

# Security Building in Central Asia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

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The formation of the Shanghai Five, the prototype of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,<sup>1</sup> was related first and foremost to security motivations, although the concept of “security” has had various meanings.

The Shanghai Five traces its origins to the bilateral negotiations on border problems between China and Russia that were resumed in November 1989.<sup>2</sup> Before the Almaty Summit of the Shanghai Five that was held in 1998, the Five’s main concern had been the security of the borders and border areas between China

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1 “Shanghai Five” is not the formal name of the forum. Actually, the forum had no formal name. In April 26, 1996 presidents of five states, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and China, gathered in Shanghai, China, to sign the Agreement on Confidence Building in the Military Field in the Border Area. The five presidents then decided to continue meeting together once a year in the five counties in turn. This summit had been widely reported in the West as the “Shanghai Five” because the location of the summit was Shanghai and the participants of the summit were the presidents of the five participating states. In June 15, 2001, again in Shanghai, the “Shanghai Five” announced that they would change from a forum to an Organization. It was formally named the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Its initiating state members are Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and China. Now the organization has only six member states. Its headquarters and Secretariat are planned to be located in Beijing.

2 After the historic visit of Mikhail Gorbachev to China in May 1989, China and the Soviet Union soon renewed negotiations on their 7300-kilometer border. After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the border that had previously been shared between China and the USSR turned into the borders between China and Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Then the five states reached the consensus that the border negotiations should be continued between China, as one side, and Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, as the other side. From 1998 the five countries began cooperation in the framework of the Shanghai Five as five independent sides.

and Russia, China and Kazakhstan, China and Kyrgyzstan, and China and Tajikistan.

One other security factor should be taken into consideration in understanding the creation of the Shanghai Five. In the mid-1990s, a significant event happened in Afghanistan. The Taliban, an extreme Islamic movement that mainly consisted of Afghan students, took control of the country. Although the Taliban had not been one of the main topics at the Shanghai Five summits at that time, it caused serious concern among the five countries. The emergence of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan sent alarm signals to China which was seriously worried about separatists in Xingjiang, to Russia which had plunged into an extended war in Chechnya, and to the Central Asian states which were suffering from internal terrorism and extremism. Thus, it was not surprising that antiterrorism soon turned out to be the main topic and task for the Shanghai Five.<sup>3</sup>

Many analysts are inclined to see the Shanghai Five and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as organizations opposed the United States. Such analysts believe that this is the real reason why the Shanghai Five and Shanghai Cooperation Organization were established. This belief overestimates the impact the United States has over the Shanghai Five and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. It should be noted that both Russia and China were worried by the United States' increasing tendency toward unilateralism in world affairs. The war in the former Yugoslavia, NATO's intentions to expand eastward, and the possible withdrawal from the ABM Treaty by the US worried those in Russia and China over their own security and strategic stability.

In 2001, the Shanghai Five found itself at a crossroads. Five years had passed since the Shanghai Five was formed in 1996. During those five years five summits were held in the five countries in turn. Now it was again China's turn to host the summit.

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3 From 1998 the main topic for Shanghai Five summits has turned from border issues to antiterrorism. The Almaty Declaration of the Shanghai Five, which was published on July 4, 1998, points out that confronting international terrorism, national terrorism, and religions extremism comprise the main tasks for the Shanghai Five.

This meant the start of a new round of meetings. Should those meetings continue in the same way as in the past five years? If so, the meetings would unavoidably have to repeat themselves because almost all political principles had been reached and declared in the previous five summits. If this was the case then the Shanghai Five would certainly suffer from a lack of developmental dynamics. There was, however, another choice that presented itself: to change the Shanghai Five from a forum into an organization. This decision was not without risks, but was the most natural and most reasonable decision if the Shanghai Five were to develop further. After serious discussions and considerations, the Shanghai Five finally made its historic decision and the SCO emerged on June 15, 2001, again in the city of Shanghai.

## 1. The Interests of the SCO Members

Broad realistic and potential common interests constitute the foundation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The formation of such common interests relates directly to geopolitics and the geoeconomics of each member state, particularly in the fields of security and economic cooperation. Nevertheless, their interests often differ, even when countries share a common organizational background.

### *1-1. Russia*

For Russia, it was a natural choice to join the SCO because of peaceful talks on the Sino-Russian border and regional military confidence. Joining the SCO was a natural outcome of the development of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership.

The foremost significance of the SCO to Russia is national security. Evaluations of national security have concluded that the southern regions are among the most important.<sup>4</sup> These regions pose a clear and present threat to Russia's national security in many complex ways. Riots in the Caucasus have integrated with religious extremism in Central Asia. One reason why the Chech-

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4 See Concept of National Security, 2000.

nya War has been so long and drawn-out is that foreign terrorists and extremists have been providing various types of support to this area, materially, financially and spiritually. Moreover, large quantities of drugs, produced in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, have been smuggled into Russia through Central Asia, making Russia a link of the chain of the narcotics trade leading to Europe.

At the same time, trafficking and illegal sales of weapons also had a connection with the Taliban. Russia will have no meaningful and sustainable national and social security without effective control over these problems. Realistically, these problems cannot be completely solved overnight and Russia has no such capability.

It is true that there are various institutions in Central Asia such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Collective Security Treaty but they did not have a genuine influence on the overall security situation. As a broad regional cooperative institution, the SCO has a role to play in combating terrorists, separatists, extremists, and drug trafficking and smuggling.

As Russia's "backyard," Central Asia is directly influenced by Russia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has continued to influence this area but its ability to control Central Asia is waning. To varying extents, the countries of Central Asia wish to be independent from Russia. In the long run, Russia's control over Central Asia is worrisome. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization links the Central Asian countries and remains attractive for this reason. Therefore, the SCO may be conducive to the exertion of Russian influence and domination. In particular, Russia may cement its broad and general existence in this region with the help of China's influence and the Central Asian countries' confidence in China.<sup>5</sup> The newly-born SCO has the potential to develop into the most influential regional organization in this part of the world. Joining the SCO is an important way for Russia to take part in Asian affairs; otherwise, Russia's potential is greatly diminished.

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5 Perhaps if there were no China in the SCO, Uzbekistan would not have joined.

