

THE FUTURE PROSPECTS OF SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION

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Abstract

Established in 1996, as Shanghai Five, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was initially considered a counter weight to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Nevertheless, despite the presence of extra-regional forces in the region over last eleven years, the forum has contributed little towards either regional stability, or exit of these forces from the region. This can be attributed either to the lack of military muscle on the part of SCO members, or deliberately, to avoid further destabilization of the region owing to the likelihood of confrontation. However, the forum has shown its concern over the expansion of extra-regional forces. Internally, there is a requirement for increased integration at political, economic and security levels. The key partners: China as a rising global power; Russia as the resurgent super power, if taking a unified stance, have the potential to free the region from the influence of foreign powers. However, both pursue their own national interests and have their own stakes and economic and political objectives in the region. This internal politics of national interests, seemingly prevent the forum from presenting and acting as a cohesive body. Even economically the forum made more promises than its demonstrated performance. In the regional politics especially in Afghanistan¹, and Central

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¹ A Comment by Michael C.H. Jones depicting the importance and the perceived aspirations of the objectives, strategy and future of the SCO as seen on <http://www.accci.com.au/JonesCommentonSCO.pdf> on September 3, 2012 on 1:30pm

Asia² so far, SCO could contribute little for the promotion of peace and stability. Nevertheless, there is an urge among the SCO members to stabilize the region from the platform of this forum, either by denying the influence of extra regional powers, or else to ensure their own grip on regional politics. This paper is aimed at analysing the future prospects of the organization for the regional stabilization and political and economic integration.

Introduction

Control of the Eurasian landmass is the key to global domination and control of Central Asia is the key to control of the Eurasian landmass. Zbigniew Brzezinski³

Zbigniew Brzezinski is a renowned Polish American political scientist, geo-strategist, and writer of many books. He has been the National Security Advisor of President Jimmy Carter and has made enormous contributions in the fields of global politics and geo-strategy.⁴ In his much-celebrated book, entitled, 'The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives' he identified four regions wherein lie American stakes. These regions indeed forming a 'grand chessboard'⁵ include; Central Asia, Russia, East Asia, and Europe. In his opinion, the US may be the first super power in a true sense, and perhaps may be the last one.⁶ Upon Eurasia, the strategically significant region, there lies the challenges either for maintaining or otherwise, the future supremacy of United States. Since there are rising and resurgent powers in Asia and Europe, therefore, in order to maintain the contemporary world order with a single super power, U.S needs to manage the conflicts to its convenience both in Europe and Asia.

Coincidentally, the formation of Shanghai Five, in 1996 and Zbigniew Brzezinski's strategic vision surfaced through his legendary 'Grand Chessboard'-1997, almost overlapped each other. Later, the scope and membership of this organization was revised and it was renamed as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001.⁷ In the opinion of political scholars, formations of SCO conceivably confirms the strategic thoughts of

² Augusto Soto, "A Central Asian Dimension of EU-China Relations", ISPI Analysis (Istituto Per Gli Studi Di Politica Internazionale), No. 130, July 2012 as seen on http://www.ispionline.it/it/documents/Analysis_130_2012.pdf

³ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy And Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, Basic Book, New York, 1997.p.45.

⁴ Tehran Times, November 20, 2008.

⁵ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy And Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, Basic Book, New York, 1997.p.45.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Official Website of SCO. Accessed on September 29, 2012 at; http://www.sco summit2012.org/english/2012-04/28/c_131558560.htm.

Zbigniew Brzezinski.⁸ After all, his vision viz-a-viz analogous assignments of dealing with the US national security from 1977 to 1981 ranked him at such an illustrious place. Even after his retirement, he remains associated with the US security policy formulation process. Brzezinski has been a close associate of Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of State, who still contributes significantly towards the US foreign policy.

With six members, five observers and three dialogue partners, today SCO is the foremost Eurasian organization, covering over 60% of Eurasian landmass and a population constituting a quarter of the globe. However, together with the observers and dialogue partners, SCO forms 50% of the global population too.⁹ As described by President Nursultan Nazarbayev in 2005, "The leaders of the states sitting at this negotiation table are representatives of half of humanity."¹⁰ It would be impulsive to say that, formulation of SCO was aimed to check the US or NATO expansion, yet for quite some time, political scientists have been considering this nascent organization as the substitute of the former Warsaw Pact. Nevertheless, ever since its transformation into a multilateral organization, its members have signed a number of documents, pacts, and agreements in various fields extending from security and economy to culture and education.

