



IS THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION MAKING A “NATO OF THE EAST”?

Muhammad Naveed Akhtar
Research Scholar PhD
Department of International Relations
Federal Urdu University of Arts, Sciences & Technology
Karachi – Pakistan
waleed_1a@yahoo.com

Dr. Faisal Javaid
Assistant Professor
Department of International Relations
Federal Urdu University of Arts, Sciences & Technology
Karachi – Pakistan
faisal.javaid@fuuast.edu.pk

Abstract

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is the largest regional origination in which Russia and China are founding members and recently Iran’s bid for full membership has been approved during the 21st summit of the SCO. These countries are against American hegemony and covertly and overtly demonstrate their concerns. SCO has been conducting military exercises regularly since 2002. Improving Strategic partnership between China and Russia, the presence of Iran, and military exercises of the SCO are matters of concern for the West. Some western scholars labeled it as “NATO of the East” and assessed it as an emerging military bloc. According to official documents and statements, SCO is a political and security organization based on cooperation and partnership and follows a non-interference policy. Does SCO contain components of a military alliance? Is SCO a military bloc or on the way to becoming in the future? This paper evaluates the SCO according to the theoretical concept of a military alliance besides comparative analysis of the SCO with NATO.

Keywords: Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Military Alliance, NATO, Military Exercises, Peace mission



Introduction

Shanghai Cooperation Organization was formed on 15 June 2001. The SCO was transformed from “Shanghai Five”. SCO comprises eight members (Iran has become a full member after approval by the Council of Heads of State on September 17th, 2021 held in Tajikistan and after some technical procedure permanent members will be nine), four observer and six dialogue partner states. The basic purpose of the SCO was to resolve border issues and suppress ‘three evils’ (separatism, extremism, and terrorism). After 9/11, forces from the United States and NATO entered Afghanistan and Central Asia. U.S and NATO forces acquired airbases from Afghanistan and Central Asian states. The Presence of U.S and NATO forces close to Russia and China was considered a strategic threat by both countries. SCO has started joint military exercises since 2002, and large-scale regular exercises have been started under the moniker “Peace Mission” since 2005. Rising China and Russian resurgence are the strategic challenges for the West. Jens Stoltenberg (NATO Secretary-General) stated that ‘Rising China’ is fundamentally shifting the balance of power at global level, China is investing heavily in military capabilities, all NATO allies are within the range of Chinese missiles, China is strengthening its ties with Russia, China is coming closer us in cyberspace, these have security consequences for NATO countries, he adds that NATO countries must face this challenge (Chinese rise) together (“NATO2030”, 2020).

Peoples Republic of China first time participated in any international military exercise by using the SCO platform. A new regional alliance including Russia and China worried U.S strategists. SCO was perceived as an anti-West organization by Western scholars. The rhetoric was fueled by the announcement of “strategic partnership” by Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Chinese premier Jiang Zemin and joint condemnation of western policies like NATO’s intervention in Kosovo and BMD (Ballistic missile defense plans of America (Hessbruegge, 2004). The Western world and the United States allegedly supported some antigovernment movements in the region and also raised the question of human rights violations (Lane, 2009). In 2005, Andijan Unrest occurred in Uzbekistan. Uzbek Government was blamed for the disproportionate use of force and human rights violations by Western countries. The United States and other Western countries called for an international inquiry of the event(Andijan massacre) which was rejected by the Uzbek Government considering it as a violation of her sovereignty; moreover, European Union Council banned visa for 12 Uzbek officials (who were blamed for direct responsible for using indiscriminate force in the event and for obstructing an independent inquiry) and also embargoed arms export to Uzbekistan (Nichol, 2013). These actions sored U.S relations with Uzbekistan. SCO officially proclaimed the withdrawal of western forces from Central Asia after the Astana (now Nur-Sultan) Summit in 2005. The demand for withdrawal of foreign forces by SCO



augmented the perception of the SCO as a strategic challenger to the presence of NATO and U.S forces in Central Asia (Cooley, 2010). Large-scale exercises of “Peace Missions” also alarmed the West. Russia and China were against U.S interference in their area of influence. Many analysts of the West especially of the United States consider SCO against American interests and resemble it with the “Warsaw Pact” or “NATO of the East” (Zeb, 2018). Now, SCO comprises eight members including four nuclear powers. It has been stretched to South Asia. Strengthening ties between Russia and China and Iran’s approval for full membership are matters of concern for the West. While replying to a question about the possibility of a military alliance between China and Russia, Putin said “We don’t need it, but, theoretically, it’s quite possible to imagine it” (Isachenkov, 2020, para. 3). China-Russia, Russia-Iran, China-Pakistan are strategic allies in the region. These strategic partnerships are also cautionary for the United States. Is an anti-west military alliance in the making? Official statements of the SCO expressed that SCO is not an anti-West military alliance. Leaders of the SCO members also stated repeatedly that SCO is not a military organization and is not against the West. This paper inquires whether the SCO contains the components of a military alliance or not and if it resembles NATO.

