

**Charting a New Silk Road?  
The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Russian Foreign Policy**

By

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B.S., University of Oregon, 2001

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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In the Department Political Science

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### **Abstract**

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) first came into being as a result of border negotiations between Russia and China but evolved shortly thereafter into more than this. A regional organization comprised of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and China the SCO's mandate now encompasses trade and security. Most secondary literature on this organization tends to detail the interests of its constituent members, while overlooking the historical relationships underlying the SCO's growth and evolution. This thesis argues that Russia's long-standing relationships with the states of Central Asia created the conditions making the SCO a necessary tool of Russian foreign policy, while Moscow's relations with China and the US have driven the development of the group. It concludes that the SCO has become the most viable of Central Asia's regional organizations because it has effectively resolved contradictions and conflicts in Russia's relationships with the other SCO members.

## Table of Contents

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <i>Supervisory Committee</i> .....   | ii         |
| <i>Abstract</i> .....  | iii        |
| <i>Table of Contents</i> .....   | iv         |
| <i>List of Figures</i> .....   | v          |
| <i>Acknowledgements</i> .....  | vi         |
| <i>Dedication</i> .....  | vii        |
| <b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....   | <b>1</b>   |
| <i>Methodology</i> .....   | 7          |
| <i>Literature Review</i> .....   | 9          |
| <i>Structure</i> .....   | 17         |
| <b>Chapter 2: Russia and Central Asia: The Long Hegemony</b> .....                       | <b>19</b>  |
| <i>Introduction</i> .....  | 19         |
| <i>Contact and Conquest</i> .....  | 22         |
| <i>Russia's Conquest of Central Asia</i> .....   | 26         |
| <i>Factors Underlying Tsarist Russia's Conquest of Central Asia</i> .....                | 28         |
| <i>Central Asia under Tsarist Rule</i> .....   | 33         |
| <i>Central Asia at the Beginning of the New Century</i> .....                            | 35         |
| <i>Central Asia: The Early Years of Soviet Rule</i> .....                                | 38         |
| <i>The Soviet Nationalities Policies</i> .....   | 43         |
| <i>Russia and Central Asia: Growing Apart and Coming Back Together</i> .....             | 51         |
| <i>Opportunities Lost</i> .....  | 52         |
| <i>Uzbekistan and Russia's Complicated Relationship</i> .....                            | 57         |
| <i>The SCO and Russia's Return to Central Asia</i> .....                                 | 58         |
| <i>Conclusion: The SCO and Russia's Renewed Role in Central Asia</i> .....               | 63         |
| <b>Chapter 3: The Bear, the Dragon, and the Eagle: Geopolitics in Central Asia</b> ..... | <b>65</b>  |
| <i>Introduction</i> .....  | 65         |
| <i>Sino-Soviet Relations: 1960-1991: The Evolution of Border Disputes</i> .....          | 68         |
| <i>Border Negotiations: The Building Blocks of a Strategic Partnership</i> .....         | 75         |
| <i>Impact of Border Negotiations</i> .....   | 79         |
| <i>Russia and the United States: The Changing Relationship</i> .....                     | 81         |
| <i>The Benefits of Regionalism</i> .....   | 90         |
| <i>Russia between the United States and China: Observations on the SCO</i> .....         | 94         |
| <b>Chapter 4: The New Russia: Beyond the Astana Declaration</b> .....                    | <b>96</b>  |
| <i>The Bear Reawakens</i> .....  | 97         |
| <i>The Bear and the Dragon</i> .....   | 99         |
| <i>Bishkek and Beyond</i> .....  | 100        |
| <b>Conclusion: Great Games, Cold Wars, and the Future of the SCO</b> .....               | <b>103</b> |
| <i>Appendix 1: A Select Chronology of Major SCO Events 1996-2006</i> .....               | 106        |
| <i>Bibliography</i> .....  | 112        |

**List of Figures**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Figure 1-Imperial Russia's Territorial Conquests .....                         | 26 |
| Figure 2-China, with the Xinjiang Autonomous Region shaded in light grey ..... | 66 |
| Figure 3-Damanskii (Zhenbao) Island .....                                      | 70 |

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## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mother  
who always believed I could do anything.

I miss you mom.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The Shanghai Cooperation (SCO) first came into being in 2001, when Uzbekistan joined the Shanghai Five - Tajikistan, China, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan – to form a new regional organization. The SCO's predecessor, the Shanghai Five, had been born as a result of ongoing border negotiations between Russia, China, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan that were institutionalized at the suggestion of the Chinese government in 1996. With the addition of Uzbekistan in 2001, the mandate of the group expanded to regional security and economic cooperation. The first formal summit of the SCO in Almaty on September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2001 institutionalized the annual meeting of the heads of state and regular meetings of heads of government (prime ministers) under the SCO framework. The SCO Charter was adopted the following year on July 7<sup>th</sup> during the meeting of SCO heads of state and an additional agreement was signed creating the Regional Antiterrorist Structure (RATS) in Tashkent, although this was not formally set up until 2004. The SCO Secretariat in Beijing and the Regional Antiterrorist Structure in Tashkent became the first permanent structures of the SCO in 2004 after a formal budget for the SCO was established at the September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2003 meeting of heads of government.

The SCO Secretariat is the primary executive body of the SCO and performs most of the organization's bureaucratic duties, including setting the SCO agenda in conjunction with RATS, preparing and distributing documents to SCO member states, coordinating and arranging SCO activities and meetings, and also serves as a research body for issues concerning the SCO. The SCO's Regional Antiterrorist Structure largely exists to coordinate regional action against terrorism, separatism, and extremism.

Russia and China are currently responsible for supplying the majority of the SCO budget. In addition to heads of state and government the SCO also set up mechanisms for the regular meetings of speakers of parliament, national security council ministers, ministers of foreign affairs, ministers of defence, law enforcement agencies, ministers of economy, transportation, health care, emergency relief, culture, and education, heads of border agencies, prosecutors general, supreme courts and courts of arbitration, and national coordinators.<sup>1</sup> Since its creation a number of states have also been welcomed as observers at SCO meetings, including Mongolia, India, Pakistan, and Iran.

On the heels of all meetings between the SCO heads of state the group releases a joint declaration outlining the goals of the SCO for the coming year and detailing the accomplishments of the group since the last meeting. The declarations all contain reaffirmations of the SCO's commitment to multilateralism and the concept of sovereignty and often also include assessments of the international situation at the time of the declaration. The declarations are often referred to by the name of the city in which the meeting took place.<sup>2</sup>

One of the most significant of these declarations was signed on July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2005 in Kazakhstan's capital of Astana. The Astana Declaration attracted more Western media attention to the group than it had enjoyed since 2001 when the SCO first came into being. For the most part it differed little from the other annual declarations released by the group since 2001. The bulk of the declaration focused on the future goals of the SCO: greater

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<sup>1</sup> All of this information is available through the SCO website at <http://www.sectSCO.org/home.asp?LanguageID=2>

<sup>2</sup> For a timeline of major SCO events from 1996-2006 see Appendix 1.

security cooperation in Central Asia<sup>3</sup>, the development of external contacts with other international bodies, regional groupings, and interested countries, and increased economic cooperation between member states.

The document also contained a section attesting to the commitment of SCO members to multilateralism and non-interference in the internal affairs of states.<sup>4</sup> This seemingly innocuous statement was in reality a direct criticism of the United States' recently-increased presence in the region and was couched in the same language that had long been used by China and Russia to criticize American foreign policy following the end of the Cold War. The majority of the Astana Declaration was typical of past Russian and Chinese criticisms of the United States, using concepts such as sovereignty and multilateralism to critique US foreign policy. For instance, the second section of the declaration stated that, "Every people must be properly guaranteed to choose its own way of development"<sup>5</sup> and furthermore that "a rational and just world order must be based on consolidation of mutual trust and good-neighborly relations, upon the establishment of true partnership with no pretence to monopoly and domination in world affairs."<sup>6</sup> However, the Astana Declaration concluded with a surprisingly direct request: It asked that the US set a timeline for the withdrawal of troops from Central Asia. This request was a surprise not only for its clarity and boldness: it also represented a turn-about in form for most SCO members and the first direct challenge to the growing US presence in the region. US forces had initially been welcomed to the region by Russian President

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<sup>3</sup> In the context of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization 'Central Asia' refers to the states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. The fifth Central Asian state, Turkmenistan, declared itself neutral following the collapse of the USSR and has largely remained removed from international politics.

<sup>4</sup> Shanghai Cooperation Organization (2005), *Declaration of Heads of Member States of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*, 5 July 2005. Last accessed 25 Jun 2007.

<http://www.sectsc.org/html/00500.html>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Vladimir Putin and the leaders of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan following the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and while there had been signs of a growing opposition to the presence of US troops in Central Asia, particularly by Russia and Uzbekistan, the direct challenge of the Astana Declaration was unexpected.

This was taken by many to suggest the beginning of a geopolitical struggle for Central Asia and a decision by China and Russia to reassert their interests in the region. M.K. Bhadrakumar, a former Indian diplomat who served in Islamabad, Kabul, Tashkent, and Moscow and is a frequent contributor to the *Asia Times Online*<sup>7</sup> even suggested that the Astana Declaration marked the beginning of a new “Great Game”<sup>8</sup> between Russia, China, and the United States for influence in Central Asia.

The declaration also once again thrust the Shanghai Cooperation Organization onto the world stage, bringing the organization the Western mainstream press that it had not had since its creation in 2001. The *New York Times* had run a grand total of 11 articles at least mentioning the Shanghai Cooperation Organization over a four-year period from 2001 up to the release of the Astana Declaration in 2005 but since then has run 15 in two years, more than double the number of articles.

The bold language of the Astana Declaration made it clear that the SCO, while not a regional bloc, had emerged from relative inactivity from 2001-2004 as a potential regional counter-weight to the United States in Central Asia. And, Moscow’s flurry of diplomatic activity in Central Asia, including a meeting between Putin and Tajik

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<sup>7</sup> Bhadrakumar, M.K. (2005), “Foul Play in the Great Game”, *Asia Times Online*, 13 Jul 2005. Last accessed 23 Jun 2007.

[http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central\\_Asia/GG13Ag01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/GG13Ag01.html)

<sup>8</sup> The term “Great Game” describes a struggle between Russia and Britain in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century for influence in Central Asia and Afghanistan.

President Emomali Rakhmon on October 6<sup>th</sup><sup>9</sup> and visits to Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan by Sergey Lavrov, head of the Russian Foreign Ministry that began on October 20<sup>th</sup>, suggested that Russia certainly felt it stood to gain most from the statement. Putin's meeting with the Tajik president came on the heels of Donald Rumsfeld's own trip to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on an "urgent mission", as the BBC put it, to try and shore up US influence in the two countries.<sup>10</sup> Sergey Lavrov's visits to Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan came on the heels of Condoleezza Rice's visits to Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan that began on October 10<sup>th</sup> and ended on the 14<sup>th</sup>.<sup>11</sup>

Russia, in recent years, had sought to re-assert its former hegemony on over its peripheries and former soviet republics. After watching a number of states drift from Russian orbit to seek European Union membership (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) or to favour American partnership over one with Russia (Ukraine<sup>12</sup> and Georgia after their "colour revolutions") the Astana Declaration represented a revitalizing victory for Russian policy in the "near abroad".

Strangely enough, the already scant commentary and literature on the SCO focuses largely on the interests of the SCO's constituent members, primarily China, and only picks up the story of the SCO from its creation in 2001. The fact that it represents a further stage in the historical evolution of Russia's relationship with Central Asia - from

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<sup>9</sup> Some in Russia worried that the US would try to build a military base in Tajikistan as a replacement for the K2 base in Uzbekistan, which Islam Karimov, the President of Uzbekistan, had unequivocally stated would be closed.

<sup>10</sup> Grammaticas, Damian (2005), "Rumsfeld in talks on US bases", *BBC News Online*, 26 Jul 2005. Last accessed 24 Jun 2006.  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4716563.stm>

<sup>11</sup> "Condoleezza of the Independent States", *Kommersant*, 14 Oct 2005. Last accessed 20 May 2007.  
<http://www.kommersant.com/doc.asp?id=617663>

<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that while the Orange Revolution in Ukraine ushered in the pro-Western government of Viktor Yushchenko, shortly thereafter the government was forced into a power-sharing arrangement with the pro-Russian party of Viktor Yanukovich.

a long-standing imperial relationship to today's international one between formally and substantially independent nation-states in the context of the SCO – has largely been ignored. This thesis is an examination of the historical evolution of this relationship. Plotting the development of this relationship since 1730, when Russia first began establishing its power over this region in the course of its eastward expansion driven by an absolutist state threatened by the industrialising west, through her encounters with other colonialisms, and the 'Soviet Experiment', this relationship has evolved from a colonial or imperial one to one between nation-states now including a powerful China as a counterbalance to Russia's own power. The historical relationship between Russia and Central Asia also remains a driving force behind Russia's continued participation in the SCO since these relationships have made the SCO the most viable of the regional organizations in Central Asia.

The novel contribution of this thesis will be two-fold. Firstly, by taking a historical perspective on the relationship between Russia and Central Asia it will address an important question that other literature on the SCO thus far has not: How has the Shanghai Cooperation Organization helped Russia redefine its relationship with Central Asia in the modern international system? To answer this question not only must the Russian relationship with Central Asia be examined, but also Moscow's relationship with China and the United States in the context of the region, both of which in their own way are also a driving force behind Russia's participation in the SCO. The second novel contribution will be the fact that this paper will be one of the few to have the opportunity to examine the SCO in the post-Astana Declaration period, which has been perhaps the most significant for Russia since the creation of the organization since it was after the

Astana Declaration that SCO activity, both regionally and internationally, seemed to pick up.

The goal will be to reconstruct the factors underlying Russia's participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, in particular the ways in which Russia's evolving relationships with China, the United States, and the Central Asian republics have driven the development of the SCO. I will argue that in a longer historical perspective we find not a resumption of the Imperial Russian relationship with Central Asia but instead the development of an international relationship to which the contribution of the USSR to the nation-hood of the Central Asian States has had an unmistakable role. It is this contribution which, in addition to and in combination with external factors, particularly the American and Chinese presence, has created the need for the SCO. The historical relationships between Russia and Central Asia, China, and the US also remain one of the drivers behind Russian participation in the SCO and are typically overlooked in academic analyses of the organization.

## **Methodology**

This thesis will largely be based on a historical, rather than theoretical argument. There are two reasons for this, the first and most significant being that it is the history of the region continues to be an often overlooked factor in the creation of the SCO, as well as one of the factors that continues to drive the organization through the conditions it has created regionally. In particular, the realities of Soviet Central Asia must be discussed since these created the conditions that have made the SCO a necessity for Russian foreign policy in the region and continue to influence any attempts at regional integration. In addition, theoretical examinations of the SCO already exist, with Jefferson Turner doing

a particularly capable job of examining the SCO from a range of theoretical perspectives within the field of International Relations. While this area is not yet exhausted, and will likely not be for quite awhile, a historical examination anchoring the SCO in the context of Russia's long relationship with Central Asia has not yet been attempted and thus represents a novel contribution to the study of the SCO and Russian foreign policy in Central Asia.

The primary method to be used in addressing the questions of this thesis will be research into primary sources and the analysis of the currently available secondary sources. For the primary sources the time period to be consulted will be from 1996 when the Shanghai Five was created to any current materials with a focus on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization itself and its development. Since the primary focus will be the relationship between Russia and Central Asia, the main primary sources consulted will be *Eurasianet.org*, an online English-language news source specifically covering the Central Asian region. The *Asia Times Online* will also be used as a source for news and commentary on Russia's relationship with Central Asia, as well as the regional interactions between Russia, China, and the United States. The primary sources consulted for news on Russia will be *Mosnews* and *Kommersant*, both available online and in English. The *People's Daily* will be consulted for Chinese perspectives on developments in Central Asia and the Sino-Russian relationship. The *Beijing Review* will also serve as an additional source for information on the SCO and the Sino-Russian relationship. Both the *People's Daily* and the *Beijing Review* are available online and in English. For Western perspectives on developments in Central Asia and the US-Russian

relationship the *Guardian Unlimited* (UK), *BBC News Online* (UK), *Washington Post* (US), and *New York Times* (US) will be consulted.

Secondary sources will largely be used to detail the historical relationships underlying the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, particularly Russia's relationship with Central Asia from the tsarist period onwards. Secondary sources on the relationship between Russia, China, and the United States will also be used to flesh out the geopolitical situation in Central Asia in the period prior to the Astana Declaration, as well as the bilateral relationships between Russia, China and the United States. Existing secondary sources on the SCO will also be consulted where applicable.

### **Literature Review**

The academic literature specifically focusing on the SCO is rather slim. The organization is often mentioned in passing in literature detailing bilateral and multilateral relations in Central Asia but this typically amounts to little more than a few sentences. This is probably because of the fitful evolution of the organization, in particular the long period of "dormancy" from roughly 2001 to 2005 which, among other things, ensured the SCO's muted response to the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. However, following the Astana Declaration in 2005, which included a direct challenge to the US presence in Central Asia, the group has become more visible and the amount of primary literature, particularly newspaper and online articles, has expanded greatly.

Much of the secondary literature that has been written on the SCO to date has largely concerned Chinese interests in Central Asia. All of the secondary literature has

focused on the period from the group's creation in 2001 up to approximately 2005 with very little historical detail outside of references to the border negotiations that originally gave rise to the group. Now that the SCO is receiving more attention as a result of the shifting geopolitical situation in Central Asia it is quite likely that this body of literature will expand but the secondary literature so far has tended to concentrate on the interests driving the organization rather than the historical events that laid the ground for its creation and continue to drive regional integration under the SCO.

The focus on the way in which the SCO has benefited China makes sense seeing that the creation and institutionalization of the SCO was a suggestion of the Chinese government. However, this perspective fails to take into account the importance of Russia in the organization or account for why Russia has continued its participation in a group that, according to the bulk of academic literature, is a vehicle for Chinese regional economic and security interests. It also ignores the historical relationship between Russia and Central Asia which has existed for over 200 years and which in fact was what led to the creation of the modern states of Central Asia, making a redefinition of the relationship between Russia and Central necessary and which the SCO has played a vital role in. The secondary literature also tends to only touch upon the historical relationship between Russia, China, and the United States that led to the external conditions in Central Asia that made the SCO an appealing tool to Russia.

Sun Zhuangzhi writing in the *Review of International Relations* in 2004 details the growing role of China in Central Asia since the establishment of the SCO and the role that the SCO plays as a regional organization in Central Asia.<sup>13</sup> Zhuangzhi concludes

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<sup>13</sup> Zhuangzhi, Sun (2004), "New and Old Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Sino-Central Asian Relations", *The Review of International Affairs* 4: 600.

that the SCO performs an important role in Central Asia as a way of promoting both Chinese economic and security interests in the region while also serving the agendas of the Central Asian states. Because Zhuangzhi's piece was written at a time when the SCO was taking very little in way of concrete action, however, he is for the most part confined to explaining the events leading to the creation of the SCO and the Chinese and Central Asian interests underlying it. Zhuangzhi does speculate regarding the future of the organization and the potential that "political, economic and even military pressures from the US will help insure Sino-Russian unity and successful cooperation in the Central Asian region" which does seem to be driving increased Russian participation in the SCO but which became a bigger factor only after he completed his article. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Similarly, Chien-peng Chung considers the changing influence of China in Central Asia through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in an article in the *China Quarterly* in December of 2004.<sup>14</sup> Chung's piece comments on the expansion of Chinese security and economic ties with Central Asia that the SCO has helped to facilitate thus far and also argues that the SCO is an example of a new type of regionalism. "New regionalism", which Chung argues is part of Chinese foreign policy, is defined as regional groupings of countries with differing ideologies but shared goals or interests that make the differences in ideology secondary to the shared interests or goals of the group. He concludes that the SCO is likely to remain in existence for the foreseeable future if for no reason other than it currently serves as the "best foreign policy fallback position" for all of its member states, serving all their interests in one way or another at least at this

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<sup>14</sup> Chung, Chien-peng (2004), "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: China's Changing Influence in Central Asia", *China Quarterly* 180, pp. 989-1009.

point in time.<sup>15</sup> Like Zhuangzhi's article Chung's was written in 2004, before the developments of the Astana Declaration and the more recent assertiveness of Russian foreign policy and therefore cannot examine two of the more interesting developments in the history of the SCO. Similarly, the article picks up a discussion of the SCO beginning with the border negotiations of 1991 and thus fails to address the historical processes underlying and driving the Russian-Central Asian aspect of the SCO.