Furthermore, healthy Sino-Russian relations are essential to Russia's regional stability. The SCO is important to Sino-Russian cooperation, particularly in Central Asia. Cooperation between China and Russia within this mechanism may consolidate bilateral relations, avoid possible collision in Central Asia, and bring relations with the Sino-Central Asia countries into a multilateral framework.

### ***1-2. Kazakhstan***

Security is Kazakhstan's main interest in this organization and border security is its top concern. A large but relatively weak country with little capability to protect itself, Kazakhstan boasts a population of less than 15 million and armed forces of about 66,000. Their gross domestic product (GDP) in 2002 was about \$24.4 billion.<sup>6</sup> Kazakhstan is a country with two strong neighbors, Russia in the north and China in the south. Clamped between these two, Kazakhstan should attach greater value to its national security. Seeking security guarantees from China and Russia, and establishing security mechanisms in Central Asia are among the main concerns of Kazakhstan's security strategy. Kazakhstan and China are two countries with a great disparity in national forces. The common border between them is 1,700 kilometers. Though the border problem has now been solved, Kazakhstan still has active concerns dating back to the complex history of the border dispute in the 19th century. At that time, China was forced to cede areas of large territories to Tsarist Russia. A part of that territory now belongs to Kazakhstan. Furthermore, some of the Sino-Soviet Union armed conflicts in 1969 took place on the border between today's China and Kazakhstan. The shadow of history has not vanished in current politics and the so-called "China Threat" exists in Kazakhstan to a certain extent. The border and territory issue is one issue of the "China Threat." Some Kazakhstan elites hold that China has claims to territory and that China may regain territory that was previously under its control. The reason why Kazakhstan attaches such importance to the SCO is

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6 *Country Profile, Kazakhstan*, 2003, p. 20, 28.

that it assists in resolving border and territory disputes with China and in maintaining regional stability, which is crucial to Kazakhstan.<sup>7</sup>

Security interests of Kazakhstan in the SCO also include measures to combat terrorists, separatists and extremists. Kazakhstan's direct suffering from terrorism, separatism and extremism is not as heavy as other countries in Central Asia because it has no common border with Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, which is the base of terrorism in Central Asia. However, the threat to Kazakhstan from these three forces is by no means unrealistic. For the integral security of Central Asia, instability and insecurity in neighboring countries will definitely influence the tranquility and development of Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan is a multi-national country where Kazaks account for only half of the population and national solidarity and harmony is naturally the foremost task of this country. Ethnic separatism and religious extremism pose severe threats to the stability of domestic politics. Thus, the SCO is regarded by Kazakhstan as a defense against terrorism, separatism and extremism.

At the same time, Kazakhstan holds a strong desire to be a regional power and it has been secretly fostering rivalry with Uz-

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7 About one third of the territory which was ceded to Russia in the 19th century by a series of treaties between China and Russia is located in today's Kazakhstan. Historically, China believes that these treaties are unfair. This problem caused hot disputes during the "Cultural Revolution" in China. Actually, China takes these treaties as the basis of border negotiations between China and the Soviet Union/Russia. This factor also has some psychological effects on Kazakhstan. Thus, being an independent country, Kazakhstan is very concerned about border security. There is also a special version of the "China threat" in Kazakhstan, especially in the first years of the 1990s. This is mainly related to the border problem with China. Territorial problems between China and Kazakhstan are currently settled. The two states signed a great treaty on good neighbors, friendship and cooperation on Dec. 23, 2002. M. Ashimbaev, Director of the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies under the President, insists that the two agreements, namely the agreement on confidence building in the military field in the border area and the agreement on mutual reduction of armed forces in the border area should remain the basic documents of the SCO. This once again demonstrates Kazakhstan's concern about border security. See Ashimbaev, 2003, p. 237.

bekistan, another geographically large country in Central Asia. Kazakhstan is one of the initial member countries of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Active participation in the Shanghai Five and SCO, and the advantages of the SCO gained in the political arena, favor the representation of Kazakhstan's role and the expansion of its influence. Although it accepts the dominant status of China and Russia, Kazakhstan expects the formation of a nucleus of China, Russia and Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan has pursued a foreign policy of "balance," kept cooperative relations with other powers, equilibrated relations between and among them, and maximized its benefits in politics, economics and foreign affairs. To Kazakhstan, the SCO is not only a channel for its cooperation with China and Russia, but also a means to balance relations among the two dominant powers.

Kazakhstan also boasts abundant resources of oil and natural gas. Most of the oil resources in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea are in Kazakhstan. Geographically, Kazakhstan is perched in the upper half of Central Asia and controls the traffic points of Eurasia. The only way for the other Central Asian countries to get to Europe by land is through Kazakhstan. Mere transportation fees realize huge gains to Kazakhstan and this may play a greater role in regional economic cooperation. In short, Kazakhstan attaches great expectations to the SCO.

### ***1-3. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan***

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan share some similarities. Both are relatively small with a population of about 5 million and have a backward economy with low standards of living. In 2002, the GDP of Kyrgyzstan was \$1.6 billion with a per capita GDP of \$325, while the GDP of Tajikistan was \$1.1 billion with a per capita GDP of \$173.<sup>8</sup> The military forces of these two countries are very limited and their capability for defense is extremely weak. Kyrgyzstan has only about 9,000 troops and Tajikistan even less, about 6,000. Tajikistan shares a common border of about 1,000 km with Afghanistan, and it cannot safeguard itself

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<sup>8</sup> *Country Profile, Kyrgyz Republic*, 2003, p. 24.

against potential threats. Accordingly, following the bilateral conventions with Russia, border defense forces and the 201<sup>st</sup> Mobilized Forces Division of Russia are stationed in Tajikistan to protect its border.

Owing to inadequacies in their national forces, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are confronted with direct threats from terrorism, separatism and extremism, which are not traditionally security threats, but a severe menace to the whole country and its sovereignty. Although Kyrgyzstan does not have a common border with Afghanistan directly, the Ferghana Valley of Kyrgyzstan is a breeding ground of the above three threats. Some foreign terrorists use this valley as an important training base to agitate, finance and arm local people against the local government and carry out other terrorist activities. The threat of terrorist forces from this region is constant. The aim of these threats is to establish an Islamic state, which would surely menace the independence and territorial integrity of Kyrgyzstan. After independence, Tajikistan did not realize domestic peace until the end of its civil war in 1997, and that peace remains feeble. Since it borders Afghanistan, the threat from the outside, particularly before the collapse of the Taliban regime, was direct and its border with Afghanistan has become the hotspot for drug trafficking and smuggling. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization may provide effective protection to these two countries, and provides them with a security framework. As a part of collective security, the SCO is liable to help them combat the three threats and safeguard their security. Kyrgyzstan was one of the first countries to put forward the concept of a Joint Counter-Terrorism Center. It is not by chance that Kyrgyzstan demanded that this Joint Counter-Terrorism Center be located in Bishkek. This can be interpreted as meaning that Kyrgyzstan needs the protection of the SCO.