As revealed by the regional history, Sino-Soviet War-1969 provided an opportunity for the US to exploit the differences between two Communist countries of the cold war. It was undreamt of that there could be an escalation between former Soviet Union and China in those peak days of the cold war. According to William Burr, editor of the US 'National Security Archive Briefing Book', sequel to this conflict, the US manoeuvred through secret diplomacy to establish good relationship with China, thus strengthening its ties with the later to weaken its arch-rival, the former Soviet Union.¹¹ Pakistan and Romania played key role in brokering this secret diplomacy between the US and China.¹²

⁸ William E. Carroll, "China in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Hegemony, Multi-Polar Balance, or Cooperation in Central Asia", *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 1 No. 19, December 2011 accessed on http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_1_No_19_December_2011/1.pdf

⁹ Sameer Jafri, Behind the Scene News: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) accounts for 60% of the landmass of Eurasia, and as the SCO gets Stronger NATO Gets Weaker, *Pitts Report*, National International News (CMAC), July 6, 2011. Accessed on September 29, 2012 at; <http://www.pittsreport.com/2011/07/behind-the-scene-news-the-shanghai-cooperation-organisation-sco-presently-accounts-for-60-of-the-landmass-of-eurasia/>.

¹⁰ Rick Rozoff, The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Prospects For A Multipolar World, *Global Research Centre for Research on Globalization*, 22 May 2009. <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-shanghai-cooperation-organization-prospects-for-a-multipolar-world>.

¹¹ The Sino-Soviet Border Conflict, 1969: the US Reactions and Diplomatic Maneuvers, A National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book (Declassified Documents 1-28) William Burr, Editor June 12, 2001, accessed on September 29, 2012, at; <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB49/>.

¹² Ibid.

During these peak days of the cold war, the US needed China and China in return got a chance of opening out and reaching over to West, thus reviving its economy and political vision with a new outlook towards the globe.

Since there are neither 'permanent friends nor permanent foes' in global politics, thus, former Communist countries once again seem united under the umbrella of SCO against their common competitor - United States. However, it is too early to predict about the resolve of this alliance. Nevertheless, Russia and China seem unanimous to evict NATO and the US from Afghanistan and the Central Asian region. From the forum of Shanghai Five, Russia and China were able to settle their border disputes after signing the Treaty on Reduction of Military Forces in Border Regions in 1997. This treaty provided an opportunity to all parties to have a consensus for the "reduction of military forces in the border region."¹³ Besides, the 'Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions', formed the basis for establishing Shanghai-Five in 1996.¹⁴ Through this treaty, all members expressed their resolve for not engaging in any sort of aggressive military activities in their respective border areas nor would they conduct military exercises against each other. Member countries also decided to "develop friendly relations between the military and border personnel, and to exchange observers during border exercises."¹⁵

In the subsequent years, from the forum of SCO, China and Russia signed the 'Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation' in July 2001. It was a landmark event in the recent history of Russia and China. Following this treaty, there has been enhancement in the bilateral connections between these two countries. As stated by Interfax, the trade volume between China and Russia has reached to \$100 billion in 2012.¹⁶ This is backed by 40% annual rate since last two years. Both sides are working to double it (\$200 billion) by 2020.¹⁷ Indeed, the SCO Charter¹⁸ stresses on the promotion of mutuality among the members states. It lays emphasis on promoting peace, security and stability within the region through joint efforts. It also binds the member states to develop a just and rational political and economic order, following the democratic norms, as per internationally accepted norms.¹⁹ From the forum of SCO, voices have been raised in the past, asking for a timetable for

¹³ Eugene B. Rumer, Dmitrii Trenin, Huasheng Zhao, *Central Asia: Views from Washington, Moscow, and Beijing*, M.E Sharpe Inc, New York, 2007. p140.

¹⁴ Henry Plater-Zyberk, *Who's Afraid of the SCO?* Conflict Studies Research Centre: Central Asian Series 07/09, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom.

¹⁵ Renmin Ribao, 27 April 1996, p1; quoted in *The Success of the Shanghai Five: Interests, Norms and Pragmatism* by Qingguojia, www.comw.org/cmp/fulltext/0110jia.htm.

¹⁶ Giuseppe Paparella, *The Sino-Russian Relationship: The Next Axis Of Power? The Risky Shift*, June 28, 2012. Accessed on October 20, 2012 at; <http://theriskyshift.com/2012/06/sino-russian-relationship-next-axis-power/>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ SCO, Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, June 7, 2002, <http://www.sectSCO.org/EN/show.asp?id=69>.

