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The Shanghai Cooperation Organization’s Role in Countering Threats and Challenges to Central Asian Regional Security

In its decade of existence, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has become a significant regional player promoting military, political, economic, and security cooperation in Central Asia. It has the potential to grow into an institution representing most of Eurasia, including Russia and China.

Central Asia is a place where the strategic interests of the world powers intersect. External factors sustain political, military, and to a large extent economic stability in the region. Russia, the West, and China act as the main outside stabilizers. World and regional powers actively defend their military-political and economic interests in Central Asia.

Since its first days as an independent republic, Kazakhstan has spoken out in favor of additional security guarantees encompassing both the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as a whole and Central Asia in particular. It is no accident that Kazakhstan has put forward a whole series of initiatives in the realm of security. Under conditions of globalization, the regional level of security is becoming increasingly


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important. This result makes it necessary to strengthen cooperation among the countries of the region. If the region proves incapable of conducting a coordinated policy in relation to the outside world, it risks losing the significant position that it has acquired in recent years in the world geopolitical and geoeconomic system.

Security cooperation in the region takes place within the framework of certain multilateral institutions, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

**Interaction Within the Shanghai Five**

The prototype of the SCO—the mechanism of the Shanghai Five—initially developed on the basis of military force reductions and confidence-building measures in China’s border regions with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

As is well known, the heads of state of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan adopted the idea of establishing a forum of the Shanghai Five in April 1996, during a meeting in Shanghai. In essence, the origins of this process reach back to February 1964, when negotiations on border issues began between China and the Soviet Union.

Unfortunately, for many reasons these negotiations did not progress for twenty years. Sino-Soviet relations began to relax only in the second half of the 1980s, with Mikhail Gorbachev’s advent to power.

In May 1989, during Gorbachev’s official visit to China, the two parties initialed the Agreement Between the USSR and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) Concerning the Eastern Section of the Sino-Soviet State Border. At the same time, the parties agreed to minimize their military presence inside a 100-kilometer zone adjacent to the Sino-Soviet border to a level corresponding to normal neighborly relations between the countries and to facilitate people’s peaceful economic activity in the border zone.

In November 1989, the Chinese and Soviet sides entered into negotiations with a view to implementing this agreement. This event may be considered the official inauguration of the Shanghai Five process, because the questions of reducing the number of border troops and strengthening military confidence-building measures, then on the agenda, were the first items on the agenda of a new organization—the Shanghai Five forum.

The interaction among the Shanghai Five grew directly out of each country’s domestic development, as well as the situation in the region and in the world as a whole.
The main features of domestic policy since the end of the cold war and the collapse of the Soviet Union have been the consolidation of independent statehood in Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan and China's prioritization of economic construction.

All five countries faced the need to tackle difficult tasks associated with the goals of reviving their economies, attaining the contemporary world level in science and technology, and withstanding the challenges of economic globalization. For each of the five countries, national revival depended on ensuring a stable and peaceful outside environment and multilateral cooperation with neighboring states.

Big changes were underway in the international and regional arenas. The climate favored peace and development. The next item on the agenda was the question of strengthening ties among neighbors, mutual trust, friendship, and cooperation among the five neighboring countries—China, Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

The main factor pushing these countries toward closer ties was the threat to the security of their borders emanating from the chief source of instability in Central Asia—Afghanistan, where a civil war had broken out between the Northern Coalition and the Taliban.

The Shanghai Forum has passed through three stages in its development.

The first stage lasted from November 1989 to December 1991. In this period, the Soviet Union was collapsing, and bilateral Sino-Soviet negotiations were being conducted. Negotiations between China and the Soviet Union on the mutual reduction of armed forces in the border zone and the strengthening of military confidence-building measures began in November 1989. The negotiations progressed rapidly, and on 24 April 1990, the parties signed the Agreement Between the Government of the USSR and the Government of the PRC Concerning Guiding Principles for Mutual Reduction of Armed Forces and Strengthening of Trust in the Military Field in the Area of the Sino-Soviet Border.

The second stage lasted from December 1991 to April 1997. This stage involved bilateral negotiations among five countries, in which China negotiated with a group representing Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991, these countries formed a joint delegation to continue negotiations with China on border issues and on reducing troop numbers in border areas and strengthening military confidence-building measures.

As is well known, the Agreement Concerning Strengthening of Trust
in the Military Field in the Border Area was concluded at the Shanghai meeting of the heads of state of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan on 26 April 1996.\(^2\) The agreement is the first document concluded at this military-political level and geographical scale in the Asia-Pacific Region.