Iwashita Akihiro presents a more balanced analysis of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, choosing to focus his piece on the regional security benefits of the SCO.<sup>16</sup> Akihiro chooses to examine the values derived from multilateral partnership in the context of the SCO and the potential that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has as a regional multilateral security structure.<sup>17</sup> Although Akihiro does see potential in the SCO, this is tempered by the challenges facing the organization. Like the articles by Chung and Zhuangzhi, his paper was written before the developments of 2005-2006, which have been important both regionally and internationally. Akihiro also develops his paper around the SCO as a multilateral institution and, like both Chung and Zhuangzhi, picks up the story of the SCO with the beginning of border negotiations between the Soviet Union and China. Akihiro does note in his conclusion that, "The multilateral concept that has formed and developed in the SCO experience for more than ten years should be positioned in a more comprehensive and long-term context of the post-Cold

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 1007

<sup>16</sup> Akihiro, Iwashita (2004), "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Its Implications for Eurasian Security: A New Dimension of 'Partnership' After the Post-Cold War Period", *21<sup>st</sup> Century COE Program Slavic Eurasian Studies*, 2: 279. Last accessed 20 Jun 2007.  
[http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no2\\_ses/4-1\\_Iwashita.pdf](http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no2_ses/4-1_Iwashita.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 279

War”<sup>18</sup> and this will be, in part, the goal of this thesis. I will take a longer historical perspective on the SCO than Akihiro suggests because this is necessary to understand the development of the multilateral concept of the SCO and the necessity for multilateralism in Central Asia for Russia. Also, Akihiro’s paper was written before the Astana Declaration and the subsequent Russian resurgence in Central Asia and thus could not consider the SCO in light of these events.

The two most comprehensive treatments of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization have been two Master’s theses from the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. One, of September 2003 by Timothy Craig, provides an overview of the SCO and the interests of its member states in SCO membership. Craig examines the interests of all the constituent members of the SCO in membership and breaks these into their own sections, one on Chinese interests, one on Russian interests, and one on the interests of the Central Asian states served by the SCO. Craig does provide a good summary of the interests that the SCO serves and the potential of the organization in the future but does not delve into the historic relationship between Russia and Central Asia which drove the creation of the SCO and continues to drive its actions because of the ties this relationship has created. Similarly to the other academic papers on the SCO it is more an analysis of the SCO as an institution rather than a historical perspective on what has led to the SCO and Russian participation in the group. Craig argues that both Russia and China have an interest in the SCO since it allows both to strengthen their influence in Central Asia, as well as providing a forum for Russia and China to “air their anti-US

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 279.

sentiments” but only briefly touches upon the reasons for these sentiments.<sup>19</sup> A more comprehensive account of the reasons for these sentiments would allow Craig to provide a clearer insight into the possible future of the organization and events that could lead to the increased use of the SCO as a bulwark against an American presence in Central Asia.

In relation to Russia, Craig first concludes that the SCO may enhance Russia’s opportunities to exploit resources in the region despite the fact that on its own Russia is financially ill-equipped to do so.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, he argues that the SCO also allows Russia to work with China and the Central Asian states to try to ensure regional stability and prevent the growth of radical Islam in the region. The main fear for Russia, Craig posits, is that the Russian republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, which both have large Muslim majorities and wide-spread poverty, could be susceptible to separatism or Islamic fundamentalism that could spread from Central Asia.<sup>21</sup>

However, Craig fails to examine Russia’s historic relationship with Central Asia that has made the SCO a virtual necessity for Russian foreign policy in Central Asia in order to redefine the relationship between the two in such a way that allows Russia to retain its influence in the region. Because Craig chooses to focus on the SCO as an institution the long relationship between Russia and Central Asia is for the most part completely ignored. The only reference to Russia’s historic relationship with the region in Craig’s thesis is a single sentence that states “Politically, the creation of the SCO has not only given Russia a “Trojan horse” to exert influence in the region it controlled for over a hundred years (1865-1991), but it could also allow Russia to achieve two of its

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<sup>19</sup> Craig, Timothy G. (2003), “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Origins and Implications,” MA thesis, Monterey: Naval Postgraduate School. Last accessed 25 May 2006.  
<http://library.nps.navy.mil/uhtbin/hyperion/03sep%5FCraig.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 10

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 11

long-standing foreign policy goals in Central Asia: “to integrate the Central Asian states in the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) sphere and make them into close allies and...to deny external powers strategic access to Central Asia”<sup>22</sup>. This is a great point and it would have been really interesting if this had been expanded upon but Craig does not return to this. The main shortcoming of Craig’s work is that the treatment of Russia is confined to eight pages dealing exclusively with the current interests of Russia in Central Asia but which fails to comprehensively deal with the rather complicated position of Russia in Central Asia following the collapse of the USSR

A much more comprehensive treatment can be found in the September 2005 Master’s thesis by Jefferson Turner. Turner takes a similar approach to Craig by breaking down the interests driving the SCO, although he excludes Central Asia from his primary analysis, instead focusing on Russia and China. Turner also approaches the SCO from a theoretical perspective, with the ultimate goal of determining what type of the organization the SCO represents in international relations theory. He does an excellent job of considering a wide range of variables that have determined Russia’s policies in Central Asia, taking the interests that Craig addressed and expanding on them, as well as considering “identity interests”. The three major variables that Turner addresses when considering the Russian perspective towards Central Asia are Russian identity interests in the region, strategic incentives and security interests, and the Russian economic agenda.<sup>23</sup>

The identity interests that Turner addresses are somewhat vague as he places these interests within three “schools”: a western school, the “Asiatic” or “Oriental” approach,

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<sup>22</sup> Craig, 7.

<sup>23</sup> Turner, Jefferson E. (2005), Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Paper Tiger or Regional Powerhouse? MA Thesis, Monterey: Naval Postgraduate School, 2003: 39-75. Available from: <http://library.nps.navy.mil/uhtbin/cgisirsi/Hv1xcGP5dj/SIRSI/169840045/523/9083>

and Eurasianism.<sup>24</sup> Turner's basic argument is that the Eurasianists in the Putin administration, who see Russia as having a unique role between East and West, have won out and therefore Central Asia has come to occupy an important role in Russian foreign policy. In addition to this discussion of 'identity' interests, Turner covers some of the same ground as Craig when he turns to economic, security, and strategic interests in the region, although Turner does offer a more comprehensive treatment of Russian interests. Turner concludes that despite the large number of interests that Russia has in the Central Asian region no long term strategy has been developed by the Putin administration and Turner states that it was impossible at the time of writing to determine what exactly the SCO would become.<sup>25</sup> Turner argues that Russian participation in the SCO is driven mainly by "identity interests" and Russia's desire to regain its status as a great power stating "...Russia's interest in the SCO should be considered only as a means for them to once again achieve great power status".<sup>26</sup> While this conclusion is interesting, Turner fails to address what exactly these "identity interests" derive from or to anchor Central Asia historically in Russian foreign policy. Turner does not specifically address how exactly the SCO promotes Russian identity interests in the region or why the region is so important to the somewhat vaguely defined Russian "identity" as a bridge between Asia and Europe. His section would have been greatly served by a consideration of Russia's long hegemony over Central Asia and the fact that made it difficult for Russia to ever truly consider surrendering its predominant role in the region without a fight. In Turner's analysis the SCO serves Russian short-term interests and may create the conditions necessary for Russia to maintain at least semi-hegemony over the region, barring any

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 75

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 107.

unforeseen events.<sup>27</sup> Turner suggests that at the time of writing it did not seem that the SCO was being used as a defensive alliance against the West but he also notes that the events of 2005 in Central Asia and the status of Sino-Russian bilateral relations could necessitate a reassessment of the nature of the SCO in Russian foreign policy. Turner's thesis was also completed before the release of the Astana Declaration, as was Craig's earlier work, and the re-emergence of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization onto the international scene, although of the secondary sources it was the most recent as well as the most comprehensive in its examination of the SCO.

## **Structure**

The layout of the thesis is as follows: Chapter 2 will detail the long relationship between first Imperial Russia and then the USSR and Central Asia, paying particular attention to the manner in which this relationship hindered and later contributed to creating the modern states of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan. It will trace the creation of national identities in Central Asia during the 'Soviet Experiment' and the emergence of the states of Central Asia onto the international scene. The goal of this will be to show that Russia itself created the conditions that made the Shanghai Cooperation Organization a necessary tool of Russian foreign policy. Chapter 3 will examine the triangular relationship between Russia, the United States, and China with the purpose of arguing that these relationships have also driven the development of the SCO and reciprocally influenced one another. Chapter 4 will examine the recent resurgence of Russia both economically and internationally and the potential impacts of this for the SCO. Chapter 5, the concluding chapter, will tie all

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 74

of these threads together in the context of current Russian foreign policy in Central Asia and then ask what circumstances would likely be necessary for Russia to continue to deepen its participation in the SCO. By examining Russian actions inside and outside Central Asia I will argue that the current international environment favours a greater alignment between Russia and China and greater pressure by the SCO to limit the American presence in the region.

## **Chapter 2:**

# **Russia and Central Asia:**

## **The Long Hegemony**

### **Introduction**

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization has marked a watershed in the evolving relationship between Russia and Central Asia. The SCO marks a significant redefinition of the Russian-Central Asian relationship, which began as one between conquerors and conquered in the tsarist period. This relationship became more complex in the Soviet period and early on seemed to hold out the possibility of becoming one between equals, with the Bolshevik Revolution's promises of national self-determination. However, by the mid-to-late 1930s Russian nationalism changed the discourse of the Soviet Union. Russian culture became the first among equals and as such the relationship between Central Asia and Russia became an unequal one between two distinct but separate cultural identities. At the same time, the Soviet Union reinforced and moulded the Central Asian nationality. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization marks the beginning of the first truly international relationship between Russia and the states of Central Asia.

This chapter will examine Russia's long hegemony over Central Asia and the relationship between Russia and the states of Central Asia following the collapse of the USSR. I will argue that Russia's long history with Central Asia made it almost impossible to erase the ties that Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan shared with the country that had created them, reflected in Central Asia's

initial desire to maintain the USSR. Once they became independent this same history made the states of Central Asia wary of attempts by Russia to reassert dominance in the affairs of the region when they realized that they could stand on their own in the international community. Russia's long hegemony created a contradictory situation, with a sense of suspicion on the part of some of the Central Asian states and a sense of Russian entitlement to be the predominant influence in Central Asian affairs while both sides also had strong interests which made a positive relationship necessary. The SCO has helped Russia and Central Asia resolve these contradictions in their long relationship by allowing Russia to retain influence in the region while at the same time reducing the likelihood of Russian domination through the SCO due to the presence of China.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 Russia, in one form or another, had been the sole hegemonic power in Central Asia since the completion of its conquest of the region in 1884. In some areas, particularly north and central Kazakhstan, Russia's hegemony dated to 1730, when Tsarist Russia began its drive south. This had significant effects on Central Asian language, government, politics and culture and would influence both the creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Russia's participation in the group. For all intents and purposes it was first Tsarist Russia and later the Soviet Union that created the states of Central Asia. However, despite, or rather, as this thesis argues, because of, Russia's role in the very creation of the modern states of Central Asia, after the fall of the USSR Russia would find itself no longer the sole influence in the region. Not only were other countries, such as the United States and China, showing an interest in the region, particularly due to the large oil and natural gas reserves in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, but Russia's power was also on the wane,

leading to a diminution of influence. Russia found itself facing five newly independent states which had never existed as such before their emergence from the Soviet Union in 1991.

Andrew Hurrell, writing on regionalism, asserts that, “Declining hegemony...may well press the hegemon towards the creation of common institutions to pursue its interests, to share burdens, to solve common problems, and to generate international support and legitimacy for its policies”.<sup>28</sup> While Hurrell does not provide an example of this in his paper he does note that this argument has been made in regards to the Asia-Pacific region by Donald Crone. Crone examines declining US hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region and the formation of regional structures during this decline. Crone concludes that “the erosion of extreme hegemony changes the incentives for all states. Subordinate actors may desire to provide a multilateral framework that keeps a large actor in the system but also constrains its exercise of unilateral power; the superordinate actor may wish to use its size to preserve bargaining power that is perceived to be eroding”.<sup>29</sup> This seems strikingly similar to what is currently occurring with regards to Russia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, although Russia’s hand in the very creation of the region means that ties and dependencies run much deeper than they do in a traditional hegemonic relationship.

It will be argued that Russia first tried to address its declining hegemony through regional organizations dominated by Russia, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Common Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) that grew out of the

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<sup>28</sup> Hurrell, Andrew (1995), “Regionalism in Theoretical Perspective” in: Fawcett, Louise and Hurrell Andrew (eds), *Regionalism in World Politics: Regional Organization and International Order*, Oxford: Oxford University Press: 52.

<sup>29</sup> Crone, Donald (1993), “Does Hegemony Matter? The Reorganization of the Pacific Political Economy”, *World Politics*, 45(4): 505.

CIS but that these attempts were not terribly successful. The goal of this chapter will be to demonstrate that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization represented a new way for Russia to preserve a level of hegemony in Central Asia and was ultimately successful in restoring some of Russia's influence over the region and achieved this in such a way that Russia's level of influence was acceptable to all. I will also argue that because of the long history between Russia and Central Asia, and the Soviet Union's role in the creation and consolidation of the Central Asian identity, many ties remained between Russia and the Central Asian states. These ties made any complete severing unlikely, therefore driving SCO integration, which represented the best middle road between continued Russian domination and a complete break with Russia in favour of the West. However, in order to do this successfully a historical examination of Russia's role in Central Asia is necessary. The point of this will be to show that it was not simply Russia's declining hegemony that made Russian participation in the SCO a necessity but also Russia's hand in the creation of the states of Central Asia. The SCO has allowed the Central Asian states to continue to interact with Russia on matters of mutual concern and benefit while not having to fear the domination of Russian interests in their interactions and this is one of the greatest achievements of the group.

### **Contact and Conquest**

Russia's first formal contact with Central Asia came in 986 A.D. when princes of the Kievan Rus, ready to abandon their pagan faith for one of the major world religions, sought instruction in the ways of Islam from Khwarazm, a thriving Islamic city located in

what is now northwest Uzbekistan.<sup>30</sup> According to Islamic historians the reason behind this was a desire to embrace Islam in order to receive the right to “conduct war for the faith”.<sup>31</sup> Despite the request Islam was, according to old Slavic versions of the story, rejected by Vladimir of Kiev in 986 A.D. because circumcision and abstaining from pork and wine were disagreeable to him, although this is most likely more legend than reality.<sup>32</sup> Contact returned to being largely of an informal nature and focused primarily on trade from the 10<sup>th</sup> century until the 15<sup>th</sup> century, with large trading centres springing up in Bulgur on the mid-Volga and Kama Rivers, and Itil near the mouth of the Volga.<sup>33</sup>

While trade was the most sustained and regular interaction between Central Asia and Russia there were also the occasional military clashes, the first in the 9<sup>th</sup> century occurring because of plundering raids launched from Russian territories against the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea.<sup>34</sup> Central Asians also fought alongside stronger forces such as the Bulgurs, Khazars, and Polovetsians<sup>35</sup>, in a number of conflicts against the Slavs from the 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. Central Asian forces, after their own conquest by the Mongols, would also assist in the Mongol’s conquest of Russia, which at the time was divided into a number of warring principalities. By the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century both Russia and Central Asia had been conquered by the Mongols whose rule lasted until the late fifteenth century, when their grip on both Central Asia and Russia would come loose.

The beginning of the end for Mongol rule in Russia came when the principality of Muscovy embarked on a program of consolidation, extending Moscow’s control to the

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<sup>30</sup> Allworth, Edward (1989), “Encounter” in Edward Allworth (ed), *Central Asia: 120 Years of Russian Rule*, Durham: Duke University Press: 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>35</sup> Bulgurs, Khazars, and Polovetsians were Turkic peoples from various regions of Central Asia.

larger principality of Novgorod by 1478. Mongol rule was also weakening during this time and, with the growth in power and territory for the principality of Muscovy, a conflict for control of Russia seemed likely. In 1480 A.D. Ivan III defied Mongol rule and war between the Muscovites and Mongols loomed but the Mongol grip of Muscovy was surrendered with neither army suffering casualties, or even for that matter, taking part in any hostilities.

By the time Ivan IV ascended to the throne in 1547 the principality of Muscovy had become tsarist Russia.<sup>36</sup> His grandfather Ivan III had begun the process of consolidating the Rus from a number of principalities to a single entity, with a centralized government and the creation of a national army that could be deployed quickly when needed. The term *tsar*, meaning *caesar* or emperor, was a term that the Russian Orthodox Church wished the grand prince to use to signify the assumption of the imperial heritage of Byzantium.<sup>37</sup> *Tsar* would not come into common use until Ivan IV, also called Ivan the Terrible, took the throne in 1547. The end of Mongol rule, the consolidation of the principalities of the *Rus*, and institution of dynastic succession meant that Tsarist Russia had emerged after centuries of Mongol domination, as well as centuries of internal division and conflict.

Following the end of Mongol rule the internal consolidation of Russia would be complimented by external expansion that would take Russia to the borders of what is now Central Asia. The first of these conquests would take place in 1552 when Ivan IV conquered the Khanate of Kazan, the strongest of the successor khanates of the Mongol

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<sup>36</sup> Soucek, Svat (2000), *A History of Inner Asia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>37</sup> Hosking, Geoffrey (2001), *Russia and the Russians: From Earliest Times to 2001*, London: Penguin Books: 85.

Golden Horde.<sup>38</sup> This would be followed two years later by the conquest of the Astrakhan khanate.<sup>39</sup> Following these two conquests Russia would expand eastward into Siberia but little into Central Asia, despite the fact that Russian territorial gains under Ivan IV had brought Russia to the doorstep of the region.

The Russian conquest of modern Central Asia began with small territorial gains in what is now northern Kazakhstan in 1730 but the pace of this expansion was initially quite slow and much more gradual in its early phase, from approximately 1730 to 1848 which included the conquest of much of what is modern day Kazakhstan, than it would be in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Russia would conquer the remaining territory of Central Asia.

The remaining khanates of Bukhara, Khiva, and Kokand survived largely due to their location – far from any large Russia military outpost and surrounded by desert – as well as the nomadic Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and Turkmen who formed an outer ring of defences for the khanates, and who shared an antipathy towards the Russians.<sup>40</sup> In addition, Soucek writes that “The initial slow pace and oscillating success may have been due to the fact that the occupation of Siberia presented enough challenge and reward for the time being. The Russians at first contented themselves with accepting offers of vassaldom from various Kazakh leaders, without actually acquiring military or administrative control over their territory beyond the erection of fortified posts gradually infringing upon it”.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 85..

<sup>39</sup> Hopkirk, Peter (1992), *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia*, New York: Kodansha International:15.

<sup>40</sup> Allworth, 10.

<sup>41</sup> Soucek, 196.



Figure 1-Imperial Russia's Territorial Conquests<sup>42</sup>

### Russia's Conquest of Central Asia

Svat Soucek breaks the Russian conquest of Central Asia into two periods, the first being from 1730-1848, during which Russia acquired the majority of modern Kazakhstan except for the southern regions of Semireche and the Syr Darya River.<sup>43</sup> In 1730-1734 Russian overlordship was acknowledged by the Lesser and Middle Hordes, two of the largest Kazakh tribal confederations, although it was exercised only to lend Russian authority to ensure peace along border regions.<sup>44</sup> Svato Soucek writes that it was between 1822 and 1848 that Tsarist Russia resolved to eliminate the four remaining Hordes in Kazakhstan altogether. The Middle Horde was suppressed in 1822, the Lesser in 1824, Bükey's in 1845, and the Greater Horde in 1848. However, this still left southern fringe of Kazakh territory untouched for two reasons: firstly the area, in

<sup>42</sup> Map taken from: [http://www.geo.tu-freiberg.de/studenten/Baikal\\_2004/baikalexursion/history/overview/pictures/asian\\_expansion.JPG](http://www.geo.tu-freiberg.de/studenten/Baikal_2004/baikalexursion/history/overview/pictures/asian_expansion.JPG)

<sup>43</sup> Soucek 195.