¹⁹ Shanghai Cooperation Organization [SCO], Declaration on the Establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, June 15, 2001, http://www.ecrats.com/en/normative_documents/2006.

the pull out of NATO and the US forces. Besides, since terrorism is a menace that all member states are facing in the region, there is unanimity in eradicating it through a regional approach. Establishment of Regional Anti-terrorism Structure (RATS) in 2004 was a landmark event in this regard.²⁰ Besides, Russia and some CARs have also signed some security related pacts like Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) for better security cooperation among themselves.

Multidimensional Roles of SCO

As per the basic declaration of the SCO, this organization has to strictly abide by the United Nations Charter; respecting the sovereignty and independence of all other countries. According to this, SCO follows the principle of 'non-alignment'.²¹ In 2006, the President of Kazakhstan, Mr Nursultan Nazarbayev, described the role of the organization as, "The SCO is neither a military bloc nor an exclusive alliance targeting third party."²² According to him, safeguarding regional security and developing cooperation in the field of economy, trade and investment are the key strategic roles of the SCO. Besides, the members have agreed to cooperate in the field of education, culture, tourism and sports. Nevertheless, economic cooperation is the hallmark of the organization. In this regard, the member countries have had approved a compendium on multilateral cooperation in the fields of economy, science and technology. For the organization, the principle tasks are to fight against evils like; "terrorism, separatism, extremism, drug-trafficking and illegal immigration."²³

As a Military Alliance

Ever since its establishment in 2001, SCO was considered as a counterbalance to NATO²⁴ or as a substitute to the former Warsaw Pact. However, there have been continuous sounding from its forum that it is a regional organization having neither any global ambitions nor intentions to

²⁰ SCO, The Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism, June 15, 2001, <http://www.sectsc.org/EN/show.asp?id=68>.

²¹ Official Website of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/topics/sco/t57970.htm>.

²² Kazakh President Underlines SCO's Great Achievements, Xinhua News Agency June 9, 2006, accessed on October 13, 2012 at; <http://www.china.org.cn/english/international/170851.htm>.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Simbal Khan, "Stabilization of Afghanistan: the US-NATO Regional Strategy and the Role of the SCO", as seen on http://www.issi.org.pk/publication-files/1299137179_72323919.pdf

pursue military motives²⁵. This aspect is amply clear from its charter, which states that the organization is based on the principles of 'non-alliance and non-confrontation.'²⁶ It does not aim at targeting any state or an organization, thus remains open to the international community for cooperation on global affairs. The maximum SCO has demonstrated in the past few years that, there have been joint military exercises among the members and collaborations in the field of defence and security, particularly cooperation against terrorism.

As a Political Alliance

Over the years, SCO has evolved into a full-fledged international organization with its own charter and well-formed structure. Members of this organization actively cooperate to resolve current political and security problems. Politically, it is becoming more active and effective with sustained mutual confidence among the member states. The organization (SCO) is fervent to boost security cooperation to safeguard regional stability, actively take part in the settlement of the Afghanistan issue, and steadily carry out regional economic cooperation. As a result, the SCO would play a more active and substantial role on the world arena and show even better prospects for its development. In its own stated aims, the SCO is not an organization that is against any groupings, regions or a particular nation-state, thus should not be seen as a threat but a vehicle for increasing economic and social prosperity in the region. The SCO has increased its openness and buoyancy to meet all challenges and, encourage member states to enhance their mutual political confidence. However, there is a general realization that, SCO has yet to make public its political integration for a major regional cause. Regional political experts have a view that, unlike EU, the SCO members lack the ideological and racial similarity, thus pursue different interests, even though having geographical contiguity.

As an Economic Alliance

There has been more economic cooperation among the members of the SCO than in the other fields.²⁷As part of the Eurasian Economic Community, the member countries have signed a framework agreement for enhancing

²⁵ Shanghai Cooperation Organization [SCO], Declaration on the Establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, June 15, 2001, http://www.echrats.com/en/normative_documents/2006.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Masayuki Masuda, "China's SCO Policy in the Regional Security Architecture", The Tokyo Foundation Policy Research Brief, August 2010 accessed on http://www.tokyofoundation.org/en/additional_info/PRB_ChinaSCO.pdf

economic cooperation in 2003. There is a free trade agreement among the SCO members. In order to overcome the economic crisis of the members, in 2011, China announced \$10 billion loan for the economic uplift of SCO countries. Besides China, Russia has also promised economic assistance for improving the regional economic cooperation. As an organization, SCO has now attained the observer status in United Nations General Assembly, EU, ASEAN, OIC, and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). It is likely that, economic integration will grow among the members of SCO over the years. On the one hand, SCO has efficiently met the global recession, while on the other it has striven to promote the regional economic cooperation. Besides, it is trying to bring reforms and improvement on the financial, economic, and trade structures. Meanwhile, the international environment facing the SCO is now apt to be grimmer with the adjacency of hotspots in the region and the aggravation of international competitiveness on a global scale.