According to the agreement, armed forces deployed by the parties in the border zone are not to attack one another or conduct military exercises directed against another party—that is, with another party assigned the role of potential adversary. The number, scale, and bounds of exercises were also restricted.

The parties undertook to inform one another of important military measures conducted within the 100-kilometer border zone, to invite observers from the other party to their exercises, to provide warning of dangerous military operations, and to strengthen friendly contacts among troops deployed in the border zone and among border guards.

At the Shanghai summit, the five countries' leaders decided not only to sign the agreement strengthening military confidence-building measures but also to conduct annual meetings of the Shanghai Five. This meeting thus showed not only that a mechanism for regular meetings had been created, but also that it had begun to function. The annual meetings came to be called the Shanghai Five forum.

In Moscow in 1997, the countries' leaders signed the Agreement Among Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan Concerning the Mutual Reduction of Armed Forces in the Border Area.\(^3\)

In compliance with this agreement, the two sides reduced their military presence in the border area to a level corresponding to neighborly relations between them.

In practice, this meant that armed forces deployed in the border zone were to perform only defensive functions:

— the parties renounced the use of armed force or the threat of its use against one another;
— the parties stopped striving for a one-sided military advantage;
— troop contingents deployed in the border zone were not to attack one another;
— it was decided to reduce and limit the size and main weapons types of ground, air, anti-air defense, and border troops deployed inside a 100-kilometer zone on both sides of the border;
— it was decided to establish maximum permissible limits for the numbers of personnel and armaments remaining after reductions;
—methods and timetables for reducing armed forces were to be determined; and
— the parties were to exchange data on their armed forces in the border zone and monitor the implementation of the agreement.

The agreement stipulated that along the 7,000-kilometer line of the shared border, the total number of ground, air, and anti-air defense troops deployed by each of the parties on its own territory to a depth of 100 kilometers must not exceed 130,400. The agreement also stipulated that the parties must regularly exchange military information concerning the border zone.

These agreements marked an important historical stage, setting in motion the mechanism known as the Shanghai Five. The annual meetings assumed a regular form, and each of the five countries in succession hosts the meetings.

The signing of these two agreements resulted from the consistent development of relations of neighborliness, mutual trust, and mutually advantageous cooperation among the five countries. These agreements have already played and will continue to play a positive role in relations among the five countries, both in the sphere of regional security and in that of international relations in general.

But the parties did not confine themselves to this area of five-way cooperation. They unanimously resolved to continue their interaction, extending it both to economic cooperation and to joint action against organized crime, international terrorism, drug trafficking, and other types of extremism.

The third stage began in April 1997. Multilateral negotiations among five equal participating countries—China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan—distinguish this stage. Once the negotiations on strengthening military confidence-building measures and reducing armed forces ended in success, the initial bilateral format of the negotiations gave way to a five-way format.

The content of the negotiations was expanded to encompass a broad exchange of opinions on political, economic, diplomatic, military, and security issues as well as military problems pertaining to the border zones of the five countries. During the negotiations, the positions of the parties moved toward agreement, the parties expressed support for one another, and real cooperation among them developed.

Subsequently, joint work at summits in Almaty (1998), Bishkek (1999), and Dushanbe (2000) generated an atmosphere of mutual trust
that came to be known as the "Shanghai spirit." Initial consultations led to a mechanism for achieving consensus and to voluntary compliance with the provisions of agreements reached. The agenda gradually expanded to cover such areas as foreign policy, the economy, culture, and environmental protection, including the use of water resources. All this culminated in a need to formalize the system of summits and consultations as a new regional association.

The three summits and the three statements adopted at them reflected the shared views of the five countries regarding the most important problems of contemporary international relations. They also expressed the group's resolve to strengthen regional security and promote economic cooperation. These three summits led to two important changes in the mechanism of interaction within the Shanghai Five:

—a transition from the initial format "five countries—two negotiating parties" to the new format "five countries—five sovereign negotiating parties"; and

—a transformation of the forums of the Five from a mechanism for meetings devoted solely to problems associated with military confidence-building measures and the reduction of armed forces in the border zone to a mechanism for establishing cooperation among the five participating countries in the political, diplomatic, military, security, economic, and other spheres.

Political interactions within the Shanghai Five have continued to develop in conformity with the requirements of the present day.

