

Shanghai Cooperation Organization and its Activities in Ensuring Human and Social Security

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ABSTRACT This paper reflects the activities of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in ensuring human and social security within the context of the latest threats. Recent geopolitical trends highlight the statement of the problem as it may influence the evolution of the organization, in particular, its fight against destructive elements. The paper focuses on the implications of the SCO for ensuring human and social security in its area of activities including Afghanistan due to its geographical proximity with Central Asia. It argues that the SCO's activities of ensuring human and social security will eventually turn the organization into a security organization. It has been discovered that the perceived notion about the availability of information in abundance concerning SCO is far from the truth. There is, in fact, a scarcity of evidence base. Therefore, in addition to the authentic available sources, the results of the surveys conducted among domestic and foreign experts by the authors have been used in this paper in order to substantiate the arguments.

INTRODUCTION

Religious extremism in all its forms and manifestations has become a systemic threat to global security in the 21st century. The most vulnerable dimension of this threat to global security has been visible in human and social security. The events unfolded in and around Afghanistan have been a major destabilizing factor for the security of the Central Asian States from the very first days of their sovereignty. Located in the geographical neighbourhood Central Asia has been exposed to all negative effects including the terror related activities coming from Afghanistan. Such activities led to the flow of weapons and drugs, thus turning the region of Central Asia into a transit corridor from East to West. This was followed by the appearance of the elements of religious extremism, mainly introduced from outside. In such a situation, the major players in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), China and Russia, have shown a clear interest in keeping the regional security and Afghan stability intact. Withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan seems to be forcing China and Russia to expand their roles not only in regional counter-terrorism but also in supporting Afghanistan to overcome its post 2014 challenges (Cordesman and Lin 2015).

The SCO's activities in ensuring human and social security has especially been witnessed in recent events, generated by the actions of the "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" (ISIL), an extremely radical Islamist group already controlling a significant part of Syria and Iraq. It is pos-

sible that members of the underground and semi-underground radical movements and organizations in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan may adopt the immoral ideology of this group and join its hands. In this regard, Kazakhstan may also encounter certain problems. It is in this context that the aim of this paper is to analyze the activities of the SCO in the fight against destructive actions of religious extremism in order to ensure human and social security in Central Asia.

Objectives

The main purpose of this paper is to highlight the transition of the SCO from the organization of cooperation to the organization that resolves security issues. To achieve this goal, the researchers focus on the following tasks:

- ♦ To analyze the conceptual issues concerning the nature and character of the SCO as an international organization engaged in ensuring human and social security;
- ♦ To consider the development and the current state of fight against destructive forces within the framework of the SCO;
- ♦ To gauge the extent of expansion and strengthening of SCO activities by various means, including its involvement in the settlement of the Afghan problem.

METHODOLOGY

During the course of gathering information for the research of this paper, the authors based

the research on the provisions of political anthropology, which has changed a lot in the last 30-40 years (Shore and Wright 1997). It has evolved not only from «Stateless» science to science «in and of state», but also reached the level of studying the processes of interstate character. Currently, the political anthropology studies the reality and possible interstate cooperation in the “political field” (Wright 1994).

Thus, political anthropology studying traditional changes of the society on the way to their evolution, adopts scientific categories of classical “history” and “political science”, such as “wars”, “conflicts”, “alliance”, “confederation”, “organization” and so on. At present, anthropology as a whole, comes from the former “war” and “peace”. Today the situation in the world shows that human security is closely connected with the realities of world politics. A “structured approach” to the category of human security shows its versatility, complexity and the fact that its maintenance depends on the combination of many factors, including political.