Expansion in the Organization

On the eve of 10th Summit of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on June 11, 2010, its member states agreed to open the organization's membership for other countries of the region. Currently, India, Pakistan, Iran, and Mongolia have the observer status in this organization. Hectic efforts are underway by Pakistan²⁸, India and Iran for the membership of SCO.²⁹ Since the criteria of the membership is that, no state under UN sanctions or international embargo can get its membership, thus, it is unlikely that Iran gets such a status in the near future. Despite having their relationship with Iran, the key members of the Organization, Russia and China, would not grant Iran, the membership of SCO³⁰ at this critical juncture of the history, while annoying rest of the world. Besides, Russia and China are unanimous for not granting observer status of SCO to United States.³¹

Russia has repeatedly shown full support to the Indian membership of SCO.³² On the eve of 10th Summit, Russian Ambassador to India, Mr. Alexander Kadakin said in a statement that, our position has all along been that we want India as a full-fledged member of the SCO. He said that, irrespective of hurdles,

²⁸ Qandeel Siddique, Pakistan's Future Policy Towards Afghanistan: A Look at Strategic Depth, Militant Movements and the role of India and the US, DIIS (Danish Institute for International Studies) Report, "2011:08 as seen on http://www.diis.dk/graphics/publications/reports2011/rp2011-08-pakistans-future-policy_web.pdf

²⁹ Pakistani president calls for strengthened economic cooperation within SCO http://www.scosummit2012.org/english/2012-06/08/c_131640806.htm

³⁰ Ariel Pablo Sznajder, "China's Shanghai Cooperation Organization Strategy", Journal of IPS, Spring 2006 accessed on <http://irps.ucsd.edu/assets/004/5367.pdf>

³¹ Yuasa Takeshi. Japan's Multilateral Approach toward Central Asia. Eager eyes fixed on Eurasia (Hokkaido University, Sapporo, 2007), P. 70

³² Ibid.,

"India meets all the requirements to be a member."³³ Russia also supported Pakistani membership during the 11th Summit of SCO. China, however, unequivocally supported Pakistani membership of SCO.³⁴ Pakistan thoroughly pleaded its case for the membership during 10th and 11th Summits of SCO.³⁵

Pakistan believes in further increasing the regional cooperation through the platform of SCO and desires to be associated more closely in the fields of economy, trade, finance, transport, customs and communications. Expansion of the SCO could have a sizeable impact on the future shape and influence of the organization, as a large cohesive organization could become a dominant force in the region. Since the organization is broadening its scope by including more states into its membership, thus in the future, it can be presumed that, SCO may bring together multiculturalism in its ambit by having countries like Pakistan and Iran³⁶ on the one hand, and Eurasian countries on the other hand. Nonetheless, it is debatable, whether the SCO can integrate countries having diverse backgrounds and culture.³⁷

SCO and the Region: Peace, Stability and Prosperity

The organization members are determined to carry out all-around cooperation within the SCO framework and develop the organization into a reliable guarantee of regional peace, stability and prosperity.³⁸ Over the years, SCO has established "over twenty large-scale projects"³⁹ in areas like; banking, defence, economy, transport, energy, telecommunication etc. Except NATO, a military alliance, these projects have no parallel among the contemporary regional organizations. For development in the region, the forum seems determined to promote and strengthen, unity, cooperation, and desires to maintain stability. During its 10th Summit, SCO finalized the strategies for fighting the three evil forces; terrorism, separatism, and extremism. It also safeguards security and stability; and advancing pragmatic cooperation among the members of SCO.

³³ The Economic Times, India pitches for SCO's membership, Afghanistan role, June 5, 2012.

