russia and China dominate the organization. The SCO also ensures an institutional base for the corporation of these two regional hegemony and with regard to Central Asian countries the testing of their partnership is done. More particularly, the SCO has varied meanings and purposes for every member. For Russia, the origin of SCO in 2001, marked the beginning of the between Russia and China in financial as well as in strategic forum. Since this event, there has been a continuous marked improvement in the relation between China and Russia. Number of deals and bilateral negotiations have been finalized and executed in the energy field, whereas Chinese banks financed the purchasing of important upstream oil production by a Russian state-owned bank in late 2004. While cooperating with the US during the Anti-Taliban movement in 2002, Russia figured out that SCO was a helpful way to balance association with the USA by deepening ties with Central Asia and China. Kazakh analyst Zakir Chotaev has pointed out that the SCO is a "*structure that*

allowed Moscow to control a limit Beijing's activities in Central Asia". This organization ensures the conditions for the development of multilateral relations, regional securities and coordination of foreign policies of SCO members. Russia considers SCO on par with CSTO, as a vehicle for ensuring safe development of central Asia though the benefits Russia is drawing from the SCO's substantive activities are noteworthy. The SCO helps in staving off the open and interstate tension in Central Asia. The SCO's work of fighting Islamic extremism in the area of Central Asia has gained a lot of attention marked by its successful operations. This organization has ensured a discussion forum on mutual security concerns. The SCO's role in reinforcing the status quo in regional politics in context of Central Asian countries by neutralizing the extremist activities is also appreciated by Russia. Russia appreciates the SCO's positive role in cooperation and harmonization of its energy policies among itself, Uzbekistan, China and Kazakhstan. With the help of SCO mechanism, all border conflicts which China had with other member states including Russia, are settled. Apart from these, the SCO in the capacity of a mediation forum has helped in resolving conflicts over water resources, customs, and borders in Central Asia. The risk of conflict emergence has gone down; though Russia is interested in administering the SCO's potential for combating the trade of drugs and the movement of drugs across Central Asia. The thought of an extended cross regional communication system that would promote exchange of information under the SCOs framework has been appreciated. The organizations' Eurasianist thrust and the code of non-interference are a considerable aspect for Russia and promote new foreign policy assertiveness of an energy superpower.

China's motive:

Throughout the process of gradual evolution from Shanghai to SCO, China has played a vital function as a major force. This positively marks the new stage of Chinese diplomacy with an overview of multilateral interactions. China's strategic goals are derived through the various stages of the organizations' development. The strategic implication of the SCO for China is great. China no longer feels exposed to military threats on its northern and western flanks because through the SCO as a forum, China has maintained peace and security through confidence building measures with regard to border issues. Followed by this process, China also contributes to a good framework for combating terrorism, extremism, and separatism along with cross border crimes. Apart from the security aspect, the SCO ensures economic cooperation; this goal is pursued because it is directly in sync with China's arrangement of developing its western regions chiefly in energy, imports and transport. The SCO promises a favorable neighborhood and peaceful development to China. The

SCO exerts greater influence beyond its own sphere through friendship and cooperation. The process of area security by means of cooperative security and mutual trust are marked by assessing the border dispute settlement between China and Russia. The SCO through its engagement in combating contemporary, non-conventional and conventional security issues leaves China at a better place to play an important role in the global security cooperation.

A new representation of state-to-state relationship is witnessed under the SCO framework. The relationship among Russia, Central Asian countries and China under the SCO framework constitutes interaction on constructive aspects through stopping short of military alliance. This new representation of regional cooperation and state-to-state relationship paves the way for cooperation and reciprocity in the economic sphere. More particularly, the SCO helped Chinese diplomacy to evolve from bilateral relations to multilateral interactions. The 21st century has gradually marked a constructive role in the multilateral era. The success of the SCO is marked through the coordination and consultation between China and Russia.

Central Asian motives:

The nature of the SCO and its growing regional and global role has called for a sufficient focus on Central Asian countries as members of this organization. The role of Central Asian states in SCO can be understood in these contexts:

- To determine how the organization influences regional security and economic development.
- To know the extent to which it has renewed the day today challenges the region.

The broader impact of SCO in the context of Central Asian states is yet to be discussed. One of the intriguing issues is how the national interests of Central Asian states are co-related with the actual agenda of the SCO. It is to be noted that the interaction among large powers i.e. Russia and China with the states of Central Asia within SCO are influenced. The interests of Central Asian states in the organization are secured and they have succeeded in outlining their national interests effectively. The role of the Central Asian states can be seen as important features of balance, both internally as well as externally. From regional interests to region's general international aspect, the Central Asian states are paying attention to the SCO's functions for regional security; trade, anti-terrorism activity, confidence building, combating drug trafficking, transportation, border security, investment projects and networks.

- In terms of geo-political affiliation, Central Asian states are more on the side of Russia.

