

Chapter 4

The SCO's Success in Security Architecture

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The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is now showing a more active posture in safeguarding security and promoting economic-cultural development in the region, being cognisant of the situation in areas around Central Asia like East Asia, the Middle East and South Asia, and demonstrating that the SCO, barely eight years old, has embarked on a new course of pragmatic development.

Achievements in maintaining security in the heart of Eurasia

Since 1996, the process of the 'Shanghai Five—SCO' has registered some remarkable achievements in security cooperation. Its major accomplishments include three outcomes.

First, confidence-building measures have been put in place, leading finally to the resolution of the border problems left over from history. Within the frameworks of the 'Shanghai Five'—SCO, and due to the joint efforts of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, all the disputes regarding the Western section of the former China-Soviet border of more than 3000 km—a border that had bred instability and conflict for centuries—were completely solved in six years. This was a rare accomplishment in the history of international relations.

Second, there has been close cooperation in the struggle against destabilising trans-border elements. After the breakup of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan, extremist and terrorist forces started acting rampantly in the Central Asia, causing big trouble for countries in this region. The 'Shanghai Five' was the first international organisation to call for cooperative action against terrorism in Central Asia. On 15 June 2001, less than three months before the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, leaders of the six founding states of the SCO signed the *Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism*. This Convention, as the first international treaty on anti-terrorism in the twenty-first century, spelt out the legal framework for SCO members to fight terrorism and other evil forces, and for their coordination with other countries. Within the framework of the Convention,

SCO member states cooperated and established the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) to combat and contain extremism and terrorism in the region.

Third, the SCO has been able to restrain conflicts from spreading and to maintain regional security and stability. The ethnic and religious conflicts and issues that history left to Central Asia are as intricate and complex as those in the Balkans and the Middle East. Fortunately, the establishment of the SCO mechanism proved to be the defining difference for Central Asia, providing this region with a more positive outlook than either the Balkans or the Middle East. Within its framework, Central Asia managed to restrain malignant conflicts like the civil war in Afghanistan from spreading in the region as has happened in the Balkans and the Middle East. The SCO established a successful model for the troubled international scene after the end of the Cold War. One can say without exaggeration that, in the absence of the 'Shanghai Five-SCO', the Taliban may have continued marching northwards, and the conflict in Afghanistan could have possibly spread to neighbouring countries as well. In this regard, one can say that the SCO is playing an essential role in maintaining regional security and stability.

Taking a wider view, all these abovementioned successes, achieved within the 'Shanghai Five-SCO' framework, have been of strategic significance not only for the member states and for the security and development of Central Asia overall, but also for the peace and development in areas around Central Asia such as East Asia, the Middle East and South Asia and, indeed, even globally.

Economic and cultural development: a solid basis for security cooperation

The SCO leadership has placed emphasis on promoting economic and cultural cooperation, believing that such cooperation constitutes not only the basis of political and security cooperation, but serves directly the long-term development and broader interests of future generations in the region. The SCO summit meeting in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, pointed out that

maintaining a sustained economic growth in Central Asia and the countries in its periphery and meeting the urgent needs of their peoples serves as a major guarantee for ensuring the stability and security of the region and the countries in its periphery.¹

The SCO summit meeting in Astana, Kazakhstan, made it clear that the main priority for the near future was to put into practice the Action Plan on Fulfillment of the Program of Multilateral Trade and Economic Cooperation between SCO member states, thus embarking on a pragmatic course of cooperation in, for example, trade, transportation, environmental protection, disaster relief, and the rational use of natural resources. At the 2006 SCO summit meeting in Shanghai, China, members decided to choose energy, information technology,

and transportation as the priority areas for economic cooperation,² stressing particularly the importance for proceeding with the implementation of certain demonstration programs in these areas. The SCO Mechanism of Inter-bank Cooperation—the first step to the SCO Development Bank to be formally inaugurated before the Shanghai summit—was expected to provide a financing platform for major projects in the region. The official launch of the SCO Business Council during the Shanghai summit will provide a new source for facilitating greater economic cooperation within the SCO framework.³

In respect of cultural cooperation, SCO member states have actively cooperated in the SCO framework on education, culture, sports, tourism, and other cultural endeavours. Chinese President Hu Jintao has always stressed the need for humanistic cooperation. As he pointed out at the SCO Tashkent summit:

SCO members all have their distinctive humanistic resources that make up good potentials for cooperation. Cooperation should be actively promoted in fields of culture, education, science and technology, tourism, mass media, etc. so as to enhance the mutual understanding and friendship among the SCO peoples, and consolidate the social basis of growth of SCO.⁴

Especially noteworthy is the point mentioned at the Astana summit: 'Formulation of coordinated methods and recommendations on conducting prophylactic activities and respective explanatory work among the public in order to confront attempts at exerting a destructive influence on public opinion is a vital task.'⁵ The Shanghai summit emphasised again the need to promote substantially both people-to-people and cultural cooperation. In the short run, the focus of such cooperation is to highlight the spirit of the Silk Road by enhancing the mutual communication and understanding among different civilisations and nations in the region, so as to strengthen the emotional ties among the Chinese, Central Asians and Russians, and also to pave the way for the unfolding comprehensive cooperation within the SCO. The document on educational cooperation signed at the Shanghai summit is another SCO initiative to broaden both its people-to-people and cultural cooperation, while the formal launch of the SCO Forum—an academic mechanism of research and discussion before the Shanghai summit—will provide intellectual support to the further development of the organisation.⁶ The first and second SCO Cultural and Art Festival held during the Astana and Shanghai summits have also shown themselves as specific achievements in this field.

Response to new challenges

Since the beginning of 2005, there has been a wave of 'election-related turmoil' or so-called 'Colour Revolution' in Central Asia, with terrorist and extremist forces fishing in troubled waters. In Afghanistan, a new wave of Iraq-style

terrorist attacks has signalled the resurgence of the Taliban and al-Qaeda. More ominously, Hizb-ut-Tahrir (the Islamic Party of Liberation) and other extreme groups are fast gaining support in Central Asia, particularly in the poverty-stricken Fergana countryside, bespeaking a re-emerging grim security situation in the region that poses new challenges for the SCO.

Facing such a serious situation, the SCO Astana summit in 2005 took the initiative in shouldering chief responsibility for safeguarding security in Central Asia. The heads of the states decided to increase significantly the security cooperation on the basis of the achievements made so far, including particularly the following measures:

- a. promoting close cooperation among the diplomatic, foreign economic, law-enforcing, national defence and special-mission authorities of the member states;
- b. working out effective measures and institutions to respond collectively to those developments that threaten regional peace, security and stability;
- c. coordinating the security-ensuring laws and regulations in the member states;
- d. cooperating in researching and developing new technologies and equipment for coping with new challenges and threats;
- e. establishing new effective structures in the mass media arena to deal with new challenges and threats;
- f. combating the smuggling of weapons, ammunitions, explosives as well as drugs, and fighting organised transnational crime, illegal immigration and mercenary troops activities;
- g. giving special attention to the prevention of terrorists using weapons of mass destruction and their launching vehicles;
- h. taking precautionary measures against cyber-terrorism; and
- i. drafting uniform approaches and standards for monitoring financial flows to individuals and organisations suspected of terrorist sympathies.

It was also believed that cooperation on drug trafficking should become a focus as defined by the previous SCO agreement on fighting the illegal trafficking in narcotics and their precursors. It was resolved that the SCO should specifically step up its participation in the international efforts on the formation of an 'anti-drug belt' around Afghanistan, and in formulating special programs to assist Afghan authorities to stabilise the country's social, economic and humanitarian situation.

Especially conspicuous has been the following words quoted from the Declaration of the SCO Astana summit:

Today we are noticing the positive dynamics of stabilizing the internal political situation in Afghanistan. A number of the SCO member states provided their ground infrastructure for temporary stationing of military

contingents of some states, members of the coalition, as well as their territory and air space for military transit in the interest of anti-terrorist cooperation. Considering the completion of the active military stage of anti-terrorist operation in Afghanistan, the member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization consider it necessary that respective members of the antiterrorist coalition set a final timeline for their temporary use of the above-mentioned objects of infrastructure and stay of their military contingents on the territories of the SCO member states.⁷

Three points should be emphasised. First, these remarks are not specifically targeted at the United States, but more broadly at 'respective members of the anti-terrorist coalition'; in other words, at all those countries and international organisations that use the infrastructure facilities of SCO countries or station their troops in SCO countries. Second, the SCO has voiced its views and suggestions, while any final arrangements still have to be worked out through multilateral or bilateral consultations between SCO states and those relevant parties. Third, as the situation in Afghanistan remains severe, this is not the right time to formulate a timetable for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Central Asia. Indeed, it is necessary to step up anti-terror activities in Central Asia and strengthen the anti-terror ties among the SCO, the United States, the European Union and other parties.