³⁴ Sreemati Ganguly, "2012 Meet of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO): A Step towards the Future?", Institute of Foreign Policy Studies dated June 26, 2012 as seen on <http://www.caluniv.ac.in/ifps/Sreemati%20Ganguly.pdf>

³⁵ Rizwan Zeb, "Pakistan and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization", Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program, Vol. 4 No. 4 (2006) Pp. 51-60 accessed on http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/CEF/Quarterly/November_2006/Zeb.pdf

³⁶ Alexander A. Pkiayev, "Enlarging the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Is Iran a viable member?", Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Moscow PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No 15, August 2008 accessed on http://www.gwu.edu/~ieresgwu/assets/docs/pepm_015.pdf

³⁷ Marcel de Haas, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the OSCE: Two of a Kind?", accessed on http://ftp.clingendael.nl/publications/2007/20071100_cscp_art_haas.pdf

³⁸ Fazal-ur-Rehman, "The Ninth SCO Summit: A Step Forward", accessed on http://www.issi.org.pk/old-site/photos/THE_NINTH_SCO_SUMMIT.pdf

³⁹ Zhou Wa, China & Russia Quit the Dollar, The Wall Street Examiner, November 24, 2010. <http://forums.wallstreetexaminer.com/topic/911455-china-russia-quit-the-dollar/>

As security threats and challenges continue to emerge, SCO members should further cooperate in fighting all forms of terrorism and strengthen dialogue between different civilizations and cultures to prevent the growth of terrorism and extremism. Despite having instability and rampant terrorism in the neighbouring Afghanistan, the forum is trying to keep the region intact and free from the menace of terrorism. Even, the worst economic crisis, the forum has played a positive role in bolstering regional stability, spurring the economic recovery of its member states and striving for common development, and regional cooperation.

Member countries of SCO have intensified their mutual political and economic cooperation. They have also devised a new mechanism of consultation on global and regional issues. From the platform of SCO, member nations have joined hands to combat terrorism, drug production and trafficking and organized crimes side by side. During 10th Summit of SCO, it was emphasized that Central Asia should be a nuclear-free zone. This step will not only enhance regional peace and security but would also contribute towards global peace and security.⁴⁰

In order to meet the forth-coming challenges, the organization has attached great importance to substantial cooperation among the members. Besides, it has beefed up its self-development and expanded its external exchanges. Cooperation in political, security, economic, cultural and humanitarian areas is being expanded and organization's external exchanges are enhanced. SCO Secretariat is working to have collaboration with international organizations including; United Nations, Organization of Islamic Cooperation and European Union.

SCO: For a Stabilizing Role in Afghanistan

After a prolonged silence, China hinted in June 2012, that together with Russia, it would play a bigger role for the stabilization of Afghanistan. This statement of the former Chinese President Mr. Hu Jintao came just before 12th Summit of SCO, held in Beijing in June 2012. President Hu said, "We will continue to manage regional affairs by ourselves, guarding against shocks from turbulence outside the region, and will play a bigger role in Afghanistan's peaceful reconstruction."⁴¹ Mr. Hu emphasized that "We will strengthen communication, coordination and cooperation in dealing with major international and regional issues." He urged new cooperation models and proposed ways to identify non-resource sectors as a new priority for economic

⁴⁰ SCO summit vows to boost regional peace, stability, prosperity, Xinhua, China.org.cn, June 11, 2010. http://www.china.org.cn/world/hu_sco_2010/2010-06/11/content_20240433.htm.

⁴¹ GlebBryanski and Chris Buckley, China's Hu sees role for regional bloc in Afghanistan, Chicago Tribune News June 06, 2012 Accessed on October 25, 2012 at; http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-06-06/news/sns-rt-us-china-russia-hu-afghanistanbre85504t-20120605_1_afghanistan-sco-china-s-hu.

cooperation. He said that China would provide \$10 billion⁴² for undertaking projects in SCO countries.

According to Mr Zhang Deguang, former Secretary General of SCO and Chairman of China Foundation of International Studies (CFIS), "SCO can and will play a bigger role in Afghanistan after the NATO withdrawal."⁴³ Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev called for setting up a special fund to complete projects in member countries of SCO. He pledged to take forward the spirit of SCO and specially mentioned the need for peace, progress and stability in Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan. Russia wants the Shanghai group to play a part in stabilization of Afghanistan, rather challenging the US and NATO role,⁴⁴ i.e. upholding the SCO policy of non-alliance and non-confrontation.⁴⁵

According to 'The Global Times,' a Chinese daily, under the current situation where NATO and the US are facing embarrassment in Afghanistan, SCO countries would not like to become a party or counterpart to this alliance. The forum is looking for the reconstruction of Afghanistan, following the pull out of the NATO and the US forces⁴⁶. Already China has invested a lot in Afghanistan. Afghanistan has been given an observer status of SCO during its 12th Summit. Afghan President, Hamid Karazai desired a strategic partnership with China and said:, "Afghanistan will be expanding and strengthening relations with China."⁴⁷ Chinese President Mr Hu assured President Karazai for a continued support. He said, "China will continue actively participating in international and regional cooperation concerning Afghanistan."⁴⁸ Earlier, Mr Liu Weimin, spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry said, "Events in Afghanistan are of great concern to the security and stability of Central Asia."⁴⁹ Indeed, regional countries and especially China is seriously concerned about the uncertainty and instability in Afghanistan.