While adopting the research methodology it has been kept in mind that, first of all, it is necessary to clarify some conceptual traits related to the nature and character of the SCO as an international organization. The definition of these basic concepts indicates the importance of such component as security in the SCO’s activities. It is also important to take into account the perception of the SCO abroad on the basis of “constructivism” (Taber 2011). One of the important aspects of the problem analysis has been the survey of experts, which include scholars from both the Central Asian States as well as foreign countries.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Main Aspects of SCO Activities

Currently, the international community assesses the activities and the very existence of the SCO as quite controversial. Nevertheless, it gradually comes to understand that the Organization is neither anti-American nor anti-Western. Earlier used definitions, such as the “anti-Bush coalition” have not transformed into “anti-Obama coalition”. The arguments in favor of “anti-western nature of the SCO” are ungrounded for one reason or the other. Each of the SCO’s member states has been successfully developing its own bilateral relations with western states.

None of the documents of the SCO and its structures has a negative reference to the United States or the western countries. However, the expansion of the SCO through inclusion of two nuclear powers, India and Pakistan, and a strong regional leader, Iran is being considered by the *Western* states as one of the main threats. Moreover, the issue of expansion is permanently on the agenda of the SCO. Prospects for further expansion of the SCO will be discussed at the forthcoming meeting of the Council of Heads of SCO Member States in Ufa (Russia) on 9-10 July 2015. Another matter “of concern” by the West is military exercise, carried out by the SCO member states. In this regard, the British newspaper, *Daily Telegraph* described the SCO as “the second Warsaw Pact” (Blomfield 2007). Another newspaper, *New York Times*, while commenting on the military exercise stressed on the desire of Russia and China to get control over energy reserves in Central Asia (Stern 2007). The German newspaper, *Suddeutsche Zeitung* noticed the desire “to create a center of influence independent from the West” (Bressler 2007). Similar statements were also made by the French *Le Figaro*, the German *Die Tageszeitung*, and the Japanese *Yomiuri* (Sedr 2007; Bensmann 2007). But it is worth paying attention to the fact that this military exercise is of purely anti-terrorist character. For example, the latest exercise “Peaceful mission-2014” of the SCO member states took place on the firing range in Chzhuzhihe (China), from 24 to 29 August 2014. Before the exercise, *The Legend* voiced: “Interethnic conflict exacerbation in an imaginary city led to the political instability and growth of terrorist activity. At the request of the government and with the mandate of the UN Security Council, the SCO countries decided to provide assistance to this state”. That proves the *destructive nature* of the exercise. *The Legend* has a very important detail, that is, the mandate of the UN Security Council, which once again demonstrates the absolutely peaceful character of the SCO and its commitment to solve only internal issues.

However, in the western academic circles, one of the renowned approaches to the analysis of the SCO has been “...to create the potential to act independently of the unipole or at cross with it” (Ikenberry et al. 2011). The Western experts understand the nature of the SCO quite different from its member states, that is, they define it predominantly as an economic organization. Yet, M.

de Haas emphasizes on SCO's concentration on security issues: "...the SCO's development towards a full-grown security organization [seems to be visible due to its going] on its way to an alliance with a span of activities and a depth of cooperation similar to that of NATO" (Haas 2011). Of course, participation of Russia and China in the SCO is considered by the international community as a major factor that contributes to enhancing the geopolitical ambitions of the two mighty powers in the Central Asian region. It is an undeniable fact that the SCO is a geopolitical project for China and Russia, designed primarily to serve their interest.

According to experts, "the conservation of declarative nature in the SCO activity and further divergence of Chinese and Russian priorities can become a serious challenge to the Organization in emerging new conditions of the second decade of its existence" (Danilovich and Rozanova 2012). Meanwhile, there is a very important aspect of functioning of the SCO. The SCO membership of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan is a guarantee to ensure national and regional security, not only in terms of economic security but also in terms of human security by ending the threat of religious extremism. Because of the proximity of a dangerous source of insecurity such as Afghanistan, these Central Asian countries often try to fit into the system of maintaining peace and security at the national and regional levels.