It was decided at the 2006 SCO Shanghai summit to deepen cooperation in security affairs. It stressed: 'To comprehensively deepen cooperation in combating terrorism, separatism, extremism and drug trafficking is a priority area for SCO.'⁸ It was therefore deemed imperative to continue the construction of RATS, to launch anti-terror joint exercises, and to establish an anti-drugs mechanism. This summit pointed out for the first time that SCO members prohibit any individual or group from conducting on their territories any kind of activity that would undermine the interests of other members. Following the proposition made at the Astana summit to 'establish effective mechanisms in the mass media for coping with new challenges and new threats', the summit witnessed the signing of 'the Statement of Heads of Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation On International Information Security' and the decision to establish a commission of information security experts to lay the groundwork for the drafting and implementation of related action plans. In Shanghai, the leaders also instructed the Council of National Coordinators to conduct consultations on concluding a multilateral legal document on long-term neighbourly and amicable cooperation within the SCO framework.⁹

Strategic significance of the SCO for the security architecture of Asia

The SCO, as an open organisation, is achieving the development of fruitful multilateral cooperation with all the states and international organisations on the basis of the principles of equality and mutual benefit. The 'Regulation on the Status of Observer to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation', accepted during the June 2004 Tashkent summit, is the first document concerning contacts between the SCO and the outside world, which has important significance for the promotion of international cooperation, as well as the development of the Organisation itself. In December 2004 the SCO was granted observer status in the General Assembly of the United Nations. In April 2005 the SCO signed the Memorandum of Understanding with ASEAN and the Commonwealth of Independent States, establishing a relationship of cooperation and partnership. In September 2005 SCO Secretary-General Zhang Deguang was invited to address the UN Summit, dedicated to the sixtieth anniversary of its establishment. This was an important sign of the maturity and international prestige of the SCO. It is important to note that the SCO granted observer status to Mongolia, Pakistan, Iran and India, which increased the potential opportunities of cooperation and broadened the prospects for SCO development.

The strategic significance of the SCO's success for the security architecture in Asia has a number of dimensions.

First, the SCO has contributed to confidence-building and stability in Asia. It has increased confidence-building and mutual trust among its members and observers—especially between China and her nine close neighbours, including Uzbekistan and Iran with whom China shares no borders. The borders that China shares with seven SCO members and observers takes up about three quarters of China's total land border—14 799 km. When peace and security is maintained in such massive border areas, the peoples in the region no longer feel exposed to direct military threats. Meanwhile, when it boasts over half of the world's population with such large members and observers like Russia, China and India, the SCO exerts a much larger influence over a major part of the Eurasian landmass.

Second, the SCO has provided a very positive example to the rest of Asia in solving complicated issues left over by history. By resolving in a matter of several years the century-old border problems between China and the states of the former Soviet Union, the approach adopted by the SCO (of mutual trust, disarmament and cooperative security) may provide a model that can be adapted to other outstanding border problems such as those between China and India, between India and Pakistan, among Central Asian states, and with respect to the South China Sea dispute and the China-Japan dispute over the Diaoyutai Islands and part of the East China Sea.

Third, the SCO's anti-terror campaign is strategically important for anti-terror cooperation in Asia. In the new surge of terrorist attacks sweeping the world following the 2003 Iraq War, the formation of an 'arc of terrorism'—a 'belt' stretching from the Middle East, Central Asia and South Asia to Southeast Asia—is a most disturbing development. What is particularly worrying is that Southeast Asia, sitting at the eastern end of this 'belt', has become a high-risk area of frequent terrorist attacks in recent years. Lee Kuan Yew, Minister Mentor in the Singapore Cabinet, has remarked that it is very disturbing to see that, although the 230 million Muslims in Southeast Asia have long been 'tolerant and easy to live with', recent changes indicate that extremism and terrorism are seeking their opportunities among them. Certain terrorist groups closely connected to al-Qaeda (like Jemaah Islamiyah, Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia, and Abu Sayyaf) have plotted a series of terrorist activities. If the maritime terrorist activities in Southeast Asia affect the security of the Strait of Malacca, which is indeed a very realistic possibility, East Asia's energy security will be threatened, as 60–70 percent of East Asia's imported oil goes through the Strait. It is clear that the terrorist groups in Southeast Asia are closely connected with terrorist organisations in Central Asia and South Asia, particularly so in terms of intellectual connections, organisational networks, and approaches to activities, and by all functioning within one international terrorist network. For this reason, the SCO's success and its protracted efforts in combating terrorism are strategically important for the anti-terror campaign in Asia as a whole.