<sup>44</sup> Hosking, 322.

particular the lower and middle course of the Syr Darya, was rather remote and separated from northern and central Kazakhstan by semi-arid stretches and secondly, this area had come under the control of the Khanate of Khoqand, a conflict with which could have caused complications in Russian relations with China and Britain. Despite the conquest of most of what is now modern Kazakhstan, it was not until the early-nineteenth century that Russian ambitions began to lean towards a conquest of the entire Central Asian region.

During the second period of Central Asian conquest, 1864-1884, Russia captured the southern reaches of Kazakhstan, as well as present-day Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan.<sup>45</sup> The period opened with Russia's defeat in the Crimean War and the suppression of the uprising led by Shaykh Shamil in the Caucasus. These preoccupations, some argue, lay behind the pause in the conquest of Central Asia between 1822 and 1848, following the capture of much of central and northern Kazakh territory.<sup>46</sup> Once the conquest resumed, Chimkent in what is now south-central Kazakhstan and Jambul, at the time called Aulie Ata, were the first conquests.<sup>47</sup> Tashkent followed in 1865 and soon after became the vital centre of Central Asia under the tsarist regime. The more notable of the remaining Russian conquests included the Bukharan Emirate in 1868<sup>48</sup>, the Khivan khanate in 1873, the Khoqand khanate 1873, and the Turkmen regions in 1881.<sup>49</sup> With that the Russian conquest of modern Central Asia was complete.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Soucek, 195.

<sup>46</sup> Soucek, 198.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 198.

<sup>48</sup> d'Encausse, Hélène Carrere (1989), "Systematic Conquest: 1865-1884" in Allworth, Edward (ed), *Central Asia: 120 Years of Russian Rule*, Durham: Duke University Press: 142.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 148.

### **Factors Underlying Tsarist Russia's Conquest of Central Asia**

Perry Anderson offers an examination of Tsarist Russia in *Lineages of the Absolutist State* that helps to explain the massive expansion of the Russian empire, both in relation to Central Asia and in a more general sense. Anderson states that the absolutist state which began to emerge in Europe towards the end of the feudalism and in response to its crisis was one “built overwhelmingly for the battlefield” and that the climate of Absolutism was marked by “the virtual permanence of international armed conflict”.<sup>51</sup> While absolutist states in the West soon witnessed emerging capitalist structures, in the case of Russia society remained largely feudal in nature. Anderson states, “...transnational interaction within feudalism was typically always first at the *political* level, not the economic level, precisely because it was a mode of production founded on extra-economic coercion: conquest, not commerce, was its primary form of expansion”.<sup>52</sup> Expansion was a way of aggrandizing the state while also satisfying the needs of the ruling feudal classes whose profession was war. Expansionism and war were thus hallmarks of the absolutist state in Russia in part because they remained the most rational and rapid method of resource extraction available under feudalism.<sup>53</sup> Anderson's theory for Russian expansion would favour an economic argument for the conquest of Central Asia, in conjunction with the use of territorial expansion in to the region as a way of legitimizing the Tsarist government and the feudal relations it was built upon.

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<sup>51</sup> Anderson, Perry (1974), *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, London: Verso: 32-33.

<sup>52</sup> d'Encausse, 197.

<sup>53</sup> Anderson, 31.

However, Anderson also argues that for feudal absolutist states warfare was the primary method of interstate competition during the time of Russia's great expansion. It is frequently the geopolitical competition between Britain and Russia, known as the "Great Game"<sup>54</sup>, that is cited as the major reason for Russia's accelerated expansion into Central Asia and this would seem to fit with Anderson's theory. Britain was, during the mid to late 1800s, one of Tsarist Russia's biggest rivals and had had a hand in Russia's defeat in the Crimean War, which preceded the conquest of Central Asia. Most scholars of Central Asia agree<sup>55</sup> that this was likely the primary factor driving the Russian conquest of the region.

In addition to Russia's rivalry with Britain, other factors also played a role in the conquest of Central Asia. Russia was fresh from its defeat in the Crimean War when it began pursuing expansion in Central Asia and both Jonson and Allworth feel this played at least a small role in the decision of Russian policymakers to pursue a program of expansionism as, in the words of Jonson, a "compensation in the East for losses in the West".<sup>56</sup> Soucek explains that it was primarily amongst members of the military that Central Asia was seen as a way of compensating for losses in the Crimean War, stating "...many Russians, especially the more fiery members of the military, sought psychological compensation through expansion elsewhere".<sup>57</sup>

There are further factors to take into account though. Lena Jonson cites several, all of which seem to be accepted by scholars of Central Asia, at least to a degree.<sup>58</sup> First,

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<sup>54</sup> This term is frequently credited to Kipling and his novel *Kim* but it was in fact a British soldier, Arthur Connolly, who first coined the term. See Hopkirk, 1.

<sup>55</sup> See Hopkirk (1992), Soucek (2000), and Hosking (2001).

<sup>56</sup> Anderson, 26.

<sup>57</sup> Soucek 199.

<sup>58</sup> Jonson, Lena (2004), *Vladimir Putin and Central Asia: The Shaping of Russian Foreign Policy*, New York: I.B. Tauris.

were security concerns arising from raids launched against border towns by Central Asians and the robbery of Russian caravans in border areas and the Central Asian markets<sup>59</sup> In the course of these raids and robberies it was not simply possessions that were taken but also people, who then were sold into slavery. Allworth writes, “...probably no other cause involving Central Asia stirred popular resentment in Russia more than the imagined plight of these Christians under “heathen” oppression and the feeling that it was a sacred duty to free them”.<sup>60</sup> Svat Soucek also places some of the blame for Russia’s conquest on Central Asia’s leaders stating, “The causes and goals of all these campaigns and conquests were complex and shifting, but two catalysts can be singled out: one was the unrealistic attempts by the local leaders, both secular and religious, to recover from the infidels what had been lost, thus provoking the Russians to actions they might not otherwise have taken so quickly (this was especially true of Bukhara); the other was the virtual collapse of government in the Khanate of Khoqand, which began with the death of Madali Khan in 1842 and worsened in the 1850s and 1860s; the Russians, for several years endeavouring to establish a working relationship with a khan in Khoqand, finally threw up their hands and carried out the annexation”.<sup>61</sup>

Jonson also associates the domestic economic condition of the state with the Russian expansion into Central Asia, although she feels that it played a smaller role than security concerns. Soviet scholars had tied the quest for markets and natural resources to the conquest of Central Asia. Most Western scholars, however, disagree with this conclusion.<sup>62</sup> A study by Russian scholars in the 1990s argued that economic

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>60</sup> Allworth, 5.

<sup>61</sup> Soucek, 199.

<sup>62</sup> Jonson, 27.

motivations were not behind Russian interest in Central Asia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by examining government documents from the late-nineteenth century that largely referred to political factors, mainly the Russian rivalry with Britain, as the reason for the expansion into Central Asia.<sup>63</sup> Still, it is not as if the region held no economic value for its conqueror and it would be naïve to assume that the economic benefits of the Russian expansion into Central Asia were not taken into account at some stage. Both Britain and Russia realized the value of Central Asia as a market for their goods and this realization is at least part of the reason that the two sought hegemony in the region.

I would argue is that Russia's expansion into Central Asia was in fact a synthesis of a number of the issues mentioned and mirrors in some ways the current attempt on the part of the Putin administration to regain and expand influence in the region. To first turn to Russia's initial conquest it seems to have been driven by the existence of a large military structure in Tsarist Russia and one that sought territorial gains not only as a means of aggrandizing the state itself but also as a way of filling the coffers of those in the military and those responsible for the military, in this case the Tsarist court and feudal nobility. In addition, Russia's defeat in the Crimean War doubtless meant that there was little Russian desire to allow Britain to expand into Central Asia and thus onto the doorstep of Russia but there was also the desire to avoid another direct military conflict with Britain over the region. This led to the increased pace of Russian conquest which had for the most part stalled after capturing north and central Kazakhstan.

Some factors have changed slightly but an examination of Russia's desire for modern influence in Central Asia still bears many of the same hallmarks. Although there is no longer the military structure driving a physical expansion, there are the hawks in the

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 27.

Putin administration who favour the immaterial expansion of Russian “influence” as a means of regaining Russia’s status as a “great power”. This is attained through political allegiances, a privileged access to natural resources and markets, and the at least implicit acknowledgment of Russia as the primary influence in the region. Russia’s desire to retain influence in Central Asia is driven by economic interests in the region, particularly in regards to natural resources, security concerns, a desire to maintain a semblance of “great power” status, and a fear of the United States gaining a foothold in the region through NATO. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is one of the tools Russia is using to realize these goals by acknowledging a changed international situation where the states of Central Asia must be treated as equals and their concerns taken into account. By bandwagoning with China in the SCO Russia has provided a counterweight to offset Central Asian, particularly Uzbek, suspicions of renewed Russian domination of the region.

Regionalism has come more and more to define the international sphere and with hegemony on the decline for all the former colonial and imperial powers, perhaps with the exception of the United States, multilateralism in the form of regional organizations and groupings has become a method of retaining influence not by threatening force but instead by offering or threatening to take away incentives. Thus far at least, the SCO as a tool of Russian foreign policy in Central Asia has been successful in helping Russia maintain primacy in the region. Another question remains though, why has Russia been unsuccessful in achieving the same goals through Russian-dominated multilateral organizations like the CIS? The answer to this requires us to revisit the period following Russia’s conquest of Central Asia.

### Central Asia under Tsarist Rule

Upon the Russian capture of Merv in 1884 the external borders of what are now modern Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan had been laid. Under tsarist rule Central Asia became the Governorate-General of Turkestan, divided into five regions (or oblasts) and two protectorates (the Emirate of Bukhara and the Khanate of Khiva).<sup>64</sup> Initially, tsarist policy towards Central Asia simply meant ensuring the stability of the region while interfering as little as possible into native customs and ways of life.<sup>65</sup> During the initial period of Russian conquest, from approximately 1730 to 1848 when much of the northern and central Kazakh territory came under Russian control, St. Petersburg embraced an “at first sight surprising device of tying the still only marginally Muslim Kazakhs more firmly to Islam; the idea was that this would entice the unruly nomads to a more sedate way of life, especially since it was the tsar’s subjects, the Tatar mullahs, who spread among the Kazakhs as preceptors and even built mosques and madrasas”.<sup>66</sup>

The initial administrative and territorial organization of Central Asia was officially settled upon in 1867, even before Central Asia was completely subdued. The region was organized territorially into the guberniia of Turkestan, with Bukhara and Khiva remaining protectorates. Civil and military power in the region was given over entirely to the military but all local affairs of a non-political nature remained the province of the traditional hierarchies, which “would continue to apply the customary procedures”.<sup>67</sup> This meant that while Russia was the de facto ruler of Central Asia intervention in local institutions was very limited, at least initially, and the local and

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<sup>64</sup> Soucek, 201.

<sup>65</sup> Rywkin, Michael (1963), *Russia and Central Asia*, New York: Collier Books: 28.

<sup>66</sup> Soucek, 197.

<sup>67</sup> d’Encausse, 152.

Russian authorities coexisted with “loose ties to one another”.<sup>68</sup> This amounted to indirect rule and differed greatly from Russia’s earlier conquests of Astrakhan and Kazan, which were directly ruled by Tsarist authorities and integrated more fully into the Russian state.

Thus, while Central Asia was undeniably under the thumb of Tsarist Russia the peoples of Central Asia maintained a level of cultural and spiritual freedom. Soucek points out that “Islam, the *sharia*, *waqf* religious practices and education, and the general way of life were not interfered with unless in direct conflict with Russia’s interests...”.<sup>69</sup> Even proselytism by the Orthodox Church was not encouraged, which differed from tsarist policy towards other Muslim populations, such as the Tatars, conquered earlier by Russia, where forced conversion and expulsion of those who refused to convert wreaked havoc on the population.<sup>70</sup>

While the population of Central Asia was not forcibly converted to Christianity or made to adopt Russian culture as their own under Tsarist Russia, the region bore many of the hallmarks of a colonized land. Central Asia was quickly turned into a supplier of raw materials for Russia, with cotton being the most important of the exports. In addition, the Central Asia became a giant market for Russian goods in, as Soucek puts it, “the classical colonial pattern” with exports of raw materials and imports of final products.<sup>71</sup> Russia also began a program of colonization of the vast spaces of Central Asia, particularly for agricultural settlers of Russian and Ukrainian descent, in the late-nineteenth century.<sup>72</sup> This usually involved the appropriation of land used by the nomadic population of

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 152.

<sup>69</sup> Soucek 204.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 204.

<sup>71</sup> Soucek, 203.

<sup>72</sup> Rywkin, 31.

Central Asia by designating these tracts as “surplus” which not only expropriated the grazing lands long used by Central Asia’s nomadic population but also hampered the seasonal movements in search of water and pasture.<sup>73</sup> Because tsarist rule was primarily indirect, Central Asia also saw few benefits in terms of improved education or infrastructure.

While Russia’s Central Asian policy was less repressive than it was for Muslims of territories conquered earlier by Russia, there was never any serious attempt to integrate Central Asians into the Russian state. Instead they were officially deemed *inorodtsy*, literally meaning alien-born, and while some were educated and became part of the tsarist administration full integration was never truly attempted. The primary consequence of this was that the Central Asian peoples did not come to consider themselves part of the Russian state. This laid the foundation for the establishment of the Central Asian identity by separating it from Russia. This foundation was built upon following the Bolshevik Revolution through the Soviet nationalities policies and it is to this period that I will now turn.

### **Central Asia at the Beginning of the New Century**

Cracks had appeared in the tsarist empire as early as 1905, when Russia was defeated by Japan. A revolution followed the same year but the empire survived and managed to cling to life. While the role of Central Asia in the revolution of 1905 was small, if not inconsequential, the revolution did stir ideas regarding what the workers and citizens of the region deserved. More importantly, the revolution also contributed to the growing sense of nationality in Central Asia. On the heels of the October Manifesto,

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 31.

which Nicholas II signed under the duress of the revolution and which granted basic rights to the Russian people, representatives from Central Asia also sought concessions from the Tsar. d'Encausse states that,

After the imperial message of October 17, 1905, representatives from among the dignitaries of Islam, intellectuals, and important citizens decided to bring action to obtain equal rights among Russians and Muslims. In March, 1906, at a meeting in Tashkent, they demanded guarantees of religious freedom, that real estate be untaxed, the restitution of pasture land expropriated from nomads, and the creation of a Muslim Ecclesiastical Administration in Tashkent. These demands remained a dead issue, but the movement which had led to them had contributed both to the Central Asian political experience and to the awakening of a consciousness of nationality.<sup>74</sup>

Thus while Central Asia played a negligible role in the 1905 revolution it nonetheless had a fairly profound effect on the way Russia was perceived in the region. The defeat by Japan in 1905 had revealed the weakness of the tsarist empire and the revolution further revealed that there were anti-tsarist feelings that were embraced by the Russians themselves.

During World War I the peoples of Central Asia were once more reminded of their role and place within imperial Russian society. The men of Central Asia, due to their official status as “natives”, which marked them for all intents and purposes as second-class citizens, were not required to serve in the military, which at the outset of World War I appeared to be an asset. However, in 1916 the tsarist authorities issued a decree that the Central Asian Muslims be drafted to dig trenches and for other labour behind the battle lines.<sup>75</sup> The decree sparked outrage due to what was perceived as the insulting nature of the order and wild rumours began to circulate regarding the role of

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 188.

<sup>75</sup> Soucek, 209.

Central Asians in the Russian military due to the vague wording of the proclamation which drafted them into service. This came at a time when the tolerance of many in Central Asia was already stretched thin by other policies of the tsarist administration, which included further Russian colonization of Central Asia, making life more difficult and pastureland even harder to come by, taxation of the residents, and price-fixing by Russian merchants who had increasingly pushed out the native merchants.<sup>76</sup> The labour decree was simply the straw that broke the camels back. A number of revolts broke out across Central Asia with violence directed against government representatives but also against civilians and in particular the agricultural settlers that had long been the object of Central Asian hostility. These revolts in turn provoked Russian repression, with a much greater number of casualties amongst Central Asians and infinitely more suffering.<sup>77</sup>

On the heels of this repression came the Russian Revolution, which at least at its outset seemed to promise a greater role for Central Asians in the administration of their lands. While under tsarist rule, the Central Asian peoples had largely been left out of any decision-making that affected the region, the Revolution professed the goal of national self-determination for the former subjects of the tsarist empire, which seemed to suggest that those native to Central Asia would have more influence in the future of the region.<sup>78</sup>

The revolution in Russia did lead to drastic changes in the way that Central Asia was administered and gave Central Asians more of a role in the governing of the region, as well as changing the very geography of the region. In addition, it would be the Soviet Union that not only drew the boundaries of what is modern Central Asia but also created

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<sup>76</sup> d'Encausse, Hélène Carrere (1989), "The Fall of the Czarist Empire" in Allworth, Edward (ed), *Central Asia: 120 Years of Russian Rule*, Durham: Duke University Press: 210.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 210.

<sup>78</sup> Soucek, 210.

the very nationalities it would find itself confronting with the collapse of the USSR. The period of Soviet rule was thus one of the most important not only for Central Asia but also for Russia itself.

### **Central Asia: The Early Years of Soviet Rule**

The Bolshevik Revolution at its outset seemed to herald a new beginning for Central Asia. A proclamation issued on November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1917 and addressed specifically to the Muslims of the former tsarist empire declared that “From now on your beliefs and customs, your national and cultural institutions are being declared free and inviolable. Arrange your national life freely and without hindrance. This is your right”.<sup>79</sup> However, only shortly thereafter it became clear that the new authorities had no intention of allowing Central Asia to pursue a course that could lead to independence or even a weakened Soviet position in the region. On November 15, 1917 the Third Regional Congress of the Soviets declared the authority of the new regime over the territory of Central Asia in the form of the Turkestan Council of People’s Commissars.<sup>80</sup> At the same time the Third Congress of Central Asian Muslims was meeting in Tashkent and some of the participants demanded autonomy from the Soviet state but a Turkestanian-Russian coalition government was instead proposed to the Soviet authorities. This was of course rejected.<sup>81</sup> Michael Rywkin notes that the Soviet authorities in Tashkent also made little effort to win over the native population. During the winter famine of 1917-1918 no effort was made to relieve the suffering of the urban Muslims and in the

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<sup>79</sup>As cited in Soucek, 211.

<sup>80</sup> Soucek, 212.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 212.

countryside Soviet troops requisitioned food and forced cotton to be handed over on pain of death.<sup>82</sup>

However, the Tashkent Soviet soon realized the problems created by the exclusion of Muslims from the government and of Soviet policy towards the Muslim peoples of Central Asia more generally, as independence movements sprung up in Turkmenia, Bukhara, and Khiva. In addition to the independence movements the Kazakh plains were the site of chaotic clashes between at least three different military forces, all of which were in pursuit of opposing goals in the region. By 1923 the majority of the native revolts had been put down by Soviet authorities and the political organization of Central Asia, and its integration into the Soviet Union, became the foremost concern of the government.

The reorganization of Central Asia under Soviet authorities would, during the initial post-revolutionary period, favour a number of policies that aimed at harnessing cultural and national identities and giving opportunities for the expression of such in a manner that would not threaten the Soviet Union leadership. The policy of national self-determination which was one of the Revolution's professed goals was little more than a slogan at the time, directed at attracting ethnic support for the revolution but it would become much more than this as Terry Martin details in *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*.<sup>83</sup>

With the success of the revolution and the end of the Russian civil war it became necessary to develop a set of policies to go with the slogan that the Bolsheviks had so passionately professed. One thing that was worked out very early was what "national

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<sup>82</sup> Rywkin, 39.