As weak countries with complicated relations with neighboring countries, especially with respect to ethnic conflicts, territory and water resources with Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are in a difficult position while competing with powerful neighbors. It is true that the SCO will not be entangled in bilateral relations. It will, however, be a platform for both sides to

elaborate their grievances to other countries, which may bring about a sense of security to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are countries with a weak industrial infrastructure and are economically backward. They do not boast resources such as oil and natural gas that attract foreign capital. As a result, they value the economic cooperation of the SCO. They hope that regional economic cooperation will bring about real economic benefits. Economic cooperation, they hold, includes construction of railway and highway networks that link China and other members, and increase the traffic of people and foodstuffs through their countries to facilitate local economic development. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan would like other members of the SCO to invest in minerals and other resources found in their countries, increase imports in their industrial goods, and reconstruct bankrupt local enterprises that are short of capital and markets as a way of promoting the recovery and development of their respective economies.

#### ***1-4. Uzbekistan***

Uzbekistan is the youngest member of this organization. It joined in 2000 as an observer. Because there is no common border between China and Uzbekistan, Uzbekistan did not take part in the multilateral negotiations after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Uzbekistan officially joined the SCO on June 14, 2001 and participated in its activities the following day.

Compared with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, the external policy of Uzbekistan is somewhat particular. During a relatively long term after independence, its external policy focused primarily on the United States and stood distant from Russia. Its security policy also valued its relations with the United States and NATO. Uzbekistan had been unwilling to take part in Russian-oriented regional organizations in Central Asia. At one time, Uzbekistan was a member of the Collective Security Treaty, but later quit. Uzbekistan is not a member of the Eurasia Economic Community that consists of Russia and other Central Asia countries. However, it did participate actively in GUUAM, but also withdrew from it later.

Uzbekistan's foreign policy started to adjust itself delicately in 2000; it started to improve its relations with Russia and even expressed great interest in joining the SCO. In the background, President Karimov took part in the summit meeting as an observer. Uzbekistan became an official member in 2001.

Among the incentives to join the SCO was Uzbekistan's search for more reliable security protection. It had relied on the United States for its security, but was totally shocked by the assassination attempt against President Karimov in February 1999 and the sudden invasion of armed militants in the spring and summer of 2000. Uzbekistan started to feel an imminent threat and realized its insufficient capability in self-defense. Uzbekistan considered the Uzbek Islamic Movement stationed in foreign countries and the Ferghana Valley region and the Afghan Taliban regime to be its biggest threats. It could not handle these problems by itself. The SCO, with its tenet of anti-terrorism, is useful in this respect.

With a population about the same size of all the other Central Asian countries, Uzbekistan has a relatively advanced industrial foundation. It strongly desires to hold a leading position in Central Asia, believing that no security problems could be adequately solved without its participation. After several years of development, the SCO has shown a trend of playing an increased role in the fields of security, politics and economic development in this region. This may turn into the most important mechanism in this region. Isolated from the SCO, Uzbekistan will probably be excluded from the resolution of major issues in Central Asia, being helpless to raise its status and influence.

Uzbekistan hopes that the SCO may play a useful role in maintaining the strategic balance and stability of Central Asia. The goal of Uzbekistan's foreign policy is to seek a relative balance between and among China, Russia and the US in Central Asia. It is perceived by Uzbekistan that, the SCO, with the presence of China, is different from the CIS. In view of this, Uzbekistan has no misgivings about being enslaved to or being elbowed out by Russia. Since the members of the SCO include China, Russia, and other major countries of Central Asia, the balance of

power within the SCO equates with the balance of power of the whole Central Asia region. Thus, Uzbekistan endeavors to maximize the possibility of balance between the SCO and other powers.

Uzbekistan is also confronted with the imminent tasks of restoring and developing its economy. Nevertheless, as an inland country surrounded by other inland countries, Uzbekistan has to rely on traffic as a lifeline, and considers its economic benefits as one of the main reasons for participation. Thus, the value it places on regional economic cooperation with the SCO framework cannot be overstated.

## 2. China's Interests in the SCO

The SCO is a regional cooperation framework oriented towards Central Asia; it not only represents an essential direction but also a major component of China's foreign strategy. Thus the orientation of China's interests in the SCO depends heavily upon what it may provide, and at the same time, on the goals and tasks of China's foreign policy.

The main interests of China in the SCO may be listed as follows:

1) Presently and in the foreseeable future, security should be at the core of China's interests in the SCO. Security interests that China may procure from participation in the SCO may be categorized into three levels: protecting the territorial integrity and national unity of China; combating transnational crimes and stabilizing the northwest of China; and safeguarding border security.

Protecting the territorial integrity and national unity of China refers to combating terrorism, separatism and extremism. Specifically, these "isms" are represented by the Eastern Turkistan Movement. The SCO furnishes China with a relatively active and open channel to attack national separatist activities in Xinjiang Province. Eastern Turkistan separatist activities have become an international phenomenon and have integrated with other terrorist forces in the region. Traditional ways of handling these problems through a closed-door policy will not suffice. Cooperation be-

tween China and other members relates to combating these three forces, including combating separatism, and protecting the Xinjiang Province and the territorial integrity and national unity of China. The primary security interest of China is based on this concept.

Combating transnational crimes indicates that joint attacks on illegal drug trafficking, smuggling, weapon sales, illegal immigration, etc. in those regions are connected with the northwest region of China. These illegal activities are characterized by their transnational nature and pose severe threats to the social peace and security of the northwest regions of China. Joint attacks from the SCO on transnational crimes, which often originate from abroad, are conducive to combating such activities.

Maintaining border and regional security is the most fundamental function of the SCO. The Treaty of Confidence-Building in the Military Field in the Border Areas signed in 1996 and the Agreement of Mutual Reduction of Armed Forces in the Border Areas signed in 1997 are the basis of the border security that the SCO provides. China has a common border stretching over 7,300 km with the other members of the SCO, and China may protect its border through the SCO whose importance in this respect is clear. At the same time, border stability constitutes an important factor in constructing a sound neighborly environment in China.