Charter of the SCO

The Charter of the SCO was signed in 2002 during the Heads of state meeting in St. Petersburg. The Charter comprises 26 articles; Article “1” of the Charter explains “Goals and Tasks” of the organization, Article “2” “Principles” and Article “3” “Areas of Cooperation” (Charter of the SCO, 2002). The main goals of the SCO are to counter three evils (terrorism, separatism, and extremism), illicit narcotics, arms trafficking, and illegal immigration (Charter of the SCO, 2002). According to the Charter (2002) mutual respect, independence, territorial integrity, non-aggression, and non-interference are basic principles of the SCO. According to the Charter (2002), SCO is a political and security organization having elements of cooperation for economic development and cultural exchange. SCO charter (2002) promotes a new fair, multipolar and democratic world order. The decisions will be made by agreement not by voting “Article 16”, official languages are Russian and Chinese “Article 20”, disputes will be settled through negotiations and consultations “Article 22”, membership is open for those states who respect the principles and objectives of the Charter “Article 13” (Charter of the SCO, 2002). The Charter of the SCO does not carry any article which explains the concept of collective defense or military assistance.

Military Exercises of the SCO



SCO has started joint military exercises to enhance interoperability. SCO launched 24+ exercises including eight naval and two anti-cyber exercises until 2018 (Yan, 2018). Military exercises are being conducted with different names under the aegis of the SCO, mostly under the titles “anti-terror exercise” and “peace missions” regularly. SCO members have been conducting bilateral and multilateral exercises since 2002.

2002 “Exercise-01”. China and Kyrgyzstan conducted a bilateral exercise in Oct 2002 with the name “Exercise-01” held in Kyrgyzstan. It was the first bilateral military exercise held by SCO members. Around one hundred Chinese soldiers participated in it (Yan, 2018).

2003 “Coalition-2003”. The first multilevel exercise was conducted in August 2003 with the name “Coalition-2003”. China, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Tajikistan participated in the exercise. Around 1300 troops participated in the exercise (De Haas, 2016). The exercise was held in Usharal (Kazakhstan) and Ili (Xinjiang, China). It was the first multilevel exercise of the People’s Republic of China at the international level.

2005 “Peace Mission”. In August 2005 the exercise was conducted in Vladivostok (Russia) and Weifang (Shandong, China). In the exercise, 10,000 troops participated (Weitz, 2015). Russia with 1800 troops along with Tu-160 and Tu-95 strategic bombers, 140 warships, and China with about 8,000 troops participated actively; Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Iran, India, and Pakistan attended as observers (Andrew, 2005). The exercise continued for eight days. Land, sea, and air force troops participated.

2006 “East-Anti-Terror-2006”. In March 2006 the exercise with the name of “East-Anti-Terror-2006” was conducted. Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan participated. Uzbekistan hosted the exercise.

2007 “Issyk-Kul Antiterror-2007”. In May 2007 the exercise was conducted in Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan with the name of “Issyk-Kul Antiterror-2007”. Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan participated; Pakistan, India, Iran, and Magnolia monitored it (De Haas, 2016).

2007 “Peace Mission”. In August 2007 the exercise was conducted and for the first time, all SCO members participated actively by sending troops in the peace mission. The exercise was held in Urumqi (China) and Chelyabinsk (Russia). About 7,000 troops participated, China sent 1,700 and Russia sent 4700 troops (De Haas, 2016). 86 Aircraft (46 Russian, 40 Chinese) and artillery systems were used (Weitz, 2015).

2009 “Peace Mission”. In July 2009 the exercise was conducted in China (Taonan training base, Shenyang). About 2600 troops (1300 Chinese and 1300 Russian) and more than 50 aircraft and helicopters (Su-25, Su-27 combat jets, Il-76 transporter, Su-24 bomber, Mi-8 Helicopters, Bmp-1, BTR-70 armored vehicles, T-80 tanks)



participated (Weitz, 2015). Russia and China participated actively while the other four states of the SCO sent their observers.

