

INTERNAL CONTRADICTIONS OF THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, China has perceptibly strengthened its position in Central Asia largely due to the multisided cooperation format embodied by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). From Beijing's perspective, it is not only a key organization, but essentially a regional integration project. Moreover, Central Asia's development is closely tied to the development of Xinjiang, in which the Chinese leadership is making large investments in order to eliminate the separatist moods in this unsettled region. Nevertheless, the SCO has substantial systemic contradictions that the new CPR leadership headed by Xi Jinping is trying to overcome.

The West initially had a passive attitude toward the SCO. At that time, the North Atlantic Alliance regarded the Shanghai Five as a structure that did not pose a threat to the West's interests; on the contrary, it showed a decrease in Moscow's previously dominating role in Central Asia due to the appearance of a new player—China. Later, however, as China's cooperation with the region's countries, primarily with Kazakhstan in the oil sector, started to mount, Washington began having a different opinion.

The SCO's prospects for the Central Asian countries are determined by this organization's capability to maintain the balance of power in the region. Moreover, the re-

gion's countries are interested in acquiring additional investments and capital (Chinese) through the organization's channels. An analysis of the main areas of development

of this structure based on the interests of the Central Asian countries is required for a more precise definition of the SCO's prospects for the region's countries.

KEYWORDS: *the SCO, China, Russia, Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, the U.S., NATO, geopolitics, Peace Mission, free trade area.*

Introduction

During the twelve years of its existence, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has occupied a strong position in the political life of the Central Asian countries. But disputes over what this organization is—a political discussion club or a future integration union—are still going on today.

These dualistic assessments about the present and the future of the SCO are based on many factors. First, skepticism about the SCO is based on unconcealed contradictions that significantly complicate the organization's work. The optimistic (and in some circles alarmist) view of the SCO, on the other hand, is generated by the extensive projects being put forward within the framework of the organization.

General Situation

At first glance, everything in the SCO is fine, particularly when compared with other organizations. The largest post-Soviet union, the CIS, has been dubbed a “divorce club.”¹ The CSTO cannot be a full-fledged security structure while Uzbekistan, which is an important link in the regional security system, does not support it. Nationalists are not stirring up society against the SCO, as is the case in Kazakhstan with respect to the country's membership in the Common Economic Space (CES) and Customs Union (CU).² Nor does the SCO face the fate of the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO),³ which was absorbed by the EurAsEC and in turn became obsolete due to the CU and CES.

At the same time, the SCO is holding summits, advancing projects and initiatives, and enlarging its scope, but no real achievements can be seen behind this façade of wellbeing. This is why society in the member states is relatively impassive toward the organization, since apart from speeches and summits, no one considers the SCO to be an entity capable of changing their everyday lives. And this strikes a discordant note against the background of those seemingly titanic efforts that some countries are exerting in the SCO.

¹ “Putin: SNG ‘vesma polezny klub’ dlja vstrech posle razvoda,” *Novye izvestia*, 25 March, 2005, available at [<http://www.newizv.ru/lenta/2005-03-25/21939-putin-sng-vesma-poleznyj-klub-dlja-vstrech-posle-razvoda.html>].

² See: A. Shustov, “V Kazakhstane obostrilas diskussiiia otноситelno uchastia strany v Tamozhennom Soiuze,” Internet newspaper *Stoletie*, 6 December, 2010, available at [http://www.stoletie.ru/zarubejje/nacionalisty_protiv_ts_245.htm].

³ See: M. Laumulin, *Tsentralnaia Azia v zarubezhnoi politologii i mirovoi geopolitike*, Vol. V, Almaty, 2009, p. 56.