2) The SCO also represents a number of strategic economic interests to China. Oil and natural gas are the principal strategic interests. Since becoming a net oil import country in 1993, China has been increasingly relying on imported oil. Presently, China imports about 70 million tons of oil annually, and this trend will surely deepen as China's economy continues to boom. It is estimated by various institutes that about half of the oil that will be required in 2010 must be imported from abroad, reaching some 150-200 million tons. As China's own output of oil has not increased substantially, having access to a stable source of oil affects not only the future of China's economic security, but also the realization of the strategy of sustainable economic development. Central Asia is said to have the third biggest energy re-

serves, next only to the Middle East and Russia. Moreover, Central Asia is adjacent to the Russian energy bases in Siberia, and thus China is in an exceptionally advantageous position in this respect. Central Asian countries hope to diversify their energy exports, and they are interested in exporting oil and gas to China and other East Asian countries. China's interests in energy in Central Asia have three aspects: to obtain energy from this region; to diversify energy sources; and, perhaps in the future, to construct an East Asian oil and natural gas transportation network through China by extending China's domestic pipelines.

3) The SCO should be upgraded to the main channel between China and the Central Asian countries. Owing to the importance of Central Asia to China's national security and energy security, China needs to maintain its position and broaden and consolidate her presence in this region gradually and continuously. Despite the geographical vicinity and close historical ties between the two sides, the SCO represents a new beginning for mutual contacts and exchanges between China and the Central Asian countries since the declaration of their independence 11 years ago from the Soviet Union. The SCO is a unique framework that allows China to work with the Central Asian countries. Within this framework, broad, long-term and full cooperation in politics, security, economics and culture between China and other countries may be carried out, so that historically close ties can be restored.

4) The SCO may still play a role in promoting cooperation between China and Russia, both of which have direct interests in Central Asia. For Russia, the Central Asia region, whose countries are all member states of the former Soviet Union, is its own backyard. Russia has special interests and influence in this region and takes a primary position in Russia's foreign strategy. Since the inauguration of President Putin, Russia has shown an enhanced desire to restore its prominent status in Central Asia and has made more efforts toward implementing this desire. For China, it is not possible to stand aloof from Central Asia, whose countries are all her neighbors and share a common border of

over 3000 km. Therefore, encounters between China and Russia in Central Asia are inevitable and some western analysts hold that this region would be the “poison apple” that leads to friction between the two countries, and that conflicts of interest would definitely arise. Perceived from a geopolitical perspective, these two countries do have potentially conflicting factors. But there is also one reason why China and Russia must collaborate with each other to avoid any possible negative competition in Central Asia. The SCO may act as a balance between various interests for China and Russia, and possibilities of conflict can be lowered through cooperation within the SCO. Such cooperation should lead to the realization of interests on both sides, and thus a “win-win” situation becomes attainable.

### 3. What Are the Difficulties for the SCO?

Because of its immaturity, consolidation and development are the primary tasks confronting the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. As a matter of fact, the SCO faces more challenges after its development into a regional cooperation organization. With its formation, people have come to attach greater meaning and expectations to the promotion and maintenance of a formal organization, making the situation even more complicated and difficult than that of a mere conduit of dialogue.

The SCO possess great potential for further development, but some real and underlying restraining factors should be taken into consideration as well, though they may not turn out to be so insurmountable.

1) *Disparities of state members of the SCO in political, economical, historical and cultural background.* While sharing common interests in many spheres, the state members of the SCO are characterized by many differences. The six member countries have different political systems, different ideologies and different religions. China and Russia are the biggest countries in terms of population and territory, respectively, while some other members are much smaller in both regards. Disparities between SCO

member states are not necessarily going to be serious problems for cooperation, but the contrast should help them see things differently.

2) *Instability of the Central Asian countries' internal politics.*

The countries of Central Asia are authoritarian regimes with supreme power focusing on a president, which helps to stabilize the regime. However, the current presidencies of the Central Asia countries are based too much on personal might: there is no balance of political forces, and there is no institution or mechanism for a smooth transfer of state power and democracy. As a result, changes in the presidency may result in political and social instability. This is a potential source of instability for the SCO.

3) *Inconsistency between Central Asian countries.* Although these countries live together and have close ties between and among them in politics, economics, culture, tradition, religion and ethnicity, their relations that exist between them are complex and at times contradictory. Contradictions involve inconsistencies in politics, security, ethnicity, territory, and energy and water resources. The relatively stable relations between Central Asian countries, and the fact that Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan signed the Permanent Treaty of Friendship, do not eliminate the possibility that contradictions may be aggravated. If that happens, destructive forces may arise.

4) *Functional overlapping of different security mechanisms and the difficulty of their coordination.* In Central Asia, there exist at least three or four formal or informal security mechanisms, including the SCO, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the "Partnership for Peace" program of NATO, and the commitment of the United States to the Central Asian states, especially to Uzbekistan. It is a unique phenomenon that so many security mechanisms exist in one region. Whether this adds to or reduces the security of the region is a question for discussion. Politically, it may be these mechanisms do not necessarily collide, but functionally they overlap. How to coordinate these mechanisms and

make their roles and functions complementary rather than overlapping or confrontational is a problem that the SCO must deal with.

5) *Difficulties in economic cooperation.* After the establishment of the SCO, each member raised their hopes for economic cooperation and their expectations for economic benefits. However, owing to the backwardness and flaws of investment, infrastructures, market mechanisms, laws and regulations, purchasing power and economic development level, the SCO, despite its huge developmental potential and great expectations, found it hard to carry out large-scale developments and to make quick achievements. The SCO is also an organization consisting of poor countries with weak economies. Energy and transportation are the two major areas of economic cooperation, but the development of these areas is not an easy task because of the large investment and long developmental term required, and the relatively weak investment abilities of China and Russia. In other areas, the current economic cooperation is still at a low level on a limited scale, and lucrative returns are not possible to attain in the near future. Thus, difficulty in economic cooperation is one of the hardest problems for the SCO.