2010 “Peace Mission”. In September 2010 the exercise was conducted at the Matybulak range (Zhambyl, Kazakhstan), all members except Uzbekistan participated. Almost 5000 troops with 1000 armored vehicles and more than 50 aircraft and helicopters participated in three phases (Weitz, 2015). It was a large-scale exercise. It was continued for fifteen days. Russia, China, and Kazakhstan participated with 1,000 troops each, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan contributed 150 each; Russia participated with 130 tanks and aircraft (Su-24, Su-25, Mi-18), and China participated with T-99 tanks, H-6 Strategic bombers, and J-10 Fighters (Weitz, 2015).

2012 “Peace Mission”. In June 2012 the exercise was conducted in Chorukh-Dayron (Tajikistan). China, Russia, Kirgizstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan participated. Uzbekistan participated as an observer. In the exercise 2000 troops, 369 Chinese and 350 Russian with 500 vehicles participated (Meick, 2017). In the exercise, Uzbekistan denied allowing Kazak troops to pass its territory to reach Tajikistan due to poor relations between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan (McDermott, 2012). China and Russia contributed with nearly 350 troops each that were the least number of troops comparing other peace missions.

2013 “Peace Mission”. From 27 July to 15 Aug the exercise was conducted in Ural (Russia). Only China and Russia participated. China sent 600 while Russia sent 900 troops in the exercise, computer-based simulation was included in the exercise, only 1500 soldiers were physically present out of 25,000 soldiers, others were “virtual soldiers” and were not physically present (Weitz, 2015). The exercise was consisting of three phases. Along with Russian equipment, Chinese Z-9, JH-7A aircraft, and tanks were used (Weitz, 2015).

2014 “Peace Mission”. In August the exercise was conducted at “Zhurihe Training Base,” in China. China, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Kirgizstan participated in the exercise. Uzbekistan did not participate in it. It was a large-scale exercise. 5,000 Chinese, 1,000 Russian, 500 Kirgiz, 300 Kazak, and 200 Tajik troops, and about 70 aircraft and helicopters (Including J-10, J-11, JH-7, Z-10, Z-19, IL-76, Sukhoi Su-25) participated (Weitz, 2014).

2016 “Peace Mission”. In Sep 2016 the exercise was conducted at the “Edelweiss training center” near Lake “Issyk-Kul” in Kyrgyzstan. The numbers of troops were not clear, they were about 1100 including 270 Chinese, and 500 Russian (Meick, 2017). The numbers were very less compared with the 2014 peace mission but the substance was significant. Uzbekistan did not participate in it. In Aug 2016, the Chinese embassy was attacked in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The exercise was focused on anti-terror activities.



2018 “Peace Mission”. The exercise was conducted in August 2018. It was conducted at Chebarkul town (Russia). Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, China, India, and Pakistan participated actively while Uzbekistan attended as an observer. Pakistan and India participated first time after getting permanent membership of the SCO. Almost 3,000 troops participated; Pakistan participated with 110 troops, China with 748, and India with 167 (Kazmi, 2018). The exercise was consisting of three phases.

2019 “Tsentri-2019”. The exercise was conducted in Sep 2019 in Donguz Ranges Orenburg, Russia. It was a part of the strategic exercises of Russia. In the exercise, SCO members were invited to participate. China, India, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan participated. The exercise was consisting of two stages. 128,000 troops mostly from Russia participated (Sukhankin, 2019).

2020 “Kavkaz-2020”. The five-day strategic exercise with the name of “Kavkaz-2020” was held in Sep 2020 in the Astrakhan region, Russia. Russia, Armenia, China, Belarus, Myanmar, and Pakistan participated. About 80,000 troops mostly from Russia participated in the exercise (Sukhankin, 2020). “Kavkaz-2020” was also a part of strategic exercises of Russia in which SCO members took part. Azerbaijan, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Iran, and Sri Lanka sent their representatives. India withdrew from exercise by showing COVID-19 concerns.

2021 “Peace Mission”. The “Peace Mission 2021” of the SCO was held in Sep 2021 in Orenburg, Russia. All SCO members joined the exercise. Around 4,000 troops, 550 from China participated in it (Jiayao, 2021). Aircraft and Tanks were used along with light weapons.