The five countries have faced the following tasks:

1. coordination of their positions on international problems, mutual support, and close cooperation;

2. consolidated action against three dangerous tendencies that pose a serious threat to regional security, stability, and development—ethnonational separatism, religious extremism, and international terrorism;

3. development of trade and economic cooperation within the Shanghai Five, especially in the field of power engineering, raising multilateral cooperation to a new level; and

4. transformation of the Shanghai Five into a mechanism for multilateral regional cooperation. The Shanghai Five organization is playing an increasingly important role in maintaining regional security and stability and in accelerating the economic development of the five states.

The parties achieved major results in practical terms through joint effort. In the history of contemporary international relations, the creation
and development of the Shanghai Five provide a significant example of creative diplomacy:
— it laid the foundation for a new view of security based on principles of *mutual* trust, disarmament, and cooperation;
— it expanded interstate relations of the new type pioneered by Russia and China, based on partnership, not union;
— it embodied a model of regional cooperation distinguished by joint initiative, a priority placed on security, and mutually beneficial interactions among large and small states; and
— it made an invaluable contribution to the creation of a new model of international relations.

**The Transformation of the Shanghai Five into the SCO**

The actual transformation of the Shanghai Five into the SCO took place at a summit in Shanghai in June 2001. Uzbekistan, which had asked to join the Shanghai Five at the beginning of 2001, attended the summit.

With a view to developing long-term relations in a multipolar world and raising the successful mechanism of the Shanghai Five to a new level, the heads of state, at a second meeting in Shanghai in 2001, broadened cooperation within the existing regional forum and adopted a future-oriented declaration concerning the creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

This organization has become an important mechanism of regional cooperation and security for participating states in the areas of trade, economic development, and security and in the fight against international terrorism, separatism, and extremism.

In the opinion of experts, the SCO has laid a foundation for building a new Eurasian pole. A new center of influence is emerging and will inevitably expand its area of responsibility. The SCO is increasingly acquiring the features of a regional organization like the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The SCO Charter, adopted in 2002 at a summit in St. Petersburg, specifies the priority goals and tasks of the organization:
— to strengthen mutual trust, friendship, and neighborliness among its members;
— to develop multiprofile cooperation with a view to maintaining and strengthening peace, security, and stability in the region and assisting in the construction of a new democratic, just, and rational political and economic international order; and
—to act jointly against terrorism, separatism, and extremism in all their manifestations and to fight the illegal drug and arms trades, other forms of transnational crime, and illegal migration.\

This document also specifies tasks that promote political, economic, and social cooperation and cooperation in culture and the humanities. But issues of stability and security occupy first place, which reflects the members’ agreement regarding the organization’s work.

We should also mention a subjective factor: the SCO members have acquired a spirit of mutual respect and understanding, a high level of trust, and an ability to achieve mutually acceptable solutions. As President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan has observed, the “SCO was created with our active participation, and we must do whatever is necessary to strengthen it.”

Main Areas of Cooperation Among SCO Members

At the same time, the SCO members have tried to use the Shanghai mechanisms to develop economic cooperation. As early as 1998, the participants in the Shanghai Five raised the question of encouraging and developing economic and trade cooperation.

Economic cooperation is an important component of SCO cooperation overall. The six countries have already created appropriate mechanisms—meetings of ministers of economics and trade and of communications ministers; they have set about cultivating favorable conditions for trade and investment; and they are searching for practical ways to cooperate in economic terms. All this has established a foundation for regional economic cooperation.

The SCO’s Program of Multilateral Trade and Economic Cooperation, adopted in September 2003 for a period of twenty years, is an important source of guidance for the development of interstate economic cooperation in the region.

The creation of a free trade zone in the SCO is envisioned as a long-term goal; the short-term goal is to increase the flow of goods in the region. Cooperation should encompass such fields as energy, transportation, agriculture, telecommunications, and environmental protection. In 2004, the SCO Energy Club gave that component of cooperation an institutional form.

Despite the development of institutions, the signed agreements, the ministerial meetings, and the existence of twenty specialized bodies responsible for the development of economic cooperation, economic
cooperation has remained more declared than real in the ten years since the SCO was established. Most of the existing economic programs in eleven areas of cooperation have not been implemented.

Russia rejects the idea of state funding for SCO economic programs. At the Ekaterinburg summit in 2009, the heads of state proposed making greater use of the Business Council and the Interbank Association of the SCO to minimize the consequences of the financial crisis and develop economic cooperation within the SCO.

The SCO members must more actively seek out or allocate funds for investment in economic projects; this would increase the organization’s potential and make it possible to draw China into multilateral projects. As long as China has no multilateral projects in the SCO, it will enter the markets of Central Asia on a bilateral basis. At Ekaterinburg, China expressed its willingness to allocate $10 billion for multilateral cooperation with the Central Asian members of the SCO.

