
The Shanghai Cooperation Organization

The Primakov Vision and Central Asian Realities

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During the late 1990s, then Russian Foreign Minister and later Prime Minister Yevgeniy Primakov led efforts to redirect the new Russian Federation away from the West and toward the emerging powers of Eurasia by advocating the creation of a “strategic triangle” among China, India, and Russia. At the time, Primakov’s doctrine made little headway because Russia’s desired partners proved reluctant to take measures that would have marked them as geopolitical opponents of the United States. In addition, China and India were divided over various regional security issues, including their disputed borders and Beijing’s ties with New Delhi’s main rival, Pakistan.

Today, many Western observers fear that Primakov’s vision of a tri-lateral alliance among continental Asia’s three strongest military powers—one of whose objectives would be to counterbalance Washington’s regional influence—could become a reality. These concerns, presently mistaken, center on the unexpected prominence of an institution that had attracted little attention before the summer of 2005: the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). In July of that year, the leaders of the SCO governments unexpectedly told the United States and its NATO allies that they should set a timetable for their military withdrawal from Central Asia. The organization’s June 2006 summit in Shanghai, attended by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, evoked further alarm about the pos-

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sible emergence of a potent anti-American bloc among some of the world's leading energy and military powers. Several Western commentators denounced what they saw as an emerging neo-Soviet bloc of authoritarian Eurasian countries—a kind of “NATO of the East.”¹

At present, such concerns appear excessive. The SCO has indeed become an increasingly important actor in Eurasia, as its expanding network of full members (China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) and formal observers (India, Iran, Pakistan, and Mongolia)

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gives the SCO tremendous geopolitical potential. Combined, the organization's full members and observers encompass much of the world's habitable landmass and almost half its population. Yet, the SCO currently lacks the internal cohesion and capabilities usually found in

strong multilateral security institutions such as NATO. Its members disagree on such important issues as the desirability of a Western military presence in Central Asia, the extent to which governments should collaborate to suppress domestic unrest, and the SCO's role in traditional defense matters. Moreover, further expansion could just as easily weaken the SCO as strengthen it. Nonetheless, the organization's growing importance warrants NATO initiatives to develop direct ties with it, especially since both institutions will likely continue to play significant roles in future Eurasian security contingencies.

THE ORIGINS, VALUES, AND STRUCTURES OF THE SCO

Established in November 1992, the SCO arose from a series of border security negotiations between China and the former Soviet republics along its border (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan). In 1996 and 1999, the “Shanghai Five” signed agreements that restricted conventional military deployments and activities within a 100 kilometer-wide demilitarized zone along their shared boundaries. In June 2001, they joined with Uzbekistan to institutionalize their interactions by establishing the SCO.

At their June 2006 summit, the participants adopted a fifth anniversary declaration that affirms their desire for greater democracy, but only in terms of relations *among* countries.² The statement underscores SCO leaders' support for the United Nations and their opposition to international “double standards.” When it comes to the domestic affairs of the member states, however, the summit declaration insists that “Diversity of

civilization and models of development must be respected and upheld. Differences in cultural traditions, political and social systems, values and models of development formed in the course of history should not be taken as pretexts to interfere in other countries' internal affairs. Models of social development should not be 'exported.' Chinese nationals especially like to speak rhapsodically about the "Shanghai Spirit," with its professed adherence to the "principles of mutual trust and benefit, equality, mutual consultations, respect for the multifaceted cultures and striving for joint development."³ In stressing such noninterference in the internal affairs of its member countries, the SCO reflects the same eclectic approach toward values found in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other Asian multilateral institutions. This approach differs, however, from that of Western organizations like NATO and the EU, which require that their members adhere to liberal democratic principles.

The title of the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism—signed at the organization's founding summit in June 2001—aptly highlights SCO priorities. Cooperation against "terrorism" (broadly defined to include the two other "evil forces" of ethno-separatism and political "extremism") resulted in the creation of the Regional Antiterrorism Structure (RATS) in Tashkent. Since officially beginning operations in June 2004, the RATS has coordinated studies of Eurasian terrorist movements, facilitated information sharing about terrorist threats, and provided advice on counterterrorism policies. It has also coordinated exercises among SCO security forces and organized efforts to disrupt terrorist financing and money laundering. According to Vyacheslav Kasimov, director of its executive committee, the RATS has also adopted unspecified "early-warning and prevention measures" designed to "help keep the overall security situation of SCO member countries stable."⁴ In June 2006, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mikhail Kamynin stated that the information exchanged through the RATS had thwarted hundreds of attempted terrorist acts.⁵

