

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Prospects For A Multipolar World

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On June 15th and 16th the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) will hold its ninth annual heads of state summit in the Russian city of Yekaterinburg.

It will be attended by the presidents of its six full members – China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – and by representatives of various ranks from its four observer states – India, Iran, Mongolia and Pakistan – and from several aspiring partner nations yet to be announced.

The SCO as an institution and as a concept represents the world's greatest potential and in ways is its major paradox as its capacities and their realization to date are so far apart.

Its six full members account for 60% of the land mass of Eurasia and its population is a third of the world's. With observer states included, its affiliates account for half of the human race.

At its fifth and watershed summit in the capital of Kazakhstan, Astana, in June of 2005, when representatives of India, Iran, Mongolia and Pakistan attended an SCO summit for the first time, the president of the country hosting the summit, Nursultan Nazarbayev, greeted the guests in words that had never before been used in any context: "The leaders of the states sitting at this negotiation table are representatives of half of humanity." [1]

Former Joint Chief of Staff of the Russian Armed Forces and political analyst Leonid Ivashov later described the significance and unique nature of the SCO in asserting that, "Contrary to Samuel Huntington's concept of the allegedly inevitable clash of civilizations, the conclusion drawn in the SCO framework was that harmonized interactions between civilizations and their mutual assistance were possible.

"The contours of an alliance of five non-Western civilizations – Russian, Chinese, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist – began to materialize." [2]

To emphasize the world-historical prospects of the organization, he added: "The SCO is supposed to be a special world without a clearly defined boundary, a world spanning the entire global space.

"The quadrangle of the new global entity – Brazil, Russia, China, and India – is already taking shape....The above and certain other formations are related to the SCO." [3]

The quartet Ivashov mentions above – Brazil, Russia, China, and India – has since 2001 been known by the acronym formed by the first letters of the nations' names, BRIC, the world's

fastest and most consistently growing economies with the largest foreign currency and gold reserves.

BRIC held its first summit last May in the same city as this year's SCO summit will occur, Yekaterinburg, and will be holding the next in June.

Three of the four members of BRIC are also members or observers of the SCO, as are four of the world's seven official nuclear states.

As a Russian daily said in 2006, "The SCO is a momentous organisation which occupies territory from the Arctic to the Indian Ocean and from Kaliningrad to Shanghai.

"It may become the second political pole of the world." [4]

SCO members and observers also take in a stretch of Eurasia from the South China Sea to the Baltic Sea and from the Persian Gulf to the Bay of Bengal.

At the 2006 heads of states summit in Shanghai the presidents of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan – Hamid Karzai, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Pervez Musharraf – attended as observers. Photographs of the three standing side by side appeared on numerous websites at the time and abounded in importance, both symbolic and substantive. The Afghan and Pakistani presidents had been hurling mutual accusations for years over the other's nation being the base of destabilization of his own and there even had been loss of life in military exchanges between the two states' armed forces.

Iran was the intended victim of thinly veiled threats of US military strikes. In fact the granting of observer status to the nation in 2005 and Ahmadinejad's attendance at three successive heads of state summits – China in 2006, Kyrgyzstan in 2007 and Tajikistan in 2008 – played no small role in thwarting whatever plans the United States and Israel have nurtured for attacking Iran.

To see the three above-mentioned leaders in the founding city of the SCO under the auspices of a multinational security alliance headed by Russia and China, as all three of their nations were at war or could soon be, revealed the regional and global prospects for the SCO as a new model for conflict resolution and cooperation.

During the 2007 summit the SCO discussed establishing a "unified energy market" and then Russian president Vladimir Putin stated, "I am convinced that energy dialogue, integration of our national energy concepts, and the creation of an energy club will set out the priorities for further cooperation." [5]

The following year Kazakh Prime Minister Karim Massimov speaking in reference to an impending meeting of SCO energy ministers and in affirming that "the existing system of pipelines on the SCO space connecting Russia, Central Asian states and China is a serious basis for the establishment of an SCO unified energy space," said:

"The projects on the establishment of a unified energy market and the SCO common transport corridor could become bright examples of the global approach to defining the forms and mechanisms of cooperation." [6]

By 2007 the SCO had initiated over twenty large-scale projects related to transportation, energy and telecommunications and held regular meetings of security, military, defense,

foreign affairs, economic, cultural, banking and other officials from its member states. No multinational organization with such far-ranging and comprehensive mutual interests and activities has ever existed on this scale before.