One serious problem in ensuring regional security in Central Asia is the rational use of water resources, including transborder rivers and bodies of water. This problem has not intensified, but it may be regarded as an irritant in bilateral relations.

The SCO mechanism presents an excellent opportunity in one respect: today it is almost the only functioning structure that allows for the participation of all parties with an interest in settling the problem of transborder rivers.

*Cooperation in culture and the humanities* is a priority area of cooperation within the SCO. The ministers of culture first met in Beijing on 12 April 2002. The members’ governments gave active support to Days of Culture and to the participation of artistic performers and collectives.

Before 2005, however, cooperation in the humanities remained underdeveloped. In 2005, meetings of ministers and experts took place and the first programs of multilateral cooperation were adopted in various areas of the humanities.

Since then, cooperation in the humanities has gradually increased: joint events are held to mark momentous dates in the history of member-states; there are exchanges of students, lecturers, and professors and attempts to create joint educational centers.

In 2008, the SCO University appeared: a single educational network based on universities engaged in research in regional studies, information technology, nanotechnology, energy, and ecology. By 2010, the network linked fifty-three universities in five SCO countries.
In May 2009 in Ekaterinburg, the SCO established a Youth Council. The council’s mission is to stimulate cooperation among young people in the SCO member-states in the areas of education, culture, and sports.

There is an acute need for broad SCO support in health care, given the poor condition of hospitals in Central Asia, the severe shortage of qualified staff, and the lack of access to medical care in remote areas. The Russian initiative to create the Shanghai Health Organization (SHO), which may acquire a role within the SCO analogous to that of the World Health Organization at the global level, uniting members’ efforts and raising the quality of medical care.

The development of cooperation in the humanities will also be facilitated by the intensification of SCO work with the mass media and by use of the Internet.

As in other spheres of interaction, cooperation in the humanities within the SCO has great prospects, because the members possess a rich cultural legacy.

*Cooperation in the security sphere* reflects the SCO’s origins in the members’ striving to tackle issues of mutual security and strengthen confidence-building measures, which have been extended to include political, economic, and cultural cooperation.

Security issues already occupied the central place in the Shanghai process when its five participants first met in 1996.

From the beginning, one of the SCO’s main tasks was the fight against terrorism, separatism, and extremism. The members signed the Convention on the Fight Against Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism as early as 2001, at the founding summit of the SCO.\(^7\) This led to the creation within the SCO of the Regional Antiterrorist Structure—a permanent body designed to facilitate coordination and interaction among agencies responsible for tackling these tasks. The SCO members have conducted a number of joint antiterrorist exercises.

As experts in Kazakhstan note, the “SCO’s chief task was to create a system for responding adequately to contemporary risks and challenges. In this context, it is difficult and sometimes meaningless to draw a sharp dividing line between the military–political and economic components of the work of the organization, because they are all links in a common security system.”\(^8\)

*Military–political cooperation* depends on strengthening confidence in the military arena and is closely intertwined with issues of regional security in Central Asia. This focus has a corresponding legal foundation—the
1995 Memorandum on Cooperation Between the Ministries of Defense of China and Kazakhstan. The main areas of cooperation are the joint struggle against ethnic separatism, religious extremism, and international terrorism. China’s visible military advance causes some concern in the world. In practice, however, the SCO’s work removes many apprehensions concerning Chinese military forces along the border with Kazakhstan.

Thus, in terms of Central Asian interests, the military–political and economic aspects of the SCO’s work logically complement one another, facilitating the formation of a single security space in Central Asia. It is essential in this regard to maintain the organization’s multifunctional profile. In addition, given the sometimes divergent interests of the Central Asian states in response to the differential impact of new threats and challenges, it is essential to hold consultations aimed at working out a shared set of priorities and avoiding competition.

The SCO’s Potential for Stabilizing Afghanistan

Social, economic, and demographic conflicts threaten to destabilize the geopolitical situation. Unresolved new and old regional problems entangle the Central Asian states. In particular, we must consider possible negative consequences of the forthcoming withdrawal of the Western coalition troops from Afghanistan, which will exacerbate such threats as terrorism, religious extremism, drug trafficking, and illegal migration. The Afghan arena has particular significance in terms of ensuring regional security and stability, because many of these threats originate in Afghanistan. The war in Afghanistan poses a major obstacle to the development of regional economic cooperation and to the realization of the rich transit potential of Central Asia. The conflict in Afghanistan and the threats emanating from that country compel the states in the region to take additional measures to strengthen their security. Among the tools available for this mission, the Central Asian states have at their disposal such institutions as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the SCO, which also require institutional strengthening and strategic reformatting.