6) *The challenge of further expansion.* The SCO has made it clear that it will not absorb new members quickly and that expansion will be carried out gradually. So far, this is not a prominent problem. Nevertheless, both internal and external pressures are obvious in the long run. Realistically, any expansion may give rise to new problems. The further expansion of the SCO may be characterized by geopolitics, with its sphere of influence expanding to the neighboring countries. Among its surrounding countries, we may find Mongolia, Turkmenistan, Iran, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Pakistan, India, and so forth. Theoretically, these countries may join the SCO in the long run. However, their participation will definitely cause problems due to internal and external factors. Comparatively speaking, Mongolia should not cause any bitter disputes. However, its participation should reduce the meaning of security cooperation, because the threat of

the three forces to Mongolia is not obvious (this does not mean that this change would be welcomed). From relevant conditions, Turkmenistan is the closest country to the other SCO members but it maintains its neutral policy and takes a wait-and-see attitude, showing no intention of joining. Pakistan has already expressed its will to join the SCO, yet its participation should lead to acute conflicts among member states. India, as a South Asian power, has close ties with security affairs in Central Asia, geopolitically and realistically. But its unilateral participation would break the relative balance in South Asia. As a result of this, prior to any substantial improvements of their bilateral relations, the participation of Pakistan and India may make the SCO a victim of India-Pakistan conflicts.

#### 4. The Impact of September 11 on the SCO

After the September 11 attacks, profound changes have taken place in the political, security, diplomatic and the geostrategic situation of Central Asia. The changes that have taken place in Central Asia are those in the development of the SCO.

After the September 11 attacks and the collapse of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, drastic changes have taken place in Central Asia's strategic posture. One change is that Central Asia has been linked up with the Grand Central Asian region (referring to Central Asia and some of its peripheral states and regions) and has been connected to South Asia and West Asia in space and politics.

Before September 11, the existence of the Taliban had made the geographically linked Central Asia, South Asia and West Asia regions politically fragmented and mutually hostile not only in terms of geography but also in areas of politics and security. In geography, Afghanistan is located between Central Asia, South Asia and West Asia, separating the three subregions. In politics and security, the differences in policy of the various countries towards the Taliban regime had caused or aggravated estrangement, splits and hostility among the countries in the region. This includes relations between Central Asian countries and Afghanistan,

Central Asian countries and Pakistan, Russia and Pakistan, as well as the Central Asian countries and Turkmenistan. The overthrow (collapse) of the Taliban regime has eliminated the separation of the Grand Central Asian region. Strategically this change means the possibility of forming an extensive political and security cooperation mechanism, developing a new pattern of Central Asian economy, especially energy development, and adjusting state-to-state relations there.

Another important change in the Central Asian strategic posture is that the US has entered Central Asia in an all-round way. It militarily began to enter the region after the dissolution of the former Soviet Union.<sup>9</sup> But after the September 11 attacks, the depth and width of US access in this region have been historically unprecedented and the significance which has been given to the region is strategic. The US has improved its relations with all the countries in the region except Iran, including those it showed indifference to and those it criticized on the grounds of their political systems and cultures. On the other hand, the US access in the region is all-round, militarily, politically and economically, and is long-term. In view of the substantial strengthening of the US presence in Central Asia and the Caucasus, the improvement of US relations with India and Pakistan, the US's decisive role in Afghanistan, and the solidification of the US traditional alliance with Turkey after the September 11 attacks, the Grand Central Asian region has become, for the first time, a complete strategic region in US diplomacy and the US has also become the country with the most diplomatic resources and influence in the region. After the US put a lot of political, military and economic resources into this region, its importance and interests to the US have been enhanced. The US will not easily make a strategic withdrawal from the region. Moreover, whether to maintain a long-term and direct military presence in Central Asia is not the natural corollary of US strategic withdrawal from this region. Even if the US were later to withdraw its military forces, it would

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9 The US has actively taken part in the annual set of Central Asian Battalion military exercises since 1997.

spare no efforts to keep its capability to enter and control this region strategically.

After September 11, a new situation has appeared in major power relations in this region. The main players are China, Russia and the US. Before the attacks, the posture of these three major powers in the region was as follows: Russia's control of and influence in Central Asia had been greatly diminished, but it has remained the country with the most political, economic and security influence on the region. After Putin assumed office in 2000, Russia increased its input in the CIS and Central Asia and its influence in the region has rebounded and picked up momentum. Strategically thinking, Central Asia is still its backyard and the region where it has special interests, so it does not hope that this region will be fully open to other major powers. After establishing diplomatic relations with five Central Asian countries, China began to take an increasingly active attitude to its access to Central Asia. Especially after the formation of the "Shanghai Five" and the SCO, the efforts and expectations of China's access to Central Asia have been obviously enhanced. The establishment of the SCO in June 2001 have solidified China's relations with Central Asia and systematized and offered China more room and possibilities to enhance its sphere of influence in the region. In the early 1990s, the US began to enter Central Asia, but its importance to the region was minimal in US policy to the countries of the former Soviet Union whereas Russia was at the core.<sup>10</sup> After the mid-1990s, the US began to increase its input in the region. Its investment in and economic and military aid to this region increased and its political and military cooperative relations with Central Asian countries developed rapidly. However, against the background of positive cooperation between China and Russia in Central Asia, the momentum of US expansion in this region slowed down in the late 1990s. This was manifested in the positive adjustments made to the focus of political and military cooperation between Central Asian countries towards Russia, China

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10 The US did not have a clear-cut strategy and policy with respect to Central Asia and the Caucasus until 1997. See *The Security of the Caspian Sea Region*, 2001, p. 19.

and the SCO, and in the improvements made in the political and economic relations between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan and Russia, as well as in the deepening military cooperation among the members of the CIS Collective Security Treaty. It was also manifested in the Central Asian countries showing their displeasure with the US for accusations and interference in their internal affairs and being more and more unsatisfied with the US's control of Central Asian energy and reaping super-profits in its energy and economic cooperation with them. According to the analysis of Ashimbaev, of the President of Kazakhstan Presidential Strategic Institute, during the period from the independence of the Central Asian countries and September 11, 2001, the basic posture of trilateral relations among Russia, the US and China in Central Asia was a fragile balance of power. The three countries set up their respective bases and areas of domination in the region. The Russian area was military and political influence, the US base was energy investment, and China took root in the region through trade.<sup>11</sup> After September 11, this basic approach was reversed. The development momentum of the Russia-dominated CIS Collective Security Treaty has been held back. The SCO push led by China and Russia has been fraught with challenges, and the position of Russia and China in Central Asia has been weakened. Moreover, the focus of security and political cooperation among Central Asian countries has been transferred to the US. The recently shortened distance between Uzbekistan and Russia has been increased and Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which had close relations with Russia, have started to turn to the US one after another. Ashimbaev maintains that this situation has changed the fragile balance of power among the three countries in Central Asia. The basis of the US in the region has expanded from energy to the military and political areas, replacing Russia as the country with the most influence.<sup>12</sup>

The trilateral relations among China, Russia and the US have undergone subtle but meaningful changes. US direct military

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11 Ashimbaev, 2003, p. 235.