Russian security evokes no political fear and even Russia's military presence in Central Asia is acceptable unlike Chinese presence in the region. The insight in the region is that Russia is the purveyor of civilization and security protector, while China is a country that harbors territorial claims. China is attentive to these factors and seeks to gradually alter this situation (Zhao 2007). The competition between two powerful actors in the SCO poses a great challenge to its success. Although both these actors have a lot to gain from SCO's potential growth that will ensure future cooperation, this aspect is criticized because "SCO stands as a forum to discuss trade and security issues, including counter terrorism and drug trafficking" (Scheineson 2009) and such issues among member states will give a loose structural foundation to the organization. Definitive strides should be made in the security aspect. Both members are also competing for authority in Central Asia. "For China as much as for the west, Central Asia is a region essentially opened up by the end of the cold war after generations of Soviet seclusion: an intriguing market for both goods and technologies and a source of much needed energy that China can afford to pay for but would like to reserve to itself under long term agreements based on material interdependence" (Bailes et al 2007). Russia seeks to strengthen its relationship with Central Asia to improve their mutual security. For Russia, Central Asia is a close strategic addition to its own homeland. Any difficulty regarding security collapse or anti-Russian development would be an alarming action for Russia.

It is fair to say that the SCO has no objective to counter the U.S or to emerge as an alliance against U.S; rather it will not become the one in near future either. The renewed call by the Russian foreign ministry on July 15 that the foreign troops in Central Asia must leave as the situation in Afghanistan has been stable, should be interpreted as the U.S infringement in Central Asia in the name of anti-terrorism and is a worrisome aspect for the SCO. The U.S is feeling uneasy about SCO's powers in neutralizing its aim to "Americanize" Central Asia. The SCO was established initially to discuss issues over disarmament in border regions, it focused on matters of strengthening mutual trust and embryonic cooperation in the security area and the organization has witnessed the positive results in this field with the joint efforts of the member states. It has resolved China's historical border issues and to a great degree, it has also worked for combating the three evils. It has also safeguarded Central Asia and restored some form of stability in the region to a certain extent. Based on what was achieved in terms of resolution of security issues, the SCO began to deal with economic cooperation. Therefore, on September 23, 2003, the program of multilateral trade and

economic cooperation was signed with the aim of economic cooperation within the organizational framework. The growth of mutual trust among the member states gradually marked the institutionalization process of the SCO. This process manifests the ending of the development period of the SCO with the stage of consolidation.

The expectations of China and Russia from the organization are in terms of domestic issues, and resolution of border security issues. Therefore, SCO has not become a counter weight against the U.S or NATO. China's role in the SCO is directly motivated by its desire to control its vast Central Asian territory. Xinjiang, the autonomous region in north- west China and its independence movement is a serious challenge to Chinese territorial integrity. Thus, China seeks the help of member states and a platform through the SCO to combat the tension across this area and for fighting against separatist movements as well. Yet another motive behind China's involvement is to have amiable relations with Russia that ensures China's northern and western border security. The SCO is used by China to pacify its relations with Russia. Russia needs the SCO to prevent the colour revolution from CIS countries to influence Russian Republics in Asia. Russia's strategic partnership with China and efforts to maintain traditional influence in Central Asia are its prime motivations, which are channelized through the SCO. Both China and Russia have no intentions to control the Central Asian states. The SCO creates a forum for discussion and decision making on the principle of consensus. To avoid any centralized framework, member states have introduced an "authoritative external power" i.e. the rule of the U.N. The SCO adheres to the U.N charter and it facilitates a healthy organizational structure to the SCO. The SCO represents a creative value of diplomatic practice. The concept of "Shanghai spirit" revolves around harmony and diversity and sides with the cold war mentality and power politics. Apparently, the Shanghai spirit that SCO has carried is entirely different from the communist ideological indoctrination that the Warsaw Pact applied.

The SCO will not engage as a uniform powerful entity as the Warsaw Pact. As the two major actors, Russia and China need to resolve their differences and develop mutual trust. With the present status, SCO will be a weak security alliance. Both these powers share the same issues like: how to safeguard security of their vast territory, exploring underdeveloped areas, in continuation with the west to form the new rules for world politics and economy and resolving the issues with other countries which are obstructing their economic growth. CCP leaders comment that to stick to Russia's international status and to ameliorate the pressure from NATO's enlargement to the east, it is glad to cooperate with China, unlike the cooperation between Japan and U.S. The Russian and Chinese partnership is rather a stable regime to establish coordination and to cater to the needs of

the countries, but Chinese leaders are quite busy with the present situation of their relationship with Russia. The two countries try to collaborate more often by adhering to the international institutional status quo and by strengthening the role of the SCO through bilateral arrangements. Both these players take the SCO as an important player in safeguarding regional security and promoting mutual growth of the member states.