The SCO has consistently supported a rapid settlement to the Afghan problem and the consolidation of Afghanistan as a sovereign, peaceful, and neutral state. The need to solve problems emanating from Afghanistan first came up in 2002, when the SCO acknowledged the utility of
establishing an antidrug security system along Afghanistan’s borders.

The Agreement Concerning Cooperation in the Fight Against the Illegal Trade in Narcotics, Psychotropic Substances, and Their Precursors was signed in 2004 at the SCO’s Tashkent summit. A year later, the Protocol Concerning the Creation of the SCO–Afghanistan Contact Group was signed with a view to working out proposals and recommendations for achieving cooperation—above all, in border control and in the fight against drug trafficking. These agreements, however, have not been implemented in any noticeable way.

In 2007, recognizing that the SCO had not combated the drug trade with sufficient energy, President Putin of Russia proposed supplementing the “security belt” with “belts of financial security” by involving the financial monitoring agencies of SCO members in this work.

The implementation of Russian policy on Afghanistan makes it possible to enhance the SCO’s role in this regard. Hence Russia initiated an international conference on Afghanistan in 2009 within the SCO framework. The conference adopted an action plan involving the SCO members and Afghanistan in the fight against terrorism, the illegal drug trade, and organized crime as these apply to Afghanistan.

The SCO assumes, not without grounds, that what happens in Afghanistan largely will decide the fate of the whole region. Although the SCO does not directly take part in military operations, it provides the international coalition forces in Afghanistan with valuable and sometimes irreplaceable transportation, logistical, military, and technical support.

At the same time, the SCO countries sponsor social, infrastructural, and educational projects essential to the postwar reconstruction of long-suffering Afghanistan. As President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan has noted, the “possibility cannot be excluded that the SCO will have to assume the burden of many problems that may arise in Afghanistan after the international coalition forces withdraw in 2014.”

Stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan requires the revival of its economy, which in turn depends above all on the implementation of infrastructural projects. Only purposeful economic and humanitarian assistance can have a palpable effect on restoring the Afghan economy. The countries of Central Asia have the option of assisting in the economic revival of Afghanistan and involving structures like the SCO in settling the conflict. The restoration of Afghanistan requires open funding streams; here, too, the SCO and the Eurasian Economic Community can play a certain role.
SCO members can participate in projects for training Afghan law-enforcement personnel. The SCO must also devote attention to fortifying the Tajik–Afghan and Uzbek–Afghan borders and in general work out a program to assist the border troops and customs agencies of SCO member-states in improving their technical facilities and material supplies.

At present, it is difficult to be optimistic regarding the SCO's prospects, because even now the organization's mission exists largely on paper. It has no effective mechanism for responding to emerging threats and challenges. The SCO's role in counteracting the Afghan Taliban, who were at one time the main extremist force and still retain their destructive potential, has been and remains at best an auxiliary one.

It would benefit Central Asia if the SCO had a cooperative, not a confrontational, relationship with the United States and NATO. But in practice this is difficult to achieve, because Russia, China, and the United States have divergent interests in the region even though their interests coincided temporarily with regard to the overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the United States and NATO cannot cope with the Afghan conflict and settle Afghanistan's problems on their own. They must involve the SCO members in the process and take their interests into account.

By forming closer ties with the United States—and perhaps by granting the United States the status of partner in dialogues with the SCO, for which Washington applied in 2011—the SCO could help the United States cooperate with it in the fight against extremist organizations in Eurasia. The problem of Afghanistan cannot be settled without close interstate cooperation.

**Strategic Partnership Within the SCO**

The presence in the organization of two geopolitical giants—Russia and China—lends significance to the SCO's operations, as does the membership of countries in the strategically important region of Central Asia. Over the ten years of its existence, the SCO has shown itself to be a successful coalition—one of the largest in the world, with a population of almost 1.5 billion and 15 percent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP).

Strategic partnership mechanisms are also developing within the SCO framework. For all the states of Central Asia, including Kazakhstan, it is important for national security and the defense of national interests
to strengthen ties with Russia and China via bilateral and multilateral treaties and agreements. The SCO has gradually become the main site of multilateral cooperation among China, Russia, and Central Asia, which makes it possible to "insure" against possible risks associated with the development of exclusively bilateral relations in this region.