What does the SCO's sphere of activity encompass? First, security. The SCO is placing top priority on fighting the so-called three evils (separatism, terrorism, and extremism). It is no accident that one of the primary structures in the organization is the Regional Antiterrorist Structure (RATS). However, despite its mature institutional framework, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization demonstrates complete helplessness in the security sphere. When the member states are faced with real threats to their security, no one even thinks to turn to the SCO. For example, during the ethnic massacre in Osh (Kyrgyzstan) in June 2010, Roza Otunbaeva turned directly to Russia for help, without even remembering that her country is a member of an organization geared to rendering mutual assistance and ensuring security in the region.⁴ Or, for example, when tension mounted between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in January 2013 over the Uzbek enclave of Sokh, no one thought of resorting to the SCO.⁵ Moreover, enclaves have become a chronic problem for these countries, which cannot be resolved on a bilateral basis, while the SCO has positioned itself repeatedly as an organization with the potential to resolve border issues.

This is due to China's membership in the SCO. Keeping in mind the high level of anti-Chinese moods in the region, the Central Asian elites consider it unacceptable to invite Chinese soldiers into their territory to resolve security problems. A Chinese soldier who enters any Central Asian republic to carry out combat action there, regardless what kind, instantly reduces to zero the legitimacy of the ruler who decided on this move. Let us recall that Askar Akaev's regime fell because he was accused of betraying the interests of Kyrgyzstan in favor of China after border settlement between these countries.⁶

China itself also demonstrates unremitting indifference toward the SCO in national security issues. After the bloody events in Urumqi in July 2009, Beijing invited around one hundred foreign media representatives to show how valid its efforts were during regulation of the conflict.⁷ However, Russia was the only country to fully represent the SCO in this endeavor. While all the reports from official Beijing at this time, which focused on protecting the country against "intrigues from abroad," world terrorism, and so on, did not once mention the SCO, which should in theory have been dealing with these things. Had it not been for a few stock phrases from the SCO Secretariat, it might have seemed that the organization was leaving China high and dry in its time of crisis.

Nevertheless, China is the main driving force behind the SCO. It is striving to boost the organization with real achievements, keep it afloat, and raise it to a new level. Beijing will also be helping to fund the summit planned for September of 2013 in Bishkek due to Kyrgyzstan's, the chairing country's, economic problems.

When security threats reach the geopolitical level, it becomes unequivocally clear that the SCO, whose job it is to ensure security, is not ready even in words to render support to any of the participants in the conflict. For example, after the military conflict between Russia and Georgia in August 2008, the Kremlin provoked the SCO in every way it could to express support of its actions.⁸ However, since, for entirely understandable reasons, the member states do not wish to be drawn into an anti-Western conflict, the SCO's formulation about "peace enforcement operations" was extremely

⁴ See: "Kirghiziia prosit pomoshchi Rossii v podavlenii mezhnatsionalnogo konflikta," *Argumenty i fakty*, 12 June, 2010, available at [<http://www.aif.ru/politics/article/35434>].

⁵ See: A. Valsamaki, "Bolshie problemy malenkogo anklava Sokh," Radio Azattyk, 13 June, 2013, available at [<http://rus.azattyq.org/content/sokh-enclave-tension-between-kyrgyzstan-and-uzbekistan/24878950.html>].

⁶ See: "O revoliutsii v Kyrgyzstane," *Vestnik Evrazii*, No. 3, 2005, available at [<http://www.eavest.ru/magasin/artikelen/2005-3.htm>].

⁷ See: "Predstaviteli bolee 100 zarubezhnykh SMI pribyli v Urumchi dlia osveshcheniia besporiadkov "5 iuilia," Xinhua Agency, 8 July, 2009, available at [http://www.russian.xinhuanet.com/russian/2009-07/08/content_904028.htm].

⁸ See: "Strany ShOS ne podtverdili priznanie nezavisimosti Abkhazii i Iuzhnoi Osetii," APN, 28 August, 2008, available at [<http://www.annews.ru/news/detail.php?ID=166016>].

diplomatic. It is worth noting the position of Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbaev, who remained very loyal to his alliance obligations by criticizing the Georgian leadership and the West, although relations between Astana and Tbilisi are customarily very satisfactory.⁹ Moscow quickly forgot about this, which shows what alliance relations indeed are both in the region as a whole and in the SCO in particular.