2021 “Joint Anti-Terror Exercise -2021”. The exercise was conducted with the title “JATE-2021” (Joint Anti-Terror Exercise). It was the first military exercise under SCO conducted in Pabbi (Nowhere), Pakistan. Pakistan and China participated. The exercise was consisting of two stages. The first stage was conducted in respective countries while stage two was conducted in Pabbi Pakistan for two weeks from 21 Sep 2021 to 4 Oct 2021 (“Pakistan, China joint”, 2021).

An Assessment of Military Exercises of the SCO

The military exercises under SCO got attention from all over the world. The first time China participated in any international joint military exercises. China and Russia two major powers participated together. Certain analysts of the West interpreted military exercises as an anti-West phenomenon and it might lead to establishing permanent military forces by SCO for safeguarding interests of Russia and China (Aris, 2009). The SCO conducted military exercises with the name of “Peace Missions” that were not only for counter-terrorism but also was a demonstration by Russo-Chinese combination for the West to show power and through these exercises, a coded message was transmitted to the



West that Asia is for the Asian powers (De Haas, 2016). The exercises also expressed Russian rise. Exercises enhanced the capability and interoperability of the SCO states. SCO exercises were consisting of Land, Air, and Naval forces equipped with heavy weapons. The scale and intensity of weapons used in exercises were gauged excessive to anti-terror exercises that created skepticism in western circles. Despite the exposure of unity, military exercises also exposed some differences among SCO members. Different attitudes of members of the SCO were observed. Initially, China was reluctant to show its equipment, during the peace mission of 2007, except China all states used Russian equipment and ammunition (Weitz, 2015). Kazak Government did not allow Chinese troops to cross its territory to reach the Ural (Russia) for the Peace Mission of 2007. Uzbekistan refused to allow Kazak forces to cross her territory in peace mission 2012. Uzbekistan remained reluctant and in the majority of the peace missions, it did not participate actively. A gradual reduction in the term of size and Uzbekistan's persistent refusal to join exercises were two identifiable trends that could be observed (McDermott, 2012) but under the presidency of Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan has been abandoning its self-imposed isolation and has begun participating actively in multilateral military exercises (Garibov, 2019). Pakistan and India participated in peace mission 2018 with a smaller number of troops, 110 and 167 respectively. India did not participate in the "**Kavkaz-2020**" due to border tension with China but officially it showed COVID-19 concerns. Now, the size and scale of the exercises are not as large as it was during the peace Missions of 2005 and 2007. The important thing to be noticed is that during all peace missions, Russia and China remained the main and key players in respect of the number of troops for participation; moreover, Russian and Chinese weapons (artillery, radar systems, aircraft, etc.) were used other states only sent their troops. Hence, it could be concluded that SCO's large-scale peace missions are the demonstration of only the Russo-Chinese military strength rather than a combined military exercise by all members as a whole.

Is SCO a Military Block?

Is SCO a military bloc or on the way to becoming in the future? It divides scholars into two groups. One says it is not a military bloc and others opine that SCO may lead to a military alliance in the future. The United States and NATO have paramount concerns for the military dimension of emerging SCO (Carroll, 2011). According to the Western view, the basic purpose of the SCO is to end U.S encroachment in the areas of Russian and Chinese influences (Castillo, n.d). SCO was created as a geopolitical counterweight to the U.S, it is a mechanism for Russia, China, and Iran for increasing their collective power under the guise of Peace, Security, and Friendship (Stakelbeck, 2005). The Strengthening ties between Turkey, Iran, and China worry the



