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**Who's Afraid of  
the SCO?**

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## **Key Points**

- \* The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) began its existence as the Shanghai Five in 1996. Its sole, original, purpose was to address the border problems between China and the four former Soviet republics facing it.
- \* The SCO member states' main concerns are extremism, terrorism and separatism, followed closely by organised crime, drug trafficking and illegal migration.
- \* The SCO is not aiming at becoming either a military organisation or a closed political club. However, until recently, the SCO was not ready to accept new members.
- \* Its activities now range from economic, trade, transport and health to social and cultural projects.
- \* China is, and will continue to be, the unofficial "senior partner" in the organisation.

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# Who's Afraid of the SCO?

Henry Plater-Zyberk

## Two births of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

The Shanghai five, the SCO's predecessor, began its existence with the first meeting of the heads of state of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan and Tajikistan in Shanghai, on 26 April 1996. China shared long borders with all four Soviet republics (with Russia – 3645 km; with Kazakhstan – 1533km; with Kyrgyzstan – 858 km and with Tajikistan – 414 km). All the borders were heavily fortified, an inheritance from the Sino-Soviet border cold war, and there were still several border readjustments to be agreed on.<sup>1</sup> The Shanghai five signed a Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions, in accordance with which they agreed not to engage in offensive military activities within their border areas, not to conduct military exercises against each other, to limit the scope and frequency of exercises in the border regions, to inform one another about military activities in the one hundred kilometre border belt, to develop friendly relations between the military and border personnel, and to exchange observers during border exercises.<sup>2</sup> The second summit, held in Moscow in April 1997, produced an agreement on the reduction of military forces in the common border areas. During the third Shanghai five summit, held in Almaty in July 1998, the member states agreed to work on peace and stability in the region. The participants of the summit agreed to fight national separatism and religious extremism, terrorism, weapons smuggling and drug trafficking. At the Almaty summit, for the first time, the Shanghai five countries showed an interest in cooperation on non-military issues.<sup>3</sup>

The fourth summit, held in Bishkek in August 1999, discussed the need for the five to develop new mechanisms of cooperation and to hold regular meetings. The fifth and last Shanghai five summit was held in Dushanbe in July 2000. In addition to issuing statements promoting peace and stability in the region, the five countries decided to broaden and deepen their military, security and other links. They supported the Russian position on Chechnya and China's right to reunification with Taiwan. They also expressed their concern about the situation in Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup>

The Shanghai five worked well within the original imprecisely defined limits. At the Dushanbe summit the Shanghai five decided to transform the organisation to address the "challenges and threats more effectively".<sup>5</sup>

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) was founded on 15 June 2001, the day before admitting a new member, Uzbekistan, to what legally was still the Shanghai five.<sup>6</sup> This was the second, elaborate, birth of the organisation.

China's economic growth and corresponding prestige made it a natural leader of the new organisation. Russia, under Vladimir Putin's leadership, was looking for new policies and alliances. The four Central Asian members of the SCO saw the two regional super-powers and economic locomotives as natural allies. Both countries knew the Central Asian states and were ready, unequivocally, to accept their

individual political paths without having the urge to lecture them on how to run their countries.

## **The SCO Structure**

The working languages of the SCO are Russian and Chinese. The SCO has two principal pillars: the permanent organs and the meeting mechanism.