The economic component looks more impressive against this background, particularly since Beijing is trying to do all it can to make use of its main trump card—its powerful economy. But here the hitch is that essentially all successful economic projects assigned to the SCO have in fact been created on the basis of bilateral agreements. This is because implementation of large projects within the framework of the SCO, even despite the currently approved cooperation plans, has come up against numerous obstacles.

The establishment and functioning of the SCO University is a vivid illustration of how SCO projects are implemented.¹⁰ The idea itself of a common education space is very laudable, particularly for the Central Asian republics, since rampant corruption in the education system is causing a constant drop in the quality of higher education and decrease in the value of diplomas. However, the idea was carried out in true SCO style. Current higher educational institutions of the member states were appointed as the head organizations of the SCO University. As a result, several higher educational institutions simply acquired the opportunity to send a few exchange students to the university for one semester and issue their graduates, in addition to their own diploma, another certificate from the SCO University. Since there is already a skeptical attitude toward all documents issued in universities in the post-Soviet expanse, the pompous name and rousing reports in reality produced no more than a very few exchange students.

This situation is a legitimate result of the existence of two levels of systemic contradictions among the SCO member countries that, in turn, generate a chain of factors that has a negative effect on the functioning of the organization.

First Level of Systemic Contradictions in the SCO

The first level is the competition between China and Russia, whereby this competition is seen only in Central Asia. In all the other problem issues on the international arena, such as the situation around Iran and Syria, enlargement of NATO, deployment of the U.S. antimissile defense system in Europe and the APR, the velvet revolutions, Afghanistan, and many more, Beijing and Moscow are manifesting rare unanimity, which is due to competition with the United States. Until recently, this unanimity has not created a true alliance, since both Russia and China have been more interested in relations with the West, the U.S. in particular, than with each other. So Beijing and Moscow often used their friendship as a bargaining chip for upping their value in Washington's eyes, but forgetting about the interests of their strategic partner as soon as the opportunity appears to smooth out relations with the U.S. For example, it came as an unpleasant surprise for Beijing that Moscow, as the result

⁹ See: "Bush odnim iz pervykh byl proinformirovan Rossiei ob atake Gruzii na Tskhinvali, rasskazyvaet Nazarbaev," Interfax-West Information Agency, 28 August, 2008, available at [<http://www.interfax.by/news/world/45117>].

¹⁰ See: "Model Universiteta ShOS," Official website of SCO University, available at [http://uni-sco.ru/stat/3/stat_3.html].

of a warming trend in relations with Washington, permitted American bases to be deployed in Central Asia and offered the U.S. its traditional ties with the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan in order to reinforce the American contingent there. China was also more oriented toward the U.S. due to its dependence on the American market.

However, the trend is now changing. Since Xi Jinping's advent to power, China has been building its economic model with an emphasis on stimulating internal consumption and lowering external dependence. So relations with Russia are beginning to acquire a new meaning for China. This is particularly shown by the fact that Xi Jinping paid his first visit to Moscow, which aroused great irritation in Washington. In February 2012, Xi Jinping, while still Secretary General Hu Jintao's deputy, but already the unequivocal contender for the post of PRC leader, visited the U.S., where he was given an ostentatious welcome essentially fitting a head of state in the effort to strengthen relations with the future leader of China. Xi Jinping's visit to Moscow did not justify the hopes of the American establishment, which was well shown in an article by Zbigniew Brzezinski, who expressed extreme bewilderment that Russia was chosen for the first visit rather than the U.S., an important economic partner and leading world power.¹¹

At the same time, the foreign policy of Barack Obama's second term announced a "turn toward Asia." It is no accident that the U.S. president began his first tour after his re-election with the Asian countries. Some relation to the global standoff can also be glimpsed here. It should be kept in mind that during his Asian tour, Obama supported Myanmar, where he spoke in favor of cutting back on the import of military technology from China. Moreover, Obama visited Myanmar despite the fact that significant ethnic cleansing and pogroms are going on in this country. According to the U.N., the Muslims of Myanmar, the Rohingyas, are one of the most repressed ethnic minorities, violence against whom is supported by the state.¹² In addition, Obama called Thailand one of the U.S.'s leading allies in the region, although this state is also a country accused of ethnic repressions. The southern states of Thailand are inhabited by Malaysian Muslims and the degree of religious and ethnic intolerance periodically leads to an escalation of violence in which Bangkok takes the position of the Buddhists and rains down repressions on the Malaysians.¹³