<sup>83</sup> Martin, Terry (2001), *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

self-determination” did not mean. It did not mean federation or the devolution of power from the centre to the national republics. The details of what national self-determination meant for the constituent republics of the Soviet Union was worked out, largely by Lenin and Stalin, in the period between 1919 and 1923. The Soviet nationalities policy thus settled on the promotion of national territories, languages, elites, and identities as the main means of national self-determination.<sup>84</sup>

Central Asia was viewed as too important a region to lose control of and the nationalities policy gave the Soviet Union a method by which nationalist tendencies could be vented without allowing these to pose a challenge to government authority. Soucek quotes Stalin himself as saying, “Turkestan, because of its geographical position, is a bridge connecting socialist Russia with the oppressed countries of the East, and in view of this the strengthening of the Soviet regime in Turkestan might have the greatest revolutionary significance for the entire Orient”.<sup>85</sup> Lenin’s New Economic Policy brought some material relief to a Central Asian population that had grown weary of conflict and the promises of the nationalities policy gave hope that even if Central Asia was to be ruled by the Soviet Union, at least the lot of its people would be improved.

Whereas initially the Tashkent Soviet had rejected the participation of Central Asian Muslims due to the lack of a proletarian class from which to draw party members it now changed this policy. Central Asian “workers”<sup>86</sup> were given positions in the party and the government but the lack of political and intellectual awareness of those chosen

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>85</sup> Soucek, 213.

<sup>86</sup> The Russian term can also be translated as “working people” or “toilers”, which is not closely associated with the industrial proletariat.

ensured that they were at the mercy of the Russians.<sup>87</sup> Low literacy rates and a lack of technical training was largely to blame for the lack of truly qualified individuals to fill positions in the Soviet bureaucracy, which government officials sought to combat through education. The Soviet authorities began a program of *korenizatsiia*, which translates roughly as “indigenization”, the goal of which was two-fold.<sup>88</sup> First, national languages were to be promoted to the official state language and secondly, national elites were to be promoted to posts in the party, government, educational system, and industries of the respective territories.

In addition, Soviet authorities favoured the creation of national territories but this was a complicated issue in the context of Central Asia where many identified themselves through tribal lineage, rather than along national lines. In the initial period following the revolution Central Asia had been composed of the Turkestan Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic and two People’s Republics of Bukhara and Khwarezm (formerly Khiva) which largely conformed to the lines drawn during tsarist times. In addition, on August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1920 the former Governorate-General of the Steppe and the two provinces of Turgai and Uralsk, which were created by the tsarist authorities from the territory of northern and central Kazakh lands (more or less corresponding to what is present day Kazakhstan), became the Kyrgyz Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic.<sup>89</sup> Martin points out that national delimitation in Central Asia, where identities tended to be prenational, meant the consolidation of disparate local identities to a larger national identity.<sup>90</sup> However, the Soviet authorities did not take this task lightly and a decision was reached on May 11<sup>th</sup>,

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<sup>87</sup> d’Encausse, Hélène Carrere (1989), “Civil War and New Governments” in Allworth, Edward (ed), *Central Asia: 120 Years of Russian Rule*, Durham: Duke University Press: 235.

<sup>88</sup> Martin, 10.

<sup>89</sup> Soucek, 215.

<sup>90</sup> Martin, 73.

1924 on the composition of the new Central Asia. The decision on the territorial delimitation of Central Asia was reached after Russian linguists, anthropologists, and politicians conducted ethnolinguistic surveys to determine how the territory of Central Asia should be divided. The former Turkestan ASSR and the two People's Republics of Bukhara and Khwarezm would be divided up into an Uzbek and Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), which would enter the framework of the USSR.<sup>91</sup> A Tajik Autonomous region (oblast) was formed and became part of the Uzbek SSR, and a Kara-Kyrgyz (Kyrgyz in current terminology) Autonomous Region was formed, with the republic it would enter to be determined at a later time.<sup>92</sup> By 1936 Stalin had raised Tajik and Kyrgyz Autonomous Regions to SSRs and the three provinces of the Kazakh plain had been consolidated into a single Soviet Republic. The borders of the Kyrgyz, Tajik, Uzbek, Turkmen, and Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republics of 1936 correspond to the geography of modern Central Asia.

Boris Rumner, a rather prolific scholar on Central Asia, wrote in his 1989 book *Soviet Central Asia: A Tragic Experiment*, that “Although the territory of Central Asia was ostensibly divided on the basis of nationality, the ethnic composition was actually mixed in a number of localities”.<sup>93</sup> Rumner compared the frontiers of Central Asia drawn by Soviet authorities to the “medieval open-field agrarian system, with parts of one republic wedged inside another to form all kinds of islands and peninsulas”.<sup>94</sup> This would be the source of a number of problems once Central Asian states gained their independence in 1991, ranging from clashes over territory between Uzbekistan and

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<sup>91</sup> Soucek 224.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 224.

<sup>93</sup> Rumner, Boris Z. (1989), *Soviet Central Asia: A Tragic Experiment*, Boston: Unwin Hyman: 18.

<sup>94</sup> Rumner, 18.

Kyrgyzstan to differences in economic and military power differentials which would affect the Central Asian states' interactions with the outside world. However, Soucek disagrees with Rumner's negative conclusions regarding the territorial delimitation of Central Asia, arguing instead that the Soviet authorities did a fairly competent job in drawing the borders of the region. He bases this argument on the fact that following the collapse of the Soviet Union the states of Central Asia emerged to assert a national identity as independent republics. Soucek points out that it is quite rare for any state to have a perfectly monoethnic and monolingual population and that most states have pockets of minority groups within their borders.<sup>95</sup> Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, and Turkmen continue to identify themselves with their respective states, despite the fact that these borders were created by Soviet authorities. Tribal identities do remain strong in Central Asia though and the desire of the Central Asian states to work with China and Russia regionally could in fact be partially based on a fear of the Central Asian governments of a resurgence of this identity resulting in instability and possibly separatism. Russian and China, because of their location, remain the best security guarantors for the region and their desire to maintain the status quo in Central Asia also makes them the less threatening than the United States.

### **The Soviet Nationalities Policies**

Soviet policy thus defined the region and also, at least initially, sought to bring some benefits to Central Asia, which was considered "culturally backward" due largely to low literacy rates, small numbers of children enrolled in school, the absence of a "written script with a single developed literary language", the presence of social vestiges

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<sup>95</sup> Soucek, 225.

of tribal life, and finally the lack of national cadres in the Soviet system.<sup>96</sup> The Soviet system would try to address these deficiencies through *korenizatsiia*, although how this was executed would change with time.

By 1926 the early form of *korenizatsiia*, which had favoured the placement of sometimes unqualified nationals into posts overseeing Russian technical staff, was re-evaluated due to growing Russian resentment towards this policy, not only in Central Asia but throughout Soviet territories. In fact, this early form of *korenizatsiia* began to be seen as potentially supporting divisive forms of nationalism and interethnic conflict.<sup>97</sup> So changes were made to the program in an attempt to address these issues, the two most significant being that ethnicity was replaced by linguistic mastery as means of filling local positions. Secondly, ethnic quotas were replaced by a list of specific jobs to be filled by those speaking local languages (*nomenklatura*), which would have some negative repercussions for Central Asian bureaucrats.<sup>98</sup> The replacement of ethnicity with linguistic ability meant that Russians could now fill the posts formerly reserved for nationals and the replacement of the quotas with *nomenklatura* had effects that would essentially keep Central Asian officials in Central Asia, rather than allowing them to fill posts in the central Soviet bureaucracy since their linguistic abilities meant that their skills were needed in their local territories more than they were in the central bureaucracy.

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<sup>96</sup> Martin, 166.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 144. The term *nomenklatura* is usually defined in Western literature as the ranking Soviet bureaucracy, the list of position appointments which were controlled by the Communist Party apparatus. However, the Russian word *nomenklatura* (from Latin) means any systematic listing of jobs—in this case, positions requiring the command of local languages.

*Nomenclatura* thus became yet another factor keeping Central Asia from becoming an organic part of the Soviet Union by ensuring that Central Asian bureaucrats remained in Central Asia with more limited opportunities than their Russian brothers. Martin states, “The focus on primary and pedagogic education at home left the republics reliant on Moscow for training of technical cadres. The center provided a generous Affirmative Action program, but the lack of qualified eastern nationals, hostility from the central economic commissariats, and, above all, the reluctance of the eastern republics to risk losing an educated titular national all combined to undermine this program”.<sup>99</sup> What this ultimately meant was that technical posts were typically staffed by Russians while humanitarian positions were filled by nationals.

By 1930 cracks had begun to appear in the Soviet Union’s policy of *korenizatsiia* as Stalin began to turn to appeals to Russian nationalism as fears that *korenizatsiia* could lead to the defection of national communists grew and Russian resentment towards the policy persisted. In a letter written in February of 1931 Stalin stated that, “The revolutionary workers of all countries unanimously applaud the Soviet working class and, above all, the *Russian* working class [Stalin’s emphasis], the advance-guard of the Soviet workers, its acknowledged leaders, having conducted a more revolutionary and activist politics than any other proletariat of the world could dream of”.<sup>100</sup> The growth of Russian nationalism in the 1930s would be complemented by party purges aimed at disarming the growth of national communism that was increasingly being seen as a challenge to Soviet unity. Between 1937 and 1938 a number of national cadres in Central Asia would be purged from the party and the toll would be a heavy one for a region with

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 170.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 272.

a limited number of nationals qualified for top positions to begin with. Michael Rywkin points out that the native party leadership, already weak and dependent on Russian technical expertise, “became weaker and less efficient than ever and, consequently, more dependent on outside (Russian) guardianship”.<sup>101</sup>

By the end of the 1930s a number of changes occurred in Soviet policy which would have repercussions on the relations between Russia and the states of Central Asia when the Soviet Union broke up. In something of an about face from earlier Soviet policy Stalin began to promote a Russian nationalism that lauded the accomplishments of the Russian people, celebrated Russian culture and folklore, and made the Russian language the uniting language of the various peoples of the Soviet Union. National culture was still promoted, as were national languages, but Russian history, culture, and language had become pre-eminent in the Soviet Union and would remain so until its collapse. During the Khrushchev and Brezhnev periods elites did win the battle to promote indigenous cadres to top positions and under Gorbachev the national languages of Central Asia were raised to the status of state languages but the promises of self-determination that had been made at the start of the Bolshevik Revolution largely turned out to be hollow ones.<sup>102</sup>

While Central Asia did experience some benefits of Soviet rule, primarily access to improved education and a greater participation by nationals in government at least at the local level, some of the problems of tsarist rule persisted. While there was not quite the condescension that was displayed towards Central Asia under the Tsar, Russia and the Russian peoples were still considered above their fellow “brothers” in Central Asia. The

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<sup>101</sup> Rywkin, 104.

<sup>102</sup> Kaushik, Devendra (2003), “Russia and Central Asia: Emerging Pattern of a Relationship” in: Joshi, Nirmala (ed), *Central Asia: The Great Game Replayed*, Delhi: New Century Publications: 19.

herds of the Kazakhs were collectivized and sedentarization was forced upon the formerly nomadic people, a policy that bore some similarities to policies toward Kazakhstan pursued by tsarist Russia, and much of Central Asia's economy remained focused on cotton cultivation and export to Russia. Industry would also become an important part of the Central Asian economy during World War II when some aspects of industrial production were shifted to Central Asia to protect them from German attack but while this provided work, many of the specialists in these industries were still Russian nationals.

The result of all of this was that the Soviet Union came to be a contradiction in terms for Central Asia. While the stated goal of the Bolshevik Revolution had been to move beyond nationality to a broader socialist identity, the early nationalities policy, as both Martin and Suny point out, went out of its way to create nationalities, even when the nationalities it sought to create were only loosely defined to begin with. In the case of Central Asia, the Kyrgyz, Kazakhs, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Turkmen lacked a common written script and it was the Soviets who created the written forms of the various Central Asian languages, first based on the Latin alphabet and later on Cyrillic.<sup>103</sup> As mentioned earlier it was also the Soviet authorities who drew the borders of what would become modern Central Asia and defined the nationalities of the region. Suny states that "Even peoples who had not had a national or independent state experience in the past now acquired all the trappings of a long national tradition".<sup>104</sup> Customs and local traditions were promoted and encouraged and a sense of statehood was created in areas that had

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<sup>103</sup> Martin, 167.

<sup>104</sup> Suny, Ronald Grigor (1998), *The Soviet Experiment*, New York: Oxford University Press: 288.

never had any independent experience of this but by the 1930s the contradiction had emerged.

While Stalin continued to encourage the expression of nationality it was during this time that he also began to assign Russia and Russian traditions a privileged position in relations between nationalities in the USSR. Martin states, “By 1937, Russian national identity was no longer submerged—it was being crudely celebrated at every turn-but it was still closely identified with the state.”<sup>105</sup> While the Russian identity was still part of the larger Soviet identity it became the “first among equals” and the Russian language and Cyrillic script were elevated to the primary language and script of the Soviet Union.<sup>106</sup> Thus, while the Soviet Union created the states of Central Asia not only geographically but also encouraged their development culturally, by the late 1930s the Soviet state became associated with Russia and the Russian culture. Suny points out that, “The irony of Soviet nationality policy was already evident by the 1930s. A state that believed that it was moving beyond nationalism and nationality was in fact creating new nations and consolidating others as a result of its nationality policies. At the same time relations between the center and the non-Russian republics and autonomies were unequal, hierarchical, and imperial”.<sup>107</sup>

Tsarist Russia’s failure to integrate Central Asia as part of Russia other than territorially meant that the peoples of the region never came to identify themselves as “Russian”. The Soviet nationalities policies built upon this by defining and encouraging these differences and also creating the broader identifications that would become the official nationalities of the region. However, when Russian culture was elevated to its

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<sup>105</sup> Martin, 457.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 459.

<sup>107</sup> Suny, 289.

privileged position this meant that not only were the Central Asians told they were different and encouraged to be so, they were now also told that the culture of their conquerors was in fact a superior one.

The policies of the USSR towards Central Asia differed from those of Tsarist Russia in that Soviet policies did seek to bring benefits to the region and encouraged the development of broad-based national and cultural identities. However, while the USSR promoted the development of these regional identities it was quite clear that they were to be developed in the context of the USSR. The Soviet nationalities policies sought to harness nationalism and identity and channel it in directions that did not represent a challenge to the Soviet system, while also allowing for their expression. Ronald Suny points out that, “The deeply contradictory policy of the Soviet state, on the one hand, nourished the cultural uniqueness of distinct peoples and thereby increased ethnic solidarity and national consciousness in the non-Russian republics, and on the other, by requiring conformity to an imposed political order frustrated full articulation of a national agenda”.<sup>108</sup>

Thus, the Soviet Union created the conditions that would make Russian participation in the SCO a necessity. It created the states that Russia was forced to confront following the collapse of the USSR and the internal conditions within these states that led to a wariness of playing a subservient role in a Russian sphere of influence once the states of Central Asia became independent. As Martin and Suny point out, the story of Russia’s relationship with Central Asia was never as easy as one of domination and repression. Simply stating that Russia dominated Central Asia ignores the post-Cold

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<sup>108</sup> Suny, Ronald Grigor (1991), “Incomplete Revolution: National Movements and the Collapse of the Soviet Empire”, *New Left Review*, I/189: 113.

War analysis of the incredibly significant role that the Soviet Union played in the development of Central Asia, creating its very geography and consolidating its cultural identities. Moshe Lewin also points out that was no rush to break with the Soviet system, pointing out that, “The republics still kept coming to talk and sign, even when all that was left of the center was a lonely Gorbachev. They left when the USSR was not coping with anything else-especially with Russia itself”.<sup>109</sup> Relations between the Russian center and the multiethnic peripheries were unequal but at the same time the states of Central Asia benefited from their association with the USSR, whose relationship to the region was never as simple as colonialism or imperialism. The USSR tried to tie together a expansive and diverse territory under the rubric of an international Soviet identity and the failure of this was as much due to stagnation of the centre as it was due to unequal relations.

Upon the collapse of the USSR there was an inability, and even a lack of desire, to truly sever ties with the Russian state because of the myriad of connections between the two that had been created over the preceding century. There were a number of concrete ties that had developed over the course of Central Asia and Russia’s long relationship and this meant there were positive reasons to maintain this. Native Central Asians who wanted technical expertise would typically study in Russia, most if not all of the elites in Central Asia were part of the Soviet bureaucracy, and Russian was the de facto second language of the region, with large Russian minorities in many of the Central Asian states. Furthermore, much of Central Asian industries, primarily oil and natural gas, remained dependent on a continued partnership with Russia following independence

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<sup>109</sup> Lewin, Moshe (1995), *Russia USSR Russia: The Drive and Drift of a Superstate*, New York: The New Press: 272.

since pipelines for both natural gas and oil had to run through Russian territory to reach European markets.

### **Russia and Central Asia: Growing Apart and Coming Back Together**

When the USSR collapsed in 1991 the former Soviet republics of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, retaining the borders that Soviet authorities had drawn back in the 1920s and 1930s, found themselves suddenly independent. Despite some of the negative effects of first tsarist and then Soviet rule 90 to 95 per cent of eligible Central Asian voters in the spring of 1991 had favoured the preservation of the USSR.<sup>110</sup> This can be accounted for, somewhat, by the concessions won by Central Asian elites during the Khrushchev, Brezhnev, and Gorbachev periods and the fact that all of the leaders of Central Asia were members of the Soviet bureaucracy.<sup>111</sup> Gorbachev's reforms had minimal impact in the region, where local elites continued to fully control public expression. In addition, there were large Russian minorities in some of the Central Asian states, mainly Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, who likely favoured continued union with Russia.

The desire to preserve the Soviet Union also reflected the contradictions in the Central Asian/Russian relationship. While the region had been exploited, first by tsarist and later Soviet authorities, the very identities of its states and peoples were forged during these times. Not only did the USSR create the national identities of Central Asia but it also built a great deal of the industry in the region, trained the elites of the Central Asian bureaucracy, raised the national literacy rates, built schools, and laid the

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 19.

infrastructure of the region. The states of Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan had never existed as independent entities, nor had their economies functioned independently, and their leaders were drawn from the very bureaucracy that they now saw crumbling. Despite the exploitation of Central Asia there is no doubt that a large number of its citizens and elites faced a future without the Soviet infrastructure and bureaucracy with a certain level of fear and even faced independence with a sense of ambivalence. While the USSR had exploited the region it had also brought positive benefits to the region and it is not surprising that many voted to preserve the USSR. Better the devil you know than the devil you don't know, as the saying goes.

### **Opportunities Lost**

However, Russian officials were too preoccupied with their own rebuilding to pay much attention to the Central Asian states during the transitional period immediately following the end of the USSR. In 1991 the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was created to facilitate continued cooperation between Russia and other Soviet successor states and offered an opportunity to maintain a common framework for interaction amongst the former Soviet republics.<sup>112</sup> Russian officials initially saw the CIS as a way of maintaining some level of control over former Soviet territories but as the level of resistance to Russian domination through the CIS, particularly from the Ukraine, became obvious and Russia's own internal problems began to demand more attention, Russian attempts to revitalize this organization waned.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Jonson, 43.

<sup>113</sup> Olcott, Martha Brill (2005), *Central Asia's Second Chance*, Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: 56.

The rhetoric of reintegration remained but in reality Russia, even if it wanted to, was unable to pursue renewed control over Central Asia. This was in part because of Russian domestic factors but also because of the problems facing Central Asia itself, which promised to make it a burden to a Russian state that was unable to shoulder it. Jonson quotes Boris Yeltsin as stating, “Integration must not bring harm to Russia itself or lead to an overstretch of our forces and resources, material as well as financial’.<sup>114</sup> Despite this statement Russia would become involved in the Tajik civil war that flared up in 1992, contributing troops and eventually assisting in the negotiation of a peace deal due to fears that the instability could come to pose a threat to Russian security.<sup>115</sup> The Tajik civil war was a regional-political conflict but Lena Jonson argues that Russia viewed the conflict “through the prism of its fear of Islamic extremism” which some believed could reverberate with Russia’s own Muslim population, which goes a long way in explaining the Russian willingness to get involved in the conflict.<sup>116</sup> Despite the engagement in Tajikistan, on the whole the Russian involvement in Central Asian affairs during the first few years of Yeltsin’s first term was kept to a minimum and engagement was most often only to ensure that problems in Central Asia did not bleed over the borders into Russia.

The fact that Russia surrendered its hegemony over the region so easily attests to the problems faced by Russia during the early 1990s, particularly due to the fact that Russia could have retained influence in Central Asia with only a moderate level of involvement, as was attested to by the large number of eligible voters who initially favoured the preservation of the USSR. Konstantin Syroezhkin, in his contribution to

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<sup>114</sup> As cited in Jonson, 44.