1. Council of Heads of State, the main strategic organ of the organisation, meets once a year to discuss all topics interesting the member states and decides the budget of the SCO.
2. Council of Heads of Government adopts the SCO budget and coordinates mainly economic issues. Regular sessions of the Council are held once a year.
3. Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs meets one month before the annual meeting of the Heads of States.
4. Council of Ministers and Heads of Agencies coordinates specific issues in specific areas ranging from military to cultural.
5. Council of National Coordinators meets at least three times a year to manage and coordinate the tasks set by the SCO's decisionmaking councils. Its chairman is the National Coordinator of the host country in charge of the meeting of the Council of Heads of State. The Council coordinates the "temporary" meeting mechanism of nine main subjects, as instructed by the Councils of Heads of State and Government. These are the meetings of:
  - The heads of the border control organs
  - The general prosecutors
  - The law enforcement bodies
  - The ministers of foreign affairs
  - The ministers of defence
  - The ministers of economic affairs
  - The ministers of transport
  - The ministers of culture
  - The ministers of emergencies.
6. The Secretariat is one of the two permanent bodies of the SCO. Based in Beijing, the secretariat was launched on 15 January 2004. It is headed by the Executive Secretary (later the Secretary General) appointed by the Council of Heads of State. The secretary serves a non-consecutive three-year term. The first Executive Secretary was Mr. Zhang Deguang, a Russian linguist, who once served as the Chinese Ambassador to Moscow.<sup>7</sup> The Secretary General has three Deputy Secretaries. The three deputies are responsible for: political groups, including anti-terrorist and defence activities; the economic group; and the administrative and legal group. There is also an Assistant to the Secretary General dealing with the media, SCO newsletters and translations. The number of positions allocated to each country correspond to their financial contributions to the SCO's budget. The new Secretary General of the SCO Bolat Nurgaliev, who took over in January 2007, came to Beijing from Tokyo where he served as the Kazakh Ambassador. He also represented Kazakhstan in the USA and South Korea. As a Soviet diplomat he served in Pakistan and India.
7. The Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) is the other permanent body of the SCO. RATS was formally launched on 17 June 2004 in Tashkent.<sup>8</sup> It is run by its own Council and Executive Committee. The Council, the principal decisionmaking organ of RATS, probably consists of officials from the SCO organisations combating terrorism in the member states. RATS coordinates

the SCO's anti-terrorist struggle and processes information provided by the member states. The Tashkent office started its activities with 30 officials, including seven from China, seven from Russia and the remaining 16 from the other four member states. The Director of the Executive Committee is appointed by the Council of Heads of State. The first head of the RATS executive committee is an Uzbek, Vyacheslav T Kasymov. Russia and China pay 25% of the costs of RATS. Its data bank at its inception in mid June 2004 held information on about 600 wanted individuals and 30 terrorist organisations.<sup>9</sup>

The political culture of the SCO member states and discreet nature of RATS' activities make that organisation opaque. Most of the economic and cultural activities of the SCO will become more transparent, especially if the organisation decides to be more active on the world's stage. The security and defence activities will remain closely guarded secrets.

### **Fighting terrorism?**

The SCO sees terrorism as its main security concern. China is willing to admit, reluctantly, that the East Turkestan Islamic Movement aiming at establishing an independent Islamic state in the Chinese province of Xinjiang is becoming a major security challenge. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan experienced serious problems with radical Islamic organisations and all SCO six states know that radical Islam tends to "export" itself across borders. Russia has no major terrorist problems in the Far East and will cooperate with its neighbours to keep it that way.

The SCO heads of government met two days after 9/11 in Almaty. The meeting, planned well in advance, was to discuss economic cooperation but its final statement supported an uncompromising struggle with terrorism.<sup>10</sup> On 23 May 2002, a month before the SCO states signed the SCO charter in Astana, at the regular meeting of the heads of law-enforcement and security organisations of the SCO, member states signed the decision on drafting an agreement on establishing a Regional Antiterrorist Structure.<sup>11</sup> The meeting recommended that the work on documents which would create the new structure should be speeded up.<sup>12</sup>

Russia and Kyrgyzstan argued that the new antiterrorist centre should be based in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), where the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) anti-terrorist HQ was already located. And so, on 7 January 2002, at the extraordinary meeting of foreign ministers of the SCO in Beijing, it was decided that the antiterrorist centre of the organisation would be located in Bishkek.<sup>13</sup> Uzbekistan, one of the founders of the original CSTO, had left it in 1999 (it rejoined only in 2006), and had complained about the Russo-centric nature of the organisation and announced that it wanted to have the RATS HQ in Tashkent. Supported by China, the Uzbeks won the bid. Prime Ministers of the SCO member states on 23 September 2003 signed six documents including the agreement on the anti-terrorism centre in Tashkent.<sup>14</sup> That did not stop the first head of the RATS Executive Committee, Uzbek V.T. Kasymov, from criticising the CSTO at a conference in Beijing in summer 2004. His speech raised many eyebrows in both organisations.<sup>15</sup>