Fourth, the SCO's energy cooperation has strategic significance for energy security in Asia. After several years of construction, the oil pipeline from Kazakhstan to China became operational in 2006. This new pipeline will develop into the SCO's multilateral energy cooperation project involving Russia and other Central Asian countries. The designed handling capacity of the pipeline is 20 million tonnes per year, which will be a big jump over the annual amount of 500 thousand tonnes currently handled on railways. Gas pipelines from Central Asia and Siberia to China will also be constructed. If connected with the Xinjiang–Shanghai Gas Pipeline, the Central Asia–China lines will also help the implementation of the Energy Eastward Transportation Program. Japan and South Korea, which can also take part in this project, will be entitled to part of the gas transported by the lines. This will open a new chapter in energy cooperation between East Asia and Central Asia. It should be pointed out that Central Asia and Siberia, as distinct from the Middle East, Africa and Latin America, are sources of energy supply that demand no protection from any blue-water navy. As East Asian countries are still unable, for the foreseeable future, to develop the naval power necessary to protect long oil shipping lines, this sole alternative to maritime transportation is of crucial strategic significance for East Asia's energy security and overall development. Likewise, for the first time in history, Central Asian countries obtained an eastward energy pipeline,

which is not going through Russia, or the Caucasus or the Middle East, but crossing China, and finally reaching the Pacific Ocean. Obviously, this pipeline is strategically important for the future development of Asia.

In any case, making the fight against drug trafficking and cross-border crimes its top priority, signing a joint declaration on maintaining the international information security, giving full attention to environmental protection and the protective development of water resources, and other endeavours, all highlight the broad perspective that the SCO adopts when viewing and implementing security cooperation. Keeping an open mind on the various non-conventional security issues as well as the conventional ones in the framework of the SCO makes not only Central Asia and South Asia but also East Asia and Southeast Asia better positioned to play a growing role in global comprehensive security cooperation.

Looking ahead: big tasks and a long journey

In June 2006, the heads of the SCO member states and observer states gathered in Shanghai to celebrate and review the 5-year process following the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the 10-year process following the initiation of the 'Shanghai Five'. The leaders discussed the new developments in the international arena and in Central Asia, and its impact on the SCO. As mentioned above, they have put forward the strategic goal to construct a 'harmonious Central Asia' and proposed an ambitious plan for the next stage of SCO development.

In looking to the future, it is necessary to highlight the fact that the SCO still faces several major issues which merit urgent attention.

It is essential to accelerate the process of economic cooperation within the SCO. Three factors are extremely important to realise this aim. The first is to be pragmatic in designing cooperation goals and in implementing the cooperation measures. Empty talk and a lack of specific goals and effective measures will never result in success, particularly when it comes to economic issues. The second point is to persist in following such market rules as a level playing field, equality and reciprocity, mutual opening, and a combination of both bilateral and multilateral approaches. Caring only about one's own interests is a mistake, while detaching cooperation from the market base is even more so. Additionally, bilateral cooperation and multilateral cooperation can be mutually enhancing—the oil pipeline between Kazakhstan and China, for example, is now giving rise to a triangular energy cooperation involving Russia as well. The third point is to move ahead with coordination and priorities for each stage. Up-front investment is certainly necessary, yet participants must guard against excessive expansion and repetitive construction.

There is an obvious need to deepen security cooperation. A joint advantage of the SCO in the near future will still be in the security area. Yet, there must be a deepening of the cooperation in this aspect if the organisation is to make headway on the basis of past achievements. Several practical steps suggest themselves: (1) RATS should be quickly consolidated to work efficiently, and specific cooperation should be stepped up in drafting an SCO list of wanted terrorists and terrorist groups, and in regularising joint anti-terror exercises; (2) a proposed Central Asian Nuclear-Free Zone (CANFZ) program should be taken forward, so that the region can avoid the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the associated risk of an arms race; and (3) further campaigns should be launched to crack down on drug trafficking and, as mentioned before, achieve active participation in the UN action to establish an anti-drug 'belt' around Afghanistan for the peaceful reconstruction of the country. Only once practical steps are taken to consolidate established initiatives can the SCO play an indispensable role in maintaining security in the whole Central Asian region as well as in its member states.