12 Ibid.

presence in Central Asia represents a serious geopolitical challenge to China and Russia. In contrast to the response they should make in this kind of situation, they have not resisted the direct US military presence in Central Asia. Furthermore, they have expressed a willingness to cooperate with the US to varying degrees. There are four reasons. First, against the background of the September 11 attacks, US deployment of troops in Central Asia to conduct military operations against terrorism has undeniable moral support. Second, China and Russia both consider US strikes against the Taliban in the region as beneficial. Third, the two countries have no real capabilities to impede the direct US military presence in Central Asia. Finally, neither wants to damage their relations with the US. The most profound meaning of the situation of the trilateral relations is that the posture of China and Russia in joining hands in keeping the US away from Central Asia has been broken and a state of trilateral overlapping interaction has taken shape. This new situation has provided possibilities of change to the alignment among the three countries and has thus increased the complexity of the interrelations among them in the region.

After September 11, drastic changes have also taken place in the Central Asian security situation. With the overthrow of the Taliban regime, the most severe source of danger in Central Asia was removed, which has eliminated the Central Asian countries' biggest worry about their own security. Though the remnants of the Taliban still exist, its security threat to Central Asia has been greatly reduced. Furthermore, the Taliban is no longer a constant and vital threat to the state power of the Central Asian countries. The security environment of Central Asia has been much improved. The overthrow of the Taliban regime and the improvement of the Central Asian security environment have made it possible for the Central Asian countries to shift their focus and direction of security. This should lead to their reconsideration and reorientation of the emphasis, objectives, direction and method of their security strategies. Meanwhile, with the overthrow of the Taliban regime, the most dangerous common enemy of the Central Asian countries has disappeared, so the conflict between them

and the Taliban is no longer the principal one. This may bring to prominence other, originally hidden contradictions, including those that exist between the Central Asian countries.

## 5. The Impacts of Changes in the Central Asian Situation on the SCO

In some respects, changes in the Central Asian situation have provided new opportunities and driving forces for the development of the SCO, while also posing a series of new questions and challenges.

The SCO stems from border security. Borders involve national security and a common border often becomes the basis of a special relationship between countries. However, border security is vital to the stability of state-to-state relations, but it does not have the sustained momentum for pushing ahead those relations. Therefore, with the fundamental resolution of the border security issue, fighting against terrorism, separatism and extremism was upgraded to the basic driving force for the development of the SCO. The emergence and development of widespread terrorism, separatism and extremism in Central Asia had internal and external reasons. The main external reason was the Taliban. In the mid-1990s, the Taliban seized state power in Afghanistan. As a result, the security situation in Central Asia sharply deteriorated and terrorism became a severe threat to the security of the Central Asian countries. In these circumstances, those countries, weak in national strength and short of self-protection capabilities, had realistic demands for a regional security mechanism, so the SCO with anti-terrorism as its main objective was just the security guarantee mechanism needed.

After the September 11 attacks, two factors encouraged Central Asian countries to change their security guarantee demands to the SCO. One was the overthrow of the Taliban regime. After that, the terrorist threat to Central Asian countries was greatly reduced, though not eliminated. Before September 11, the Taliban was the Sword of Damocles over Central Asian countries. The constant possibility that it would send troops southwards posed a

direct danger to the Central Asian countries; its support to terrorist forces in Central Asia was important; and the Taliban regime was also the source of organized crimes such as drug-trafficking and smuggling in the region. With the overthrow of the Taliban, the security situation in Central Asia changed for the better. Terrorism, separatism and extremism still exist, but their threat is no longer vital. Changes in the security situation have resulted in relevant changes in the Central Asian countries' security demands.

This is embodied, to some extent, in changes in the extent of their demands for and dependence on the SCO as a security mechanism. The other factor is US direct military presence in Central Asia. After September 11, the US attained military bases in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan opened up its air force bases to US logistic activities, thus enabling US armed forces to be directly deployed for the first time in Central Asia. The US military presence in the region offered a new and very strong security guarantee for Central Asian countries. Before that, the CIS Collective Security Treaty and the SCO were the basic security mechanisms there, besides the NATO Partnership for Peace. The new security guarantee increased Central Asian countries' dependence and expectations on the US in terms of security.<sup>13</sup>

After September 11, with the enhancement of US political, military and economic influence on Central Asia, its diplomatic influence has also increased. Except Uzbekistan, most Central Asian countries expressed to the outside world that they would still adopt a multidirectional, balanced foreign policy and their military cooperative relations with the US would not damage the interests of other major powers nor impact their relations with China and Russia. Their stance is believable, but their obvious dependency on the US after September 11 is also a fact. More importantly, if the US possesses more and stronger means to exert its influence on Central Asian countries, it will impose, to a greater extent, its intentions on them. Where the US considers it necessary to bring pressure to bear on Central Asian countries on

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13 See Abdurazakov, 2003, pp. 228-229.

some issue, the latter's stand and attitude on the SCO may be influenced. Going further, the US may place indirect restrictions to some extent on the SCO through them. This is another potential influence of the changes in the Central Asian situation on the SCO. Moreover, as the relations of members of the SCO with the US are at different levels and in different contexts, the perspectives from which they view the US military presence and role in Central Asia may not be identical. This has resulted in new issues needing coordination within the SCO, which, if handled improperly, may cause serious negative effects on the organization.