In July 2005, the SCO governments formally pledged not to extend asylum to any individual designated as a terrorist or extremist by an SCO member. The resulting accord, entitled "Concept of Cooperation Between SCO Member States on Combating Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism," provided for enhanced cooperation under the auspices of the RATS against terrorist financing and terrorist efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their means of delivery.⁶ In addition, for several years SCO members have undertaken numerous joint initiatives to combat narcotics trafficking and organized crime. In late 2005, the organization took on yet

another function by signing an agreement providing for mutual assistance to manage the consequences of natural disasters and other emergencies. The national emergency management agencies of the member states are now developing enhanced modalities of cooperation.⁷

The SCO has developed several other important institutions besides the RATS. Annual meetings occur among members' foreign, defense, and other ministers—including their prime ministers. A Council of National Coordinators oversees the organization's daily activities. While growing in size and responsibilities, however, the SCO Secretariat still employs fewer than 100 staff members and has an annual budget of under \$30 million.⁸ The SCO has also only recently begun to promote cultural exchanges and undertake other efforts to promote ties among SCO nationals. At present, the SCO is very much a top-down initiative, with little popular participation at the grassroots level.⁹

DIFFERENT VISIONS

The SCO's expansive agenda and diverse membership generates weaknesses as well as strengths. While some current and aspiring members such as Kyrgyzstan and India seem most interested in the SCO's economic potential, others, such as Uzbekistan, mainly value its regional security role. The need to reconcile conflicting national laws, regulations, and standards has delayed the implementation of many agreements. It was only in May 2006 that SCO members inaugurated annual meetings among the leaders of their national legislatures in a belated effort to achieve this harmonization. Thus far, they have declined to establish a permanent inter-

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parliamentary body akin to NATO's North Atlantic Assembly, which would broaden contacts beyond senior national party leaders.

Many accords adopted under SCO auspices consist primarily of bilateral deals, with the organization merely providing a convenient negotiating venue. China and Russia currently

devote more attention to their relations with individual Central Asian states than to their SCO-mediated multilateral ties, though they strive to give their bilateral activities a multilateral gloss. Another impediment to the SCO's development has been the serious rivalries and disputes among member governments. For example, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are peren-

nial competitors for regional primacy. In addition, Russia has repeatedly opposed Chinese efforts to establish an SCO free-trade zone or to acquire control over Eurasian energy resources.

SCO members also have different assessments of the continuing U.S. military presence in the region. At their July 2005 summit in Astana, Kazakhstan, the heads of the SCO governments issued a statement asking the United States and other members of the Operation Enduring Freedom coalition to establish a deadline for vacating their temporary military bases in Central Asia, “considering the completion of the active military stage of antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan.”¹⁰ Although all SCO members signed the declaration, they appear to have done so for very different reasons. Uzbekistan seems to have seen the statement as a useful mechanism to eliminate a Western military presence it no longer welcomes. Russia and China appear to have sought to reaffirm their expectation that NATO would eventually reduce its substantial military footprint in Central Asia. Sergei Prikhodko, a senior foreign policy aide to President Putin, indicated that a suitable deadline would be up to 18 months later—a less urgent timetable than Uzbekistan adopted.¹¹ Kyrgyzstan employed the declaration as leverage to extract greater rent payments from Washington in exchange for continuing to host the U.S. military base at Manas International Airport.

Finally, some signatories might have used the statement to signal their displeasure with certain Western policies in the region. For example, they may have hoped to galvanize the United States and NATO into more vigorously combating the terrorist and narcotics threats emanating from nearby Afghanistan. SCO members have repeatedly complained about the alliance’s failure to undertake this responsibility, which they believe NATO assumed upon occupying the country. Nevertheless, that only Uzbekistan eventually proceeded to expel NATO forces from its territory suggests that most SCO leaders, upon reflection, realized that any major Western military withdrawal from Central Asia under current conditions would substantially worsen their security given the probable inability of Russia, China, or any other country or multilateral group to stabilize Afghanistan as effectively.