The prevailing international environment in the region represented by the two major regional actors, such as China and Russia, provides little choice to the Central Asian countries to go beyond regional organization. Some analysts even consider the efforts of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and other countries in the region as defending their positions and security by diversifying their international relations. The SCO for Central Asian countries is a platform that shows the ways of ensuring security. Today, the multi-vector security system has been strengthened in Central Asia by involving the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in addition to the SCO. NATO's presence in the region counterbalances Russia's domination (Russia participates in both the CSTO and the SCO), thus giving the Central Asian countries an opportunity to diversify the ways of ensuring their security underpinned by national interests.

In general, the participation of the above mentioned countries in the SCO can be analyzed on the basis of neoclassical realism that echoes Thucydides' formula, that is, "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must" (Rose 1998). On this basis, we can make two assumptions: Firstly, membership of fragile states in organizations with participation of the strong states is imposed on the first by the second ones; and secondly, within the organization, the fragile states are prepared for the role of obedient executors without any pretensions. If neoclassical realism sees in fragile states the performers of the superpowers' will, the liberal institutionalism gives them the chance for some independence. Strengthening of globalization processes, the central idea of which is just liberalization, promises further expansion of liberal institutionalism. In international relations, the institutionalist research programme is a promising one as "the logic of institutionalist theory, with its focus on the informational role of institutions, appears solid" (Keohane and Martin 1995). With the increasing role of the institutional framework of interstate relations, the fragile states, using its membership in international organizations, can carry out their role of members of the international community. As members of certain international organizations, these states having economic, military and security guarantees, get a hypothetical possibility to set a medium and long term task of implementing their national interests.

Attempts of the SCO in Ensuring Human and Social Security

This section analyzes the measures taken by the SCO to ensure human security. Historically, the SCO began functioning in 1996-1997 as the Shanghai Five. The main issue of the Shanghai meeting at the initial stage was the signing of agreements on confidence-building measures in the military area and reduction of cross-border armed forces. At the same time, there was a need to deal with emerging cross-border non-traditional security threats to the region, mainly on issues concerning social, economic, anti-crime, migration and environment. At present, three main areas of SCO activities can be clearly defined. They are *economic issues, security and humanitarian cooperation*. The borders and the degree of elaboration of these areas are quite

different. Each of them is qualitatively different from the others and special in its own way. Since the area of security is most specific security issues were the main reason for the creation of the SCO. In 2001, when the SCO came into existence by signing its Charter, the Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism (including religious) was also signed, which contains clear definitions of relevant terms aimed at developing practical cooperation between the law enforcement and security services in the fight against human security related problems.

Security mechanism within the SCO framework is institutionalized. On June 7, 2002, the Agreement between the SCO member states on the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure was signed (2014). While continuing to address these issues, the SCO established the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) in 2004. The Executive Committee of this structure is located in Tashkent (Uzbekistan). The SCO RATS has a mechanism of meetings of Secretaries of Security Councils of the Organization's Member States. Thus, the RATS consists of two organs: the Executive Committee and the Council. The RATS Executive Committee is a standing organ and the RATS Council meets twice a year. The RATS Executive Committee of the SCO works in three main directions: coordination of the fight against terrorism, extremism and separatism; informational and analytical support to the parties' competent authorities and international legal activity. In order to develop the legal support of the RATS, at the 10th summit hosted by Astana in 2005, the RATS Council reported on signing the Agreement on the Database of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure and the Agreement on Protection of the Classified Information within Regional anti-Terrorist Structure.

An understanding on the close connection between terrorism and drug trafficking resulted in the signing of Agreement on *Cooperation in Combating Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and their Precursors within the SCO*. In 2002, the SCO recognized the use of establishing an anti-drug system in the form of security belts along the borders of Afghanistan. Up to 65 percent of the drugs, produced in Afghanistan, are transported to Central Asia, Russia and European countries. About one-third of them remain in the Central Asian region (Hill 2002). To combat this evil, the *Council of Heads of State* of the SCO held

in Tashkent in 2004 decided to *establish the Coordination Council SCO-Afghanistan* for border control and fight against drug trafficking. The establishment of a permanent anti-drug body, similar to the RATS was discussed at different forums of the SCO. The possibility of penetrating Islamic state in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Central Asia sets complex tasks for the RATS. In such a situation, this structure needs to be responded quickly for taking adequate measures to ensure the security within the SCO area.