The US has smashed the Taliban regime and is prepared to fight against terrorism in Central Asia for a long time, so there is the possibility to turn the informal anti-terrorism coalition in the region into an informal regional security mechanism that it would dominate overtly or covertly. This mechanism may be composed of the US and Central Asian countries or the US, China, Russia, the Central Asian countries, and Afghanistan as well as South Asian and Caucasian countries. At present, it is only an inference and hypothesis, but under certain conditions, this kind of change may be possible. Theoretically, a security mechanism aimed at fighting terrorism and safeguarding regional stability should be welcome. Besides, different security mechanisms in Central Asia, as pointed out above, may not be contradictory and can cooperate with one another. But in politics these mechanisms are estranged and separated and in their anti-terrorism function they are duplicated and overlapping. So, the coexistent security mechanisms in Central Asia may offset and restrict one another rather than complement one another in function and enlarge the results of security cooperation.

## 6. The Bases for Development of the SCO Remain Sound

The changes in the Central Asian situation after the September 11 attacks were an unexpected development to the SCO. The fact that the SCO did not play a leading role in the drastically changed post-September 11 situation triggered many comments

on its prospects, and pessimistic and suspicious comments prevailed in foreign public opinion.<sup>14</sup> However, the results of the St. Petersburg and Moscow Summits of the SCO on June 7, 2002 and May 28, 2003, respectively, indicate not only that the organization has continued to develop according to its own political design but also that its attitude to development is more positive and that steps have accelerated.

The changes in the Central Asian situation after September 11 have encouraged the SCO to accelerate its development and have brought about a series of negative outcomes, making its development more difficult and complex. Nevertheless, there are ample reasons for the continuous existence of the SCO and there is much room for its development. The basic foundations are as follows.

In the events of September 11 and the changes in the Central Asian situation, no aim, principle, idea, spirit, objective or task of the SCO have proved to be wrong or outdated. On the contrary, they further prove that the ideas and principles the SCO had relied on were right.

The two themes of the SCO – anti-terrorism and economic cooperation – remain as long-term needs of the region. Though the Taliban regime has been smashed and the direct threat of a Taliban invasion of Central Asian countries has been basically eliminated, terrorism, separatism and extremism in the region are far from eliminated. Even the Western academia has not denied this.<sup>15</sup> Thorough destruction of these three evil forces requires long-term and comprehensive measures and concerted cooperation among countries. In this respect, the SCO, as a regional or-

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14 Even Russian scholars have such pessimistic views. Koldunov, Deputy Chairman of the Russian Foreign Policy Association held that after the September 11 events, the SCO in fact collapsed. See Koldunov, 2002, p. 69.

15 Pauline Jones Luong of Yale University and Erika Weinthal of Tel Aviv University maintain that, over the longer term, even if the military operation against the Taliban ended successfully, the threat of Islamic extremist forces in Uzbekistan could be intensified rather than reduced. See Luong & Weinthal, "New Friends, New Fears in Central Asia," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2002, p. 64.

ganization composed of countries in this region and engaged in comprehensive cooperation, has its greatest potential. In terms of economic cooperation, it has yet to bring about any remarkable real interests to all the members, which hope to realize results as soon as possible. However, economic cooperation is a long process and a long-term objective and is still in its initial stages. Economic cooperation in Central Asia is objectively difficult. Producing instant results is rather difficult because the economic cooperation mechanism of the SCO is also in its initial stages. The general trend of economic cooperation in the organization is gradually accelerating and the interest in and demand on it by all members has increased. This shows that economic cooperation in the SCO is a realistic demand and an objective need of all members. In the long- and mid-term perspectives, its potential will be tremendous, especially in the areas of energy and communications.

Safeguarding the security of border areas is one of the important functions of the SCO, which stemmed out of the need to resolve border issues. Other cooperation mechanisms in the region have not and cannot bear such a function. Members of the SCO are neighbors or closely located, so they all pay full attention to the irreplaceable role of the organization in the security and stability of border areas, a role that has not changed because of September 11. Abandoning or damaging the SCO involves indirectly the commitment and respect of members to relevant agreements on border security and also relates to the guarantee of long-term security and stability of their border areas. Meanwhile, the SCO has the function of mutually assured security. The new security concept of common security, equal security and seeking security by cooperation it advocates is the principle not only for its security relations with other states and state groups, but also for interrelations among its members in the area of security. This principle provides reliable mutual security guarantees for its members.

In the new Central Asian situation, the majority of members of the SCO still maintain a positive attitude to its development, of which China and Russia are the two main engines. Their stand is of decisive influence to the destiny of the organization. After the

September 11 attacks, both have been identical on the issue of continuing the development of the SCO. Though Central Asian countries deepened their relations with the US, their foreign policy remains balanced and multidirectional. For most Central Asian countries, foreign policy adjustment is in the nature of showing a partiality for the US within the framework of balanced and multidirectional foreign policy. The Central Asian countries, however, located between China and Russia must give consideration to the wishes and interests of the two major powers in diplomacy. At the core of their diplomatic endeavors is the realization of security guarantees and economic interests. On the issue of relations with the major powers, they have no intention of inciting a conflict between the major powers in Central Asia and hope the latter to maintain a relative balance in the region, which is in their own interests and would help them realize more benefits. Therefore, after September 11, Central Asian countries have still regarded the SCO as an important cooperation mechanism in Central Asia and hope for its continuous development. The stand of the members of the SCO on the organization is the political guarantee of its development.<sup>16</sup>

Fundamentally, the SCO as a cooperation mechanism is an objective need for political, economic and security development in the region. It is an embryonic form of regional cooperation, while regional cooperation is a natural process of current world developments and a part of the process of globalization. Central Asia is a newly emerging geopolitical region in the post-Cold War era and has its own political, economic and security features relatively independent from other regions. As a region, Central Asian regional features in politics, economy, security and geography are complete and distinct. But as a newly emerging region, its regional political, economic and security systematization and mechanization are wanting and its regional integration is weak. With the gradual formation of regional self-consciousness, objectively it needs a regional cooperation mechanism to meet the co-

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16 In the first SCO summit after Sept. 11, the St. Petersburg Summit that was held on June 7th 2002, all the leaders of the Central Asian countries spoke positively of the SCO. [www.strana.ru](http://www.strana.ru) June 7, 2002.

operation demands of all the countries in the region and to reflect on regional demands. The SCO has satisfied such demands. It links China, Russia and the Central Asian countries, which are close neighbors and meets a need for a mechanized platform for exchange, understanding, communication, and cooperation. That the SCO has developed from a temporary dialogue mechanism for resolving border issues to a regional cooperation organization reflects, in reality, the regional demand for cooperation. It can be said that, without the SCO, this region may have needed another similar cooperation mechanism to meet the regional demand for integration. But destiny has made the SCO the bearer of regional cooperation. The political, economic and security cooperation of the SCO is beneficial to all members in the region and for this reason it has a high elasticity of existence.