ECONOMICS AND ENERGY

In September 2003, the SCO prime ministers adopted a Multilateral Economic and Trade Cooperation Program that established several general economic objectives. For example, the signatories pledged to facilitate

mutual trade and investment while working toward the free movement of goods, services, capital, and technology by 2020. At a September 2004 meeting in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, the prime ministers considered over 100 cooperative projects in such sectors as customs, communications, and public health.¹² In 2005 and 2006, the SCO governments established a series of institutions to help implement the Program and these cooperative projects. The Development Fund, the Business Council (also known as the Entrepreneurs' Committee), and the Inter-Bank Agreement aim to encourage investment in regional projects by promoting collaboration among members' state enterprises, private businesses, and government agencies responsible for foreign economic ties. In November 2005, China hosted a Eurasian Economic Forum under the joint auspices of the SCO Secretariat, the United Nations, and the China Development Bank. It involved about 1,000 political and business leaders from many countries, including from several non-SCO members such as Japan and South Korea.

Thus far, however, the limited financial resources that SCO members currently allocate to its multilateral economic initiatives have constrained their potential. The Development Fund, for instance, has a budget of only \$20 million to distribute among over 100 SCO-sponsored projects. Excessive customs duties, corrupt border officials, and the absence of a free-trade zone further impede intra-SCO commerce. The SCO governments continue to express dissatisfaction with the slow pace of economic collaboration. For example, the June 2006 Shanghai summit communiqué says, "To expand economic cooperation among them, SCO member states need to coordinate their efforts in implementing the Cooperation Program on Multilateral Economic and Trade among SCO Member States by carrying out major priority projects of regional economic cooperation. They need to work together to promote trade and investment facilitation and gradually realize the free flow of commodities, capital, services and technologies."¹³

Energy issues will likely occupy an increasingly important place on the agenda of SCO meetings. The organization's membership roster includes some of the world's largest producers and consumers of oil. According to the latest available data, in 2004 its six members produced 720 million tons of oil and consumed 452 million tons.¹⁴ In January 2006, SCO Executive Secretary Zhang Deguang said that the organization was forming a multinational working group on energy cooperation.¹⁵ At the July 2006 Shanghai summit, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that creating an "energy club" among SCO members is an "urgent issue."¹⁶ Iran's growing ties with other SCO members and observers could allow them to negotiate many privileged deals involving both oil and natural gas.

Despite these developments, it will prove difficult for the SCO to achieve its full potential in the energy realm. The SCO's two most influential members have fundamentally different interests in this sector. Although both Russia and China desire to increase
Central Asian oil and gas production, Moscow wants to maintain its control over these assets as well as the region's energy transportation infrastructure. Presently, its preeminent position allows Russian firms to divert deliveries to privileged buyers or, if world prices are low, to stockpile supplies. Yet China, a major energy consumer, desires to exert direct control over regional energy as-
sets—preferably by purchasing them outright—and to maximize production regardless of its effects on world energy prices. The SCO's two largest observers also differ on this issue, with Iran favoring and India opposing high energy prices.

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EURASIAN NEO-AUTHORITARIANISM

The SCO has long defended the principle of “noninterference” in countries’ domestic affairs. Its members interpret this injunction as immunizing them against foreign criticisms of their human rights practices or other perceived encroachments on their national sovereignty. After perceived election improprieties precipitated color revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, the SCO formed its own cadre of election observers. Since their initial use during the February 2005 ballot in Kyrgyzstan, they have endorsed every election held in a member state, despite the comprehensive criticisms offered by other foreign monitors. The SCO secretariat is now codifying the organizational and financial procedures of these monitors.¹⁷ Along with the traditionally compliant monitors organized by the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the SCO observers help bolster the legitimacy of Central Asia’s authoritarian regimes by giving the appearance of independent certification of the often questionable election results. In the November 2006 presidential elections in Tajikistan, for example, both the CIS and SCO monitors applauded the results while the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) observers decried the lack of political pluralism.¹⁸

SCO members also have been moving into the realm of Internet

censorship. Among the other June 2006 summit declarations, the most revealing might be the one on "International Information Security."¹⁹ In this statement, the SCO leaders express concern that modern information and communication technologies present a danger "for the entire world tantamount to that from the use of weapons of mass destruction." Their declaration warns of attempts to use the new technologies to interfere "in the internal affairs of sovereign states" and "for criminal, terrorist, military and political purposes that run counter to the maintenance of international security, which will...trigger social instability in countries." The summit attendees called on the United Nations and other parties to take "collective actions to eliminate these threats." The statement also announced the formation of an expert group to develop a detailed action plan for managing the issue. Even before this recent SCO declaration on information security, Reporters Without Borders had designated SCO members China, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, SCO observer Iran, and SCO aspirant Belarus as "enemies of the Internet."²⁰ Although the Russian government has yet to crack down on Internet usage, its continuing takeover of other domestic media sources suggests such a development may be imminent.