<sup>115</sup> Jonson, 44.

<sup>116</sup> Jonson, 50.

*Central Asia: A Gathering Storm*, writes of Russia's potential for continued hegemony or at the very least influence in Central Asia,

That it had such opportunities is unquestionable. They derived partly from objective conditions-economic ties, a single cultural and intellectual space, the substantial Russian ethnic diaspora in the region, the still quite positive image of Russia as an economic and political partner, various political levers of influence, and so forth. Complimenting objective circumstances were the subjective factors. The fear of destabilization in the event of precipitate Russian withdrawal and the uncertainties about resolving inter- and intrastate conflicts...The personal factor was also of substantive significance: most leaders in Central Asia were either Boris Yeltsin's colleagues in the Central Committee or had obtained their posts with his support.<sup>117</sup>

Despite the aloofness in regards to Central Asia on the part of the Yeltsin administration, as early as 1992 criticisms of the abandonment of Russian interests in the “near abroad”<sup>118</sup> had began to be voiced by Russian elites.<sup>119</sup> The Yeltsin administration, in an attempt to assuage these concerns, once again began characterizing Russia as a great power and the leader of the Commonwealth of Independent States but this was largely rhetoric aimed at satisfying and silencing the critics of the Yeltsin administration's policies towards Central Asia and the former Soviet territories as a whole.

Despite its declining influence, Russia remained the most important military and economic partner for Central Asia due to the fact that most of Central Asia's military was made up of Russian arms and munitions and much of Central Asia's natural gas and oil exports had to be sent through Russia to reach the markets in Europe. However, the lack of positive incentives to preserve this relationship led the newly independent states of

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<sup>117</sup> Syroezhkin, Konstantin (2003), “Central Asia Between the Gravitational Poles of Russia and China” in: Rumner, Boris (ed), *Central Asia: A Gathering Storm?*, Delhi: Aakar Books: 179.

<sup>118</sup> Meaning the former territories of the Soviet Union.

<sup>119</sup> Jonson, 44.

Central Asia to actively seek other partners and Moscow was threatened with potentially losing even the relatively modest level of influence it retained in the region. Russia was in no position to act as a security guarantor in Central Asia, could offer few financial incentives for the Central Asian states, and was unable to assist them in their own transition not only to a market economy but also to independence. Russia also simply lacked the political will in the early 1990s to truly fight to retain its influence in the region when there were so many problems facing the country, as well as the Yeltsin administration, at home. The Central Asian states began to drift from the Russian orbit, with Turkmenistan the first to be lost when the country declared its program of “positive neutrality” in 1993 which saw it withdraw almost completely from the international scene. Turkmenistan embarked on a period of wilful isolation, withdrawing almost completely from the international community as it pulled out of regional and international organizations.

By 1993 there was growing concern with the direction of the former republics. The *Foreign Policy Conception of the Russian Federation*, released in 1993, reflected this concern, stating,

In a number of CIS states the formation of foreign policy is being affected by ostentatious disassociation from Russia, so typical of state-making, as well as by territorial disputes fuelled by nationalist sentiments, including claims to Russia, and an aversion to anything that is a reminder of their past dependence on the union structures...Moreover, in their search for their own place within the global community, some of these states *particularly those located in the Asian part of the former USSR*<sup>120</sup>, are seeking to rely on the nations close to them in ethno-social, religious, and economic respects, including those that historically competed with Russia for influence in the region.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>121</sup> Russian Federation (1993), “Foreign Policy Conception of the Russian Federation” in: Melville, Andrei and Shakleina, Tatiana (eds), *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition: Concepts and Realities*, New York: Central European University Press, pp. 27-65.

Moreover, the placement of the “Countries of the Commonwealth” as the first key area of foreign policy activity suggested that Russia was now seeking a renewed role in the CIS countries due to worries regarding the growth of foreign influence in the region. The *Foreign Policy Conception* specifically detailed Russia’s hope that the CIS could grow into a more active body encompassing “the greatest achievable number of various spheres of international affairs” and explicitly stated that Russia did not aim to be the centre of the CIS.<sup>122</sup> Despite the lofty proclamations of the *Foreign Policy Conception* the CIS remained ineffectual. This was in part due to Russia’s own inability to provide incentives for the growth of the CIS as well as the fact that some countries, in particular the Ukraine and later Uzbekistan, saw the CIS as a grouping dominated by their former ruler and one that would simply be used to further Russian interests and thus resisted attempts at integration under the CIS. This perception of the CIS was not improved by some of the language contained in the aforementioned *Foreign Policy Conception*, as well as military doctrines also released in 1993, which advocated the creation of zones of influence and declared the area of former Soviet territory as an area of vital interest to the Russian Federation.<sup>123</sup> Martha Brill Olcott writes, “The CIS never became an effective tool of Russian domination, because most CIS state leaders strongly opposed the transfer of national sovereignty, in large or small measure, to a Russian-dominated multilateral organization”.<sup>124</sup> In addition, Russia was largely unwilling to treat other CIS member states as equals, which may have addressed some of the objections of states like Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Georgia, and Azerbaijan.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>123</sup> Kaushik, 27.

<sup>124</sup> Olcott, 56.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 56.

Another blow to Russian hopes of influence in Central Asia was the growing separation between Russia and the government of Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan. During the mid-1990s Uzbekistan had begun a program of separation from the Russia Federation by deploying its own border services, refusing to allow Russian troops on Uzbek soil and beginning the modernization and enlargement of its own military to ensure that Uzbekistan would not have to rely on Russia in the case of military conflict or domestic upheaval. With Turkmenistan's withdrawal from regional cooperation and Uzbekistan's beginning to drift towards the West, Russia's position in Central Asia seemed a tenuous one. Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan remained committed to cooperation with Russia but Uzbekistan's hostility towards Russia represented a serious problem for any attempt to retain or expand Russian influence. Uzbekistan was the region's strongest military power and challenged in economic strength only by oil-rich Kazakhstan, thus making Karimov a vital ally in the region and Uzbekistan a necessity for any comprehensive security plan for the region.

### **Uzbekistan and Russia's Complicated Relationship**

Of all the Central Asian states it was Uzbekistan that drifted the most from Russia following the collapse of the USSR, due largely to the Tajik civil war in 1992. Russia and Uzbekistan had initially worked together in an attempt to calm the situation in Tajikistan and to ensure that it did not become the flashpoint for greater regional disorder. Uzbekistan "played Russia's regional policeman in Tajikistan" according to Lena Jonson and actively participated in the civil war, providing training and air support

to the Tajik paramilitary pro-communist factions.<sup>126</sup> However, by 1993 Uzbekistan had withdrawn its support of Imomali Rakhmon, who had become president of Tajikistan and was supported by Russia, largely due to Rakhmon's policy of "kulyabization" of political posts in Tajikistan. Kulyab was the home region to Rakhmon and this policy squeezed out officials from other regions, including Leninabad which had a large Uzbek minority whose position Islam Karimov had been concerned for.<sup>127</sup>

Uzbekistan broke from Russia and began supporting local warlords in their revolts against Rakhmon. By 1993-1994 Russian-Uzbek relations had truly began to deteriorate and Karimov sought to increase its independence from Russia. It was after this point that Uzbekistan began to actively oppose any strengthening of the CIS that could increase Moscow's influence over the region. Uzbekistan was, and remains, the strongest military power in Central Asia, not to mention one of Central Asia's two economic powers<sup>128</sup> and as such the growing distance between Moscow and Tashkent signalled a serious problem for Russian policy in Central Asia. As I will detail, it would be the Shanghai Cooperation Organization that would help Russia in repairing its relationship with Uzbekistan.

### **The SCO and Russia's Return to Central Asia**

Despite Russia's long relationship with Central Asia and the initial desire by the Central Asian states to preserve the USSR, once independent many of the states learned that they could stand on their own in the international system. Even Tajikistan, the state closest to collapse following independence which had depended on Russian invention to

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<sup>126</sup> Jonson, 54.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 54.

<sup>128</sup> The other being Kazakhstan

end its civil war, soon found its feet once the situation stabilized. Russia's chance to preserve its uncontested dominance of the region, if it ever existed, passed when the USSR was formally dissolved. It now had to deal with Central Asia as a group of independent states in the international system, despite its role in their creation.

As the 1990s drew to a close there were a number of alarming developments in Central Asia that threatened Russian influence in the region. Uzbekistan, as detailed previously, had begun to drift further from the Russian orbit as it sought a more beneficial alignment with the West, in particular the United States. The NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) program threatened to further expand Western influences in Central Asia and even opened the possibility that the Central Asian states could one day become NATO members, with Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan participating in joint exercises under the PfP program in the mid-1990s. Finally, the main vehicle of multilateralism in the former Soviet republics, the CIS, was fairly ineffective in reasserting Russian influence anywhere in Russia's "near abroad" due to resistance by the Ukraine and Georgia and later Uzbekistan, who saw the organization as a vehicle for renewed Russian domination. So as the Shanghai Five came into being in 1996, Russia's interests in Central Asia faced a number of challenges and no successful way of addressing them.

Despite its weakening influence in Central Asia Russia did retain a number of interests in the region, which have been well documented in the literature on Central Asia, as well as the two Master's theses by Craig and Turner. These can be broken down into security, economic, and domestic political interests. Moscow's security interests in the region were not based solely on terrorism, separatism, and extremism but also on

concerns regarding narco-trafficking and cross-border organized crime. Economically, Russia wanted to retain its control of Central Asian gas and oil exports, which were taxed since the pipelines ran through Russian territory, as well ensuring that Russian companies, such as Gazprom, benefited from the exploitation of Central Asia's vast oil reserves. Politically, as Russia emerged from the first few turbulent years of transition it became obvious that its status had fallen internationally. Previously a superpower, Russia could now claim to be a great power at best and even that seemed a somewhat hollow accolade with Russia's declining influence across its former territories and its outdated military. Preservation of influence in Soviet successor states was a way of improving Moscow's international standing but also a way of silencing critics at home who had trouble accepting Russia's weaker international position.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization offered a different way for Russia to pursue its interests in the region, reassert some of its influence, and counter the challenges to Russian foreign policy in Central Asia. Andrew Hurrell writes that regional organizations can be beneficial to declining hegemonies by allowing them to pursue their interests while sharing burdens, pursuing problems held in common with other members, and to generate international support and legitimacy for their policies.<sup>129</sup> Russia had tried to achieve this through Russian-dominated regional structures like the CIS since it was no longer able to address regional issues unilaterally but with Uzbekistan's resistance these would ultimately be somewhat ineffective. Providing a common space for Russia and Uzbekistan to discuss regional problems is one of the greatest achievements of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization since this has helped Russia rebuild what looked like a deteriorating relationship.

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<sup>129</sup> Hurrell, 52.

It was in fact China's presence in the SCO that accounted for Uzbekistan's willingness to join the organization. Annette Bohr, writing in *International Affairs* points out that, "Uzbekistan's decision to accede to the SCO was facilitated by China's membership in that organization, which served as a counterweight to Russia's influence. For Uzbekistan, it would seem, the presence of two hegemonies in a regional organization is better than one, at least if one of those dominant powers is Russia".<sup>130</sup> Speaking in more general terms Roy Allison writes of the SCO, "...the uniqueness of the SCO lies in the opportunity it offers to bandwagon with both Russia and China in a framework where the Chinese presence increasingly offsets any Russian efforts to impose unwanted aspects of its integration agenda on the Central Asian states...".<sup>131</sup> While Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan did participate in the CIS collective security agreements and the CSTO, the exclusion of Uzbekistan from any common framework would have made any attempts at regional security incomplete. In addition, Uzbekistan's participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization furthered Russia's goal of regaining lost ground in Central Asia by facilitating greater trust between the two. It should be noted that it was not SCO membership alone that drove Uzbekistan closer to Russia, but also the US criticism of the Karimov regime, particularly surrounding events at Andijan. American support for the colour revolutions in Georgia, the Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan may also have made Uzbekistan wary of the United States, particularly since the Karimov regime could hardly be characterized as "democratic". It is of course impossible to say that one definitively had more influence in the eventual realignment of Uzbekistan towards Russia

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<sup>130</sup> Bohr, Annette (2004), "Regionalism in Central Asia: new geopolitics, old regional order", *International Affairs*, 80(3): 488.

<sup>131</sup> Allison, Roy (2004), "Regionalism, regional structures and security management in Central Asia", *International Affairs*, 80(3): 478.

and China but it is obvious that all played some role in this decision. In August of 2006 Uzbekistan even rejoined the CSTO, the regional security organization that it had withdrawn from in 1995.

The renewed relationship between Uzbekistan and Russia led to a drastic change in Central Asia in 2005 in regards to American influence in the region, which was the main competitor with Russia. After the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks the United States had been permitted to establish military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan from which it could launch attacks against the Taliban. Russia gave its blessing to the establishment of these bases, although it is unlikely that a Russian objection would have prevented their establishment. However, following the defeat of the Taliban it became obvious that the United States had no intention of removing these bases which were so close to the Russian border, insisting that they were needed to continue clean-up operations in Afghanistan. The question of the US military bases would result in a request by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2005 that the US set a timetable for the withdrawal of its military bases from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. While this request was attributed to China and Russia, Uzbekistan is also believed to have had a hand in the declaration due to American criticism of the Andijan massacre and Karimov's fear that the US could support forces opposed to his continued rule. The Astana Declaration represented the growth of Russian influence in the region and a new, more confrontational attitude towards the United States.

**Conclusion: The SCO and Russia's Renewed Role in Central Asia**

Typically it is only Russian interests that are examined in the academic literature on the SCO with the history between Russia and the other member states of the SCO often only briefly described. The goal of this chapter has been to show that not only has the SCO served the interests of Russia in terms of security, economics, and domestic politics but it has also been a vital tool for Russia in addressing its historical relationship with Central Asia as conqueror and creator. Ignoring Russia's role in the creation of the Central Asian states and its long hegemony over the region means that one misses the point that regional organizations can serve not only to promote the interests of a former hegemon and allow it to share the burdens it can no longer carry: it can also make its continued influence in the region acceptable. When it became necessary for Russia to redefine its relationship with Central Asia there was no organization in existence that allowed it to do in such a way that some level of Russian influence would be preserved while the likelihood of renewed Russian domination would be reduced. The SCO accomplishes both of these tasks due to the presence of another regional hegemon in the group. The history between Russian and Central Asia created the need for the SCO because it was the primary reason that the CIS failed and it continues to drive the continued participation of Russia in the SCO because of the conditions that have been created by this long relationship. Russia has strong interests in preserving influence in Central Asia but lacks the means to do so comprehensively without the SCO. The Central Asian states want to ensure Russia does not come to dominate the region again while also enjoying the benefits of a continued regional partnership with Russia, which is achieved through the SCO.

The organization has allowed Russia and Central Asia to preserve a mutually beneficial relationship that has been created over the last 123 years.<sup>132</sup> Central Asia's ties to Russia run deep and it would be difficult and painful to attempt to sever these but once independent renewed Russian domination could also not be accepted. The regionalism of the SCO has improved the relationships of its members and it is in this way that the SCO has come to serve Russian interests in Central Asia in a way the CIS did not and could not.

Russian interests have been well served by the SCO as well since Russia can now depend on truly multilateral support (excluding Turkmenistan of course) in maintaining regional security. Domestically, Putin's administration can point to some success in the 'near abroad', especially following the drift of Ukraine and Georgia from Russian orbit and their realignment towards the West in recent years. There is also the possibility that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's role in Central Asia could expand beyond regional security and mediation. The SCO could eventually play a role in trade between Central Asia, Russia, and China which would make it a valuable economic asset in addition to its value as a diplomatic and strategic grouping.

However, the role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization goes beyond simply one between Russia and the states of Central Asia. The SCO has also helped Russia manage its relationships with China and the United States in the context of the region and it is to an examination of this that the next chapter turns.

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<sup>132</sup> Beginning with the conquest of Merv in 1884.

## **Chapter 3:**

### **The Bear, the Dragon, and the Eagle:**

### **Geopolitics in Central Asia**

#### **Introduction**

Russia's inability to preserve regional dominance following the collapse of the USSR meant that Central Asia, for the first time in over 120 years, became open to foreign influence and interaction. Specifically, with the collapse of the USSR in 1991 both the United States and China both sought to expand their influence in Central Asia. The US presence in Central Asia began almost as soon as the states gained independence as US multinational companies moved in to try to secure deals to Central Asia's vast natural resources, in particular the oil and natural gas reserves in Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. With the growth of Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East the United States also began to fear that fundamentalist and terrorist organizations based in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan could expand into the neighbouring states of Central Asia, leading not only to greater instability within the region but also to a greater threat of terrorism outside of Central Asia. This desire for stability in the region also stemmed, in part, from the benefits of stability for resource extraction by US multinationals. The September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and the subsequent "war on terrorism" led to a greatly expanded US presence in the region, which initially was welcomed by Russia and the states of Central Asia.

While China also feared the possibility of greater instability in Central Asia as a ripple effect of events in the Middle East there was an additional concern that the Uigher separatist movement based in the Northern Chinese autonomous region of Xinjiang could

find assistance and sanctuary in Central Asia, mainly in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan, which had a significant Uigher population. The fear was that the separatist movement in Xinjiang could receive assistance from the sympathetic Uigher population in Kyrgyzstan and could even use Kyrgyzstan as a staging ground for acts of terrorism directed at the Chinese government and aimed at the creation of new Uigher state out of Xinjiang, which the separatists referred to as East Turkestan. It must also be noted that Xinjiang was also thought to have some of the largest untapped oil reserves in China and therefore stability in the region was of particular importance to China as it rapidly industrialized.



Figure 2-China, with the Xinjiang Autonomous Region shaded in light grey<sup>133</sup>

In addition, China, with its own resources stretched thin, valued the oil and natural gas of Central Asia as much as did the United States, as well as the potential market that Central

<sup>133</sup> Map taken from: <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/china401/images/map.gif>

Asia represented for Chinese goods. With Kazakhstan bordering on China there was the potential for pipelines directly connecting the two and while they did not share a border with China, both Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan had potential as suppliers of oil and gas for China's voracious industrial complex.

Russia's initial weakness following the collapse of the USSR meant that there was little that could be done to prevent the growth of foreign influence in Central Asia, particularly as Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan were now independent and free to develop relations with whomever they chose. The goal of this chapter will be to show that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization represented a way for Russia to tie an increasingly powerful China into Central Asia and increase trust between the two while ensuring that China's influence did not eclipse that of Russia. China also served to counterbalance potential Russian dominance, thus making the SCO more appealing a regional grouping than the CIS or CSTO. Furthermore, it will be argued that the SCO, with the combined influence of China and Russia, gave Moscow a stronger position from which to confront the United States when its continued military presence in Central Asia was no longer acceptable to the Putin administration.

To achieve this, a historical examination of the rocky relationship between Russia and China since the Sino-Soviet split of the 1960s is necessary in order to show that it was this relationship that led to the creation of the SCO. The SCO, in turn, continues to reinforce the Sino-Russian relationship by creating mutual trust and increasing the opportunities for interaction. Building upon this it will be argued that the border negotiations came to play a significant role in the improvement of this relationship under Gorbachev and following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the SCO has

allowed China and Russia to cooperate towards mutual goals in Central Asia, avoiding, at least thus far, conflicting agendas in the region. Finally, the cooperation between Russia and China has given greater stature to Moscow's increasingly hostile attitude towards the American presence in Central Asia and allowed Russia to become a more attractive partner in the region with US influence suffering as a result.