America's First Afghan War And Its Aftermath In Central Asia

Leaders of SCO member states routinely deny that the organization is a military alliance or one in the process of formation or that it entertains plans to model itself after or to directly challenge NATO. The first half of the claim is perfectly true, the second may be an obligation forced on it.

A penetrating Iranian analysis of late last year, "Iraq Smoke Screen" by Hamid Golpira, had this to say on the topic:

"According to Brzezinski's theory, control of the Eurasian landmass is the key to global domination and control of Central Asia is the key to control of the Eurasian landmass....Russia and China have been paying attention to Brzezinski's theory, since they formed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2001, ostensibly to curb extremism in the region and enhance border security, but most probably with the real objective of counterbalancing the activities of the United States and NATO in Central Asia." [7]

The SCO grew out of the Shanghai Five alliance of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan formed in 1996 on the basis of the Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions to insure border demarcation and security in an area of the world thrown into turmoil by the precipitate break-up of the Soviet Union five years earlier.

Mutual concerns of the five nations also included cross-border armed extremism based in the Ferghana Valley that takes in parts of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and the threat of violent secessionist movements often connected to it.

What Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were in fact contending with was the aftermath of the American Afghan proxy war of 1978-1992 which had spread, as its architect Zbigniew Brzezinski intended it to, into the Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union during that period and continued to expand in the region after 1991.

When Uzbekistan joined the Shanghai Five in June of 2001 the group was formalized as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and commenced annual heads of state and heads of government (prime ministers) summits.

Less than three months later the attacks on New York and Washington, D.C. occurred and in October the US and its NATO allies invaded Afghanistan and began establishing military bases in that nation and in Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

It was at that point which, whatever the SCO's original purpose and goals envisioned, it was brought face-to-face with the US and NATO deploying troops, warplanes and military installations on SCO territory and in adjoining nations.

After the September 11, 2001 attacks on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, SCO members like the rest of the world seemed inclined to give the US the benefit of the doubt and take it at its word: That it would launch a - limited - military operation in Afghanistan to avenge the attacks and perhaps along the way address the situation in the country and its environs that its own actions had in large part brought about.

These included the destruction of Afghanistan as a nation state after Washington's mujahedin clients took the capital of Kabul in 1992 and soon reduced much of it to rubble with mortar attacks and other acts of factional fighting.

The resultant collapse of the nation's economy and infrastructure.

The second-generation invasion of the shattered country by Taliban and their capture of Kabul in 1996 with the support of American favorite Benazir Bhutto and the active connivance of the US. Earlier this month current Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari told NBC News, concerning Taliban, that it is a "part of our past and your past, and the ISI [Inter-Services Intelligence] and CIA created them together." [8]

By the time of the fifth SCO heads of state summit in Kazakhstan in 2005, with few of the claimed objectives of the US – and NATO which joined the fray by invoking its Article 5 mutual military assistance clause – accomplished and no sign of the Pentagon and NATO ever preparing to remove their military forces from Afghanistan and four neighboring nations, patience had worn thin among SCO member states.

The United States and its NATO allies had launched three unprovoked wars in four years – Yugoslavia in 1999, Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 – as well as waging counterinsurgency and proxy conflicts and subversion campaigns in Colombia, Macedonia, Ivory Coast, Yemen, the Philippines, Liberia and elsewhere.

What alarmed SCO members as much as the preceding was the so-called Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan in March of 2005 and what government authorities in Tashkent saw as a variation on the theme of regime change in Uzbekistan in May of that year, a month before the SCO summit.

The uprising in Kyrgyzstan and the overthrow of its president Askar Akayev was the fourth in a series of Western-backed "color revolutions" in the Balkans and the former Soviet Union following those in Yugoslavia in 2000, Georgia in 2003 and Ukraine in December of 2004, only three months before that in Kyrgyzstan. The dominoes were falling with an increasing rapidity and now were occurring on the Chinese as well as Russian borders. And in the very heart of the SCO community.