The SCO summit held in Dushanbe in 2014 approved and adopted the 2013 Report of the RATS. According to this report, a large number of terrorist attacks in the six countries were prevented during the activities of this structure. A single list of persons internationally wanted in connection with terrorist, separatist and extremist crimes was approved as part of the common data bank on terrorism. On the basis of the list, the Organization began forming a single search list of the security agencies and intelligence services of the SCO Member States. But the RATS is not an Asian analogue of the Interpol, rather it is only responsible for coordinating activities of the competent bodies and law enforcement agencies of the SCO Member States. Apart from commonly known manifestations of terrorism, the RATS also deals with relatively new security issues. So, the twenty-fifth meeting of the RATS held on September 19, 2014 considered and approved the joint actions of competent organs of the SCO member states to ensure the security of cross-border oil and gas pipelines. The meeting also agreed on measures to detect and suppress facts of the internet use for terrorist purposes. It was also decided to connect the SCO RATS to the international data bank on counter-terrorism.

The SCO's primary goal is the construction of the axis of stability in the Central Asian region as opposed to the axis of instability in the Middle East. Not having a distinct military component, the organization is forced, however, to pay increasing attention to security issues, which implies the use of armed intervention. In October 2002, China and Kyrgyzstan arranged the first anti-terrorist military exercises. A year later, multilateral exercises called "Interaction 2003" were carried out with the participation of the SCO member states in Kazakhstan and Xinjiang - Uighur Autonomous Region. In March 2006, the RATS held its first joint anti-terrorist exercise "*East-Antiterror-2006*" in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (Yomiuri 2007).

As the Table 1 shows, China takes an active part in all the 12 military exercises. Russia comes after China (8 participations). Here, one would agree with the opinion of the Russian expert Golobokov that "... Military exercise is of great practical interest to all member countries, especially Russia and China. However, in Russia, the military contacts in the vast former Soviet Union are more associated with the CSTO, Collective Rapid Reaction Force already available for these purposes. In China, military ties with Russia and Central Asian republics at the collective level are implemented mainly using the potential of the SCO" (Golobokov 2010). However, it poses an open question about the potential actions of the SCO under unfavorable internal political processes of the Organization's member states, with the threat of violent seizure of power and destruction of internal security systems in the SCO. The Organization has yet to defend its interpretation of the concepts of extremism and separatism to avoid the repetition of events similar to the events in Bishkek, Andijan and the latest developments in Ukraine. The causes of the Ukrainian events are treated differently by the East and West.

Currently, the center of the conflict zone has shifted from Afghanistan far west to Syria and Iraq. But it does not translate into reduction of tensions in and around Afghanistan. After the withdrawal of NATO coalition forces (the final withdrawal is delayed until the end of 2016), Afghanistan will actually be left to itself, therefore, the Afghan problem will not lose sharpness for the CAR in the near future. Afghanistan also has a direct bearing on the SCO. The decision to grant Afghanistan an observer status in the SCO was signed by the leaders of its member states on June 7, 2012. In October 2014, a small but significant event took place. In Tashkent, at the headquarters of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO RATS), the *Ambassador* Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of *Afghanistan* in Uzbekistan Muhammad Sodik Daudzay and the Director of the Executive Committee of the RATS Zhang Sinfen discussed the situation in Afghanistan. During the meeting, the Ambassador asked the SCO member states to assist the Afghan national security forces in the fight against terrorism (2014). This can be interpreted as a lack of hope for the assistance of NATO and the United States in