The Council of National Coordinators of the SCO met in Tashkent in October 2003 and decided the structure of the RATS and the composition of its Executive Committee (EC). Three days later the Council of the RATS elected Kasymov, the

deputy head of the Uzbek security service, as Director of the EC.<sup>16</sup> The SCO also accepted the suggestion of the Uzbek delegation for regular meetings of National Security Council Secretaries.<sup>17</sup>

RATS was launched in June 2004 in Tashkent and its work began in December 2004.<sup>18</sup> Preparing for the worst, the SCO member states began to conduct bilateral and multilateral exercises even before the charter of the organisation was ready. At the beginning of October 2002, China and Kyrgyzstan had held a joint antiterrorist exercise, within the framework of the SCO, in the Chinese-Kyrgyz border area.<sup>19</sup> The first SCO anti-terrorist exercise was held in August 2003. China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan took part in this “Cooperation-2003” exercise. The exercise started in the Kazakh border city of Ucharal and then moved to China. One thousand soldiers from all five countries took part.<sup>20</sup>

The first large SCO Russo-Chinese military exercise took place in August 2005. Called The Peace Mission, the exercise was described by officials in both countries as successful. It was dominated by the Chinese, who provided about 10,000 troops. The Russian contingent consisted of 1,800 soldiers.<sup>21</sup> The Russians were concerned when the Chinese restricted the movement of some of their subunits.<sup>22</sup> Col Gen Vladimir Moltenskoy, commanding the Russian group, said that he would recommend further joint exercises within the SCO framework. An unnamed senior Russian military official said the exercise cost was “considerably greater” than the \$5m reported by the Russian media.<sup>23</sup>

The preparations for this year’s exercise, Peace Mission 2007, are well advanced. It is scheduled for July 18-25, in the Chelyabinsk region. Col Gen Moltenskoy, Deputy Commander of the Russian Ground Forces, flew to China in January 2007 for the second round of consultations in preparation for the exercise.<sup>24</sup> The Russian Chief of the General Staff Gen Yuriy Baluyevskiy was expected for further consultations in Beijing at the beginning of March and the new Russian Defence Minister, Serdyukov, is to visit China in April. At first, Peace Mission 2007 was supposed to involve battalions from Russia and China (400-450 troops each), companies from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan (100 troops each), and a Kyrgyz platoon. Beijing, however, asked to increase the number of the troops involved to 2,000 and Moscow agreed.<sup>25</sup>

China and Kazakhstan organised the antiterrorist exercise Tien-Shan-2006 in August 2006, involving border guards from both countries.<sup>26</sup>

### **No military ambitions**

The three evils facing the SCO are officially separatism, extremism and terrorism.<sup>27</sup> The other threats which the Shanghai six treat with increasing seriousness are: drug trafficking, organised crime, energy security and epidemic security.

Terrorism was and remains the main security challenge to all member states. Any terrorist problems in the member states are expected to be dealt with by the local security structures supported by specially assigned armed forces units. The legal and functional position of security structures in each of the SCO states differs and originally, in the post-border arrangement negotiations, it was easier to talk about security arrangements through ministries of defence, although their role at the present time would be limited mainly to physical suppression of large terrorist groups, signals intelligence and transport of necessary hardware and personnel.<sup>28</sup>

The SCO has no plans to become a military bloc. Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov said in June 2005 that the SCO had no intention of setting up a military alliance. Neither did the organisation plan to form a rapid deployment force.<sup>29</sup> Zhang Deguang, SCO Secretary General, said at a news conference in Moscow on 27 October 2005 that the SCO does not plan to turn into a military organisation or even a close political alliance.<sup>30</sup> Both declarations were reinforced by the Chinese Defence Ministry statement, issued during a 10 day military forum taking place in China in November 2005, that the SCO does not threaten any country or organisation. The Chinese were hosting 30 military officers and observers from the SCO member states.<sup>31</sup>

Even if the Shanghai six decide to set up a military alliance, it would be practically impossible to make it work, at least at this stage. Unhappy as they are with the unipolar world, Beijing and Moscow do not see the USA as an immediate threat. To organise the SCO as a viable military bloc would require:

- Political will. None of the current members sees the need for such an alliance.
- Long term planning and coordination, requiring from the SCO member states commitment and trust. The SCO members see the need for cooperation but the trust is limited and the interests of each member state differ.
- A long-term, prohibitively expensive and well coordinated rearmament programme. The Shanghai six do not see the need for this and long-term coordination could not be achieved in the absence of a real threat of a military nature. All the SCO leaders remember the economic price paid by their countries for the arms race during the Cold War. Driven by ideology and able to keep the majority of their populations in blissful ignorance, communist leaders were able to subordinate their countries' economies to their Cold War effort. Neither the SCO nor any of its members are driven by ideology. They are more interested in becoming economically powerful.

### **China, the SCO's senior partner**

Most the SCO's initiatives have been driven by China, although the rapid price increases of fossil fuels and Vladimir Putin's coherent leadership make Russia an attractive, if occasionally awkward partner. Only during the third Shanghai five meeting, in Almaty in July 1998, did the Chinese delegation for the first time not sit opposite the other four members at the conference table.<sup>32</sup> With its economic boom, China was able to offer economic cooperation and goods which Russia could not match. On the other hand, Russia has oil and gas and its position in Central Asia is very strong. In many respects, Russia has never left China's new Central Asian partners. Practically all Central Asia's leaders and top administrators were educated in the USSR, in Russian. The political, economic, security and even social links with Moscow have been very strong, although now they are often downplayed by those concerned.

China's advantage is its dynamic economy and foreign aid policy. China provides its Central Asian neighbours with numerous forms of assistance. In 2005, China allocated special funds for the training of 1500 people from the SCO countries<sup>33</sup> and \$900m in export credits at 2% interest for the member states of the SCO. The credit can be paid back within 20 years.<sup>34</sup>

Russia has favoured a joint external assistance budget of the Shanghai six. Premier Fradkov declared in October 2005 that the member states should contribute equally to assistance projects and the SCO should set up a special development fund for them.<sup>35</sup>

Moscow does not seem to mind playing second fiddle in the SCO. It is in its interest to keep Central Asia stable and free of extremists. In this respect, China's initiatives are very helpful, even if in some circles in Russia there is a high degree of apprehension about the Chinese long-term strategic plans, and Chinese economic and ethnic expansion into Russia and Central Asia, despite the Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation signed by the two countries in July 2001.<sup>36</sup> Moscow is aware that a religiously motivated successful Uighur independence movement could have a devastating domino effect in Central Asia and would probably destabilise parts of the Russian Far East. Russia will therefore continue to supporting the Chinese as they strengthen their control of Xinjiang. Moscow probably would not mind if China retook Taiwan as long as it was done peacefully. However, Russia would not want to become involved in any military conflict, especially one which would involve the USA on the opposite side.

### **Enlarging the SCO**

Mongolia, bordering only Russia and China, received observer status in the SCO in 2004. India, Iran and Pakistan became observers at the SCO meeting of the Heads of States on 5 July 2005. The US application to join the SCO as an observer in 2005 was rejected.<sup>37</sup> The four observer states attended an SCO high-level meeting for the first time in October 2005, when the heads of the SCO governments met in Moscow.<sup>38</sup>

Article 13 of the SCO charter makes membership open to other regional states.<sup>39</sup> Until quite recently however, the six members of the club argued that, having accepted four countries with observer status, the SCO was not ready for new members. In January 2004, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov emphasised the need for the SCO to stand on its own feet before the organisation was ready to accept new countries.<sup>40</sup> This position was reaffirmed by the Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Li Hui in June 2004.<sup>41</sup> In October 2005, SCO Executive Secretary Zhang Deguang said that the organisation would not accept new members for the time being, mainly, as he explained, because of the lack of "relevant legal basis".<sup>42</sup>

In May 2006, however, Zhang Deguang said that the SCO is not a closed political or military bloc.<sup>43</sup> At the SCO Summit in Shanghai in June 2006, the organisation announced it was ready to accept new members. Kazakh President Nazarbayev said that the summit discussed the procedures for accepting new members and observers, and Zhang Deguang implied that the SCO might soon expand but then added that legal procedures would need to be finalised.<sup>44</sup>

The front row candidates for SCO membership are, at the moment, the observer states. The future membership of Mongolia would be logical as it would bring no risks or tensions, either within the SCO or in the region, although Ulan Bator does not need the security support of the SCO – it would get help in any case from both Russia and China if any radical movements decided to target it – and it may not be ready to pay the unavoidably growing membership fees.