⁴² Christina Y. Lin, China, Iran and North Korea; A Triangular Strategic Alliance, Gloria centre, Global Research in International Affairs. March 5, 2010. Accessed on October 25 at; <http://www.gloria-center.org/2010/03/lin-2010-03-05/>.

⁴³ SCO sees role in Afghanistan, Dawn, September 12, 2012. Accessed on October 25, 2012 at; <http://dawn.com/2012/09/12/sco-sees-role-in-afghanistan/>.

⁴⁴ SCO sees role in Afghanistan, Dawn September 12, 2012. <http://dawn.com/2012/09/12/sco-sees-role-in-afghanistan/>

⁴⁵ Ruslan Maksutov, "The Shanghai Cooperative Organization: A Central Asian Perspective", SIPRI Project Paper, August 2006 accessed on <http://archives.sipri.org/contents/worldsec/Ruslan.SCO.pdf>

⁴⁶ Fabrizio Vielmini, "The SCO Central Asian Dimension of the Afghan Crisis on the eve of ISAF Retreat", ISPI Analysis (Istituto Per Gli Studi Di Politica Internazionale), No. 132 July 2012 as seen on http://www.ispionline.it/it/documents/Analysis_132_2012.pdf

⁴⁷ Hu sees Afghan role for regional bloc, Reuters, BEIJING, Taipei Times, June 7, 2012. <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/front/archives/2012/06/07/2003534708/2>.

⁴⁸ The Economic Times, June 8, 2012. <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/topic/shanghai-cooperation-organisation/quotes/2>

⁴⁹ Gleb Bryanski and Chris Buckley, China's Hu sees role for regional bloc in Afghanistan, Reuters, Jun 06, 2012. <http://mobile.reuters.com/article/idtheUSBRE85504T20120606?irpc=932>.

In a statement, Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi said that member states should boost security cooperation to safeguard regional stability, including stepping up the fight against terrorism, autonomy and extremism, optimizing the model for cooperation in ensuring security for major international events, and carrying on joint anti-terrorism exercises.⁵⁰ Yang also called for better links among the SCO member states, boosting infrastructural construction, further facilitating trade and investment, and expanding cooperation in sectors such as finance, transport, energy, telecommunications, and agriculture amid the economic downturn.

During 12th Summit of SCO, surprisingly, India also backed Chinese call for the SCO's role in Afghanistan. Indian External Affairs Minister S.M Krishna, heading the Indian delegate, said, "SCO is a promising and alternative regional platform for discussion on the rapidly changing situation in Afghanistan."⁵¹ For stabilization of the region, Uzbek President Islam Karimov emphasized for a political and economic cooperation and stepping up anti-terrorism efforts among the SCO countries.

Most of the SCO countries are geographically contiguous with Afghanistan, thus vulnerable to spillover effects of terrorism and Afghan-originated drug trafficking. Owing to these facts, they have an interest to stabilize this country. They developed a comprehensive strategic approach to deal with these issues. The SCO's members noted the situation in Afghanistan remained the main threat to security in the region, thus consider that the organization can assume responsibility for the future of Afghanistan. The organization encouraged the UN for a leading role and global mediation efforts to bring peace in Afghanistan. It also stressed the need for enhanced efforts to intensify the fight against all sections of drug production and circulation in Afghanistan.

"The SCO member states would like to coordinate with other international and regional institutions on the drug issue and called on the International Security Assistance Force to cooperate with SCO members in combating drugs," the declaration said.⁵² Apart from its members' desire, internationally it is felt that, SCO should also be a partner in stabilization of Afghanistan.⁵³ As presumed by scholars, the biggest test of the SCO would be its developmental role in Afghanistan. There have been continuous soundings in

⁵⁰ Michael Raska, China's defence aviation industry: searching for innovation, *The Nation* (Thailand), 22 Oct 2012. <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/spotlight.htm>.

⁵¹ Maj. Jefferson E. Turner, "What is Driving India's and Pakistan's Interest in Joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization?", Centre for Contemporary Conflict, Strategic Insights Vol. IV, Issue. 8, August 2005 accessed on <http://www.nps.edu/Academics/centers/ccc/publications/OnlineJournal/2005/Aug/turnerAug05.pdf>

⁵² Simbal Khan, "Stabilization of Afghanistan: the US-NATO Regional Strategy and the Role of SCO" accessed on http://www.issi.org.pk/publication-files/1299137179_72323919.pdf

⁵³ Jeffery Nickeson, 'Has the West Lost the Battle for Central Asia?' *Defence and Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy*, Vol. 35, No. 8, August 2007, p. 1.

this regard in SCO summits particularly in Bishkek⁵⁴ in August 2007 and Beijing in 2012. The possibility of regional cooperation through SCO with other groups in the region like NATO is wide-ranging and has the capacity to be long lasting.