### **Sino-Soviet Relations: 1960-1991: The Evolution of Border Disputes**

Ideological differences had begun to emerge between the Soviet and Chinese governments even before 1960, with the beginning of Khrushchev's de-Stalinization of the USSR. However, these differences boiled over in 1960 when an article that claimed to be from the hand of Mao himself and entitled "Long Live Leninism" heavily critiqued the Soviet government for its alleged "revision" of Leninist theory. A reply from the Soviet leadership followed in *Pravda*, the main newspaper of the Soviet Communist Party, and sparked an ideological battle between China and the Soviet Union. As the disagreements intensified, Khrushchev decided to withdraw all technical experts from China in 1960, although the reasons for this may have gone beyond the ideological differences between China and Russia. Writing on the economic impact of the Soviet decision in 1964, Jean Polaris states, "At one stroke it laid bare the vulnerability of an economic system founded on a narrow and exclusive collaboration with one country...".<sup>134</sup> In response the Chinese government began to dispute the boundaries between the two countries, which had been established under a number of treaties

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<sup>134</sup> Polaris, Jean (1964), "The Sino-Soviet Dispute: Its Economic Impact on China", *International Affairs* 40(4), pp. 648.

between the Qing Dynasty and Tsarist Russia signed in the mid-to-late 1800s.<sup>135</sup> The Qing Dynasty had been weakened by domestic insurgencies and the attempt by a number of European states to annex Chinese territory while the government struggled.<sup>136</sup> Imperial Russia saw its chance and claimed its own small part of China as the Qing Dynasty grappled with the internal crises and the large number of predatory foreign empires hungry to claim their own piece of China. Russia, through the Treaty of Aigun in 1858, the Treaty of Peking in 1860, and the Treaty of Tarbagatai in 1864, managed to acquire some 665,000 square miles of land from the Qing Dynasty.<sup>137</sup>

These border disputes remained latent as long as the two Communist countries remained close. After their split in 1964, however, China began to complain about the Sino-Soviet boundary and both states ordered massive troop deployments along their mutual borders as the dispute escalated.<sup>138</sup> Friction remained at the level of minor border skirmishes except for the March 1969 large-scale conflict between Chinese and Soviet troops near Damanskii (Zhenbao) Island in the Ussuri River.<sup>139</sup> This conflict ended inconclusively, with both sides claiming to be the victim of unprovoked aggression and the smaller number of casualties, with the border remaining unchanged.

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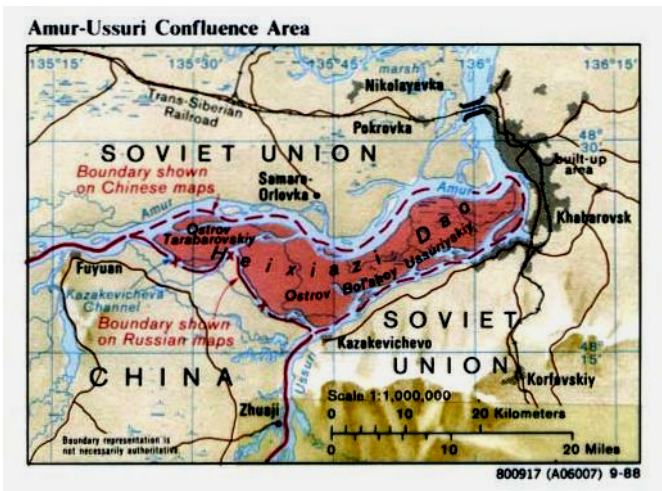
<sup>135</sup> Wilson, Jeanne L. (2004), *Strategic Partners: Russian-Chinese Relations in the Post-Soviet Era*, Armonk: M.E. Sharpe: 19.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 19.



China-USSR Border: Eastern Sector



Figure 3-Damanskii (Zhenbao) Island<sup>140</sup>

<sup>140</sup> Map taken from University of Texas website at: [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle\\_east\\_and\\_asia/china\\_ussr\\_e\\_88.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/china_ussr_e_88.jpg)

The disputed regions (see Fig. 2) would become heavily militarized as the dispute between the former allies grew more acrimonious. It was rumoured that the Soviet Union at the time even considered a nuclear strike against China as a preventative strategy.<sup>141</sup> However, a visit from Aleksey Kosygin, the Soviet Premier, to Beijing on his way back from the funeral of Ho Chi Minh in Hanoi managed to cool the situation, although the border remained militarized and little that had led to the conflict was actually settled.<sup>142</sup>

The border regions would remain in dispute throughout the 1970s and both China and the Soviet Union continued to deploy large numbers of troops along their respective sides of the disputed territories. An attempt by both sides to begin normalization of relations began through talks initiated in 1979, prompted in part by an ideological thaw between the two countries based on Deng Xiaoping's more pragmatic assessment of Marxism and the retraction of the description of the Soviet Union as a "revisionist" state in CCP discourse.<sup>143</sup> However, these were broken off in December of that year when the Soviet Union launched its ill-fated invasion of Afghanistan.

The invasion of Afghanistan created yet another roadblock to the normalization of Sino-Soviet relations, although there were some signs that some progress was being made. In 1980 the Chinese leadership formally renounced the characterization of the USSR as a revisionist socialist state, which had been one of the factors that had led to a widening rift between the two.

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<sup>141</sup> Wilson, 19.

<sup>142</sup> For a more detail examination of the Damanskii (Zhenbao) Island conflict see Kuisong, Yang (2000), "The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969: From Zhenbao Island to Sino-American Rapproachment", *Cold War History*, 1(1): pp. 21-52.

<sup>143</sup> Wishnick, Elizabeth (2001), *Mending Fences: The Evolution of Moscow's China Policy from Brezhnev to Yeltsin*, Seattle: University of Washington Press: 73.

Meanwhile, the economic reforms instituted by Deng Xiaoping which had boosted China's economy, even while they diverged from traditional communism, began to find some adherents in the Soviet bureaucracy. Some with the Soviet administration, such as Georgii Arbatov who headed the Institute of the United States and Canada of the Academy of Science and a speechwriter for Leonid Brezhnev, saw a potential lesson for the USSR in the Chinese reforms and began to advocate for improved relations between the two.<sup>144</sup> By 1983 some analysts even began to comment on the positive consequences of China's Open Door policy, although critiques of China for drifting from the Soviet model remained common in the Soviet bureaucracy.<sup>145</sup>

Another step forward was made in 1982 when the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev visited Tashkent in what is now Uzbekistan and gave a speech that "officially reaffirmed China's right to call herself socialist and spoke of his desire to restore normal relations".<sup>146</sup> Negotiations between China and the USSR resumed in late 1982 as a result of the ground given by both sides but produced little in way of concrete results. It was during these negotiations that the Huang Hua, the Chinese foreign minister, presented his counterpart Andrei Gromyko with a list of "three obstacles" to the normalization of relations between the two states.<sup>147</sup> The most important of these obstacles for the future Sino-Russian relationship was the Soviet build-up of troops along the border since it was the demilitarization of and negotiations over the border would lead to the creation of the Shanghai Five and Russia's partnership with China in Central Asia. The other two

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<sup>144</sup> Lukin, Alexander (2003), *Bear Watches the Dragon: Russia's Perceptions of China and the Evolution of Russian-Chinese Relations Since the Eighteenth Century*, Armonk: M.E. Sharpe:,148.

<sup>145</sup> Wishnick, 92.

<sup>146</sup> Lukin, 149.

<sup>147</sup> Wilson, 20.

obstacles Hua noted were the Soviet presence in Afghanistan and the invasion of Cambodia by Vietnamese troops supported by the USSR.<sup>148</sup>

It was also during 1982, at the Twelfth CCP Party Congress, that the Chinese leadership declared a new foreign policy that did not seek alliance with either the USSR or the US and instead sought to pursue good relations with a wide range of states. The economic reforms instituted by Deng Xiaoping required attention to domestic tasks which in turn required a stable international environment and the reduction of international tensions which favoured improvements in the Sino-Soviet relationship.<sup>149</sup> This greater focus on multilateralism and diplomacy rather than the strategic balancing that had been a hallmark of China's relationship with the US and the USSR during the 1970s made further improvement in the Sino-Soviet relationship somewhat easier.

By the time Mikhail Gorbachev took over as party leader in 1985 tensions between China and the Soviet Union had eased, to a degree. Ideological differences remained and the Soviet Union continued to embrace a policy of containment regarding China despite Gorbachev's new foreign policy which favoured the supremacy of universal human values and international cooperation over the concept of tripolarity that had prevailed under Brezhnev, in hopes of addressing the Soviet Union's increasing isolation on the international scene.<sup>150</sup> Gorbachev was also committed to reforming the Soviet system, which had increasingly been seen as one of the reasons underlying the continuing decline of the Soviet economy and perestroika "heightened the Soviet interest in cooperation with China by creating a shared interest in political reform".<sup>151</sup> Gorbachev

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>149</sup> Wishnick, 89.

<sup>150</sup> Lukin, 150.

<sup>151</sup> Wishwick, 99.

made the normalization of relations with China one of the top priorities of his administration and in March 1985 called for improved Sino-Soviet relations at a plenary session of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Central Committee. This speech was shortly thereafter acknowledged by Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang. That normalization would be no easy task became clear in 1986 when China's Vice Foreign Minister Qian Qichen once again reiterated that as long as the "three obstacles" remained in place these prevented the normalization of relations.<sup>152</sup>

Two of the three obstacles were removed in the course of the 1980s. In February 1988 it was announced that Soviet troops would be withdrawn from Afghanistan by March of 1989 and troop levels along the border with China would be reduced in a step meant to further the demilitarization of the Sino-Soviet border.<sup>153</sup> The USSR also pressured the Vietnamese to remove their troops from Cambodia and in January 1989 Hanoi announced that troops would be fully withdrawn by the end of September of the same year.<sup>154</sup> These developments led to Gorbachev's May 1989 visit to Beijing, which was the first visit by a Soviet leader since 1959. It was following Gorbachev's meeting with Deng Xiaoping that the official normalization of relations was announced.

While this was in part motivated by a desire to improve relations with China, the engagement in Afghanistan, the large troop deployments along the Sino-Soviet border and support for the Vietnamese in Cambodia also represented a large drain on the Soviet economy, which by the mid-1980s was suffering from the burdens of its large military

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<sup>152</sup> Mills, William deB. (1986), "Gorbachev and the Future of Sino-Soviet Relations", *Political Science Quarterly*, 101(4): 548.

<sup>153</sup> It should be noted that improved relations with China were not the only reason for the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.

<sup>154</sup> Garver, John V. (1989), "The 'New Type' of Sino-Soviet Relations", *Asian Survey* 29(12): 1139.

and lack of positive economic reforms.<sup>155</sup> Thus, the three obstacles presented to the USSR by China also represented obstacles to Gorbachev's own desire for reformation of the Soviet economy and military. The removal of these obstacles essentially set the stage for improved relations between the two countries and Gorbachev's historic visit to China in 1989 seemed to presage a new day for Sino-Soviet relations. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 meant that internal domestic issues came to the forefront of Russian policy, further complicating the Sino-Russian rapprochement although it continued, albeit at a slower pace.

### **Border Negotiations: The Building Blocks of a Strategic Partnership**

Gorbachev had begun the demilitarization of the Sino-Soviet border in 1989 as a first step in coming to a resolution but was not in power long enough to see these negotiations through to their completion. In May of 1991 the Soviet Union and China signed an agreement demarcating most of the eastern portion of the Sino-Soviet border during an official visit of Chinese leader Jiang Zemin to Moscow. This agreement also created a commission that would be responsible for the final demarcation of the remaining disputed areas of the eastern border, 4,300 kilometres of the total disputed 7,500 kilometres along the whole border.<sup>156</sup> The western border was more complicated. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 the border negotiations for the western border could no longer simply be with Russia, but would also have to include the newly independent states of Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan.

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<sup>155</sup> Wishnick, 102.

<sup>156</sup> Akihiro, 261.

Boris Yeltsin agreed to continue working on resolution of the border issues that had plagued relations between the two countries for more than a century and in 1992 the two countries reached a further agreement to reduce troop levels and offensive weaponry in a sixty-mile zone on either side of their mutual border. On July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1992 the first meeting of the Sino-Russian Demarcation Commission was held in Moscow. The Commission was set up with the purpose of definitively marking the Sino-Russian border in its Eastern sector.<sup>157</sup> Border negotiations for the Western sector of the Sino-Russian border would resume in the fall of 1992 with the inclusion of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, which now shared the disputed borders with China.<sup>158</sup>

In December 1992 Boris Yeltsin made his first official visit to Beijing. The declaration which marked it testified to a basic continuity the above trends: it lay down basis for mutual relations between Russia and China, noted the mutual reduction of armed forces in the border regions, strengthening of military trust, and other military and technical cooperation.<sup>159</sup> The first meeting of the working group set up to draft border agreements between Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan occurred in Beijing in April 1993. This was for all intents and purposes the first meeting of what would later evolve into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

While the Sino-Russian relationship had been warming, by 1994 the blush had begun to wear off of the Russian-American relationship, particularly when Yeltsin realized that Western assistance to cope with the myriad of problems Russia's accelerated transition to capitalism had engendered was not forthcoming. In addition, it seemed to

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<sup>157</sup>“First Meeting of Sino-Russian Demarcation Commission”, *Russian Information Agency ITAR-TASS*, 9 July 1992.

<sup>158</sup> Wilson, 25.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 26.

some that “there were politicians in the West who would clearly prefer Russia to remain weak and engrossed with internal problems”.<sup>160</sup> The Russian leadership quickly realized the value of good relations with China and 1994 saw the upgrading of the Sino-Russian partnership to that of a “constructive partnership” and the declaration of Russia and China’s dedication to a multipolar world system.<sup>161</sup> In addition, there was growing disquiet in Russia in 1995 over the expansion of NATO, which many in Russian political circles saw as a move that could subordinate Russia to the United States and Europe in its former sphere of influence.<sup>162</sup>

Between 1990 and 1996, overall almost 1,000 rounds of negotiations on the Sino-Russian border were held, resolving a great deal of the disputed border between Russia and China and increasing the contacts between the two formerly adversarial neighbours.<sup>163</sup> Russia ceded approximately 1,500 square kilometres of territory to China over the course of these negotiations which furthered improved the relationship between the two<sup>164</sup>. These meetings culminated in the April 26<sup>th</sup>, 1996 meeting of the heads of state in Shanghai in an attempt to put to rest the dispute over the border and move on to other topics of mutual concern. This was the first meeting of what would come to be known as the Shanghai Five and, with the upgrading of the Sino-Russian relationship, made 1996 an important year for the two countries.

The closer alignment between the two countries functioned not only to generate trust and reduce the likelihood of conflict but was also a means for both to express their

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<sup>160</sup> Bazhanov, Eugene (1995) in Shearman, Peter (ed.) (1995), *Russian Foreign Policy Since 1990*, Boulder: Westview Press: 166.

<sup>161</sup> Wilson, 28.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>163</sup> “Round-up: Sino-Russian Border, A Peaceful, Tranquil Tie”, *Xinhua News Agency*, 21 April 1996.

<sup>164</sup> Stokan, Sergei (1996), “Russia-China: An Alliance that Crosses Old Boundaries”, *Inter Press Service/Global Information Network*, 22 April 1996.

discontent with the increasingly dominant role of the United States in the international community and its increasing willingness to pursue military actions unilaterally, which threatened the creation an international system dominated by a single, unopposed, aggressive superpower. Yeltsin himself stated that, “Relations with China are extremely important to us from the global politics perspective...We can rest on the Chinese shoulder in our relations with the West. In that case the West will treat Russia more respectfully”.<sup>165</sup> The United States remained an important ally for Russia but Yeltsin had realized that Russia, at least in its weakened state, had little influence over US behaviour. The threat of alignment between Russia and China gave Yeltsin at least one card to play during times when he felt that Russia was either being ignored or undervalued by the United States. Strategic balancing once again became part of Russian foreign policy as Yeltsin realized that this was one of the few avenues open to the former superpower to attract greater attention to Moscow’s concerns and needs.

Joseph Cheng notes that China also saw the value in a partnership with Russia which was in part defined by the need for both countries to maintain a constructive relationship with the United States while pursuing multipolarity. Cheng points out that

Naturally they (Chinese leaders) hoped to accelerate the trend towards multipolarity, and to be able to check the U.S.’s attempt to dominate international affairs. This was actually the foundation for the Sino-Russian strategic partnership. Chinese leaders believed that both China and Russia accorded high priority to their respective major-power status and diplomatic traditions; but they too had to maintain cordial relations with the Western countries, and especially the U.S..<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> As cited in Lukin, 305.

<sup>166</sup> Cheng, Joseph Y.S. (2004), “Challenges to China’s Russia Policy in the Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century”, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 34(4): 484.

The point of the strategic partnership, at least from the viewpoint of China, was to balance the US while refraining from anything that could be construed as antagonistic. Neither China nor Russia held enough sway to balance the United States on their own but on issues of mutual interest, particularly sovereignty and non-interference, the pooled influence of both countries would have more sway than either would have on their own.

However, suggesting that the Sino-Russian rapprochement in the 1990s was driven primarily by mutual opposition to a unipolar world led by the United States would be somewhat naïve. Russia and China shared a host of interests that were served by improved relations. Economically, Russia represented a potential market for Chinese goods, particularly as manufacturing in Russia slowed dramatically as a result of the economic crises of the early 1990s. On the other side of the coin, for Russia China represented a valuable market for Russian arms since the United States and the countries of Western Europe maintained arms embargos against the Chinese state.

From a security perspective the improvement of relations also made sense. Both Russia and China shared security concerns, particularly in Central Asia, surrounding international smuggling, drug trafficking, and terrorism which was better addressed through greater cooperation.

### **Impact of Border Negotiations**

While bilateral relations continued to improve, the meetings of the Shanghai Five not only began to see real results in terms of border demarcation and reduction of troop levels but the group also began to expand the purposes of their meetings. The April 26<sup>th</sup>, 1996 meeting between the leaders of China, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and

Kazakhstan in Shanghai was the origin of the name “Shanghai Five”. During this meeting a “Treaty on Strengthening Trust in Military Affairs in the Border Regions”<sup>167</sup> was signed. While not completely settling the border issues, it was a big step towards the complete demilitarization of the borders as all countries agreed to establish non-military zones and to exchange military information regarding exercises within 100 kilometres of the border.<sup>168</sup> This atmosphere of mutual trust springing from the April 26<sup>th</sup> meeting came to be called the “Shanghai Spirit” and the grouping itself, the Shanghai Five.

Approximately a year later the Shanghai Five signed two more agreements: on the reduction of military forces in border areas to a “level commensurate only with the requirements of defense”<sup>169</sup> and to avoid the use of force or threats of such. These were largely symbolic. Certainly the Chinese interpretation portrayed China as acting generously from a position of strength because neither the Central Asian states nor Russia could have credibly used, or threatened to use force against China as they struggled with domestic issues. The Almaty Declaration which arose from the third meeting of the Shanghai Five in the Kazakh capital in 1998 went beyond border issues to declare the dedication of its signatories to mutually combating security threats such as ethnic separatism, religious fundamentalism, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and other cross border crimes.<sup>170</sup> This expanded mandate would form an important basis for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization when the group officially adopted this name in 2001 following on the suggestion of Jiang Zemin that the group be made into a “regular and

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<sup>167</sup> This agreement would come to be known as the Shanghai Declaration.

<sup>168</sup> Akihiro, 262.

<sup>169</sup> Zhuangzhi, Sun (2004), “New and Old Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Sino-Central Asian Relations”, *Review of International Affairs* 4: 600.

<sup>170</sup> Chung, Chien-peng (2004), The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: China’s Changing Influence in Central Asia, *China Quarterly*, 180: 990.

institutionalized mechanism for multilateral cooperation” and that Uzbekistan be added as a member.<sup>171</sup>

The fact that the institutionalization of the SCO was originally the suggestion of the Chinese leadership may be the reason that so many academic accounts tend to focus on the benefits of the organization for China, oftentimes either ignoring or downplaying the benefits that the organization has had for Russia, not only in terms of Russia’s relationship with Central Asia but also in terms of Russia’s relationship with China and the United States as well.

### **Russia and the United States: The Changing Relationship**

While border negotiations had, since 1989, assisted Moscow and Beijing in resolving their differences and in coming to see each other as valuable partners, Russia’s relationship with the United States underwent a number of changes as a result of the changed balance of power between the two following the collapse of the USSR. Initially, Russia was highly dependent on the West, particularly the United States, for investment and assistance as the difficult transition from communism to capitalism was attempted in the early 1990s. Unfortunately, Russia’s attempt to quickly privatize and transition to a western-style market economy was beset by massive problems from the outset. Privatization was handled poorly, with Russian citizens all given stakes in what were formerly state-owned enterprises but few of them knew the value of these stakes and were quick to sell them off. This resulted in the majority of Russian companies being owned by a small number of individuals with few benefits for the average citizen. There were massive layoffs as employment was no longer guaranteed under the new economic

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 991.

system. The transition to a market economy also meant that Russian companies had to restructure and rid themselves of redundant employees in a drive to make Russian business and industry competitive internationally. The ruble crashed in 1998 and Russia's economy was in tatters as a result of ill-planned reforms in economic governance.