The newspaper of the Chinese ruling party, People's Daily, wrote a month after the summit:

"The recent SCO Summit was held against a background featuring major changes taken place in the regional political situation. After the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and other direct military actions, the United States and other Western powers have basically completed integration of the world security pattern, launched offensives of 'democratic reform' and 'elimination of tyrannical outposts' in former Soviet states and the Greater Middle East region and started 'color revolutions' one after another." [9]

At the summit in Kazakhstan the SCI issued a Declaration of Heads of Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization which addressed a broad panoply of concerns and which contained a general statement on the situation obtaining in the world at the time and an elaboration of the organization's principles. It included:

"The heads of the member states point out that, against the backdrop of a contradictory process of globalisation, multilateral cooperation, which is based on the principles of equal right and mutual respect, non-intervention in internal affairs

of sovereign states, non-confrontational way of thinking and consecutive movement towards democratisation of international relations, contributes to overall peace and security, and call upon the international community, irrespective of its differences in ideology and social structure, to form a new concept of security based on mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and interaction.

“Diversity of cultures and civilisations in the world is a common human value. At a time of fast developing information technologies and communications it must stimulate mutual interest, tolerance, abandonment of extreme approaches and assessments, development of dialogue. Every people must be properly guaranteed to have the right to choose its own way of development.

“The heads of the member states are convinced that a rational and just world order must be based upon consolidation of mutual trust and good-neighborly relations, upon the establishment of true partnership with no pretence to monopoly and domination in international affairs. Such order will become more stable and secure, if it comes to consider the supremacy of principles and standards of international law, before all, the UN Charter. In the area of human rights it is necessary to respect strictly and consecutively historical traditions and national features of every people, the sovereign equality of all states.” [10]

As an earlier quote mentioned, the SCO is composed of six member states and four observers representing a true diversity of cultures, civilizations, histories and political systems, from many of the world’s oldest and most venerable traditions to some of its newest nations, from the world’s two most populous states to Kyrgyzstan with slightly over five million citizens, and political structures ranging from secular to religious and multi-party to single-party. The internal demographic composition of the ten members and observers, excluding Mongolia, is also a rich tapestry of ethnic, national, linguistic and confessional pluralism and variety.

In addition to calling for a just, rational and peaceful world in a global situation that was little enough of any of the three, the Declaration contained both an appeal and blueprint for the sort of international order required as an antidote to the current one of unipolarity, unilateralism, cutthroat competition, cynical complacency, brute force and war.

The summit declaration was the opening salvo in a long-overdue campaign for a multipolar international system, one not dominated by a self-appointed sole superpower or by several powers with presumptions to global domination or respective spheres of influence, but a democracy between nations that would augment the development of democracy within nations.

In November of 2005 Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov reiterated that the “Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is working to establish a rational and just world order” and that “The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation provides us with a unique opportunity to take part in the process of forming a fundamentally new model of geopolitical integration.” [11]

It also recognized that no single, standardized model of political, economic, social, cultural and ethical development and practices could be forced on the 88% of humanity that lives outside the Euro-Atlantic world, not a parliamentary system devised in the British Isles centuries ago nor a consumerist culture and pseudo-civilization designed on Madison Avenue and in Hollywood.

That genuine structural problems exist in the political systems of SCO member states is indisputable. Five of the six were thrust into sudden independence in 1991 with the near instantaneous break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the USSR's former Central Asian republics were among the most adversely affected by that catastrophic occurrence. Social dislocation, economic destitution, cross-border armed incursions and general destabilization are not conducive to the optimal development of electoral and other political institutions.

The SCO Declaration evinced a recognition that even if trends in all nations and societies should evolve in the direction of government that is equitable, accountable, accessible and humane, each nation and culture will arrive at that destination by its own path as well as that of universal principles.

The West that presumes to dictate, often to the point of blackmail and bombs, that its increasingly constricted and impracticable model of governance must be enforced always and everywhere, even where the native soil rejects such transplantation, would be better advised to examine its own deficiencies.