Despite SCO leaders' unanimous agreement that the organization should defend its incumbent governments against foreign-inspired Internet or terrorist threats, they remain divided over whether to respond collectively to serious but nonviolent domestic challenges. In particular, the SCO governments continue to disagree over whether the organization should protect its members against further colored revolutions. During the March 2005 government crisis in Kyrgyzstan, SCO members could not agree on joint action. Russia reportedly blocked Chinese efforts to organize some kind of collective military intervention.²¹ In late May 2005, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Liu Jianchao said China would "seriously consider" deploying troops to southern Kyrgyzstan, perhaps under the SCO's auspices, to help counter "terrorism, separatism and extremism" there.²² Kyrgyz and Russian opposition prevented realization of this suggestion, which would have entailed China acquiring its first military base on foreign soil.²³ In late July 2005, Kyrgyzstan's acting Vice-Premier Adakhan Madumarov said: "The issue of the deployment of a Chinese military base in Kyrgyzstan was discussed at a high level, but Kyrgyzstan's position is clear: we do not plan to turn the country into a politico-military battleground."²⁴

As a result of these divisions, the SCO again stood paralyzed while one of its member governments collapsed. To deal with similar challenges in the future, the SCO might evolve into a revived Warsaw Pact-like institution (an "authoritarian international") seeking to preserve its nondem-

ocratic member governments against both external and internal political challenges.²⁵ Such a development, however, could make the SCO especially vulnerable to further regime change in the region. If liberal democrats come to power in Central Asia, they might, in appreciation of past Western support, move closer towards the Western democracies and away from Russia and China, whose governments had backed the previous authoritarian regimes. The democratic opposition in a number of Central Asian countries favors pursuing deeper ties with the United States, something which the SCO, as currently constituted, cannot easily achieve.²⁶

SCO SECURITY INITIATIVES

SCO documents and statements repeatedly affirm a broad consensus among members on core security goals. The fifth anniversary declaration, for example, uses language resembling that found in standard nonaggression pacts. Members pledge not to join alliances or otherwise take actions that would “allow their territories to be used to undermine the sovereignty, security or territorial integrity of the other member states.” It also provides for immediate consultations during “emergencies that threaten regional peace, stability, and security.” Lastly, the declaration indicates interest in signing an SCO multilateral “treaty of good neighborliness” and creating a regional conflict-prevention mechanism.

Since the SCO’s establishment, member governments have conducted increasingly ambitious military exercises under its auspices. In October 2002, China and Kyrgyzstan conducted the first bilateral antiterror exercise within the SCO framework, involving joint border operations by hundreds of troops. It marked the first instance of joint maneuvers by the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) with another country’s armed forces. In August 2003, the militaries from all the member governments, with the exception of Uzbekistan, participated in the first formal SCO-sponsored combined exercise, known as “Cooperation 2003.” It involved over 1,000 troops engaging in several counterterrorism scenarios in eastern Kazakhstan and the bordering Xinjiang region of China.²⁷ During the unprecedented Russian-Chinese military exercises of August 2005, the defense or deputy defense ministers from all SCO members attended as observers. Meanwhile, representatives from the United States and other Western countries were not invited. In early March 2006, Uzbekistan affirmed its elevated commitment to the SCO by hosting a multilateral exercise under its auspices, “East-Antiterror-2006.” Representatives from the member governments’ special services and law enforcement agencies practiced rescuing hostages

and defending critical infrastructure from terrorists.²⁸

Notwithstanding their expanding activities in the area of regional security, SCO leaders deny any intention to create a Eurasian version of NATO. They justify the institution's extensive security exercises as a necessary response to the challenge of countering modern terrorist movements equipped with increasingly sophisticated firepower. Thanks partly to Russia's preference to rely on other institutions to address traditional military and collective defense issues, the SCO has remained primarily a security organization (i.e., focused on countering transnational threats from non-state actors such as terrorists), rather than becoming a collective defense structure like NATO (i.e., possessing capabilities for waging conventional wars against nonmember countries). SCO activities continue to emphasize promoting confidence-building measures, strengthening border controls, developing collective emergency response mechanisms for natural and manmade disasters, and facilitating law enforcement and intelligence cooperation against terrorism, narcotics trafficking, and other transnational challenges. The organization still lacks dedicated military forces, an integrated command structure, or even a combined planning staff.