The security of Kazakhstan, like that of Central Asia as a whole, cannot be separated from Russian security. Today the Russian Federation is the strongest state in the post-Soviet space in military and political terms. For Russia, too, participation in the SCO's work is a high-priority foreign policy task. Besides maintaining its authority in the world and preserving its influence in the region, Russia also pursues purely pragmatic goals—defense of its borders against the possible penetration of extremism from Afghanistan and deployment of its troops in Central Asia. New tendencies in the geopolitical situation in Central Asia mark a new stage in Russia's relations with the region, one based on equal partnership.

In view of the unstable situation in Afghanistan and elements of instability in the Xinjiang border region, it makes sense for Russia to strengthen cooperation with the states of Central Asia. In addition, Russia pursues the long-term goal of integration (including economic integration) with these states.

Through the SCO, Russia has succeeded in roping China into supplying resources to beef up security in Central Asia and in drawing China into military-political cooperation. This result corresponds to Russia's interest in predictability in Chinese military policy and to China's interest in strengthening its influence in Central Asia. So far, however, Russia has not managed to strengthen its own military cooperation with China within the SCO.

At the same time, Russia would benefit from paying greater attention within the SCO to the potential for conflict inside current and prospective member-states. The development of cooperation in security and conflict resolution may allow Russia to preserve and strengthen its leadership within the SCO.

China is also trying to deepen economic cooperation within the SCO, thereby turning the organization into a means of implementing China's economic strategy in Central Asia. Whereas in the first half of the 1990s, economic interests dominated China's policy toward Kazakhstan, since then the situation has undergone qualitative change. China now focuses not only on economic but also on geostrategic interests. This focus
explains why China has raised its relations with Kazakhstan to new heights and why it has emphasized questions of collective security and the fight against Islamic fundamentalism.

Above all, the SCO is the most acceptable instrument for integrating China to a certain extent into the regional security system; this is also important for Kazakhstan. From a tactical point of view, one important task is to tap China's resources for the fight against extremism, terrorism, drug and arms smuggling, and illegal migration in the region.

In long-term strategic terms, it matters to Kazakhstan to have links with China via a series of agreements, including economic agreements. In particular, the development of infrastructure in the region and implementation of the project to revive the Great Silk Road benefit both Kazakhstan and China. This goal, however, depends not only on the development of bilateral relations but also on cooperation among all the SCO countries. The plan to build an oil pipeline from western Kazakhstan to China has significance, too. Kazakhstan regards the implementation of this plan as a priority of its foreign policy once peace takes root in the region.

Thus, priority areas for cooperation between Kazakhstan and China within the framework of the Shanghai Forum include:

—jointly tackling such problems as separatism, religious extremism, and border unrest;

—establishing conditions that promote the successful development of bilateral economic ties aimed at long-term economic integration; and

—enhancing the authority of both countries on the world scene.

In multilateral diplomacy Kazakhstan and China strive to support each other, closely cooperating in the United Nations and other international organizations.

Nevertheless, these states do not agree on every issue. In particular, the Chinese worry about strengthening the economic and military-political positions of the United States and NATO in Central Asia. In addition, the Chinese side sees Kazakhstan’s plan for the SCO as leaving an important aspect out of account: the possible enlargement of the organization to include such countries as India and Mongolia.

As the struggle among the leading powers over Kazakhstan’s oil intensifies, the Chinese increasingly understand that the rising influence of the West—above all, the United States—in Central Asia clearly opposes the interests of China and Russia. This perception encourages the search for mutually acceptable forms of Russian-Chinese cooperation in Kazakhstan and throughout the region.
At present, China needs to sustain the minimum level of military contacts that enable it to pay close attention to the development of events in Central Asia. China can best do this through multilateral cooperation, preferably with Russian participation.

Economic contacts between China and Central Asia will develop at a rapid pace over the coming decade. This reflects a global tendency: China continues to grow into a powerful economic center of the contemporary world. China’s exports, investments, and in recent years technological capabilities have constantly improved.

We agree with the Russian experts who say that the long-term roles of Russia and China in Central Asia depend on certain unpredictable factors that may include the liberalization of the social system inside China, the evolution of Russian–Chinese relations, and the increased penetration of the region by the United States and its allies.

**Kazakhstan and the SCO**

For Kazakhstan, participation in the SCO is a key issue in its multidirectional foreign policy. The leadership of Kazakhstan considers it expedient to initiate a series of measures aimed at strengthening the SCO—stimulating activity conducted within its framework, changing its status and functional orientation, giving it new content, and eventually turning it into an important element of the regional security system. In general, the SCO has the capacity to become an effective means by which Kazakhstan can achieve several geopolitical goals.