The standard bearer of Western values, the United States, held federal elections last year in which two billion dollars of private funds were expended in an effort to buy influence. And that in a system where only two established political parties are given automatic ballot status and thus have a monopoly on fielding candidates broadly and surely in winning posts.

Time For US And NATO To Leave Central Asia

The Declaration adopted at the 2005 SCO summit also contained this provision:

"Considering the completion of the active military stage of antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan, the member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation 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 contingent on the territories of the SCO member states." [12]

Which is to say that the US and NATO had outlived whatever usefulness their presence in South and Central Asia had served and it was now time for them to leave.

A Chinese daily expressed the matter in these terms:

"The Declaration points out that the SCO member countries have the ability and responsibility to safeguard the security of the Central Asian region, and calls on Western countries to leave Central Asia. That is the most noticeable signal given by the Summit to the world." [13]

On July 7 of 2006 Uzbekistan issued an eviction notice to the 800 US military personnel housed in its base at Karshi-Khanabad, stating that the use of the base had been allowed "for the sole purpose of ousting Taliban rulers from Afghanistan" which had been achieved almost four years earlier.

The government demarche said "Any other prospects for a U.S. military presence in Uzbekistan were not considered by the Uzbek side." [14]

On the 17th Kyrgyzstan's newly elected President Kurmanbek Bakiyev "stressed ...that with

the appeasement of the situation in Afghanistan, it is the time for the United States to schedule its pullout of forces from the base in his country," where an estimated 1,500 US and NATO military personnel were stationed.

On July 20 Tajik Foreign Minister Talbak Nazarov said "it is time for the United States and its allies to set a date to pull their conventional troops out of Central Asia as the situation in Afghanistan has stabilized," with local reference to the use of the former Soviet Kulyab airbase and the use of Tajikistan's airspace. [15]

"Nazarov reiterated the call made jointly by the six member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) earlier this month that the US-led anti-terror coalition should set a deadline for the withdrawal of their troops and the temporary use of infrastructure in Central Asian countries." [16]

Later in the month Russia signed an agreement with the government of Tajikistan for the use of a military base in the country.

The US Secretary of State at the time, Condoleezza Rice, denounced the SCO Declaration's call for the removal of US and NATO bases in Central Asia with the pat response that "there is still a lot of terrorist activity in Afghanistan and US troops were needed to train the Afghan army to counter it," [17], a state of affairs that from the Western perspective persists to this day, four years later, and into the indefinite future with the war now fully extended into Pakistan.

So concerned was Washington that its plans for permanent military deployments in Central and South Asia under the guise of the so-called Global War on Terror were in jeopardy that it deployed Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld on a hastily scheduled tour to the region, visiting Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

At the time the US had "1,000 planes in the Ganci military base" in Kyrgyzstan and "about 1,500 military staff and planes in the Khanabad base in Uzbekistan." [18]

"Rumsfeld planned his trip after the Shanghai Cooperation Organization called for a timetable for US withdrawal in an early June summit in Astana.

"During his talks in Bishkek, Rumsfeld will demand the lease of Ganci military base, in the vicinity of Bishkek's Manas Airport, to be extended." [19]

Washington had leverage with the governments of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in two respects: The ever-looming threat of another "color revolution" could be activated against any government that defied US diktat and America could offer economic incentives to the two Central Asian nations that had no substantial oil and natural gas resources, unlike Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

In August what were described as anti-terrorist exercises (most any military deployment or exercise since September 11, 2001 has been characterized as such) were conducted in the Caspian Sea with the participation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the post-Soviet Collective Security Treaty Organization (comprised of Russia, Armenia, Belarus and the four Central Asian nations in the SCO) and the Commonwealth of Independent States anti-aircraft defense allied command.

Participants included the chiefs of anti-terrorist units and secret services from Azerbaijan,

Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and officials from the Iranian Security Ministry attended the exercise in the capacity of observers for the first time. [20]

This was while US Defense Secretary Rumsfeld was conniving to establish a Western-dominated Caspian Guard in the region.

