

NATO

**Topic B: Growing Presence of the Shanghai
Cooperation Organization**

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Background

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was originally founded as The Shanghai Five on April 26th, 1996. Five countries – China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – signed the “*Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions*” in Shanghai. In 2001, the five countries met again in the Chinese capital, Beijing, and admitted the sixth member of the organization, Uzbekistan. On June 15th, 2001 the six member states signed the “*Declaration of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*,” and thus founded the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

While there are six member states in the SCO, they are not the only countries involved with its activities. Currently, there are four nations with observer status in the SCO – India, Iran, Mongolia and Pakistan. Mongolia was the first country to receive observer status, which was awarded in 2004 at the annual SCO summit that took place in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. India, Pakistan and Iran were awarded observer status at the 2005 summit meeting in Astana, Kazakhstan. Iran applied for full membership status on March 24th, 2008 and has pledged to cooperate with all member states on issues of terrorism, collective security, and the illegal drug trade. India and Pakistan both expressed interest in joining the SCO as full members, but conflicting interests between the two countries have greatly hindered the process. Of the four countries with observer status, Mongolia has expressed the least interest in becoming a full member.

Other than the countries with observer status, the SCO also contains two “Dialogue Partners,” a position created in 2008. Countries who are dialogue partners share common goals and principals with the SCO, and pledge to eventually form mutually beneficial economic/military partnership with the organization. The only current dialogue partners are Sri Lanka and Belarus. The SCO-Sri Lankan cooperation was recently showcased with the defeat of Tamil Tigers – a victory won with the economic/military assistance of SCO member countries (most notably China and Russia). In addition, China is currently building a port in the Sri Lankan town of Hambantota, which is widely viewed as a potential naval base. The inclusion of Belarus as a dialogue partner had been controversial due to the geographic location of the country (Russia argues that it is a purely European country). Nonetheless, Belarus, with the support of Kazakhstan, was accepted as a dialogue partner at the 2009 summit in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

Like NATO, the SCO has a formal structure within the organization. The official working languages of the SCO are Chinese and Russian. At the top of the leadership ladder is the Council of Heads of State. The council consists of the presidents of all six member states and meets annually at the capital city of one of the countries. Right below this council are the Council of Heads of Government and the Council of Foreign Ministers, which meet regularly to discuss issues on intergovernmental cooperation and interaction with other international organizations. The Secretariat of the SCO is the organ by which drafts, resolutions, agendas, declarations...etc. are made. The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS),

stationed in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, is a permanent section of the SCO that promotes cooperation against the three major threats – terrorism, separatism, and extremism. The head of RATS is elected on a three-year term, and all six member states have permanent representatives in this sector.

Current Situation

The cooperation between the member states can be roughly divided into three types – economic, cultural and military. China's premier, Wen JiaBao, pledged in the 2003 summit to establish free trade between all member states. In 2004, over 100 economic actions were signed into effect. One of the main economic concerns in the SCO is energy resource, which is widely available in the Central Asian regions (most notably oil). In 2005, the SCO Interbank Association was created to manage funds for future energy projects. The Interbank first met in Beijing in February 2006. In late 2006 the Russian Foreign Ministry brought up the idea of an “energy club”, an idea that was initially not received well by the other member states. However, with the recession in 2008, talks over the “energy club” have resumed. Other than economic cooperation, there are cultural events which bring together the six vastly spread nations. The first SCO Arts Festival and Exhibition was held in Astana, Kazakhstan in 2005.

Nothing concerns NATO more than the SCO military cooperation. NATO member states have increased their military presence in the Central Asian region to combat the threat of insurgents in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The SCO, on the other

hand, has been using its Central Asian countries to counter western influence in the region. For example, the Karshi-Khanabad (also known as the “K2”) is an airbase located in Uzbekistan. The United States Air Force has been using the airbase to support its operations in Afghanistan. In 2005 under the pressure of the SCO, however, the Uzbeks asked the US Forces to evacuate the base in six months. By November 2005, the Americans had cleared out of the base. The Russian Foreign Ministry’s Special Ambassador claimed in 2006 that the SCO is not a counter-military bloc against western forces, but merely a group of countries cooperating together against “terrorism, extremism, and separatism.” However, some analysts believe that the SCO is simply an “anti-NATO” organization.

In addition to increasing their influence in central Asia, Russia and China have been conducting massive military exercises called “Peace Mission (year name).” This year’s Peace Mission 2009 took place in Eastern Russia and in Jilin province of China. Around 3000 soldiers from air, land, and sea divisions took part in the exercises. While the SCO claims that the exercises are merely anti-terrorism training, western analysts say that the exercises are merely to show NATO the SCO’s ever-advancing military capabilities.

Questions

- 1) What is the best way to deal with the growing SCO military presence in Central Asia?
- 2) Is the growing military participation by the SCO a legitimate threat?

- 3) Is SCO as a whole a potential military threat to NATO?
- 4) Iran has observer status and has applied for full membership. How will this affect the way NATO nations deal with the Iranian regime?
- 5) Should NATO have more open dialogues with the SCO, with regards to economic/military cooperation?
- 6) Should NATO nations try to “recruit” surrounding Asian countries into their spheres of influence?

Sources

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