Washington is trying to kill two birds with one stone by supporting such odious states: on the one hand, it is fortifying the loyalty of problematic, but strategically important countries against China and the religious regimes of the Middle East. On the other, Thailand and Myanmar are in need of international support for resolving their domestic problems, and the U.S., like no one else, can and is providing them with an information shield. This ensures the loyalty of Thailand and Myanmar relatively cheaply but effectively.

The new Chinese leadership is perfectly well aware of how quickly the geopolitical game against it is toughening up, so it is placing its stakes inside the country on Han nationalism, while striving to create a political, economic, and energy buffer on the outside along its borders. The SCO is one of the key elements of this buffer, since it protects the border from the north and west and can also potentially provide the energy flows necessary for the Chinese economy.

However, it is Moscow's policy that is hindering the SCO's rapid development. At the last summit in Beijing, Russian diplomats made it clear they were taking the credit for successfully torpedoing the main Chinese initiatives. It is difficult to understand how an efficient and reliable organization can

¹¹ See: "Brzezinski predlagaet Pekinu vybrat mezhdu Moskvoi i Vashingtonom," *Voennoe obozrenie*, 28 March, 2013, available at [<http://topwar.ru/26007-bzhezinskiy-predlagaet-pekiniu-vybrat-mezhdu-moskvoy-i-vashingtonom.html>].

¹² See: "Buddisty zhgut sosedei," *Gazeta RU*, 2 May, 2013, available at [<http://www.gazeta.ru/social/2013/04/30/5286769.shtml>].

¹³ See: A. Kaukenov, "Pomozhet li OIS musulmanam Tailanda?" *Expert Kazakhstan*, No. 37 (327), 19 September, 2011, available at [<http://expertonline.kz/a1648/>].

be established if the second largest participant is set on doing all it can to prevent major projects from working. And there is an explanation for this; it is obvious that one of the reasons for Russian's accession to the SCO was to prevent China's uncontrolled penetration into Central Asia. At the beginning of the 2000s, it became clear that China's entry into the region was inevitable, so Moscow gave the green light, as long as it was involved too. This was also advantageous to Beijing, since Moscow's participation in the organization gave the SCO, which also meant China's entry into the region, a significant reserve of legitimacy. So Moscow has always occupied the position of an active pessimist in the SCO, making generous offers, allotting funding, but in the end doing everything to ensure that the SCO does not go beyond the framework of a dialog platform. Russia's attempts to make the SCO more global by means of enlargement or active efforts on the global scale are being opposed both by Beijing, for which the SCO is an entirely specific mechanism, so it is worried about its erosion, and by the Central Asian countries, which are worried they will be drawn into a new standoff between Russia and the West. Moscow has other organizations for strengthening its influence in Central Asia that entirely duplicate the SCO's functions, but without China. And here Russia is taking very successful steps to boost various organizations' activity, such as creating rapid response forces in the CSTO to increase security or establishing a common customs space in the economic sphere.

Xi Jinping's visit should in all likelihood launch a change in trends and make Moscow interested in joint projects, seeing as China has investment possibilities. And the first results are already obvious, the so-called hydrocarbon breakthrough during Xi Jinping's visit to Moscow made it possible to talk about cooperation in this sphere with Kazakhstan, particularly with respect to use of the Atasu-Alashankou pipeline. This breakthrough might make it possible for Chinese diplomats to persuade Russia at the 2013 summit in Bishkek to cooperate in the energy sphere within the SCO by beginning work on the SCO Energy Club, for example, which has been suggested so many times.