Days later Russia and China launched their first-ever joint military exercises, the eight-day Peace Mission 2005, in Eastern Russia and in China's Shandong Province, consisting of land, sea and air components and 10,000 troops.

In December the Chief of the Russian General Staff at the time, Yuri Baluyevsky, announced "Our goal is to organise such multi-country military exercises [with both India and China] within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation." [21]

A Pakistani commentary in the same period drew attention to the purpose of such exercises:

"NATO was often regarded as the hidden fist behind a peaceful US-led drive for equal access to the vast energy resources of the successor states of the Soviet Union." [22]

SCO Appeal Resonated Throughout Eurasia

But the most significant aspect of the period following the SCO June summit was the eagerness with which nations outside the organization welcomed its new enhanced role and the underlying call for global multipolarity.

Indian External Affairs Minister K. Natwar Singh, who had represented his nation at the summit, announced a month afterward "To deepen engagement with the region, India plans to apply for full membership of the SCO," [23], a position he repeated in November when stating that India planned to expand its engagement with the SCO and "declared India's intention for a greater role in the organisation." [24]

At the same time the Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz "stressed that the SCO...represents 3 billion population of the world" [25] and said his country "wanted to become a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," adding, "This organization is of immense strategic importance" and "that if the SCO conducted military exercises like those performed by Russia, China, and India recently, Pakistan would consider participating." [26]

New observer state Iran also expressed its desire to become a full member and stated that it would offer the SCO access to the Middle East and, according to Iran's First Vice-President Mohammad-Reza Aref, "Iran would play a key role in linking the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to Persian Gulf states and even Europe." [27]

Malaysian Ambassador to Russia Mohamad Khalis, who had attended the Astana summit, said "Malaysia completely supports the goals set by the SCO and is ready to cooperate with the organisation and its members for common interests." [28]

In the ensuing months similar interest was expressed by nations as diverse as Bangladesh, Belarus, Nepal, Turkey and Azerbaijan.

On November 4, 2005 a ceremony was held at the SCO Secretariat to sign a protocol on the establishment of a Contact Group between the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Afghanistan. [29]

The SCO has also established relations with the United Nations, where it is an observer in the General Assembly, the European Union, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

The response to the prospects of an expanded SCO was such that a Pakistani commentator considered "The new contenders for admission are Afghanistan, North Korea and South Korea. If the SCO continues its southward expansion, Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia may join in the future." [30]

US Strikes Back: India

The US counteroffensive was not long in coming nor was it limited to attempts at maintaining airbases in Central Asia.

It targeted the most populous new SCO observer state and that nation which can tilt not only the region but the world either toward Western dominance or a new multipolar international order: India. July 18, 2005 American President George W. Bush and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh issued a joint statement on the Indo-U.S. civilian nuclear agreement that came into effect three years later and that permitted a waiver to be granted to India to commence civilian nuclear trade.

This was the economic enticement to lure India away from the SCO and closer security arrangements with Russia and China and begin the process of its orientation toward strategic military ties with Washington and its serving as the fourth pillar of an emerging Asian NATO along with Japan, Australia and South Korea. India as a full member of the SCO would insure the demise of global unipolarity, of bloc and power politics on the world stage and of Western domination on not only the military but the diplomatic and economic fronts.

India as a US military ally will perpetuate divisions in the world and hostilities in Eurasia.

An Indian analyst warned two years ago that "Washington is not interested in New Delhi's official admission to the nuclear power club because that would enhance the latter's influence in international affairs. An important objective of the Americans in the region is to turn India into a major factor capable of counterbalancing a rapidly growing China.

"In order to reduce the SCO's role and influence in the region and to promote realisation of the American concept of a 'Greater Central Asia,' Tokyo and Washington are trying to drag New Delhi into a so-called Quadrilateral of Democracies aimed at building an alliance-like relationship between the US, Japan, Australia and India." [31]

Another Indian writer at the time echoed the same concern in stating, "It is indeed sad that New Delhi should continue to underestimate the importance of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

"So enamoured are our foreign policy mandarins of the new found friendship with Washington that they have found no time to evaluate the SCO's great potential strategic importance to India.