China would stand to benefit most from the conversion of the SCO into a traditional defense alliance. Beijing presently has no multilateral mechanism with which to legitimize and coordinate the use of its armed forces in Central Asia. Russia, however, favors the status quo. At present, it can veto SCO actions, which require consensus, while China lacks equivalent influence over the Moscow-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) because it is not a member. Unlike the SCO, moreover, the CSTO is a genuine collective defense alliance whose members pledge to defend one another against external aggression. It has already established a rapid deployment unit consisting of 4,000 troops and is developing a collective peacekeeping force and additional crisis management capabilities. Since the entry of Uzbekistan in June 2006, the CSTO includes all the SCO governments except China, along with Armenia and Belarus. Russia can exploit its leading position within the CSTO to organize a regional military operation in Central Asia without obtaining SCO approval. Even if Moscow endorsed an SCO-only military operation in Eurasia, the organization does not have the capacity to carry out such a task and would have to assemble an ad hoc force from SCO national contingents. Such an endeavor would take a considerable amount of time and would likely encounter major interoperability, command-and-control, and other problems.

At present, the SCO would probably have to appeal to the CSTO

to organize any major military intervention on its behalf. Recent developments may be laying the grounds for possible collaboration along these lines. On November 3, 2006, General Yuri Baluyesvsky, the chief of the Russian General Staff, announced that the SCO and the CSTO would hold their first combined military exercise next year. Designated "Peaceful Mission Rubezh-2007," the exercise will occur in Russia's Volga-Urals region and will involve the ground or air forces of every state that is a member of either organization.²⁹

THE EXPANSION DILEMMA

The precise number of countries seeking to obtain full membership or observer status in the SCO is unclear. Shortly before the June 2006 Shanghai summit, Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Li Hui claimed, "A lot of countries in Asia and other continents have applied, demonstrating the SCO is broadening its influence."³⁰ At the conclave, however, the SCO members declined to expand the number of formal members. The reason given was that the members had not yet worked out the legal basis for such expansion.³¹

The real cause might have been their recognition that expanding the SCO further could prove problematic. If India and Pakistan became full members, the SCO would encompass more than half of the world's population; if Iran were to join, the SCO's share of the world's oil and gas resources would increase dramatically. Yet, the tremendous disparities in existing members' populations, geographic size, military strength, and economic resources have already made it difficult for them to negotiate and implement effective cooperative measures. Granting India or Pakistan full membership could exacerbate differences regarding the desirability of a long-term Western military presence in Central Asia. India, for instance, has no interest in a U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan, which could facilitate a resurgence of the Taliban. Already concerned by the lack of democratic principles in most SCO member countries, Indian leaders would also likely resist using the SCO to maintain an authoritarian status quo. Giving India or Pakistan full membership, moreover, might require the SCO to address Kashmir and other divisive South Asian issues. The admission of Iran would risk discrediting the institution's anti-terrorism credentials and would entangle the SCO in a myriad of Middle Eastern disputes. Fulfilling Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's longstanding request to join the SCO would give credence to Western perceptions that the institution has become a dictators' club.

NATO AND THE SCO: CLOSING THE INSTITUTIONAL LACUNA

In recent years, the SCO has developed institutional contacts with other important multilateral organizations. For example, it enjoys observer status in the UN General Assembly and has established formal ties with several UN agencies. The fifth anniversary declaration stresses that the SCO adheres to “the principles of openness, non-alliance and not targeting at any third party” and “has actively engaged in dialogue, exchange and cooperation of various forms with countries and international organizations that, like SCO, are ready to carry out cooperation on an equal and constructive basis with mutual respect to safeguard regional peace, security and stability.” More interestingly, the statement asserts that the “SCO welcomes participation by relevant partners in specific projects in priority areas like energy, transportation, information and communications and agriculture.” A few weeks before the June 2006 Shanghai summit, Executive Secretary Deguang explicitly declared that the SCO was “open for cooperation” with NATO on issues of mutual interest.³²

Given the substantial presence of both the SCO and NATO in Central Asia, Western governments should pursue this opportunity. Central Asia represents the one area of the world where the militaries of Russia, China, and NATO all regularly operate in close proximity. Although a military clash between the two institutions is inconceivable, misunderstandings and competitive pressures threaten to impede opportunities for beneficial cooperation among their members. At present, NATO has no institutional ties with the SCO.