In any case, competition between Russia and China over Central Asia is the most fundamental and systemic problem for the SCO, on which many factors have an influence and which can only be overcome if changes are made in the very format of bilateral relations between Moscow and Beijing. However, the Chinese side has evidently already understood this.

Second Level of Systemic Contradictions of the SCO

The second level of contradictions in the SCO is competition among the Central Asian countries themselves, the disintegration processes among the region's countries, and the tendency of the Central Asian elites to cast about among the different regional power centers.

So the declared Shanghai spirit of trust is not acceptable in practice not only in relations with China, with respect to which anti-Chinese moods in neighboring countries are traditionally high, but also at the level of bilateral relations of essentially all the Central Asian countries, and for the most diverse reasons. Relations between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan are at the stage of stable conflict, without even any attempts to resolve the enclave, diaspora, water resources, or energy issues. Incidents on the border have become par for the course, while the anti-Uzbek hysteria that periodically surfaces in the Kyrgyz media gives reason to believe that the massacre in Osh in 2011 will be far from the last.

Relations between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are just as volatile. Here it is important to remember that there is no spirit of trust or harmony between these countries in sight. Mutual reproaches, complaints, constantly regurgitated insults, talks behind the scenes about lost territory, not to mention disputes over the water problem, bring to mind not the spirit of trust, but how relations will develop after the regime change, first in Uzbekistan, and then in Tajikistan.

Uzbekistan, which is in the center of all the major scandals in Central Asia, has a powerful army, a more than 30-million-strong population, and is facing a change in power, is raising as many questions itself.

We should also take note of the political competition between Tashkent and Astana. However, this problem does not pose a clearly expressed threat compared with others and is more of a personal nature between the heads of both states. The change in power in Tashkent could pose much more serious problems for the entire region, since there seems to be no trace of the regime change scenario predicted in the neighboring state.

In turn, Kazakhstan is also experiencing the negative consequences of the disintegration processes in the region. Due to its geographic location, Kazakhstan is literally in the center of the SCO, which means it is also in the center of interests regarding the border, water resources, ensuring security of infrastructure facilities, and fighting drug trafficking and extremists. Its flexible foreign policy makes it possible for Astana to avoid an overly emotionally charged atmosphere, but there are also plenty of “powder kegs” in its relations with regional neighbors. However, the SCO mechanism has still not been used for discussing transboundary river problems with China in the trilateral format, by including Russia in the talks on the Irtysh tributaries.

Moreover, creating mechanisms for a change in power is a systemic issue for the entire region, whereby there are not that many alternatives. The Turkmen scenario only postpones the issue, since there is no system anyway. After he became president, Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov graphically demonstrated to everyone claiming the role of Gray Cardinal in Central Asia, how this in actual fact takes place. As it turned out, the omnipotent Rejepov and all his cronies who put Mr. Berdimukhammedov on the throne found themselves behind bars within a month.¹⁴ That is, next time, the Turkmen alternative will not work even in Turkmenistan itself.

The Kyrgyz alternative is even worse, since it shows only the state’s slide toward mob rule and power being seized by the criminal world. Due to Emomali Rakhmon’s age, his predicament is still a ways off for Tajikistan, but it will also get there and, keeping in mind the negative experience of the civil war and Tajikistan’s proximity to Afghanistan, the risk level in this country is much higher.

However, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are the most important states in the regional security system. The region, and the SCO in turn, might be able to live through the chaos in Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan, even without interfering in it, but a fragmented Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan will mean the end to the existing security system, which will mean an end to the SCO as well.

However, the SCO is absolutely incompetent in this most vital security issue too. This was graphically shown by the events in Kyrgyzstan, as a SCO member and previous member of the Shanghai Five. The SCO could only stand by and watch the two revolutions in Kyrgyzstan, lamenting from the mouths of experts at all kinds of forums the absence of any levers of influence on the situation. Nor was the SCO able to become an arbiter or a platform for gripe sessions in the region.