West (Sengupta, 2013). Peace Missions of 2005 and 2007 alarmed the Western strategists about security developments of the SCO. Western scholars started evaluating SCO as a type of a military alliance against the West especially after large-scale military exercises (peace missions) of the SCO. De Haas(2008) identifies five steps/developments anticipating the future of the SCO as a mature military alliance, a) Political and military features were combined in SCO war games of 2007, b) Although military assistance is the main ingredient of a pure security organization is missing in the SCO documents, Peace Mission of 2007 revealed it (military assistance), c) SCO military exercises have become more ambitious and extended on large scale, d) the Joint communique of the Shanghai summit of 2006 affirmed an immediate consultation for an effective response to a regional threat, e) Improving relations of the SCO with the Collective Security Treaty Organization(CSTO). Security cooperation has been intensified within SCO, the Organization could evolve into a mature security grouping (Bhadrakumar, 2007). Dr. Jingdong Yuan says, to compare SCO with NATO or Warsaw Pact both analogies are inaccurate; he adds an organization like NATO or Warsaw Pact requires a formal treaty, military alliance structure, integrated or semi-integrated military operations, regular military exercises, SCO is not going to move toward that direction (Personal communication, June 23, 2021). Professor Michael Fredholm says that SCO was not established as a military alliance and it is unlikely that the disparate group of members and observer states would agree to such an alliance (personal communication, June 21, 2021). Javaid and Khan (2015) point out three objectives(Political, Security, Economic) behind the formation of the SCO, a) to resolve border issues among China, Russia, and Central Asian states, b) to counter a mutual threat (terrorism, extremism, and separatism) with a united intergovernmental network, c) to recognize the need for financial collaboration for regional countries; they also reject the chances of conversion of the SCO into an anti-West coalition due to ineffective structural capability and unwillingness of the members to provoke the United States. SCO follows a nonalignment policy and it is not a military alliance or bloc against a third party, it has no global ambitions and intentions to pursue military motives (Khan, 2012). The SCO has no characteristics of a military-political bloc and no intention of a military alliance and interaction among defense departments of the members is exclusively focused on anti-terrorist activities (Rozanov, 2013, p. 42). It is extremely unlikely that SCO will develop into a pact of mutual defense due to a lack of trust and the precarious nature of shifting regional interests (Bulut & Aghazade, 2015). SCO has a defensive nature, it may be graded as a security organization instead of a military alliance as perceived by some Western circles (Hasnat & Awan, 2016).

SCO vs. NATO



North Atlantic Treaty Organization was created in 1949 after signing North Atlantic Treaty (also known as the Washington Treaty) for providing collective defense to Central and Eastern Europe against the Soviet Union (Haglund, 2021). NATO is a political and military alliance comprising 30 countries, article 5 of the NATO treaty deals with the concept of collective defense (North Atlantic Treaty, 1949). After 9/11, the first time in the history of NATO, Article 5 was invoked. NATO has an allied forces structure. NATO has expanded its areas of operations. United States provides a major chunk of NATO's budget. SCO is formed in 2001 initially by six countries and now after the addition of Pakistan and India comprises eight countries. SCO provides no security guarantee to its member states. SCO has no combined military forces structure. NATO and SCO both conduct military exercises regularly. In NATO, the United States has a dominant position while in the SCO China and Russia are dominant. Some Western scholars labeled SCO as "NATO of the East". NATO is responsible for providing military assistance to its members in particular situations while SCO has no such obligation or responsibility. Rashid Alimov (former Secretary-General of SCO) stated SCO can hardly be compared with other organizations, it is not "NATO of the East", it is not a military alliance, military exercises of the SCO are focused on counter-terrorism, it is the responsibility of the SCO to provide peace and stability between the Arctic, Indian and Pacific Oceans (Aixin, 2018). Xin(2018) deters SCO's likeness to NATO with three aspects, she explains that, a) SCO was established with different purpose and intentions to NATO, b) Chinese leadership repeatedly stated that China would not forge a military alliance, c) diversity among states would prevent the SCO gelling into a military alliance.

Table 1

A Comparison Of NATO with SCO

Areas	NATO	SCO
Members	30	8
Nuclear powers	3	4
Agenda	Global	Regional
Nature	Political and Military Alliance	Political and Security Alliance
Basic purpose	Collective Defense	Collective Security
Threat	External	Internal
Military assistance	Yes	No
Combined force structure	Yes	No
Political Requirement for membership	A member must be a democratic state	Democracy is not necessary for members
Military exercises	Regular	Regular
Membership	Open	Open

Note. Sources of the table (Haglund, 2021), ("NATO Enlargement", 2016)



Definition of a Military Alliance

The literature lacks a comprehensive definition of a military alliance's concept (Bergsmann, 2001). Different definitions of "alliance" could be found and these definitions are too broad or narrow to explain all components of an alliance (Tugsbilguun, 2009). Military alliances are of two types formal or informal. Military alliances provide security guarantee formal alliances has explicit security guarantee in the form of written agreement/treaty and informal alliances has no treaty or written agreement but has implicit security guarantee (Tertrais, 2004, p.136).

Formal Military Alliance

As stated above there is no comprehensive definition of a military alliance. Bergsmann(2001) defines alliance

An explicit agreement among states in the realm of national security in which the partners promise mutual assistance in the form of a substantial contribution of resources in the case of a certain contingency the arising of which is uncertain (p.36).