As Prime Minister Karim Masimov of Kazakhstan has noted, “Kazakhstan favors close interaction with SCO member-states and observers to ensure security and stability and make our organization flourish. We are willing to contribute further to joint efforts aimed at resolving common problems in the SCO.”

From Kazakhstan’s perspective, the SCO has already made an important contribution by achieving weight in contemporary international affairs. The high level of regional integration within the SCO on matters of security, stability, and economic and humanitarian cooperation demonstrates the members’ ability to act together effectively to withstand external threats and challenges and find ways to tackle current and strategic issues based on their interests. Kazakhstan consistently supports constructive dialogue between NATO and the SCO and between NATO and the CSTO. In view of the growing threats posed by terrorism and
drug trafficking, the SCO does not deny the possibility of cooperation with NATO.

One of Kazakhstan’s main priorities while holding the SCO chairmanship has been to maintain peace, security, and stability in Central Asia. In particular, as President Nursultan Nazarbayev declared at the SCO summit in Tashkent, “the chairmanship of the Republic of Kazakhstan will include among its priorities rendering assistance to Kyrgyzstan and helping to settle the Afghan problem.”

The events in fraternal Kyrgyzstan, which led to much death and destruction, posed a serious challenge to Kazakhstan’s chairmanship. As is well known, the SCO was one of the first organizations to respond to the events of April and July 2010 in Kyrgyzstan, because a crisis in this republic’s socioeconomic and political life might have had destructive consequences for the entire region. Through their joint efforts, the SCO members managed to halt the destabilization of the situation in Kyrgyzstan and avert civil war. The SCO members rendered prompt assistance to their brothers in Kyrgyzstan and provided large-scale financial, material—technical, and humanitarian aid worth more than $50 million.

It is gratifying that Kazakhstan’s SCO chairmanship in 2011 should have coincided with the organization’s tenth anniversary. Summing up the results of those ten years, we can confidently say that in a brief period of time, the organization has grown stronger and demonstrated to the whole world its viability as an important factor in contemporary international relations. As President Nursultan Nazarbayev has noted, “it is already difficult to imagine today’s world without the SCO. We observe with satisfaction that through joint efforts, the SCO is consistently strengthening its positions as a guarantor of security and stability in the region.” The Republic of Kazakhstan holds true to its international obligations and leans toward mutual trust, understanding, and constructive dialogue.

Enlargement of the SCO—New Opportunities?

Since the SCO was founded, people have been calling for the admission of new members—that is, for the enlargement of the organization. Let us recall that Mongolia, Iran, India, and Pakistan hold observer status at the SCO. Mongolia obtained this status in 2004, the three other states in 2005. At the Ekaterinburg summit in June 2009, the leaders decided to grant Belarus and Sri Lanka the status of SCO partners in dialogue.

Mongolia has never sought to become a full member of the SCO;
it wants only to retain its status as an observer. Yes, Mongolia wants to develop a partnership with Russia, but it does not want to become wholly dependent on China and regards the SCO as responsive primarily to Chinese interests. Ulan Bator also fears that joining the SCO might make it more difficult to establish ties of friendship and partnership with the United States, Japan, and the European Union.

India, as Russia’s strategic partner in Asia, might have become a connecting link in a single Eurasian energy market. A few years ago, New Delhi expressed a desire to join the SCO, but membership in this organization has now lost most of its appeal for India. Several reasons lie behind this change of attitude, including the lack of any cooperation with India as an observer and the emergence of an anti-U.S. slant in SCO policies.

Pakistan sought observer status in the SCO before India did. Pakistan stepped up its efforts to join the SCO when it felt the negative effects of U.S. policy in Afghanistan, with missile strikes on its territory near the Afghan border. In Islamabad’s view, Pakistan’s membership in the SCO will make the United States more cautious about encroaching on Pakistani territory. Russia has declared more than once that it will consent to the accession of Pakistan only if India joins the SCO at the same time. According to Russian experts, if India and Pakistan join the SCO Russia hopes to initiate a discussion of nuclear nonproliferation in the region and include China. Russia would benefit from such a discussion.¹²

The accession of India and Pakistan would also impel the SCO to discuss a settlement to the Kashmir conflict. Since 2007, the two countries have gradually returned to a peaceful dialogue on the disputed territories in Kashmir. They have also resumed economic cooperation—in particular, to construct a gas pipeline from Iran. These moves suggest that the problem can be solved and that the SCO may succeed in solving it.