In the face of these difficulties Russia looked to the West, and the United States, for assistance but found that the levels of support that had been expected were not forthcoming. Eric Shiraev writes that, "The expected massive influx of American and western assistance never materialized. There was no Marshall Plan prepared for Russia. The country's leadership realized that it had to use its own, already drained resources".<sup>172</sup> This lack of aid began to lead towards a drift in Russian-American relations under Yeltsin, particularly after the economic collapse of 1998, and the NATO campaign in Serbia, undertaken without UN sanction, which exacerbated the disconnect between Russia and the United States.<sup>173</sup>

In the face of the NATO bombing of Serbia and the economic collapse of the preceding year, anti-American sentiment reached a high-point. Keith Bush, writing in 1999 for the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), states that the bombing of Serbia "brought to a head the growing sense of frustration, impotence, and irrelevance felt by most Russians as their nation was sidelined on the international stage by the sole remaining superpower, and their economy continued to deteriorate—for which many blamed Western advisers and international financial institutions. The NATO

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<sup>172</sup> Shiraev, Eric (2005), "Russia's view of America in a Historic Perspective" in Shlapentokh, Vladimir, Joshua Woods, and Shiraev, Eric (eds.) (2005), *America: Sovereign Defender or Cowboy Nation?*, Burlington: Ashgate: 48.

<sup>173</sup> Goldgeier, James M. and McFaul, Michael (2003), *Power and Purpose: U.S. Policy toward Russia after the Cold War*, Washington: Brookings Institute Press: 254.

bombing campaign exacerbated these sentiments to the extent that most polls showed over 80 percent-and sometimes up to 98 percent-of respondents condemning the U.S. and NATO".<sup>174</sup> Furthermore, proposals to employ missile defence systems drew criticisms from the Russian government as potential violations of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty with the potential to undermine Russia's nuclear deterrent.<sup>175</sup>

It should also be noted that it was during the second term of Boris Yeltsin that Sino-Russian rapprochement began in earnest, in part due to this disillusionment and growing distrust of the United States. China shared many of Russia's concerns over the increasing domination of world affairs by the United States and favoured a multipolar world system. With Russia and China being geographic neighbours it is likely that an improved relationship between the two was inevitable since hostile relations were in the interests of neither. US and NATO actions in Serbia and the proposed missile defence system simply made Russia realize the value of China much more quickly than is likely they would have had US-Russian relations met the expectations of the Yeltsin government.

However, while US actions contributed to the growing discord between the two countries, Russia's own role in this must also be taken into account. Lilia Shevtsova argues that the perceived role of Russia in the international community as that of a great power, something which Yeltsin and the elites in Russian power circles clung to perhaps to lessen the embarrassment of Russia's fall in stature internationally, made US-Russian relations difficult when the United States was not willing to humour the Yeltsin

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<sup>174</sup> Bush, Keith (1999), "U.S.-Russia Relations: A Time of Troubles", *Comparative Connections*, 1(1): 29. Last accessed 20 Jun 2007.

<http://www.csis.org/media/isis/pubs/9902q.pdf>.

<sup>175</sup> Wilson, 34.

administration's delusions of grandeur. Shevtsova points out that, "A strong belief among the Russian political class that a great-power role was the crucial consolidating factor in Russia, and the only way for Russia to survive as an entity, was a major cause of the growing rift between the United States and Russia".<sup>176</sup> She goes on to argue that this tension between the United States and Russia could have been resolved if Russia was willing to accept a lesser role in the international community as simply another country rather than a great power, as well as US hegemony in international affairs.<sup>177</sup> This was not a role that Yeltsin was willing to take on though and as a result he saw China as somewhat of a natural ally in Russia's opposition to US hegemony in international affairs. Border negotiations in meetings of Shanghai Five had also been increasing trust in the Sino-Russian relationship and their joint opposition to a unipolar world helped to make the benefits of a positive relationship between the two countries more valuable to both sides.

When Vladimir Putin took office in 2000 there was little perceptible change in Russia's opposition to the US domination of world politics. In fact, the *Foreign Policy Conception of the Russian Federation*, released in 2000 shortly after Putin had taken office, declared "...new challenges and threats to the national interests of Russia are emerging in international affairs. There is a growing trend towards the establishment of a unipolar world order, with economic and power domination by the United States".<sup>178</sup> In addition to this, the Shanghai Five, meeting in Dushanbe in July of 2000, also stated their

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<sup>176</sup> Shevtsova, Lilia (2005), *Putin's Russia: Revised and Expanded Edition*, Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: 150.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 150.

<sup>178</sup> "Foreign Policy Conception of the Russian Federation", 2000 in Melville, Andrei and Shackleina, Tatiana (eds) (2005), *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition: Concepts and Realities*, New York: Central European University Press.

opposition to “the use of force not sanctioned by the UN Security Council in international affairs, and all attempts by any state or group of states to monopolize, in their own interests, decision-making with regard to global and regional problems”.<sup>179</sup> This seemed to suggest little change in Russian policy towards the United States. Putin, however, was by nature a pragmatist who recognized the necessity of ties with both the United States and China for the future well-being of the Russian state.

Despite the seemingly negative rhetoric directed at the United States in both Russia’s foreign policy conception and the 2000 Dushanbe declaration of the Shanghai Five, Russia did not object to plans to build US military bases in Central Asia on the heels of the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks in 2001 and in fact welcomed the United States to the region, in part because Russia was also troubled by the radical Islamist regime in Afghanistan and hoped for the Western recognition of its actions in Chechnya as part of the worldwide “war on terrorism”. Wilson observes that following the attacks Putin made an offer of “military intelligence, use of Russian air corridors, sanctioning of U.S. airbases in Soviet Central Asia, and increased assistance to the Northern Alliance in Tajikistan. Putin’s decision to position Russia squarely in the U.S. camp evoked considerable surprise”.<sup>180</sup> Shevtsova also notes that this was also significant in that Russia “for the first time in its history recognized the hegemony of another state and voluntarily chose to play junior partner”.<sup>181</sup> Putin and Bush also developed a close relationship during Putin’s first term and this helped to ease some of the tensions that had

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<sup>179</sup>Shanghai Five (2000), “Dushanbe Declaration by the Heads of State of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People’s Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation, and the Republic of Tajikistan” in : Melville, Andrei and Shakleina, Tatiana (eds) (2005), *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition: Concepts and Realities*, New York: Central European University Press: pp. 147-163.

<sup>180</sup> Wilson, 165.

<sup>181</sup> Shevtsova, 205.

built up during the final years of Yeltsin. Putin was more balanced in his temperament and approach to international relations than Yeltsin had been and at least initially sought to place Russia at an equal distance from both the United States and China.

Despite the close relationship between Putin and Bush, as well as the improved relationship between the two countries, disagreements between the two countries soon surfaced and seemed to threaten the amicable relationship between Bush and Putin. The 2003 US led military actions against Iraq—a former Soviet ally in the region--were heavily criticized by Russia, largely due to the fact that action was taken without U.N. sanction and for reasons that many saw as exaggerated at best and fabricated at worst. China chose not to openly criticize the US for the pre-emptive strike against Iraq, instead remaining largely silent but both France and Germany came out strongly against the invasion of Iraq and Russia chose to join with them in criticizing the Bush administration's actions. Lilia Shevtsova cites a number of reasons for Russia's opposition to US action in Iraq, first of these being a basic desire to limit US influence, "thus protecting Russia's great-power role".<sup>182</sup> In addition, Putin worried that support for the war in Iraq could lead to hostility in the Muslim states bordering Russia, as well as in Russia's own Muslim population. Furthermore, many political elites, according to Shevtsova, had expected either investments or other concessions from the US for Russia's support of US policy after September 11<sup>th</sup> which had never materialized. Finally, many of the political elites in Russia continued to find American hegemony unacceptable to Russia's own interests.<sup>183</sup> However, Russia did not seek a confrontation with the United States over Iraq but with European criticism also levelled at the United

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid, 266.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 266.

States Putin may have seen an opportunity to express his dissatisfaction with US unilateralism without standing alone in doing so. This is supported by the fact that there was shortly thereafter rapprochement between the two countries once again, with Russia signing on to the U.N. resolution that legitimized the US and British presence in Iraq.

Yet another set of events shortly thereafter further complicated the relationship between the two countries. This was the beginnings of what have come to be called the “Colour Revolutions” that swept pro-Western leaders into office in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, usually at the expense of leaders who had aligned themselves towards Russia. Georgia was the first of these countries to experience the largely bloodless form of revolution that came to be the standard when Eduard Shevardnadze was deposed and replaced by Mikheil Saakashvili in the “Rose Revolution” of December 2003. The Kremlin worked with Washington to ensure an orderly transition but once in office Saakashvili distanced himself from Moscow in favour of closer relations with the West, in particular the United States. Next was the Ukrainian “Orange Revolution” in 2004 which saw two elections, a drawn out process of vote recounts, and large scale protests before the pro-Western Victor Yushchenko was declared the new president of the Ukraine, defeating Viktor Yanukovich. Yanukovich had strong support from the Kremlin and there were even accusations that Russia was not only trying to influence the result of the elections but also assisting Yanukovich in his attempts at various forms of election fraud. Finally, in 2005 Kyrgyzstan had its own colour revolution, this time dubbed the “Tulip Revolution” which swept Kumanbek Bakiyev to power. His predecessor, Askar Akayev, was forced into exile in Russia.

All of these events took place in the former Soviet space, a region in which Russia still liked to perceive itself as the primary influence. The colour revolutions proved that this was no longer true. American support for the colour revolutions, whether tacit or explicit, was in direct conflict to Russia's goal of maintaining influence, and primacy, in what it considered the "near abroad" as they all swept pro-Western parties into power. The Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan must have been particularly tough to swallow for the Putin administration since Central Asia, of all of the post-Soviet space, perhaps with the exception of Belarus, remained closely tied to Moscow. While the Kremlin had supported the US presence in Central Asia the American role in supporting revolution in the post-Soviet space was seen as a threat not only to Russian interests in the region but also to Russia's great power status.

It was on the heels of the Tulip Revolution that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization released the Astana Declaration on July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2005 and the request contained within that the United States set a timeline for a withdrawal of troops from Central Asia. The Astana Declaration also once again reiterated the opposition of its members to the monopolization of world affairs, the violation of state sovereignty, and the primacy of international law. While the closing section of the Astana Declaration noted that the SCO did not seek to hurt the interests of any other states and did not constitute a bloc of any kind this was somewhat in contradiction to some parts of the declaration. Clearly, the request for the withdrawal of troops by the United States was meant to lessen US influence in the region, which was in the interests of Russia, China, and Uzbekistan at the very least.<sup>184</sup> The shared ideology of the SCO, particularly its dedication to multipolarity

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<sup>184</sup> Uzbekistan's president Islam Karimov, had come under heavy criticism from the United States from the violent clashes between police and protestors in Andijan which left a number of protestors dead. The

and the primacy of sovereignty and international law, meant that the SCO did constitute at least an ideological bloc if nothing else.

The Astana Declaration was immediately decried by American military officials as a case of “bullying” on the part of Russia and China, despite the fact that Uzbekistan was also said to have had a large role in drafting the request for US military withdrawal.<sup>185</sup> In fact, just 14 days after the release of the Astana Declaration Uzbekistan formally requested that the US military base at Karshi-Khanabad (K2) close within 6 months and also announced that Uzbekistan would also end all security cooperation with the United States in the war on terrorism, which was the pretext for the US presence in Central Asia.<sup>186</sup> Kyrgyzstan, the site of another US military base, asked for more money from the United States to maintain the lease on the base.

The Astana Declaration was followed up by a frenzy of diplomatic actions by the United States and Russia with Condoleezza Rice sent to tour the region to try and shore up US influence in October of 2005. Rice visited Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan but Uzbekistan was omitted from the tour.<sup>187</sup> Shortly thereafter the head of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Sergey Lavrov visited Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan in his own tour of the region. The goal of Lavrov’s trip was to solidify Russia’s new ascension in Central Asia. Putin also held a meeting with the Tajik president in early October to try

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request for the removal of antiterrorist coalition troops from Central Asia was seen by some as just as much a move on the part of Uzbekistan against the US as it was by China or Russia.

<sup>185</sup> Tyson, Ann Scott (2005), “Russia and China Bullying Central Asia, U.S. Says”, *Washington Post*, 15 July 2005: A19.

<sup>186</sup> For more information see Marten, Kimberly (2005), “Understanding the Impact of the K2 Closure”, *PONARS Policy Memo*, 401, 211-216. Last accessed 20 Jun 2007.

[http://www.csis.org/component/option,com\\_csis\\_pubs/task,view/id,2190/](http://www.csis.org/component/option,com_csis_pubs/task,view/id,2190/)

<sup>187</sup> “Condeleeza of the Independent States”, *Kommersant*, 14 October 2005. Last accessed 20 Jun 2007 <http://www.kommeresant.com/doc.asp?id=617663>

and ensure that the United States was not permitted to build a replacement military base in Tajikistan, which was considered by Russia to be somewhat of a weak ally.<sup>188</sup>

The Astana Declaration clearly marked a shift in the Russian-American balance in Central Asia. Whereas the United States had been welcomed into the region initially, not only by the Central Asian states themselves but also by Russia, it was now politely asked to leave, not by just the Central Asian states but Russia and China as well. While the SCO did not take a hostile or adversarial stance towards the US it was clear that Russia was flexing its newfound ability to balance the United States in the region through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

### **The Benefits of Regionalism**

In his article in *China Quarterly* Chien-peng Chung argued that the SCO and the “Shanghai Spirit” underlying it represents a “new regionalism” in the eyes of many Chinese scholars. Chung defines “old” regionalism as groupings of states with similar ideologies, shared history and culture, and similar economic systems, represented primarily by the European Union.<sup>189</sup> In contrast “new” regionalism is based on the expansion of trade and tackling of mutual problems, while placing little emphasis on the similarities between members. “Old” regionalism in this view is about surrendering sovereignty while the “new” regionalism of groups such as the SCO maintains sovereignty while allowing for the pursuit of shared goals.

The SCO seems to lie somewhere between both the “old” and “new” regionalisms, since the SCO is largely based around the belief in multilateralism and the

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<sup>188</sup>“Bases of the Argument, *Kommersant*, 6 October 2005. Last accessed 20 Jun 2007 <http://www.kommersant.com/doc.asp?id=615203>

<sup>189</sup> Chung, 992.

inviolability of state sovereignty but at the same time does not seek to surrender sovereignty in favour of greater integration, which places it between the two types of as defined by Chung. In fact, one aspect of the “old” regionalism of the EU also seems to be a possible factor in Russia’s continued participation in the SCO. The desire to tie Germany, a nation which had been the centre of two world wars, into Europe in a way that would make future aggression unlikely was one of the driving forces behind the creation of the European Union. A similar goal is at least one factor in Russia’s continued participation in the SCO. Apart from the other benefits of the organization, the increasingly complex interactions between Russia, China, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan under the rubric of the SCO may have an effect of tying China into Central Asia in a way that makes Sino-Russian conflict over the region less likely. There is no doubt that the increased presence of China in Central Asia has worried some, particularly as China continues to grow in strength economically and militarily, but at the same time there was little that a weakened Russia could or can do to prevent the growth of Chinese influence in the region. The SCO represents the best way that Russia has been given to manage the growing power of China and the attraction this will likely have for Central Asia.

In addition, Moscow wishes to regain its position as a great power in world politics, a position that it lost following the dramatic collapse of the USSR and the variety of problems that plagued Russia in the years following. The SCO has allowed Russia to share the burden of Central Asia with China, which has in some respects allowed Russia’s return to the region. On its own Russia is viewed with suspicion by some of Central Asia’s leaders, in particular Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan, due to fears that

Russia could seek renewed control over its former territories. The presence of China in the SCO not only allows Russia to share some of the economic burden of Central Asia but also reduces Russia's role enough that the SCO winds up being more appealing than those regional structures dominated solely by Russia, such as the CIS.

The regionalism of the SCO also allows for the sharing of political burdens in the context of Central Asia. A perfect example of this was the request contained in the 2005 Astana Declaration of the SCO that the US set a timeline for the withdrawal of troops from Central Asia. While it was rumoured that Uzbekistan had wanted US troops removed prior to the declaration and may have in fact pushed for the request to be included, the subsequent flurry of Russian action in Central Asia suggests that Vladimir Putin had also tired of the US presence. Since the statement was issued via the SCO it was not attributable to a single country and in fact a *Washington Post* article dated July 15, 2005, ten days after the release of the Astana Declaration quoted Richard B. Myers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as stating "It looks to me like two very large countries were trying to bully some smaller countries".<sup>190</sup> Both China and Russia shared the political burden of the Astana Declaration and the signatures of both countries on the declaration lent it greater influence than it may have had if the declaration been issued by Moscow or Beijing alone.

In fact, following the Astana Declaration there was a flurry of articles declaring the beginning of a "New Great Game"<sup>191</sup>, the revival of the of "Cold War Rivalry"<sup>192</sup> in

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<sup>190</sup> Tyson, A19.

<sup>191</sup> Bhadrakumar, M.K. (2005), "Foul play in the Great Game", *Asia Times Online*, 13 July 2005. Last accessed 20 Jun 2007.

[http://atimes01.atimes.com/atimes/Central\\_Asia/GG13Ag01.html](http://atimes01.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/GG13Ag01.html)

<sup>192</sup> Wright, Robin and Lynch, Colum (2005), "Cold War Rivalry Reviving in Central Asia", *Washington Post*, 13 July 2005: A13.

Central Asia, and a resurgence of Russia in Central Asia. The statements by top officials and the number of articles appearing in mainstream news sources suggests that the Astana Declaration was taken quite seriously and this was in part due to the presence of both Russia and China in the organization. One article appearing on the Eurasianet.org, a website created by the Soros Foundation for the study of regional developments in Central Asia, on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2005 just one day after the release of the Astana Declaration, declared that “The SCO request offers the clearest sign to date that US prestige in Central Asia is eroding. It additionally provides proof that Russia and China are teaming up to undermine the United States’ strategic position”.<sup>193</sup> The majority of articles that followed on the heels of the Astana Declaration also chose to focus on the gains Russia had made in Central Asia through the SCO, while for the most part ignoring China. This is somewhat strange considering the fact that the majority of academic literature on the SCO tends to identify the group as a Chinese creation and one that serves Chinese interests in the region. However, with the reassertion of Russian interests in the “near abroad” that has seen Russian interference in the Ukrainian elections, disagreements with Georgia that are largely believed to stem from the Western leaning of the state, and a renewed drive for greater influence in Central Asia, it is perhaps Russia that has the most to gain from an anti-American slant to SCO statements.

Currently, it is Russia that faces the greatest competition in region, largely due to the fact that the Putin administration believes Russia should, because of geography and history, have a pre-eminent role in Central Asia. China’s interests clearly lie in having a role in Central Asia but thus far Beijing has pursued a restrained policy in the region

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<sup>193</sup> Blagov, Sergei (2005), “The Geopolitical Balance in Central Asia Tilts Toward Russia”, *Eurasia Insight*, 6 July 2005. Last accessed 20 Jun 2007.  
<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav070605a.shtml>

while also avoiding any actions that could be seen as a challenge by Moscow. This could change but for the time being it is Russia and the United States who are contesting pre-eminence in Central Asia, with the Chinese government content to slowly expand their influence there with the help of Russia and while being careful not to alienate their neighbour, something the United States clearly does not fret over.

### **Russia between the United States and China: Observations on the SCO**

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization has proved to be a boon for Russian foreign policy in the region of Central Asia. The primary benefit of the SCO for Russia has been its usefulness in helping the Putin administration to navigate the waters between the United States and China in the region. China has interests in Central Asia that it would likely pursue, with or without the blessing of Russia, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has helped Russia to tie China not only into the region, but also to tie China to Russia in Central Asia. China's regional policy is now inextricably linked to Russia policy in the region, and vice versa. This has benefits for both sides since they can combat regional problems together while being fairly certain of the other's activities. Burden-sharing is one of the benefits of regionalism and for a state like Russia, still recovering from the collapses and mismanagements of its early years, necessary. China is a major partner in the region and one that is less likely, at least for the time being, to seek to undermine Russia's own influence. Therefore, Moscow can share the burdens of Central Asia with Beijing while not having to worry that the Chinese state is actively seeking to expand its role in the region at their expense. The SCO also works to build greater trust between Russia and China, not only regionally but bilaterally

as well which is quite important for both countries. Neither Russia nor China would benefit from a climate of suspicion and acrimony in the region and the SCO helps to ensure at least a little trust and cooperation between the two regional powers.