Table 1: All military exercises conducted in the framework of the SCO, are as follows (2002-2013)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Exercise</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Participating states</i>
October 2002	Joint anti-terror military exercise "Exercise -01"	China and Kyrgyzstan	China, Kyrgyzstan
August 2003	First multilateral anti-terror military exercise "Soyuz-2003"	China and Kazakhstan	China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan
August 2005	Joint anti-terror military exercise "Peace mission-2005"	China and Russia	China, Russia
August 2006	Joint anti-terror military exercise "Tyanshan-1"	Kazakhstan	China, Kazakhstan
September 2006	Joint anti-terror military exercise "Cooperation-2006"	Tajikistan	China, Tajikistan
August 2007	Joint anti-terror military exercise "Peacemission-2007"	Russia	China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan
July 2009	Joint anti-terror military exercise "Peace mission-2009"	China and Russia	China, Russia
September 2010	Joint anti-terror military exercise "Peace mission-2010"	Kazakhstan	China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan
May 2011	Joint anti-terror military exercise "Tyanshan-2"	China	China, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan
June 2012	Joint anti-terror military exercise "Peace mission-2012"	Tajikistan	China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan
August 2013	Joint anti-terror military exercise "Peace mission-2013"	Russia	China, Russia
August 2014	Joint anti-terror military exercise "Peace mission-2014"	China	China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

Source: Compiled by the authors on the basis of information gathered from different sources

this matter due to the termination of the coalition forces mission and planning cooperation with the SCO.

Nevertheless, the SCO does not distance itself from the Afghan problem. If the Western coalition is going to leave the country, the SCO will stay due to its geographical proximity. The uncontrolled situation in the country is a big risk for the nearest neighbours, because the representatives of the Islamic state in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) can come to Afghanistan when the authority is weak. The country itself and its neighbors will have a lot of problems for many years. The SCO has been forming a common approach to the Afghan problem within the entire period of its activity. In 2005, the Protocol on Establishment of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group between the SCO and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was signed. Uzbekistan at the time proposed formula "Six plus Three" for the solution of the Afghan problem, which means the involvement of Afghanistan's six direct neighbors, as well as Russia, the US and NATO. However, this formula excludes the Afghan government and the opposition forces (for instance, Taliban) that are the immediate parties of the conflict. "Seven plus Five" formula seems to be more appropriate, it was voiced at the UN in creating a contact group to address the problems of Afghanistan. The "Seven" in this formula includes Afghanistan itself and India, and the "Five" - the SCO and the CSTO. But this format is complicated by the confrontation of Iran and the United States as well as possible differences between Pakistan and India. Besides, the presence of Afghanistan in the "Seven" was blurred, as it was not clear which political forces in Afghanistan would represent the country. Without taking into account the views of all the opposing forces, the result will be zero.

Regarding possible cooperation between NATO and the SCO, the strong contradiction is inherent in the very status of these organizations. NATO is a purely military bloc, while SCO is a non-military organization. The SCO is not going to be presented in Afghanistan as a military contingent. However, at the summit in January 2011, the SCO member states declared their readiness to cooperate with NATO on special projects, related to security at the borders of Afghanistan. The specifics of this cooperation has not yet been determined. According to some experts, the prospects are vague, because of

"lack of mutual trust between the structures" (2014). Others believe that the cooperation between the SCO and NATO could pass through Iran, which probably has the greatest influence on Afghanistan (2014). In March 2009, the SCO framed a detailed "*Plan of Action of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Member States and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on combating terrorism, illicit drug trafficking and organized crime*" (2014).

The situation may get worse after the withdrawal of coalition forces as the aspirations of different warring parties in Afghanistan will go high for power. In this connection, on March 28, 2014, a meeting of the Board of the RATS took a decision on protective measures against the terrorist threat emanating from Afghanistan due to the withdrawal of coalition troops from the country (2014). Many of the SCO member states have programmes of assistance to Afghanistan on a bilateral basis. China takes the most active steps in this direction. China's strength in this regard compared with Russia and the United States is that it has a neutral player reputation. China is able to take the most important place in a number of countries helping Afghanistan. Significantly, the new head of the Afghan state, Ashraf Ghani chose China to visit as his first official trip abroad, and the two countries have already signed several agreements to expand their commercial and technical cooperation.