## **7. SCO Also Needs Adjustment of Its Development Strategy and Tactics According to a Changed Situation.**

After the St. Petersburg and Moscow Summit, the SCO has had its own charter and set up its permanent secretariat and anti-terrorism center. The documents passed by the summit have perfected its basis legally and organizationally. This means that the SCO will soon become a regional organization with a capacity for legal transactions. As a regional organization the SCO should strengthen its group features, which refers to the need of appearing often on international and regional arenas at various levels in a collective capacity to express its attitude and policy. This will enable the SCO to gradually become a player with a recognized capacity for legal transactions accepted by the international community in international relations. At the political level, it should broaden its vision, and especially cast its political eyes on nearby Afghanistan, South Asia, West Asia and the Caucasus, and actively extend its political influence there, including the reconstruction of Afghanistan, mediation of regional crises, regional security and stability guarantees, anti-terror cooperation and anti-drug cooperation. The SCO needs to treat other countries, espe-

cially neighboring ones in this region, in a more open posture. Its enlargement needs to follow the principle of graduation, safety and benefit, but contact, dialogue, consultation and cooperation with other countries should become its important contents, including inviting relevant countries for special dialogues and as observers or associate members.

Meanwhile the SCO needs a more open development concept and image. This means that it should stress its non-antagonism and non-exclusiveness while keeping its regional group features, emphasizing its openness to cooperation with other states and state groups in various fields as well as strengthening its pursuit of regional multilateral cooperation while weakening its “big power colored” politics. Central Asian countries hope the SCO will not be “politicized,” that is, become a political tool of big power competition. Therefore, the “politicization” of the organization may lead to internal slack and even splits, which would not be conducive to strengthening its inner cohesion and policy identity.

The SCO needs timely adjustments to focus its interest structure. It is a cooperation mechanism based on the two wheels of security and economy, of which security is primary. From the perspective of realistic long-term development and change, its interest structure should be adjusted to both security and economic cooperation as the primary foci. The general trend of Central Asia towards gradual stability of the regional security environment, and demands for economic development of all countries in region should increase sharply, which is also a trend seen throughout the world. Economic cooperation has the greatest affinity, and is the most expansive force with the tightest and most lasting adhesive linking the interests of various countries. In the long run, economic cooperation will be the most important and active factor for pushing ahead the SCO and the most important factor for attracting its members, especially Central Asian countries. If the SCO cannot clearly increase its economic cooperation content in a timely fashion, its capacity of functional expansion will be restricted. Thus, it should make up its mind on whether or not to increase its intensity of economic cooperation and make

economic cooperation gradually one of the main foci supporting the organization. This task is very difficult. We cannot spoil things by excessive enthusiasm. We can combine long-term objectives and short- and mid-term projects, conduct multilateral and bilateral cooperation concurrently and carry on multilevel and multifaceted cooperation at the same time. The SCO should also put forward specific initiatives and projects and implement them in the areas of joint protection of the Central Asian environment, the fight against pollution, the protection of animal and plant resources, and the rational utilization of natural resources. Cooperation in these areas is well received particularly by Central Asian countries, as it benefits all countries and can garnish support and recognition from the international community. It is also conducive to enhancing the cohesion and influence of the SCO. Furthermore, the cultural field should also be an important area where the SCO needs strengthening and sustained development.

The SCO needs a principled consensus and a coordinated stand on its relations with the US. A direct US military presence in Central Asia is a political reality, which cannot but exert pressure on the SCO. Therefore, it is quite important and necessary for the members of the SCO to reach a principled consensus and coordinate policies on relations between the SCO and the US. A principled consensus and coordinated stance should be based on a mutual understanding and respect of all the concerned parties' interests. It should be based on coordination of common interests. Out of the need of security, economy and balance between major power relations, Central Asian countries welcome a US military presence in the region and hope to forge close relations with the US. However, China and Russia hope the US will withdraw its armed forces from Central Asia after its military operation against the Taliban in Afghanistan, but they do not oppose a constructive US role in the region and have been conducting anti-terrorism cooperation with the latter. Therefore, on the issue of cooperation between the SCO and the US in Central Asia, all the members of the organization have no divergence. US military presence in Central Asia is of constructive and positive significance to this region, but it also has the potential of playing a negative role. Its

positive role in destroying the Taliban, the largest source of threat to Central Asian security, is beneficial to security and stability in the region and also to improving the macro environment of regional economic and social development. Stability in Central Asia has important and positive impact on the security of all countries in the region, including China and Russia. The possible negative role is the US's double standard for terrorism may encourage the development of some separatist forces, and lead to the intensification of big power competition, damaging both Chinese and Russian interests while intensifying the political instability of the Central Asian countries.<sup>17</sup> This dual meaning of the US military presence in Central Asia is the premise behind the SCO formulating a coordinated policy on the US issue. The SCO should cooperate in areas where the US can play a constructive role, but oppose areas that may play a destructive role. This conforms to the common interests of the members of the SCO. Political turmoil in Central Asian countries, instability resulting from big power competition in the region, and damage to relations between Central Asian countries and China and Russia will damage the interests of all these countries, especially the Central Asian countries. Thus, active cooperation with the US to allow

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17 After the September 11 events, there has been increasing evidence that Central Asian countries are politically unstable. In November 2001, a political crisis broke out in Kazakhstan, leading to the government falling from power. In March 2002, a political riot occurred in Kyrgyzstan, causing casualties from conflicts between the police and demonstrators. After that, political demonstrations continued to take place. In Turkmenistan, the political opposition led by former foreign minister Boris Shikmuradov stepped up their anti-government activities abroad. The confrontation between the Uzbekistan government and the political opposition has tended to intensify. The intensifying political instability in Central Asian countries is not accidental; the US factor has played an indirect role. Lynn Pascoe, US Deputy Assistant Secretary for Central Asian Affairs, has stated that the US is forging political and military relations with Central Asian countries, but its policy of demanding them to conduct democracy and market reforms and respect human rights will not change. US political and military cooperation with Central Asian countries and its human rights policy have encouraged not only ruling authorities but also the opposition.

for and maintain its constructive role while restricting its destructive influence should be the basic position held on SCO-US relations.

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