On the whole, the latently hostile relations among Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, the disintegration processes, the hyped-up nationalism in the region, and the lack of compliance between

¹⁴ See: V. Kravchenko, “Turkmenistan: igra na vyzhivanie,” ZN, 17 August, 2007, available at [http://gazeta.zn.ua/POLITICS/turkmenistan_igra_na_vyzhivanie.html].

the proclaimed values (the Shanghai spirit) and the real processes going on in the region form the second level of systemic contradictions in the SCO.

Anti-NATO

Relations with the West are another serious issue in the SCO. Western political scientists began talking about the SCO's anti-Western orientation almost as soon as the organization was established. However it was the declaration at the Astana summit of 2005, where the question was raised of how long the American bases would be present in the member states, that promoted development of this opinion.¹⁵ This declaration is also interesting in that it created a precedent in which some of the SCO members were able to use the organization for political aims. But this developed into "ganging up against someone," in this case, against the U.S. Russia showed the Americans how important and strong it was in Central Asia, China took to pushing the U.S. as far as possible from its western borders, and Uzbekistan did what it could to punish Washington for criticizing its repression of the Andijan revolt. While Kyrgyzstan took advantage of the situation to raise the rent for the Manas base. Admittedly, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan gained no specific benefits from joining this declaration, although there was no clear damage either.

However, it was interesting for Astana and the other Central Asian participants to knock some of the wind out of Washington's sails over the success of the velvet revolutions in the post-Soviet expanse. These same velvet revolutions made the leaders of the authoritarian regimes of the CA feel uncomfortable, which made them agree to play into Moscow's and Beijing's hands, thus showing Washington that it was not worth sponsoring coups, since the Central Asian countries of the SCO have someone to take sides with and something to offer in the geopolitical bargaining. It stands to reason that Washington began cooling its attitude toward the SCO, while in the Western press, the SCO began to acquire traits of a new Warsaw bloc.

These anti-Western sentiments prompted Iran to want to become a full-fledged member of the organization.¹⁶ This geopolitical positioning, as well as the collective security and economic cooperation in the SCO, would resolve many of Tehran's problems, which is under international sanctions. But the SCO countries, while not against bluffing in the game with Washington and raising their clout in its eyes, are not at all interested in any real standoff with it. For some time, Tehran's activity placed the SCO before the dilemma of the organization's enlargement. On the one hand, China and Moscow would like Mongolia to become a full-fledged participant in the organization. A geopolitical struggle is going on in Mongolia among China, the U.S., Japan, and South Korea, although in recent years the advantage has been going to Beijing. It is important for the CPR to increase its influence on Mongolia using a new lever, while Russia wants to return Mongolia, whereby return it with China's approval. But Ulan-Bator also understands this and is not rushing to join, since it still has the opportunity to use its geopolitical location as a bargaining chip. So it is important for the SCO to keep its doors open, in the event that it can manage to finally talk Mongolia into ascending to the SCO. But these doors must be closed for Iran and other possibly undesirable candidates.

¹⁵ See: M. Laumulin, "ShOS—grandiozny geopolitichesky blef. Vzgliad iz Kazakhstana," *Russie Nei Visions*, No. 12, July 2006.

¹⁶ See: "Iran podal zaiavku na vstuplenie v ShOS," IA Regnum, 24 March, 2008, available at [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/975605.html>].

Therefore, a provision on accession to the organization was adopted at the SCO Tashkent summit in 2008 stipulating that the SCO could not accept countries on which international sanctions have been imposed.¹⁷ It stands to reason that Tehran took umbrage over this decision, particularly since it tried with Dushanbe's help to stop this provision from being adopted, but unsuccessfully, since Tajikistan does not have the necessary clout and, most important, depends more on Moscow, and also Beijing at present, than on Tehran. Before the meeting in Tashkent in 2008, Tehran especially sent all the states of the Shanghai Six notes stating Ahmadinejad's desire to participate in the work of this summit, but received a polite refusal, therefore Head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Manouchehr Mottaki represented the country at the summit instead. This was due to the next twist in tension in relations between Iran and the U.S., which meant that the SCO countries did not want to offer Ahmadinejad a platform for making his anti-American speeches. This all meets the interests of the SCO countries, since sliding into anti-Americanism is extremely pernicious, while on the other hand entirely disavows the previous attempts to stick Washington's nose in the mud. Moreover, this casting about only makes the organization more amorphous, points more obviously to its lack of precise goals and indulgence in transitory requests, as well as the absence of a unifying long-term strategy.