Scholars attempted to formulate essential elements of a formal military alliance. According to the available literature on international relations, there are some essential elements of a formal military alliance. The three major components of a formal military alliance are

a) A treaty for the obligation. Typically a military alliance is formulized by a treaty and critical clauses of the Treaty define the **casus foederis (Haglund, 2019)**. Members of a military organization are obliged by the Treaty. The Treaty defines the roles and tasks of the organization in a particular situation. The Treaty is based on the concept of collective defense. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty (1949) and Article 3 of the charter of the CSTO (2002) explain the concept of **collective defense**. SCO is based on China's new security concept according to that concept, relations are based on partnership rather than alliances and the difference between partnership and alliance is that in alliance there is a treaty obligation for members on specific issues (Fei, 2010).

b) Common External Threat/Enemy. Normally any military alliance is established to counter the existing or potential common external threat/enemy. Warsaw pact was against the Western political ideology. NATO was established against Russian influence and the expansion of communism. CSTO is formed for regional security against any external aggression. SCO has no common external enemy. SCO is focused on internal threats. SCO has no uniform policy against any external threat.



c) Particular Structure of the Organization. A military organization has a particular structure for the implementation of military actions. In past, alliances had no integrated structure, permanent operational headquarters, and a reaction force; new alliances (NATO, CSTO, etc.) have these attributes (Tugsbilguun, 2009). NATO has an allied command structure under a military committee whose headquarters is in Brussels, Belgium. NATO Response Force (NRF) consists of 40,000 troops (NATO Response Force, n.d, para.1). CSTO has a Collective Security Council whose headquarters is in Moscow. Collective Rapid Reaction Force (CRRF) of the CSTO comprising about 20,000 troops was created in 2009 (“From the Treaty”, n.d, para. 29). SCO has no combined force structure. SCO has Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), the purpose of RATS is to collect and manage data of terrorists and terrorist organizations and to cooperate with member states regarding information. RATS also conduct anti-terror training secessions.

Informal Military Alliance

The informal military alliance has no written agreement or treaty. Normally security guarantee is implicit in this type of alliance (US- Taiwan, US-Saudi Arabia, US-Israel), a broader definition would include today’s strategic partnerships into an informal military alliance even without a security guarantee (India-Israel, Pakistan-China, Pakistan-Saudi Arabia. Russia-China) (Tertrais, 2004, p. 136).

Theoretical Prospects of a Military Alliance and the SCO

According to the modern concept of a military alliance, there are three major and essential components of a military alliance, a) A Treaty, b) Common external threat and c) Particular structure of the organization. By examining, it is found that SCO lacks all three major components of a formal military alliance. First SCO has no clause of treaty or agreement identifying collective defense or military assistance. SCO Charter or any other official documents do not have any statement expressing compulsion for collective defense. Second SCO members have no common external threat, its formation was based on internal threats of separatism, extremism, and terrorism. Third SCO has no specific combined force structure. SCO has a Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure and tasks of RATS are limited to intelligence sharing of data regarding terrorist groups and individuals and assisting in conducting training exercises and military exercises. So SCO does not fulfill the criteria of a formal military alliance. Informal military alliances do not have written agreement and security guarantee is implicit. SCO members do not have such types of strategic relationships among themselves.



Conclusion

The purpose of the SCO was to cooperate for overcoming three evils (terrorism, extremism, and separatism), to control drug trafficking, and to cooperate in economic fields (SCO Charter, 2002). Russian and Chinese stance on multipolarity, SCO's military exercises, SCO's proclamation for setting a deadline for withdrawal of foreign forces from central Asian bases, rejection of U.S application for an observer of the SCO, the presence of Iran in the SCO, promotion of new world order by SCO charter and Russo-Chinese deepening strategic partnership created an anti-West perception of the SCO in the West. Some Western scholars started analyzing SCO as an emerging military bloc in Asia and rival to NATO. SCO was also labeled as NATO of the East. The analysis infers that SCO has no component of a military alliance and has no intentions to become in the future. Theoretically, SCO does not fulfill the criteria of a military alliance. Sino-Russian and Pak-China strategic partnerships could be a matter of concern for the United States but it would be difficult to align against the U.S and the West. China is advancing in economic fields and according to official statements, it does not want to become a member of any military alliance against the West (Xin, 2018). SCO members have their national interests and foreign policies. There are conflicts and clash of interests among SCO members, China and Russia are partners but competitors as well in the region, Pakistan and India are enemies with the history of wars. It is improbable that Pakistan and India will participate in a joint military operation against any third country. It is hard to form a military alliance having diverse policies. The number of troops decreased as compared to Peace Missions of 2005 and 2007. Only China and Russia are participating with a larger number of troops and weapons. In parallel with peace missions, SCO members especially Russia and China have started bilateral exercises on a larger scale. Bilateralism and mutual conflicts have impeded the marching of the SCO towards a military alliance. The analysis showed that SCO has no signs of a military bloc. Inter-states conflicts and diversity neutralize the expectancy of a military bloc if it exists.