The Kashmir conflict between India and Pakistan would make their membership of the SCO potentially embarrassing and divisive, considering the historically close



alliances between Moscow and New Delhi and between Beijing and Islamabad. It would be a major victory if the SCO succeeded in patching up the differences between New Delhi and Islamabad but there is very little room for compromise, and the SCO may not want to risk becoming involved in mediation. However, their joint participation in the SCO can be seen as a long-term confidence building success.

Indian and Russian military contacts have been particularly close during the last few decades. New Delhi has been one of the most important buyers of the Russian military hardware and both countries held a joint anti-terrorist exercise, INDRA 2005, in October 2005. The next joint exercise, INDRA 2007, has been planned for April 2007.<sup>45</sup> China has maintained close and friendly contacts with Pakistan as a counterbalancing act in the region. The Chinese and Pakistani armed forces held a joint counter-terrorist exercise "Friendship-2004" at the beginning of August 2004, in Xinjiang's Taxkorgan Tajik Autonomous County. In July 2004, during a visit to China, Pakistan's Interior Minister Sayed Faisal Sayed Hayat held talks with China's Public Security Minister Zhou Yongkang on combating terrorism. The two countries agreed to set up a telephone hotline between the two ministries.<sup>46</sup> China offered to set up a DNA test laboratory, a scientific police test centre in Pakistan and supply it with necessary equipment to strengthen its security capabilities.<sup>47</sup>

Accepting Iran as a full member would be problematic and would potentially damage the SCO's international credibility. Premier Ahmadinejad's public calls to wipe out Israel clash with the SCO's anti-extremist agenda and its very vocal support of the UN. The SCO would also have to consider whether it is worth alienating the USA and several European countries for relatively minor economic gains. Iran would expect the SCO to offer it some protection from economic sanctions – were such sanctions to be imposed – and political pressure from the US and Europe.

The SCO may want to invite less controversial countries like Vietnam, which was particularly vocal in welcoming the establishment of the SCO,<sup>48</sup> or Turkmenistan if Ashkhabad decides to abandon its self-imposed isolationism and readjusts its non-aligned foreign policy.

### **The SCO and other organisations**

At the July 2004 meeting of Heads of State in Tashkent, the participants accepted the need to establish and expand the organisation's contacts with other international organisations and states around the world.<sup>49</sup> President Putin sees the SCO as a "transcontinental bridge naturally connecting Asia and Europe",<sup>50</sup> a view which may not necessarily be supported by other leaders, who find the European obsession with their own view of legality an impediment to cooperation. Preoccupied more with the responsibilities of ethnic minorities rather than their rights the SCO member states are less sensitive to collateral damage inflicted in anti-terrorist operations than Western countries. This determination sometimes replaces efficiency in an attempt to suppress not always armed radicals, but is often very effective, and may be attractive to potential SCO candidate members.

Terrorism with a global reach is the threat which makes the SCO potentially an attractive partner to every country and organisation fighting it. Established in 1992, the CSTO which includes Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan<sup>51</sup> could be the SCO's closest partner. The CSTO is dominated and to a large extent funded by Russia. Moscow is keen to build it up

into a powerful military organisation. The CSTO is permitted to use military force to protect its members when terrorist acts take place on their territories and the head of state of a threatened country appeals to it for military assistance.<sup>52</sup> The SCO members, on the other hand, do not seem to be convinced that the present situation in the region warrants a military build up and the corresponding financial expenditure, when most antiterrorist related operations can be solved within the SCO framework or on a bilateral level. In November 2006, Armenia, one of Russia's closest allies, proposed strengthening the cooperation between the CSTO and the SCO. Armenia has been particularly interested in addressing the problems of illegal migration.<sup>53</sup>

In April 2005, the SCO, ASEAN and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) signed a memorandum of understanding on conducting counter-terrorism operations.<sup>54</sup> Representatives of the SCO Secretariat and the CIS Executive Committee also met in Minsk on 7 September 2006.<sup>55</sup> The SCO and NATO, to which the Shanghai six has been compared by some political commentators, have so far made no attempt to establish official links. The SCO can pick and choose its partners.