The Peace Mission military exercises are another important tool in the SCO's geopolitical game. Joint operations of the armed forces of the member countries are once more inspiring Western researchers to write articles about "the iron fist against democracy" and representatives of the SCO countries to talk about the organization's potential for maintaining security and stability in the region.

The very history of holding Peace Missions demonstrates the following reality. Whereas the first exercises were modest, in 2005 the Peace Mission was carried out with unprecedented panache and great political advantages for China.¹⁸ According to the scenario, a provisional country becomes embroiled in unrest and the SCO countries bring in their troops to establish order. But in so doing, on the Shandong Peninsula, where the exercises were held, it was not the internal troops that were activated, whose purpose it is to put down unrest and carry out police functions, rather a massive landing operation was carried out with preliminary repression of air defense means and firing positions and long-range, front-line, and military transport airplanes were activated, in particular strategic bombers and missile carriers, more than 60 ships, and several submarines.

All of this was akin to executing a landing on Taiwan, which Taipei reacted to by carrying out its own military exercises with American subdivisions designed to rebuff aggression from the sea. It became obvious that Beijing was using the SCO and primarily Russia to demonstrate its strength once more to the rebel island and its U.S. supporters. The Kremlin was criticized further for allowing itself to be drawn into such a risky game, since Russia did not gain any political advantages from being a satellite of muscle-flexing China. Moscow justified itself by demonstrating the latest Russian weapons for sale, as well as pointing to the possible political advantages in the future from China's gratitude. We will note that China is now manufacturing weapons itself, having become one of the five largest world arms suppliers, although it did not help Moscow to brandish its arms against Georgia.

After that the Peace Missions no longer had such clear hints toward specific potential adversaries of the member states, but attention should be paid to the following nuances:

¹⁷ See: "ShOS gotova k rasshireniyu," *Rossiiskoe federalnoe izdanie VVP*, No. 7 (57), 2010, available at [<http://www.vvprf.ru/archive/claue149.html>].

¹⁸ See: A. Georgiev, "'Mirnaia missiia' vpolnima," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kurier*, No. 31 (98), 24 August, 2005, available at [<http://vpk-news.ru/articles/1242>].

- First, although the scenarios of most exercises declare a struggle against non-traditional threats, and specifically against the forces of terrorist gangs, the course of the exercises nevertheless shows slightly different circumstances. They usually demonstrate how aviation destroys the command point of the provisional enemy and wipes out its artillery positions, while the armored vehicles and artillery units of the SCO countries go into battle against similar forces of the provisional enemy. That is, terrorists look like the regular army.

At the same time, it is obvious that the region is threatened more by the penetration of armed gangs rather than the large-scale intervention of any power from the outside, as happened for example during the Batken events in Kyrgyzstan. It goes without saying that in these instances operation tactics dramatically differ since such formations frequently have support from the local population and there is no single headquarters or operational front. This struggle has the nature of partisan raids and surprise attacks on population settlements and little desire to become involved in extensive trench battles.

It stands to reason that this is just as obvious to the organizers of the exercises, but this shows that the real objective of these undertakings is to demonstrate to their “brothers-in-arms” their combat potential, show off their military capabilities, so to speak, whereby directed not externally, as Western experts and observers sometimes believe, but into the organization itself. This is most likely why Uzbekistan, which has the most realistic chances of entering a military conflict with its neighbors, avoids participating in the exercises.