It should be pointed out that there is great potential for anti-terror cooperation between the SCO and other Asian countries and organisations. They can be specifically described as follows: a joint research program on anti-terror; a joint training program on anti-terror; joint anti-terror exercises (search, rescue, quick response); the promotion of reconstruction in post-war Afghanistan; an exchange of information on terrorism in East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia and Central Asia; and counter transnational criminal programs focusing on thwarting activities such as weapons smuggling, drug trafficking and illegal immigration.

Cultural cooperation should be pushed forward steadily. The existing bilateral cultural cooperation among the SCO member states should be expanded into multilateral cultural cooperation within the SCO framework, which certainly calls for organisational coordination, financial support, and professional programming. In the near future, the cooperation will specifically unfold on many fronts, including exchanging mutual visits by cultural, artistic and sporting groups; hosting joint art festivals and exhibitions; dispatching and accepting more exchange students; promoting visits by high-level experts and scholars; mutually assisting in training talents in various fields; increasing cultural exchanges among young people; and facilitating culture-oriented tourism along the Silk Road.

External exchange and augmentation of the organisation should be handled judiciously. After Mongolia, Pakistan, Iran and India were accepted as SCO observers, more and more countries have expressed their wish to become SCO observers, join the SCO or cooperate with the SCO. In light of these growing requests, the Shanghai summit has commissioned the SCO Secretariat to monitor the implementation of the documents on cooperation between the SCO and other

organisations, and to facilitate the actual work of cooperation between the SCO and its observer states. The heads of state have also entrusted the SCO Council of Member State Coordinators to make suggestions regarding the procedures for accepting new members.¹⁰ It remains a major challenge for the SCO to sort out its relationship with such important players as the United States, the European Union, and Japan which, although unlikely to be interested in becoming members or observers of the SCO, nonetheless offer great potential as partners. One way is to establish, aside from the formal members and observers, the category of partner states, modelled after the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)'s Partnership for Peace. One country, for example, might become an SCO partner for anti-terror or an SCO partner for anti-drug cooperation. Indeed, Afghanistan has already become a fully active partner of the SCO. Whether immediately feasible or not, these moves are worthy of careful consideration when broadening the external exchange and attempting cautious enlargement of the SCO.

Conclusion

In reviewing the successful journey that the SCO has undertaken and examining its future development, the following points merit special attention. First, regional cooperation must be steadily institutionalised, and be guaranteed by relevant international or regional laws and regulations. At the same time, the discrepancy in rules and regulations between the domestic and the regional should be sorted out in a careful manner. Second, regional security cooperation must be based on 'comprehensive security', and, particularly, the handling of conventional security threats should be combined closely with the handling of non-conventional security threats. And finally, it must be remembered that the maintenance of regional security and stability and regional economic and cultural cooperation are closely interdependent. Each facilitates the other.

ENDNOTES

¹ The Tashkent Declaration from the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 17 June 2004.

² *Joint Communiqué of the Meeting of the Council of Heads of Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*, Shanghai, 15 June 2006, available at <<http://china.org.cn/english/features/meeting/171590.htm>>, accessed 17 June 2009. The 2007 meeting of the Council of Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation took place on 16 August 2007 at Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The Joint Communiqué is available at <http://www.sectsc.org/news_detail.asp?id=1721&LanguageID=2>, accessed 5 May 2008.

³ *Joint Communiqué of the Meeting of the Council of Heads of Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*, Shanghai, 15 June 2006.

⁴ President Hu Jintao's speech at the Tashkent Summit, Uzbekistan, 17 June 2004.

⁵ *Declaration of Heads of Member States of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*, Astana, Kazakhstan, 6 July 2005.

⁶ The SCO Secretariat, *The SCO Bulletin*, Beijing, 2006, p. 57.

⁷ *Declaration of Heads of Member States of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*, Astana, 6 July 2005.

⁸ *Declaration on the Fifth Anniversary of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*, Shanghai, 15 June 2006, available at <http://english.scosummit2006.org/en_zxbb/2006-06/15/content_755.htm>, accessed 17 June 2009.

⁹ *Joint Communiqué of the Meeting of the Council of Heads of Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*, Shanghai, 15 June 2006.

¹⁰ *Joint Communiqué of the Meeting of the Council of Heads of Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*, Shanghai, 15 June 2006.