References

- Aixin, L. (2018, Sep 16). Comparing SCO to NATO inappropriate. *Global Times*.
<https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1119789.shtml>
- Andrew, M. (2005, September 27). Power Politics: China, Russia, and Peace Mission 2005. *China Brief*, 5(20). <https://jamestown.org/program/power-politics-china-russia-and-peace-mission-2005/>
- Aris, S. (2009). Shanghai Cooperation Organization: An Anti-Western Alignment? *CSS Analyses in Security Policy*. No.66. Center for Security Studies (CSS).
<https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSS-Analyses-66.pdf>
- Bergsmann, S. (2001). The Concept of Military Alliance. In: E, Reiter & H, Gärtner (Eds) *Small States and Alliances* pp.25-37. Physica, Heidelberg.
- Bhadrakumar, M. K. (2007). The new 'NATO of the East' takes Shape: The SCO and China, Russia and US maneuvers. *The Asia-Pacific Journal | Japan Focus*, 5(8), 1-9.
- Bulut, F. M., & Aghazade, N. (2015). Place of Shanghai Cooperation Organization's in the new world order. *European Scientific Journal*, 11(7), 78-80.
<https://eujournal.org/index.php/esj/article/view/5307>
- Carroll, W. E. (2011). China in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Hegemony, Multi-Polar Balance, or Cooperation in Central Asia. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 1(19), 1-8
- Castillo, A. (n.d). SCO: Rise of NATO East? *Diplomatic Courier*. Centre for Security Studies (CSS). <https://css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/articles/article.html/90108/>
- Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (2002, October 7).
https://en.odkb-csto.org/documents/documents/ustav_organizatsii_dogovora_o_kollektivnoy_bez_opasnosti/
- Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. (2002).
<http://eng.sectsco.org/load/203013/>
-



- Cooley, A. (2010). Russia and the Recent Evolution of the SCO: Issues and Challenges for U.S policy. In T. Colton, T. Frye & R. Legvold (Eds.), *The Policy World Meets Academia: Designing U.S. Policy toward Russia* (pp. 8-19). American Academy of Arts and Sciences
- De Haas, M. (2008). The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's Momentum towards a Mature Security Alliance. *Scientia Militaria - South African Journal of Military Studies*, 36(1), 14-30. <https://doi.org/10.5787/36-1-42>
- De Haas, M. (2016). War Games of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization: Drills on the Move. *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 29(3), 378-406. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2016.1200383>
- Fei, G. (2010). The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and China's New Diplomacy. Netherlands Institute of International Relations, Clingendael. <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/discussion-papers-diplomacy-no-118-shanghai-cooperation-organization-and-chinas-new>
- From the Treaty to the Organization (n.d). *Collective Security Treaty Organization*. <https://en.odkb-csto.org/25years/>
- Gariboy, A. (2019, October 15). Central Asian Perspectives of the Tsentr 2019 Military Exercises. *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 16 (142). <https://jamestown.org/program/central-asian-perspectives-of-the-tsentr-2019-military-exercises/>
- Haglund, D. G. (2019, November 12). Alliance. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/alliance-politics>
- Haglund, D. G. (2021, March 18). **North Atlantic Treaty Organization**. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/North-Atlantic-Treaty-Organization>
- Hasnat, S. F., & Awan, Z. (2016). Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a Platform for Regional Understanding: Its Economic, Political and Security Potential. *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs*, 21(1), 83-100.



Hessbruegge, J. A. (2004). The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: A Holy Alliance for Central Asia? *Al Nakhlah*, Article 2, 1-9

Isachenkov, V. (2020, October 23). Putin: Russia-China military alliance can't be ruled out. *AP News*. <https://apnews.com/article/beijing-moscow-foreign-policy-russia-vladimir-putin-1d4b112d2fe8cb66192c5225f4d614c4>

Javaid, F., & Khan, M. A. (2015). The Role of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) with special reference to U.S. Rivalry towards Central Asia. *International Research Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(3), 58-63.