The lack of formal connections between China and NATO compounds this problem. Unlike other SCO members, China does not participate separately in the alliance’s Partnership for Peace (PFP) program. Following a cooling-off period after NATO warplanes mistakenly attacked China’s Belgrade embassy during the 1999 Kosovo campaign, the Chinese ambassador to Belgium met with NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson in October 2002 to discuss establishing a closer relationship.³³ Chinese officials appeared especially interested in engaging in a bilateral dialogue on strategic developments and security threats in Central Asia.³⁴ In July 2004, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said the alliance wanted to cooperate with China on several areas of common concern: antiterrorism, WMD proliferation, and “maintaining regional stability,” especially in Afghanistan and Iraq.³⁵

These expressions of mutual interest have yet to result in concrete progress. Unlike Japan, China does not even have a “dialogue partnership”

with NATO. A September 2006 editorial in the semi-official *People's Daily* decried what it described as American plans to create a "Global NATO" with a large rapid response force capable of operating worldwide. The paper said that already the alliance's "interference in the affairs of major 'hot spot' regions"—such as Afghanistan and Iraq—"has drawn extensive concern of people worldwide."³⁶ By establishing formal ties with China, NATO members could both help to overcome such distrust and increase their chances of winning China's support for achieving greater access to SCO activities.

Opposition from Russia and China probably excludes NATO governments from obtaining formal SCO observer status, while their physical distance from Central Asia makes full membership impractical. In November 2002, however, the SCO Council of Foreign Ministers adopted a mechanism whereby it could invite "guests" to attend its meetings.³⁷ Alternatively, Western officials might induce the individual hosts of SCO meetings to invite NATO observers directly to those sessions. At the July 2005 SCO summit in Astana, then-SCO chairman and host, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, invited senior officials from India, Iran, and Pakistan to participate as "guests of the chairman."³⁸ Although these countries obtained formal observer status at the summit, Afghan representatives have attended several SCO meetings without receiving or requiring such status.³⁹ Finally, NATO governments could seek to become a "partner" of specific SCO components, such as the RATS.

If the SCO were to establish something resembling the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), this structure might provide another institutional mechanism for linking the two organizations. Influential Asia-Pacific countries created the ARF in the 1990s to conduct informal consultations on political and security issues. A comparable SCO structure could provide another means for institutionalizing NATO governments' involvement in Eurasia's regional security dialogue. As with the alliance's partnership programs, this connection could entail NATO-SCO collaboration in certain mutually agreed functional areas. Topics that could entice SCO interest in working with NATO governments might include regional socioeconomic development, energy exploitation, counterterrorism, consequence management, and curbing the trafficking of narcotics, people, and WMD.

The SCO's future role in Eurasia will depend heavily on its very unpredictable environment. None of the major political forces currently shaping the region will necessarily progress in a linear fashion. It remains unclear whether Eurasia is experiencing a democratic wave or crest. The political future of the Central Asian regimes themselves is especially uncertain. The evolution of Islamic terrorism continues with no end in sight.

The fate of WMD proliferation now lies at a tipping point. Although recent developments in Iran and North Korea could encourage other countries to pursue nuclear weapons, the Central Asian countries recently established a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone. The exploitation of the region's energy sources remains contingent on international efforts to stabilize Afghanistan. Major uncertainties surround the future regional policies of Russia, China, and the United States, where analysts have only recently begun assessing the consequences of a possible American defeat in Iraq.

NATO's upcoming summit in Riga provides a timely opportunity for launching new cooperative initiatives aimed at helping the international community manage the changing Central Asian security situation. Strengthening security along the Tajik-Afghan border might provide a starting point for cooperation since the major multinational institutions' zones of interest overlap in this region. Tajikistan is a member of both the CSTO and the SCO. Russia remains heavily engaged in strengthening Tajik law enforcement efforts. NATO enjoys overflight rights over Tajikistan in support of coalition operations in Afghanistan and has been providing technical assistance to Tajikistan's border guards and interior ministry. All these actors have sought to curb the transit of Afghan heroin through Tajikistan to Eurasian and European markets. Offering concrete plans for working with Tajikistan and other SCO members to curb narco terrorism in Afghanistan would underscore NATO's continuing commitment to Eurasian security and help avert the realization of Primakov's exclusionary vision. ■

ENDNOTES

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