### **The SCO and Afghanistan**

The SCO member states bordering Afghanistan learned to live with their Taliban neighbours, albeit reluctantly, and periodically experienced some difficulties with Islamic radicals and drug dealers penetrating their borders. In the joint statement by the ministers of foreign affairs issued in Beijing on 7 January 2002, the SCO welcomed the defeat of the Taliban and called for a UN-led effort to stabilise Afghanistan to make it "a peaceful and neutral state".<sup>56</sup> The defeat of the Taliban reduced the threat of armed Islamic extremist movements in Central Asia but the explosion of drug production in Afghanistan and the corresponding drug trade has become an increasing problem for the SCO states. None of the Shanghai six looks at the ISAF battle in Afghanistan with particular enthusiasm, and there are serious worries that some of the US bases will stay in the region after the official announcement of the victory followed by an official pull-out takes place.

President Karzai attended the SCO Tashkent Summit in June 2004 which officially launched the Regional Anti Terrorist Structure, but was not offered observer status in the organisation.<sup>57</sup> On 4 November 2005, the SCO and Afghanistan established in Beijing the "SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group" which rather vaguely describes its role as "elaborating proposals and recommendations on realisation of cooperation between the SCO and Afghanistan on issues of mutual interest".<sup>58</sup> The group's main, originally undeclared aim was to establish an anti-narcotic belt around Afghanistan.<sup>59</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Without taking its eyes off the security agenda the organisation will probably seek closer economic integration. The different political aims of the SCO's two main pillars, Russia and China, practically exclude the possibility that the organisation could become a new military alliance with an effective global ambition and reach. The past struggles between the leaders of the two countries to dominate the communist camp left a residue of distrust at the highest level in both capitals. Even the profitable export of Russian military hardware to China is seen in some circles in Moscow as a short-term gain and a potential threat when, with the help of

reverse engineering, China begins to produce its own improved versions. There are also concerns in Moscow about allegedly coordinated Chinese migration to the Russian Far East, especially worrisome as the local population begins to decline.<sup>60</sup>

The principal challenges binding the SCO members are:

- Combating terrorism - usually fighting under the banner of a radical misinterpretation of Islam - linked to the other two official SCO targets, extremism and separatism,
- The economic development of the region.

Terrorism, the primary target of the SCO, does not require large, well synchronised formations, overwhelming firepower or strategic bombers or missiles. The fight against terrorism will stay at the top of the SCO agenda, guaranteeing the close collaboration of the member states. The transnational ambitions of radical Islamic groups make SCO members vigilant and assure a continuous high degree of cooperation within the organisation. This is why RATS rather than the SCO's military cooperation is likely to develop most successfully. The cooperation within the present organisation and the expansion of RATS' intelligence collection, processing and dissemination capabilities will be determined by the threat perception of the heads of state, not the parliaments or the local media. The SCO is a club of like-minded heads of state and the organisation will function as long as they are like minded.

Bordering four out of five SCO members and facing growing problems in Xinjiang province, China will be the main driving force of the SCO's antiterrorist programme.<sup>61</sup> Moscow would like to strengthen the CSTO, which it dominates completely and to which four members of the SCO (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) already belong. For Moscow the SCO is simply one of many important organisations to which Russia belongs. Its commitment to the SCO will depend on the regional terrorist threat and the interest in greater economic cooperation within the region.

Structural changes and the growing scope of interests of the SCO will inevitably lead to demands for more money from the member states. The debate inside the organisation appears now to be concentrating on future plans and the budget. The budgetary planning of the SCO is a victim of its success and its development in all directions. The SCO member states have independent foreign policy interests. They are content to issue joint statements condemning, supporting, demanding or suggesting, but this does not mean that they are ready, at this stage, to undertake any joint foreign policy initiatives or military operations. The SCO call, in July 2005, for the USA to determine the deadline for withdrawal of its military bases from Central Asia was an example of such a gesture.<sup>62</sup> There is no evidence that the US departure from the Karshi-Khanabad air base in Uzbekistan was the result of SCO pressure on President Karimov.<sup>63</sup> The reverse is more likely to be true: the US was given its marching orders when it confused its role as an ally with that of an arrogant and vocal teacher. This was purely an Uzbek-US affair.