Jiayao, L. (2021, September 25). SCO "Peace Mission 2021" counter-terrorism drill concludes in Russia. *China Military*. http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2021-09/25/content_10093190.htm

Kazmi, S. (2018, August 30). SCO Peace Mission 2018: Prospects for Peace in the Region. *Modern Diplomacy*. <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2018/08/30/sco-peace-mission-2018-prospects-for-peace-in-the-region/>

Khan, R. M. (2012). The Future Prospects of Shanghai Cooperation Organization. *Journal of Contemporary Studies*, 1(2), 22-36.

Lane, D. (2009). 'Coloured Revolution' as a political phenomenon. *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 25(2-3), 113-135. DOI: 10.1080/13523270902860295

McDermott, R. (2012). Uzbekistan Snubs SCO Peace Mission 2012. *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 9 (116). The Jamestown Foundation. <https://jamestown.org/program/uzbekistan-snubs-sco-peace-mission-2012/>

Meick, E. (2017, March 20). *China-Russia military-to-military relations: Moving toward a higher level of cooperation*. Staff Research Report. U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission. <https://www.uscc.gov/research/china-russia-military-military-relations-moving-toward-higher-level-cooperation>

NATO Enlargement & Open Door. (2016 July). *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*. Fact Sheet. https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_07/20160627_1607-factsheet-enlargement-eng.pdf



- NATO Response Force. (n.d). <https://mncne.nato.int/forces/nato-response-force>
- NATO 2030: Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on Strengthening the Alliance in a Post-COVID World. (2020, June 9).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrso3UVC8SQ>
- Nichol, J. (2013). *Uzbekistan: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests* (RS 21238). Congressional Research Service (CRS). <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS21238.pdf>
- North Atlantic Treaty (1949, April 4).
https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/stock_publications/20120822_nato_treaty_en_light_2009.pdf
- Pakistan, China joint anti-terrorist exercise concludes (2021, October 4). *The Express Tribune*. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2323273/pakistan-china-joint-anti-terrorist-exercise-concludes>
- Rozanov, A. (2013). The issue of security in the SCO. In A. Rozanov (Eds.), *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Central Asia's Security Challenges* (pp.37-49). Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, Ltd. https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/DCAF_RP16_SCO.pdf
- Sengupta, A. (2013). Rethinking Regional Organizations (Turkey and the SCO). In M, Fredholm (Eds) *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Eurasian Geopolitics* (pp.176-198). Nordic Institute of Asian Studies. Copenhagen K.
- Stakelbeck, F.W. (2005, August 5). A new bloc emerges? *American Thinker*.
https://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2005/08/a_new_bloc_emerges.html
- Sukhankin, S. (2019, October 24). What Did Russia's Strategic Military Exercise Tsentr-2019 Reveal? *International Centre for Defence and Security (ICDS)*.
<https://icds.ee/en/what-did-russias-strategic-military-exercise-tsentr-2019-reveal/>
- Sukhankin, S. (2020, October 7). Kavkaz-2020 Exercises: A Preliminary Analysis. *International Centre for Defence and Security (ICDS)*. <https://icds.ee/en/kavkaz-2020-exercises-a-preliminary-analysis/>
-



- Tertrais, B. (2004). The Changing Nature of Military Alliances. *The Washington Quarterly*, 27 (2), 135–150.
- Tugsbilguun, T. (2009). Does the Shanghai Cooperation Represent an Example of a Military Alliance?. *Mongolian Journal of International Affairs*, (15-16), 59–107. <https://doi.org/10.5564/mjia.v0i15-16.32>
- Weitz, R. (2014, October 8). Analyzing Peace Mission 2014: China and Russia exercise with the Central Asian States. *Second Line of Defense*. <https://sldinfo.com/2014/10/analyzing-peace-mission-2014-china-and-russia-exercise-with-the-central-asian-states/>
- Weitz, R. (2015). Parsing Chinese-Russian military exercises. *Strategic Studies Institute*, U.S Army War College.
- Xin, L. (2018, June 7). SCO Trilogy: Is SCO the NATO of the East? *CGTN News*. https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d414e334d544f77457a6333566d54/share_p.html
- Yan, L. (2018, June 5). A quick guide to SCO and its military cooperation. *China News Service (CNS)*. <http://www.ecns.cn/hd/2018-06-05/detail-ifyuurnp1000209.shtml>
- Zeb, R. (2018, February 8). Pakistan in the SCO: Challenges and Prospects. *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*. <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13496-pakistan-in-the-sco-challenges-and-prospects.html>