“The US has sought to undermine the SCO and given an opportunity, it would have loved to throttle it in its infancy.

“India is the most important ‘swing state’ in the international system. It has the potential to emerge as a strong, independent centre of power. Must India allow the US to play midwife to the birth of a new great power?” (32)

India is, as a member of the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, China, India) and RIC (Russia, India, China; the Strategic Triangle that former Russian foreign minister and prime minister Yevgeny Primakov spoke of in 1998) group of nations, as a major economic power in its own right and as a nation of over one billion citizens, that country in the world which can decide whether efforts by the SCO and complementary ones in Latin America, Africa and the Middle East toward securing a democratic, peaceful, prosperous and safe world system are successfully expedited or are made more laborious, painful and costly by artificially prolonging the disproportionate and by now manifestly unjust and disastrous power of the major Western states in and over the world.

West Contained And In Decline

Yet the 2005 SCO summit has not been without effects. Since that time the cycle of wars waged by the US and its NATO allies from 1999-2003 has been halted. There have been no more successful “color” coups in the former Soviet Union, notwithstanding apparent attempts in that direction in Belarus, Armenia and most recently Moldova.

The current president of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, attended the 2007 heads of state summit as did Afghan President Hamid Karzai, the second for two years in a row.

In early October of 2007 the SCO and the Collective Security Treaty Organization signed a memorandum of mutual understanding to integrate regional and international security cooperation and the following month agreed on a collaborative approach to Afghanistan.

This May 15th Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov informed the news media that the SCO had recommended what is described as dialogue partner status to Belarus and Sri Lanka, which would extend the geographical range of the SCO to a nation entirely in Europe and to another not part of the Eurasian landmass.

And not only has the post-World War II global domination of the West, given an extended and virtually unbridled license after the end of the Cold War, been curtailed by the new assertiveness of a revived Russia, a democratized and progressively more integrated Latin America and new formations like the SCO, but its power to dictate economic, financial, trade, copyright, political and energy terms to the rest of the world – and its ability to reserve the exclusive prerogative of using military force outside its own borders – has begun to collapse under its own weight.

Not that the military, including strategic, threats have abated. A Turkish analyst reminded readers last September that “the SCO has seen the unipolar mentality of the US as a source of conflict rather than a cure for the world’s common challenges.

“Stressing the necessity of a multipolar world for the sake of international security, the SCO has supported the maintenance of a strategic balance of power.

“The SCO has thus warned that the US endeavor to create a global missile defense system, as in Poland and the Czech Republic, is a futile attempt, as such efforts will neither help uphold the strategic balance nor prevent the spread of weapons of every kind, including nuclear.” [33]

In the same month the head of Russia’s Center for Contemporary Studies on Iran, Rajab Safarev, indicated the outlines of an alternative: “If Iran would become a SCO member, the SCO would become the third most influential, most powerful international body after the United Nations and the European Union.”

“I even believe the SCO would rank second, next to the UN, from the competence point of the view, after Iran’s membership.”

“The SCO would also get stronger following Iran’s membership, because its member states would be the owners of two thirds of the world’s energy sources which gives them a great financial power.” [34]

Caucasus War As Turning Point

On August 1st of last year Georgian armed forces launched artillery barrages against the capital of South Ossetia, Tskhinvali, killing several people including a Russian peacekeeper. Only the preceding day a US-led NATO military exercise had been completed in Georgia and American troops and hardware remained in the country. Six days later Georgia, hours after its US-educated leader Mikheil Saakashvili announced a unilateral ceasefire, unleashed a full scale invasion of South Ossetia.

Russian forces beat back the Georgian offensive and decisively defeated an army that for years had been armed and trained by the Pentagon and NATO.

The Caucasus war was a double precedent. It marked the first time that a US and NATO proxy army had come into direct armed conflict with Russia and its defeat put the first dent in the West’s post-Cold War image of invincibility.