Iran was the second country to apply to join the SCO. President Ahmadinejad has attended every SCO summit since 2006 and is doing all he can to lobby for his country’s membership. Iran’s accession to the SCO raises a number of problems. First, there is the Iranian nuclear program. But if Russia manages to persuade Tehran to make concessions regarding its nuclear program, Iran has every chance of joining. Second, Iran’s SCO membership may be impeded by its rigid policy on the division of the Caspian Sea, where Iran seeks to gain control over oil resources beyond the limits of its territorial zone. Russia may see the SCO as a structure that might assume responsibility for the Iranian nuclear program and persuade
Tehran to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency. The forum provided by the SCO may serve Russia as an additional chip in negotiations over the Caspian.\footnote{13}

Conclusion

In its decade of existence, the SCO has undergone significant evolution and turned into an influential organization.

Ensuring and strengthening the military security of the organization’s members is an important SCO task, but by no means its chief task. More salient tasks include the promotion of trust, friendship, and neighborliness in the region and action against new threats, of which the terrorist threat occupies the top spot. The SCO members direct all their efforts exclusively at maintaining peace and stability in their region; moreover, they envision expanding the geographical area of their cooperation. The SCO is neither a military alliance nor a political union of states but a flexible regional security structure that seeks to expand areas of cooperation. Multilateral cooperation within the SCO encompasses economic as well as military-political cooperation. The SCO has already made significant progress in improving its mechanisms and advancing business cooperation and diplomatic relations among its members.

The SCO is unique in that its members also participate in the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) and provide a striking example of the establishment of qualitatively new ties. The countries have settled territorial disputes, reduced border troops in a planned and transparent manner, and developed mutually advantageous trade and economic cooperation. The Shanghai phenomenon has demonstrated its effectiveness and has the potential to encompass Asia as a whole. The SCO shows the whole world an example of peaceful coexistence among different races, nations, religions, civilizations, and cultures.

Without question, the presence of external threats and challenges to the stability and security of the states in the region—above all, the escalation of terrorism and extremism—and economic problems in a world undergoing a difficult globalization drive SCO members to integrate.

As a short-term priority, the SCO will certainly seek to coordinate members’ efforts to neutralize radical and extremist actions by destructive forces, aimed at inflaming interethnic and interfaith hostility. In the near future, SCO members must try to improve the legal foundation supporting
the most significant areas of development. In particular, they must aim to agree on and adopt as soon as possible certain important documents: an agreement to improve conditions for international road haulage; regulations on the procedure for forming a special development fund and the principles governing its operations; an agreement against illegal migration; an antidrug strategy for 2011–16; and an agreement to cooperate on health care.

The SCO’s evolution into a full-fledged security and conflict resolution organization is important, because no other organization exists to deal with security problems in Central Eurasia. It is also necessary to keep the SCO actively involved in the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking and to draw China into military cooperation with Russia, involve it in consultation and synchronization, make use of its resources, and monitor its policies. The pressing issue of SCO enlargement will also affect its future development. The accession of new members will bring new problems into the SCO—above all, security problems.

Over the long term, the SCO has the potential to become a global player, a serious center of political decision making. The SCO has begun to function as a forum for the discussion of security issues that do not pertain directly to its members: the North Korean nuclear program, the Georgian–Ossetian conflict, and the normalization of relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan and between India and Pakistan.

The SCO can cooperate with NATO and the United States to fight terrorism and the drug trade in Afghanistan. Such cooperation must be based on mutual interests. An SCO–NATO Council could be set up for this purpose. Alternatively, the United States or NATO could join the SCO–Afghanistan Contact Group, which should stimulate cooperation in resolving the problem of Afghanistan. The Shanghai Forum undoubtedly has room for growth and will one day play a significant role in international affairs. On global problems, the SCO must interact more with other international organizations—especially the United Nations.

A new world is emerging in which continuing globalization goes hand in hand with policies aimed at regionalizing the world and dividing it into spheres of responsibility. The negative tendencies of globalization and world politics are stimulating the formation of regional and interregional associations, including the SCO.

Notes

1. “Soglashenie mezhdyu pravitel’stvom SSSR i pravitel’stvom KNR o rukovodiashchikh printsipakh vzaimnogo sokrashcheniia vooruzhennykh sil i ukreplenii
7. “Konventsiia o bor’be s terrorizmom, separatizmom i ekstremizmom” (www.sectsco.org).
10. See www.izvestia.kz.
13. Ibid.