The SCO's economic and cultural programmes are developing independently and no less dynamically. The Framework Agreement aiming at enhancing economic cooperation signed by the SCO states on 23 September 2003 was a starting point for planned and controlled cooperation. Beijing is likely to seek to make one of the long-term objectives of the SCO the creation of a free-trade area. The economic, cultural and other related programmes may gradually take over the SCO agenda,

especially if Russia decides to concentrate its security efforts and funding on the CSTO.

One subject absent from the official statements of the SCO agenda has been the issue of energy security. Eleven years after the first meeting in Shanghai its members still prefer to address the issues of energy security discreetly on a bilateral level.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Kazakhstan and China settled their border disputes in 1998, after five years of talks. China and Tajikistan agreed to speed up the bilateral border talks in July 2000 but the demarcation of the disputed parts of the border began only in 2006. The demarcation process is expected to be completed in 2008. China signed with Kyrgyzstan two border agreements, in 1996 and 1999. The latter agreement was signed in spite of protestations by some Kyrgyz parliamentarians. Russia and China solved all their border disputes in June 2005.
- <sup>2</sup> Renmin Ribao, 27 April 1996, p1; quoted in The Success of the Shanghai Five: Interests, Norms and Pragmatism by Qingguo Jia, [www.comw.org/cmp/fulltext/0110jia.htm](http://www.comw.org/cmp/fulltext/0110jia.htm)
- <sup>3</sup> [www.comw.org/cmp/fulltext/0110jia.htm](http://www.comw.org/cmp/fulltext/0110jia.htm)
- <sup>4</sup> [www.comw.org/cmp/fulltext/0110jia.htm](http://www.comw.org/cmp/fulltext/0110jia.htm)
- <sup>5</sup> People Daily 15 June 2001.
- <sup>6</sup> The announcement about the creation of the SCO was made on 15 June 2001. According to many sources the actual decision was made on 14 June. However the official birthday of the SCO is on 15 June. <http://www.sectSCO.org>
- <sup>7</sup> [www.sectSCO.org](http://www.sectSCO.org)
- <sup>8</sup> RIA, in Russian, 15 January 2004.
- <sup>9</sup> <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/topics/sco/t57970.htm> , [www.sectSCO.org/html/00096.html](http://www.sectSCO.org/html/00096.html) [www.sectSCO.org/html/00035.html](http://www.sectSCO.org/html/00035.html) RIA, 15 January 2004, Xinhua, in English, 15 January 2004; Tai Yang Pao website, Honk Kong, in Chinese, 22 June 2004, BBC MS.
- <sup>10</sup> <http://www.sectSCO.org/html/00030.html>
- <sup>11</sup> The SCO Charter was signed on 7 June 2002 in St Petersburg and came into force on 19 September 2003. The charter's ten principal goals include combating terrorism, separatism and extremism, illicit arms and drugs trafficking as well as illegal migration. The charter encourages "efficient regional cooperation" in more than 12 specific areas including defence and law enforcement bodies. <http://www.sectSCO.org> ; [www.sectSCO.org/html/00096.html](http://www.sectSCO.org/html/00096.html)
- <sup>12</sup> <http://www.sectSCO.org/html/00030.html>
- <sup>13</sup> Xinhua, 7 January 2002, BBC MS; <http://www.sectSCO.org/html/00030.html> Article 10 of the SCO charter points out that originally the founders planned to place the Regional Antiterrorist Structure in Bishkek. [www.sectSCO.org/html/00096.html](http://www.sectSCO.org/html/00096.html)
- <sup>14</sup> Xinhua, in English, 23 September 2003.
- <sup>15</sup> Novoye Pokoleniye, in Russian, 3 September 2004, p9, BBC MS.
- <sup>16</sup> <http://www.sectSCO.org/html/00030.html>
- <sup>17</sup> <http://www.sectSCO.org> , 17 July 2004.
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