Varied Regional outlook of Major SCO Members

Whereas, there is a consensus based approach for the development of the region, there appear internal differences especially between major countries of the SCO on some of their areas of influence. Russia and China have their own outlooks and interests on the regional geo-politics of Central Asia.⁵⁵ These, indeed, are the impediments SCO may face in the days to come. Though both seek to bring robust peace in the region that is a crucial development, nevertheless, both are pursuing policies with a little difference of interests over Central Asia. Russia is more possessive about Central Asia and its resources,⁵⁶ aiming not to share those with any third country. China is making huge investments and promoting good will, trade and commerce with Central Asian States. Russia also has major concerns over China's involvement in Central Asia. Traditionally, both China and India have been massively relying on the Russian origin military hardware. However, owing to Sino-Indian differences and Russian intimacy with India, this resurgent super power is exercising restraint over the supply of its military equipment to China.

It is worth mentioning that upon economic and political collapse of the former Soviet Union in December 1991, its former republics formed Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).⁵⁷ All Central Asian States are its members. Function of the CIS is to coordinate important policies of the member states particularly those related to defence, foreign relations and economy etc.⁵⁸ Russia being the successor of the former Soviet Union, intended on maintaining a hold over other states, especially the hydrocarbon rich Central Asia. Within CIS, in May 2002, a security organization was established with the name of Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Apart from Russia and some other former Soviet States, four Central Asian States (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) are its members. The major objective of this organization is to preserve the territorial integrity of the member states. As per former Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov, CSTO is

⁵⁴ Marcel de Haas, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the OSCE: Two of a Kind?", accessed on http://ftp.clingendael.nl/publications/2007/20071100_cscp_art_haas.pdf

⁵⁵ Marcel de Haas, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the OSCE: Two of a Kind?", accessed on http://ftp.clingendael.nl/publications/2007/20071100_cscp_art_haas.pdf

⁵⁶ Ruslan Maksutov, "The Shanghai Cooperative Organization: A Central Asian Perspective", SIPRI Project Paper, August 2006 accessed on <http://archives.sipri.org/contents/worldsec/Ruslan.SCO.pdf>

⁵⁷ Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Encyclopedia Britannica. Accessed on October 23, 2012 at; <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/128945/Commonwealth-of-Independent-States-CIS/128945yblinks/Year-in-Review-Links>.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

the potential partner of NATO. Ivanov realizes that, "the next logical step may be to work out a mechanism for cooperation between NATO and the CSTO with corresponding, clearly defined spheres of responsibility."⁵⁹

Future Prospects

Since there has never been a concord on all issues by all members even at the level of UN or EU, therefore, expecting unanimity from the SCO forum, having a decade old history would be asking for too much. Nonetheless, it is the only forum that raised a voice for regional security ever since it came into being. In 2006, from the forum of SCO, NATO and U.S were asked to vacate the military bases, occupied by them in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Besides, the organization has been raising its concerns over the presence of extra-regional troops and their activities in the region. Currently, the organization may be behaving toothlessly or having forbearance, but has the potential to become a future competitor to the Western alignment. With over 60% Eurasian landmass, it is the only organization which can effectively pose itself as the "political bulwark against further U.S. penetration in the region."⁶⁰

With rapidly increasing economic and political cooperation among the members, SCO has been debating the aspects of military and security cooperation in the "Asiatic area." After the US announcement that by 2020, 60% of its Navel fleets would be deployed in the Asia-Pacific⁶¹, Russia and China felt more endangered. Thereafter, navies of both countries have decided to undertake joint exercises in the Yellow Sea, following the military exercises of the US and Vietnam. Besides, as major SCO countries, China and Russia have unanimously rejected the UNSC Resolutions⁶² sponsor by the US for a likely military intervention in Syria. This and many other cooperative actions of both at global level indicate that they have a realization that they can compete the growing the US and Western domination through a joint approach, rather independently.