The opposition of Moscow and Beijing to US foreign policy has also played a role in the development of the SCO, as it has provided a “common enemy” for China and Russia. This has made their value to one another greater than it would have been if either or both countries enjoyed a healthy relationship with the US. In addition, the tacit US support for the colour revolutions also drove Uzbekistan, which had formerly been drawing closer to the West, back towards the less judgemental arms of Russia and China. It remains to be seen what effect the loss of this “common enemy” would have on the SCO but the longer interactions continue under the organization the more entrenched it will become as a policy tool for Central Asia, China, and Russia.

Even if the SCO does not evolve past its current form, its value as a “talking shop” between Russia, China and the four participating states of Central Asia should not be underestimated. It has served Russian interests in Central Asia by allowing Russia to balance the influence of the United States and given a shared voice to Russia’s anxiety over US foreign policy. It has helped Russia resolve long standing border disputes with China and drawn the two states closer together than they had been in decades, as well as drawing Uzbekistan back into the fold with China’s counterbalancing influence. The SCO has helped Russia place itself between the United States and China, not as an adversary but as a gatekeeper to Central Asia.

## **Chapter 4:**

### **The New Russia:**

### **Beyond the Astana Declaration**

It has now been close to two years since the Astana Declaration was released. As was mentioned earlier, the declaration was initially followed by a flurry of mainstream press on the SCO and whether a “New Great Game” had truly begun in the region. Looking back on the events that followed the Astana Declaration a case certainly could be made that geopolitical competition has once again become the norm in Central Asia.

This may be jumping the gun a bit though. While the Astana Declaration was followed by a flurry of diplomatic action, first by the United States and then by Russia, the rhetoric of the SCO was tuned down the following year in the “Declaration on the 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the SCO” by the heads of its constituent member states. While this declaration did contain some carefully worded warnings to the United States, such as stating that “models of social development should not be “exported”” and that differences in development, culture, and political systems should be respected, it contained nothing more explicit than this.<sup>194</sup> The rest of the document focused on extolling the friendship between the SCO member states and reviewing the accomplishments and future goals of the organization.

But while 2006 did not see the SCO repeat the direct and confrontational language of the Astana Declaration, Russia’s relationship with the United States has continued to deteriorate. With oil prices reaching record highs, Russia began to regain

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<sup>194</sup> Shanghai Cooperation Organization (2006), *Declaration on the 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the SCO*, 15 June 2006. Last accessed 23 Jun 2007.

[http://english.scosummit2006.org/en\\_zxbb/2006-06/15/content\\_755.htm](http://english.scosummit2006.org/en_zxbb/2006-06/15/content_755.htm)

some of its former economic strength and has begun to reassert itself internationally and as it has done so confrontations between the US and Russia have grown.

### **The Bear Reawakens**

Under Putin the United States and Russia have had a rollercoaster relationship, with Bush and Putin starting off as good friends and Russia welcoming the United States into Central Asia on the heels of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Things started to change by Putin's second term in office, when the Bush administration tacit support of the colour revolutions, NATO expansion, and unilateralism put a strain on the relationship. First was the Astana Declaration and Russia's diplomatic offensive in Central Asia. On the heels of this Russia took yet another provocative action by deploying a new fleet of Topol-M missiles that could penetrate US missile defences and by the end of 2005 registered the "fastest increase in nuclear spending since the run-up to the Cuban missile crisis".<sup>195</sup> While Russia still lagged far behind the United States in military spending as well as military technology Putin made it clear that Moscow was determined to retain their nuclear deterrent if nothing else.

Russia also began using energy supplies as political tools, providing low cost energy to friendly former Soviet states but also cutting off energy over price disputes to governments that had become adversarial to Moscow. First was Ukraine on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006, which while obstinately about pricing was believed by many to be Moscow's way of expressing its disapproval of Ukraine's growing relationship with the West and stated

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<sup>195</sup> Nelson, Frazer (2005), "Putin's Show of Strength Triggers Fear of Fresh Nuclear Arms Race", *Mosnews*, 26 Dec 2005. Last accessed 6 Jan 2007.  
<http://www.mosnews.com/commentary/2005/12/26/armsshow.shtml>

intention to join NATO.<sup>196</sup> Later in January came two attacks on Russian pipelines supplying gas to Georgia and Armenia which Russia was accused of orchestrating after having doubled the pricing of natural gas exports to the two countries earlier in the month.<sup>197</sup> Russian relations with Georgia in particular had plummeted following the “Rose Revolution” in 2003 and the new pro-Western orientation of the former Russian territory.

The recently proposed missile-defences in Poland and the Czech Republic have further exasperated relations between the United States and Russia. Putin has stated that this poses a potential threat to Russia’s nuclear deterrent and on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2007 Moscow tested a new multiple-warhead intercontinental missile, the RS-24, which carries multiple independent warheads all of which can lock onto different targets.<sup>198</sup> On June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2007 the language coming from Russia became even more reminiscent of the Cold War when Vladimir Putin, speaking to foreign reporters, said that Moscow could target nuclear weapons at Europe should the proposed radar system in the Czech Republic and interceptor missiles in Poland get the go-ahead.<sup>199</sup>

This was the starkest language used in what has been an escalating war of words between Moscow and Washington, with the latter accusing the Putin administration of weakening Russia’s damaged democracy, interfering in the affairs of neighbouring states, supporting non-democratic regimes, and using energy supplies as a tool of foreign policy.

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<sup>196</sup> For an overview of the dispute see Finn, Peter (2006), “Russia Cuts Off Gas To Ukraine In Controversy Over Pricing”, *Washington Post*, 1 Jan 2006. Last accessed 20 Jun 2007.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/01/01/AR2006010100401.html>

<sup>197</sup> “Russia blamed for ‘gas sabotage’”, *BBC News*, 22 Jan 2006. Last accessed 20 Jun 2007.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4637034.stm>

<sup>198</sup> Harding, Luke (2007), “Russian missile test adds to arms race fears”, *Guardian Unlimited*, 30 May 2007. Last accessed 20 Jun 2007.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/russia/article/0,,2091130,00.html>

<sup>199</sup> “Putin: Missiles may target Europe”, *CNN.com*, 4 Jun 2007 Last accessed 20 Jun 2007.

<http://www.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/europe/06/04/russia.putin.ap/index.html>

Moscow argues that the US is seeking international hegemony and a world order based solely on the model of, and led by, the United States. The result is that relations between Moscow and Washington have sunk to the lowest levels they have been at since the end of the Cold War. Russia, with its newly reinvigorated economy, has deigned to play the junior partner role that it seemed to be assigned in the post-Cold War era and Washington has been unwilling to accept any other country as an equal, at least under the current administration.

### **The Bear and the Dragon**

While relations with the US have degenerated, over the last few years Russia's relationship with China has grown increasingly close. At the end of 2005 the two countries held their first ever large-scale war games together, with Russia remaining China's main supplier of military equipment. At the same time the two countries have repeatedly expressed their belief in a multilateral world system and there has been little explicit tension between the two countries. It has been a truism that relations between Russia and China have, in the past, been dependent on each other's relations with the United States. With Russia's relationship with the United States at its lowest point since the Cold War it is very likely that Russia will seek to strengthen ties with China, both in the context of the SCO and bilaterally. China remains not only a valuable partner regionally but internationally as well, as China's backing can lend greater weight to Russian concerns.

Over the course of recent tensions over the proposed missile defences in Eastern Europe, the Chinese government has defended Russian concerns, at least to a degree.

The *People's Daily*, the mouthpiece of Beijing stated, "As the Russian economy grows stronger, the US cannot simply sit back and relax. It must continue to contain the nation to prevent it from rising again. By deploying its national missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic, Washington is no doubt targeting Russia which has reacted strongly".<sup>200</sup> China has its own concerns regarding the deployment of missile-defences in East Asia, particularly Japan and Australia, and thus could seek to pursue a coordinated strategy with Russia, as a Chinese expert at the Hong Kong based think tank Kanwa pointed out on June 4<sup>th</sup>.<sup>201</sup> Thus the growing distance between the United States and Russia has given the Sino-Russian relationship even more room to grow ahead of the August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2007 Bishkek summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

### **Bishkek and Beyond**

Since the Astana Declaration Russia's position in Central Asia has vastly improved. The US military base in Uzbekistan has closed and Russia ensured that no other base was built to replace it. At the same times the Manas air force base in Kyrgyzstan remains but with an exponential increase in the rent paid for the land and as the only significant US presence in Central Asia. Russia has also concluded a number of deals with Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan that ensure that Russia remains the middleman in the sale of Central Asian gas and oil to Europe, trumping US attempts to convince these states to build pipelines with alternate routes.

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<sup>200</sup> "Are we on the brink of a new Cold War", *People's Daily*, 9 May 2007. Last accessed 20 Jun 2007. [http://english.people.com.cn/200705/09/eng20070509\\_373093.html](http://english.people.com.cn/200705/09/eng20070509_373093.html)

<sup>201</sup> Bhadrakumar, M.K. (2007), "US missiles hit Russia where it hurts", *Asia Times Online*, 7 Jun 2007. Last accessed 20 Jun 2007. [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/central\\_asia/if07ag01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/central_asia/if07ag01.html)

It is very likely given the current state of affairs between Russia, China, and the United States that the 2007 Bishkek Declaration will contain strong criticisms of the current path of US foreign policy and once again reaffirm the dedication of its members to a multilateral world. The SCO has helped Russia rebuild its position in Central Asia but with the Russian state resurgent internationally and growing in economic power it remains to be seen if the SCO will still be seen as a necessary tool.

As was mentioned earlier, Russia has other multilateral organizations, such as the CIS and the CSTO which include the Central Asian states and which Moscow dominates. With Uzbekistan rejoining the CSTO and moving closer to Russia there is a good chance that Russia will choose to work through these organizations first. However, China's presence remains a fact in Central Asia and one the Moscow cannot erase due to China's shared borders with Russia itself as well as Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan and interests in the region. China is also a valuable partner for Russia, not only as a market for military goods but also as a means of balancing the United States and it seems unlikely that the Kremlin will want to take any actions that could upset Beijing. China thus far has avoided any actions that could be seen as a challenge to Moscow's dominant position in Central Asia and there seems little reason for a Sino-Russian split anytime in the near future.

As a result, it seems quite likely that the SCO will remain a valuable tool for Moscow to use in managing its relationships in Central Asia. The SCO has helped Russia assuage some of the fears of domination held by Uzbekistan, has given Russia a way of balancing the United States in the region by pooling its influence with China, and has helped tie China into the region in such a way that Russia remains the dominant

partner. Unless serious disagreements arise between Beijing and Moscow, which seems unlikely at least for the immediate future, there seems little reason for Moscow to distance itself from the SCO or seek to weaken it.

## **Conclusion: Great Games, Cold Wars, and the Future of the SCO**

With the recent deterioration in the Russian-American relationship a lot of loaded terms are getting thrown around again. In particular, more and more references are made back to the Great Game or the Cold War periods, usually to suggest that it is in this way that the Russian-American relationship is heading. What this misses of course is the fact that the international situation is much different than it was during either of these periods and they are unlikely to ever be repeated. Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and the United States are all tied to one another in a myriad of ways that makes the repeat of a Cold War or Great Game not only unlikely, but almost impossible.

Regional organizations like the SCO are a new method of managing relationships that used to be based almost solely on power differentials but are now coming to be based to a greater degree on the mutual benefits of cooperation, economics, and diplomacy. At the time of writing, the SCO still remains in its infancy, just having celebrated its 5<sup>th</sup> year of existence in 2006, and a great deal remains unresolved regarding the exact purpose of the organization. In particular, it will be of great interest to see if the SCO does become a tool of regional economic integration, which has become a goal of the organization, or if it remains primarily a regional security structure and method of geopolitical balancing.

The next decade holds great promise for the SCO, as it has the potential to evolve into a much more effective regional actor if it manages to expand its mandate. Currently the SCO's further development hinges on the relationships amongst its constituent members and it is likely that it will continue to do so for the near future. China and Russia have the ability to cripple the SCO should they choose to withdraw or wilfully

weaken it. Uzbekistan or Kazakhstan's withdrawal or resistance could weaken the group as well. However, the longer the group is in existence and the more duties it takes on, the greater the ties will become between its members. The greater these ties, the harder it will be to sever them.

A number of factors continue to drive SCO integration and make it unlikely that Russia will choose to either significantly weaken the organization or withdraw from it completely. First, Russia's long domination of Central Asia has created suspicion of Russian-dominated regional organizations and this is unlikely to disappear anytime soon. The states of Central Asia benefit more from an organization such as the SCO which provides a second regional hegemon as a balance to Russian domination and this makes the revival of the CIS or CSTO unlikely. Russia does not have the ability to provide large enough incentives to working through groups such as the CIS now, nor does it seem likely that it could in the future. Both Central Asia and Russia have interests in continued interactions however and the SCO is currently the best option available for both sides.

The increasing ties between Russia and China and increasing trust under the rubric of the SCO also make it unlikely that Moscow will seek to weaken the organization or to withdraw from it, which would likely be viewed as hostile by Beijing. This could lead to an increase in Chinese influence in Central Asia bilaterally, with little ability for Moscow to control or channel this influence. A benefit of the SCO is that it ties Chinese influence in the region, at least to a degree, to Moscow and this helps ensure that Russia at least has some say in Chinese regional policy. Without the SCO Russia would not only be competing with the US for influence in Central Asia, but likely also

with China, and this would make Russian influence in the region that much harder to preserve.

The SCO has helped Russia redefine its relationship with Central Asia on friendly terms, has brought Beijing and Moscow closer than they have been since the 1960s, and helped Russia earn a small victory over US expansion in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. It has helped Moscow resolve the historical contradictions and conflicts in its relationships with China, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan, which was not achieved by Russia's other attempt at a comprehensive regional grouping, the CIS. In the current geopolitical atmosphere the SCO is the most effective tool for preserving Russian influence in Central Asia. Changes in the geopolitical situation could, of course, change this. Rapprochement between Moscow and Washington could remove one of the factors currently driving the SCO and the increasingly close Sino-Russian ties but the longer the SCO is in existence the more likely it is that it will become entrenched in Russian foreign policy and a permanent tool of Moscow's in the region. As long as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization continues to benefit Russian policy in the region Moscow will remain a willing participant.

## Appendix 1

### A Select Chronology of Major SCO Events 1996-2006<sup>202</sup>

#### 1996

- April 26th, 1996: Heads of state for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China, Russia and Tajikistan meet in Shanghai and sign an agreement on deepening military trust in border regions. This meeting was later named as the first summit meeting of the "Shanghai Five", the predecessor of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

#### 1997

- April 24th, 1997: Second summit of the heads of state of the Shanghai Five meet in Moscow, where an agreement on mutual reduction of military forces in border regions was signed

#### 1998

- July 3rd, 1998: The third Summit of Shanghai Five took place in Alma-Ata. Russian President Boris Yeltsin could not attend due to illness and Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov attended the summit in his place. The focus of the meeting was security and regional cooperation and the "Almaty joint statement" was signed.

#### 1999

- August 24th-26th, 1999: Fourth summit of the Shanghai Five took place in Bishkek. Opinions were exchanged on matters of regional security, regional cooperation, and the current international situation. The Bishkek Declaration was signed.

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<sup>202</sup> All information taken from the SCO website, where a more detailed chronology can be found.  
<http://www.sectSCO.org/html/00030.html>

**2000**

- March, 2000: First meeting of the Ministers of Defence of the Shanghai Five member states was held in Astana.
- July 4th, 2000: First meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Shanghai Five states took place in Dushanbe.
- July 5th, 2000: The fifth meeting of the Shanghai Five took place in Dushanbe. Islam Karimov participated as an observer for the first time. States exchanged opinions on matters of multilateral cooperation, important regional and international problems of common interest. The Dushanbe Declaration was signed.

**2001**

- June 14th-15th, 2001: The first meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization took place in Shanghai and the Declaration on the Establishment of Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Shanghai Convention on Fighting Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism were signed. Uzbekistan was formally made part of the organization.
- September 13th-14th, 2001: First meeting of Heads of Government of SCO member-states took place in Alma-Ata and matters of regional trade and economic cooperation were discussed and a condemnation of the September 11th terrorist attacks was issued.
- October 10th-11th, 2001: Shanghai Cooperation Organization special meeting held in Bishkek to carry out consultations on security problems in Afghanistan and the

Central Asian region and methods of strengthening the struggle against terrorism, separatism, and extremism.

## **2002**

- January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2002: Extraordinary meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs is held in Beijing to exchange opinions on the situation in Afghanistan, the international “war against terrorism”, and increasing the international role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.
- June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2002: Second meeting of the SCO Heads of State in St. Petersburg. The Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Agreement on the Regional Antiterrorist Structure, and the first formal Declaration of the Heads of SCO Member States were signed.
- October, 2002: China and Kyrgyzstan hold first joint antiterrorist exercises near the Kyrgyz-Chinese border.

## **2003**

- April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2003: Meeting of SCO Ministers of Foreign Affairs took place in Alma-Ata and drafts of emblem and flag for the SCO were agreed upon.
- May 28<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup>, 2003: Third summit of SCO heads of state in Moscow. An agreement was signed on the formation and administration of the SCO budget. Regulations for the SCO Secretariat and RATS were confirmed and the flag and emblem were approved. Moscow Declaration signed by heads of state.

- August 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>, 2003: Joint anti-terrorist exercises carried out by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China, Russia, and Tajikistan.
- September 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup>, 2003: OSCE meeting on the prevention and struggle against acts of terrorism held in Lisbon. China's ambassador in Portugal spoke of behalf of the SCO on regional anti-terrorist actions taken by the SCO.
- September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2003: SCO Charter officially comes into force.
- September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2003: Meeting of heads of government of SCO member states held in Beijing. Regional economic integration cooperation discussed, as was accelerating the construction of the SCO permanent bodies (Secretariat, RATS). Heads of Government received by Hu Jintao, Chairman of the CCP.
- October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2003: First meeting of SCO RATS Council in Tashkent. First chairman elected and rules of procedure drafted.

## **2004**

- January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2004: Official inauguration of the SCO Secretariat held.
- June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2004: Meeting of SCO Heads of State of held in Tashkent. Regulations were adopted on formal observer status. Tashkent Declaration was signed primarily detailing the achievements of the SCO to date and future goals of the organization, particularly enhanced regional cooperation on security and trade. The official ceremony establishing the SCO RATS in Tashkent was held on the eve of the summit. Mongolia was also given formal observer status in the SCO.
- September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2004: Meeting of SCO Heads of Government held in Bishkek. 2005 budget approved.

**2005**

- July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2005: Meeting of SCO Heads of State held in Astana. Astana Declaration released and a formal request for withdrawal of US military bases following the completion of NATO action in Afghanistan was made. Meeting was attended by the presidents of Mongolia, vice-president of Iran, prime minister of Pakistan, and India's minister of foreign affairs in addition to the SCO Heads of State.
- September 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>, 2005: At the invitation of Kofi Annan a delegation of the SCO, headed by the SCO Secretary-General, attended the 60<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations as observers and the Secretary-General of the SCO addressed the UN General Assembly.
- October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2005: Meeting of SCO Heads of Government held in Moscow. For the first time, representatives from Iran, Mongolia, and Pakistan participated as observers. An emphasis was placed on regional cooperation on trade and the exploration of gas and oil deposits. SCO budget for 2006 was approved.

**2006**

- June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2006: Sixth meeting of the SCO Heads of State and the fifth anniversary of the creation of the SCO in Shanghai, attend by representatives from SCO observer states Mongolia, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. ASEAN and CIS representatives were also present. Declaration on the Fifth Anniversary of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization signed detailing the progress of the SCO and

reaffirming the commitment of SCO members to the UN, multilateralism, non-intervention in one another's affairs, and the principle of sovereignty.

- September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2006: Meeting of SCO Heads of Government held in Dushanbe with a focus on regional economic cooperation. 2007 SCO budget adopted.

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