- Second, whereas there is a sufficiently high level of coordination of troop subdivisions among Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, coordination with the National Liberation Army of China looks rather interesting. It stands to reason that the high level of interaction among the military of the former republics of the Soviet Union is due to their common technology, military school, and language, etc. In addition, coordination of the SCO countries, apart from China, is reinforced by their participation in the CSTO, which has its own armed forces—the Collective Rapid Response Forces—and regularly holds exercises. That is, the SCO exercises are interesting with respect to the extent to which it is possible to interact in such a sensitive area as military cooperation with China. But even a superficial look makes it obvious that the Chinese military are clearly an isolated entity in the exercises. That is, whereas the military of the other countries fly in unison (if we are talking about aviation), move together in a combat operation (if we are talking about armed vehicles), move together on foot, the Chinese military do all of this separately. The CSTO countries + China were not seen participating in any joint operations “shoulder to shoulder” during the part of the exercises open to coverage by the press. Moreover, when the tanks and self-propelled weapons moved, a road divided the Chinese contingents and contingents of the CSTO countries.

Of course, it requires a lot of time and effort to coordinate operations with a country that until relatively recently was a potential enemy, but this is not the point. It is more important to ask ourselves in what operations and under what conditions can this practice be used? It is extremely unlikely that Chinese troops will participate even in Afghanistan, while entry of the Chinese army into any country of Central Asia by way of military assistance will be unequivocally perceived as occupation.

Thus, this confirms the thesis that the SCO exercises are a way for the member states to show off their capabilities to one another, on the one hand, and to external players, on the other, and not to practice interaction in the event of a real threat.

Conclusion

Despite its high political, commercial, and transport potential, the complicated internal systemic contradictions that have accumulated over the ten years of the organization's existence mean that the SCO's opportunities remain essentially untapped. The far-from-simple relations and internal contradictions among the SCO member states prevent them not only from elaborating new ways to achieve cooperation, but also from putting into practice even those decisions that were adopted earlier.

Nevertheless, the SCO is China's geopolitical project and so, due to the country's growing might, the organization is not only keeping its head above water, but also trying to overcome the barriers it faces.

After Xi Jinping's visit to Moscow, it became obvious that China's new leadership is placing particular importance on interaction with Russia, while Moscow itself is increasingly interested in cooperation with China. Moreover, against the background of the failed resetting of relations between the Russian Federation and the U.S., the Magnitsky Act, and the possible changes in the EU's energy balance due to the shale gas revolution, Russia has additional incentives for turning its attention toward the East. This mutual interest between China and Russia has the potential of changing the current situation in the SCO, which is playing the role of the cart in the fable about the swan, the crab, and the pike. But it should be noted again that this depends on many factors, so while the potential may be great, it has every chance of not being realized.

The interest of the Central Asian countries in receiving investments from China will prompt the organization to resolve the question of the financial institutions of such structures as the SCO Bank, the SCO account, and others.

The initiative of the SCO Energy Club is potentially close to institutional registration. This project was put forward and supported at different summits by the Chinese, Russian, and Kazakh sides. But since the region's energy system is currently experiencing a difficult time, in which each country is trying not so much to integrate into the overall energy system of the region, as to create its own self-sufficient system, the SCO Energy Club has every opportunity to become another existing but non-functioning structure of the organization.

Also, despite Russia's resistance, China is promoting the idea of creating a Free Trade Area in the SCO. After Russia and Kazakhstan accede to the WTO, Moscow will probably no longer have the opportunity or the incentive to oppose the project, since China is also a WTO member, so the project will reach its logical conclusion. Nevertheless, a SCO Free Trade Area would change the economic structure of the region, and China's Xinjiang would become a powerful economic pole of the region.

On the whole, efficient implementation of the SCO projects depends on China's political and economic might. If the SCO does indeed become a full-fledged organization, it might be said that China's project to dominate in the region has been successful. But at present, implementation of the SCO is being hindered by Russia and the U.S., which are offering their own integration projects. The U.S. is proposing the New Silk Road, while Russia is offering the Customs Union, CES, and CSTO. But even if the PRC does attain economic and political domination in Central Asia, there will still be numerous contradictions in the SCO among the Central Asian participants, and this will cause inefficient execution of the decisions adopted in the organization.