According to the New York Times, SCO is prepared to preserve the regional security without involvement of the US or any other extra regional power. Moreover, SCO will not develop into a military alliance.⁶³ However, maintaining regional security has become its most significant mission. The

⁵⁹ Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Globalsecurity.org. Accessed on October 23, 2012, at; <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/int/csto.htm>

⁶⁰ Richard Weitz, China-Russia security relations: strategic parallelism without partnership or passion? Strategic Studies Institute, ISBN 1-58487-360-4, August 2008. Accessed on October 30, 2012 at; <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/pub868.pdf>.

⁶¹ Leon Panetta: the US to deploy 60% of navy fleet to Pacific, BBC News the US and Canada, June 2, 2012. Accessed on October 30, 2012 at; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-18305750>.

⁶² Paul Harris in New York, Martin Chulov, David Batty and Damien Pearse, Syria resolution vetoed by Russia and China at United Nations, the guardian, February 4, 2012.

⁶³ Zhang Hong, Shanghai Cooperation Organization not Asia's NATO, People's Daily, June 21, 2011.

establishment of the organization is based on a common strategic requirement, which is to curb the "Three Evil Forces" of terrorism, regional separatism and religious extremism. Over the past 10 years, SCO has conducted ten anti-terrorism exercises. Besides, it has resolved to fight against drug smuggling and transnational organized crimes and launched cooperation in many new fields, such as anti-money-laundering and the security of large-scale international activities.

It would be optimistic to say that SCO countries would deploy their forces for the security of the region and confront the NATO alliance. However, it would surely resist any foreign intervention in the region. Such an opportunity will be obtainable only after pullout of NATO and the US forces from the region. Regional integration and harmony among the members is the prerequisite for attaining such a level of commitment. Whilst SCO members are making all out efforts to block the entry into the region, NATO and the US would desist such a strategy.

Since the Central Asian region has huge hydrocarbon reserves, therefore, the sole super power and its allies may not allow a free ride to China and Russia. On many regional and global issues, each side expects a guarded response from the challengers. Then there is a resurgent Russia, striving for the restoration of its former status and a rising China, looking for a new towering position at the global standpoint.

In the views of some analysts, future of SCO may be viewed as an organization which takes into consideration all aspects of the region; economic, political and a wholesome security provider. However, the SCO, rather going for a brisk walk leading to confrontation, is resorting to a gradual approach of consolidating its gains. There is a general feeling among the realist scholars of international relations that in the past decade SCO did not attain much. This realization is there among the members of this organization too.

In order to make it an animated regional organization having a global acceptance, major members of SCO need to reorient themselves with a clear delineation of their national interests and larger organization's interests. If they are aiming to have their own domination over the region by making use of this platform, then the organization may not become a proficient forum and its members will be open for the manipulation by extra-regional powers. Therefore, sincerity and regional devotion and dedication would play a pivotal role in the future effectiveness of the organization.

Conclusion

As its members are viewing SCO as a vehicle for increasing economic and social prosperity in the region, therefore, the organization can play a fundamental role in stabilizing Afghanistan and Central Asian region. The organization has made a direct engagement between Central Asian nations and Russia and China. The circle of engagement of the organization would enhance with the increase in its membership. Countries like Afghanistan, Mongolia,

India, Pakistan, and Iran, having observer status currently, would be a good addition in the organization if given permanent membership. Indeed, such multi-nationalism would make the SCO a key player in accelerating regional amalgamation and cooperation. Its aim seems to be more multi-faceted than simply to move towards balancing power or securing the region. SCO⁶⁴ is also focusing on economic and social integration of the region and has gone to great lengths to create confidence in its desire to promote prosperity and cooperation. The SCO continues to evolve into a stable representative unit that has broadened its responsibility to cooperating on social, economic and security considerations.

Afghanistan is a unique prospect that can be used as a confidence building exercise for SCO and NATO to work together because major players from these groups are active in the re-construction and stabilization process. SCO can be a key stakeholder and important enabler of Afghan and Central Asian stability. Achieving a stable and prosperous Central Asia will rest on the success of this important regional security forum.⁶⁵ Regional members have an opportunity through the SCO platform to turn Afghanistan into a peace bridge for the region and the globe. Besides, the organization can bring about a shift in focus by moving away from issues of weak and porous borders to measures that help build confidence so that the member states can augment internal security and direct finances for the economic and social prosperity.

⁶⁴ Alyson J.K. Bailes, Pal Dunay, Pan Guang and Mikhail Troitskiy, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization", SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute), Policy Paper No. 17, May 2007 accessed on http://www.voltairenet.org/IMG/pdf/SIPRI-Shangai_Coop_Org.pdf

⁶⁵ Matthew Hall, 'The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: A Partner for Stabilizing Afghanistan', Shedd Papers, p. 10.