After the war last August and in response to it Iranian President Ahmadinejad affirmed his country’s intention of joining the SCO and added, “The thing is that every organization has its own functions. We have our own expectations related to the SCO. The world does not consist only of NATO and the United States.” [35]

Addressing the Georgia-Russia war also, the head of Russian Center of Political Information Alexei Mukhin took the above point to the next level: “If we are talking about SCO’s move from an economic organization to a military one, then this has already happened....All the member states were willing to respond to the strengthening of NATO.” [36]

The director of the Russian Academy of Sciences’ center for SCO and regional problems, Anatoly Bolyatko, added:

“[T]he recent conflict in the Caucasus underscored the need for a multipolar world order. If NATO and even the UN are unable to settle this conflict, the SCO could well become a viable platform for resolving such problems....

“The SCO should eventually start playing a new role both in and outside the Caucasus. What we see now is a real crisis of the idea of a unipolar world now that the US and its NATO allies

pretend they are unable to get to the core of what's been happening in the Caucasus.

"I believe that organizations like the SCO and BRIC, that brings Russia together with Brazil, India and China, should play an important role here." [37]

Russian political analyst Andrei Areshev also noted on this score that "Following the August crisis in the Caucasus, political consultations within the SCO have intensified....The SCO's transformation into an organisation capable of effective resolution, inter alia, of joint defense issues will become ever more relevant as the tension on the Eurasian continent, which is provoked from without, increases further." [38]

An even more forceful assessment is that which follows:

"Changes in world politics that took place after 'the awakening of the Russian bear' could open the SCO's doors for Tehran, which remains one of the key oil suppliers for China.

"If this should be the case, it may be possible to speak of an unprecedented consolidation of the countries of the Eurasian continent around Beijing and Moscow.

"This will render the US's attack on Iran impossible and put an end to America's plans of redrawing the lines in the Middle East and Central Asia.

"Such developments...change the entire world order formed after the collapse of the USSR." [39]

Prospects: World Crisis And Emerging International Alternative

In late October of 2008 the prime ministers of the SCO member states met in Kazakhstan against the backdrop of the worst world financial and economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

At the summit Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said that "Amid the global financial turmoil the SCO function acquires new meaning." [40]

He specified that each member of the organization "offers its competitive advantages to be added to the common asset of interaction on international markets."

"In this sense, the organization's role doubles today, since we are going through a complicated process in the international financial system and in the world economy. God has blessed the countries of our region to make use of their competitive geographical and historical advantages." [41]

What Putin was alluding to was a central hallmark, indeed the very foundation, of the SCO and its model of horizontal rather than vertical integration. What provides the organization the vast potential it has both as the major multifaceted alliance and structure in Eurasia and also as microcosm and prototype alike for an international transformation in all realms is not only the individual or even collective resources of its members, but its principle and practice of complementarity, of avoiding inefficient and costly repetition and redundancy and what in the West is uncritically celebrated as "competition."

It is that precise variant of myopic and avaricious, ruthless and asocial policy practiced over the past twenty years – when the US and its allies held practically uncontested sway over the world and were free to fashion it just as they chose to – that has led to the people of the West and the world staring into an economic and social abyss. The last mechanisms left available to power-obsessed Western political elites is to rob their own citizens and those of the world to subsidize the institutions and individuals that created the crisis and to maintain war as their ultimate trump card.

At last October's SCO summit Iranian Vice President Parviz Davudi addressed an initiative that has been garnering greater interest and assuming a heightened sense of urgency when he said, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is a good venue for designing a new banking system which is independent from international banking systems." [42]

The address by Russia's Putin also included these comments:

"We now clearly see the defectiveness of the monopoly in world finance and the policy of economic selfishness. To solve the current problem Russia will take part in changing the global financial structure so that it will be able to guarantee stability and prosperity in the world and to ensure progress."

"The world is seeing the emergence of a qualitatively different geo-political situation, with the emergence of new centers of economic growth and political influence.

"We will witness and take part in the transformation of the global and regional security and development architectures adapted to new realities of the 21st century, when stability and prosperity are becoming inseparable notions." [43]

The world is at a historical crossroad with the security and even survival of humanity at stake. One path continues along the way that has been pursued to date, of the right of might and every person for himself regardless of the consequences.

The other is one of a more rational, just, peaceful and multipolar alternative.

NOTES

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