Regional cooperation:

The SCO has attained a positive success in its capabilities and potentials to address security issues across the region followed by growing confidence. With regard to minimization of the three evils, the SCO has gained the success. The institutional framework, durability and acceptability by the leaders of the member states have also made the SCO an important tool for security. The SCO model like E.U is not supranational; rather it lays its foundation on intergovernmental cooperation forums. The decision making in the SCO is based on the consensus agreement through discussions among the states. Nonetheless, the informal discussions which led to the informal nature of the organization along with the evolutionary aspect of the organization are prominent in the organization. The SCO is one of the most comprehensive regional consultative structures with a security dimension. Critics argue that SCO is an elite-driven instrument designed to resolve issues and to further channelize the interactions among its member states. But with the formation of the permanent organizational bodies i.e. RATS and the secretariat has contributed to the unbiased and acknowledged functionality of the SCO as a body that will be strengthened (*Guang 2004*) and as a product of these permanent institutions, it "*has embarked on a new option of pragmatic growth*" (*Guang 2005*).

Central Asia shares a highly volatile security landscape and the building of a stable regional framework through the SCO is significant. As one analyst states "*SCO's major achievement to date is its accomplishment in creating a stable institutional foundation regardless of the challenges brought about by the hasty and unexpected changes in the international security environment*" (*Zhao 2006*). The SCO has shaped a regional community and has developed as a normative and value-based organization that enables collaboration. The SCO model is more normative in its nature than the liberal democratic undertakings of the west, and is more in agreement with the "Asian values". This model of the organization encompasses the shared aims of approach and system among members as in the case of western organizations. The SCO has been seen with the lens of skepticism among western analysts because the organization is projected as a combined Russian-Chinese geo-

political medium to oppose the increasing US presence in Central Asian states and in common as an anti-western bloc. This understanding may be explained by a wider presence of multilateral institutions which do not comprise the U.S as Mc Farlane states, in general with regard to Central Asian context, the U.S *“is wary of structures where other powers are preponderant”* (Mac Farlane 2004). The viewpoint that the "SCO chiefly serves as a geopolitical counterbalance to the United States", is also not rare among US analysts of the region (Cohen 2006).

Another aspect on which the SCO is criticized is its design and framework which is considered to be not enough to deal with serious regional cooperation, thus questioning its potential permanence. The cooperation is limited to mutual support because the member states are not liberal democracies. In this context of political structure of the member states, the SCO has been criticized as a *“club of autocrats”* (Wall 2006) for the absence of democratic principles and the record of human rights violation (Tisdall 2006). The evaluation of the organization has also included a review of relations among its members and the disputes that project the SCO as a platform that facilitates only talks. The most usually cited illustration of this is the lack of reaction by the SCO to the important new regional security actions (Blank 2005). Despite these critical evaluations, the SCO has gained an important place in the strategic and volatile region of Central Asia and at a global level as well. The SCO is predominantly focused on its basic principle of addressing the security challenges that are emerging in the region. So far this organization has proved relatively successful and appropriate in a region that remains so affected and sensitive. The basic principle of the SCO includes regional security and whatever challenges are being posed, member states comprehensively deal with them. The charter of the SCO includes reference to "maintenance of peace and ensuring security and confidence in the region" and on various areas of traditional security of international cooperation such as "coordination in the field of disarmament and arms control". The prominence of non-traditional security threats within the region is acknowledged because *“the nature of the security problems in Central Asia is more transnational than interstate”* (Allison 2004). Thus, the SCO is a platform to deal with these issues by ensuring a suitable mechanism for regional security. The SCO sets an example of a new concept of security, based on mutual benefit, cooperation, equality and mutual trust. It also ensures the collaborative approach or commonality among its member states, either about a dispute, threat or the methods to address any threat, the SCO stresses that it is an open organization with no inclination towards any power bloc or with any other dimension of power politics, driven by the interest of any hegemon.

Conclusion

The SCO has made significant progress in establishing its purpose and principles by the means of cooperation among its members. The gradual growth of the organization has been appreciated, the group's focus on non-traditional security threats is appreciated and has earned positive attention but the rate of execution of missions remains low. The SCO is indeed recognized as a prominent regional security organization in Asia but the organization has to make progress in future missions to present a strong image to the international players. The structural framework and their activities are strictly based on the organizational principles. With open regionalism, non-interference, mutual trust and combating three evils- separatism, terrorism, and extremism, the organization has secured its place, by settling down the border disputes and security threats. The organization has verified the flexible nature and its swift development. The security structure of the SCO is working for the disputes settlement and has ensured security cooperation. "Economic, political and security cooperation of the organization have proved helpful to all members in the region and this reason has ensured high elasticity of the existence of the organization" (Zhao 2004). It has worked with appropriate organizational structure by identifying the right areas of cooperation.

Though analysts on the surface level, have often gone to the extent of painting the SCO as an "anti-NATO" but this organization, like any other supranational organizations has its strong and weak points. The organization is in no way anti-NATO, rather it is more of an organization which is engaged with the task of restoring stability, peace and security in the volatile region of Central Asia. The specific motives of the member states are also served with the help of this organization. Interoperability is achieved among its members, armed forces, security services and anti-terrorism deployments. It has made positive records in the field of economic security and energy cooperation. The real uncertainty is whether the SCO might be worn-out by national crises or by policymakers' stiffness on domestic issues or whether a change among the policy makers will be acknowledged. The input-output of the SCO can be seen as affirmative; the considerable fund is restricting the growth of the organization and the rudimentary nature of the SCO's important institutions.

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