Kazakhstan also contributes to tackling this issue. The Kazakh-Afghan Intergovernmental Commission (IGC) on trade and economic cooperation plays an important role in the development of trade and economic relations. The bases of the bilateral legal framework are the "Treaty on Principles of Relations and Cooperation between Kazakhstan and Afghanistan", intergovernmental agreements on trade and economic cooperation, cooperation in education, cooperation in the fight against illicit traffic in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and their analogues precursors and abuse, as well as the "Protocol on the establishment of diplomatic relations". First of all, it is required to stabilize the situation and establish inner peace in the country for the settlement of the Afghanistan problem. Perhaps, the peaceful nature of the SCO and its focus on economic issues can be a tool to solve the Afghan problem. This approach is confirmed by Bayzakova: "Only targeted economic and humanitarian assistance can be tangibly

contributed to Afghanistan's recovery. Close cooperation in all areas between interested international organizations and countries will help to create an acceptable social sphere, which, in turn, will factor in regional stability and common security. The Central Asian countries can aid the economic rehabilitation of Afghanistan, involving the SCO in this settlement. It is certain that it will be highly effective to use the potential of Afghanistan's neighboring countries - Tajikistan and Uzbekistan that are the SCO member states and have great influence in their North as well as that of the SCO observer countries (2014).

It can be stated that not only the situation in Afghanistan is highly dependent on the SCO steps in the region, but also the future of the SCO depends on what it would do in Afghanistan. But finally, the issue of reconciliation in the country can be resolved only by the Afghans themselves. History shows that the Afghans are able to agree among themselves and showed it repeatedly. It seems that the most appropriate for Afghanistan is to attract the neighboring Central Asian states especially as partners.

CONCLUSION

Lately, the struggle for security in general and the fight against destructive actions in particular have become the priority sectors of cooperation in the SCO. This is more so in order to achieve all the other goals of economic, social and humanitarian nature. In view of the increasing threats due to the events unfolded in the Middle East, the urgency of combating religious extremism within the framework of the SCO has grown. It, today, requires well-judged actions from the SCO to ensure human and social security in the Central Asian region. Most experts, including those who have been part of a survey conducted, agree that the activities of the SCO in ensuring human and social security is fundamentally important and the Organization is developing towards a full-fledged security body.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In September 2014, Pakistan and India formally applied for membership in the SCO, Iran also claims full membership in the Organization. Sri Lanka and Armenia submitted the request for observer status. Belarus, Sri Lanka and Turkey have *dialogue partner status* in the Shanghai

Cooperation Organization. Prospects of the Organization's enlargement mean the expansion of the security issues in all areas including anti-terrorist, and conceptualization of approaches to security in the SCO activity. But in our opinion, at present, it is too early to think about the enlargement of the Organization. Today, it would be more realistic to deepen and strengthen the security measures in the current format.

At the same time, in the face of rising tensions between the major actors, a lot of aspects can be observed and serve as a real basis for further convergence of Russia and China on key issues of world politics and not for the Russian-Chinese latent rivalry. Therefore, the geopolitical tensions in the world today can serve as an impetus for further evolution of the SCO in all areas, and particularly in ensuring human and social security. The SCO member states, such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan should pool efforts in addressing fundamental issues not to remain in the margins of the Organization. This means preliminary discussions, coordination of positions on various issues. In general terms, these countries, as more vulnerable to terrorism than China or Russia, first of all should be interested in strengthening security in SCO activities. Therefore, the Central Asian countries should step up their cooperation within the SCO to achieve the desired result in safeguarding human and social security.

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