



Indian Council
of World Affairs



TOWARDS A SECURE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION

Views of SCO Resident Researchers at ICWA

Indian Council of World Affairs
Sapru House, New Delhi

2023



Indian Council
of World Affairs

TOWARDS A SECURE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION

Views of SCO Resident Researchers at ICWA



S | E | C | U | R | E | S | C | O
SECURITY | ECONOMY | CONNECTIVITY | UNITY | RESPECT | ENVIRONMENT

Indian Council of World Affairs
Sapru House, New Delhi

June 2023

© ICWA June 2023

Disclaimer: The views, analyses and recommendations in these articles are personal and do not reflect the views of the ICWA.

Foreword	5
Contributors	7
Role of SCO in Regional and International Cooperation <i>Gulden Kaskarbayeva</i>	9
Shanghai Cooperation Organization Information Security Cooperation : Current Status and Policy Options <i>Zou Zhengxin</i>	19
Discovering Common Ground, Embracing Diversity : Common Future of SCO Countries <i>Karagulov Batyr-Mukhammad Azamatovich</i>	29
The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in a New Geopolitical Environment: Becoming an Institution of All-Eurasia Cooperation? <i>Dmitrii Pavlovich Novikov</i>	37
Advancing a Multidimensional Strategy : A Comprehensive Response to Drug Trafficking Challenges in the Digital Age <i>Rahimov Faridun</i>	53
Strengthening Regional and Inter-regional Connectivity in SCO <i>Davlatov Kamronbek Sanjarbek Ugli</i>	65



India assumed the Chairmanship for the first time of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Council of Heads of States for the period 2022-2023. India's SCO Chairmanship culminates with a Summit in July 2023. The theme of India's SCO Chairmanship is "Towards a 'SECURE' SCO", which was articulated by the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi earlier in the 2018 SCO Summit. SECURE stands for Security, Economic Cooperation, Connectivity, Unity, Respect for sovereignty and integrity, and Environment. It encompasses the holistic vision of India towards the region and reflects the Indian ethos of '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*'- world is one family. During its Chairmanship, India has held a host of Ministerial and Official meetings, seminars, conferences, cultural exhibitions and visits of experts, scholars, and artists. In collaboration with the Ministry of External Affairs of India, the Indian Council of World (ICWA), India's oldest foreign policy and international affairs think tank, organized SCO Resident Researchers Programme. The Programme involved hosting young scholars from SCO Member States for a period of one month each. During this period, the scholars held interactions with experts in India and visited academic and research institutions in Delhi as well as in other Indian cities, including Sonipat, Bangalore, Chennai and Puducherry. This volume is a collection of papers written in English by the young participants of the SCO Resident Researchers Programme at ICWA. The papers reflect the perspectives of the scholars on the progress of the Organization, its future growth, the challenges, and the way forward. Gulden Kaskarbayeva from Kazakhstan has termed SCO as a 'model of the modern world', where virtually all religions, various cultures and ethnic groups are represented. She also notes the key role of the Organization in meeting the key challenge to security posed by terrorism, separatism, and extremism. Zou Zhengxin from China examines the current state of cooperation in the field of information security among SCO Member States and urges for its further strengthening. Batyr Karagulov from Kyrgyzstan argues for the common future of SCO Member States and makes a case for embracing diversity and discovering common ground with renewed vigour. He emphasizes greater economic cooperation through the formation of banking and customs union. Dr. Dmitrii Novikov from Russia examines the impact of ongoing geopolitical fissures on SCO and makes a case to position SCO as the institutional backbone of Greater Eurasia. Faridun Rahimov from Tajikistan examines the menace of drug trafficking in the region and argues that the SCO is uniquely poised to confront this challenge head-on due to its collective capacity and regional influence. Kamronbek Davlatov from Uzbekistan calls for strengthened connectivity in SCO and argues that initiatives like INSTC and Chabahar port would boost regional and inter-regional connectivity.

The publication gives rich insights into the prevailing thinking among the young researcher community of the SCO Member States regarding SCO's role and future. I am confident that the present publication will prove to be useful for diplomatic practitioners as also scholars with an interest in the activities of SCO.

Amb Vijay Thakur Singh

Director General

Indian Council of World Affairs

Sapru House

June 2023

Ms. Gulden Kaskarbayeva

*Expert, Foreign Policy Research Institute,
PhD student, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University,
Astana, Kazakhstan*

Mr. Zou Zhengxin

*Director Assistant at the Centre for South Asia-West China Cooperation and
Development Studies, Institute of South Asian Studies, Sichuan University and PhD
scholar in Political Science, University of Delhi, India.*

Mr. Karagulov Batyr-Mukhammad Azamatovich

*Expert in the Department of International Relationships
National Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz Republic*

Dr. Dmitrii Pavlovich Novikov

*Deputy Head, School of International Relations, National Research University,
Higher School of Economics, Moscow, and Leading Researcher, Institute of China
and Contemporary Asia, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow*

Mr. Rahimov Faridun

*Junior Research Fellow, Department of Europe and America, ISPAEC National
Academy of Sciences, Tajikistan, Dushanbe*

Mr. Davlatov Kamronbek Sanjarbek Ugli

*Researcher, University of World Economy and Diplomacy under the Ministry of
Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Tashkent*

ROLE OF SCO IN REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Gulden Kaskarbayeva



The Shanghai Cooperation

Organization acquires the status of an important Asian political forum, activities of which focus mainly on solving regional issues, and becoming a dialogue platform in demand in the interests of developing cooperation between the CIS countries, the Middle East, South and East Asia. Thus, at present, the SCO consists of 8 member states, 4 observer states and 9 dialogue partner states.

The Declaration on the Establishment of the SCO, signed in 2001 by China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, was an attempt to lay the foundation for a security system in the vast Euro-Asian region. It was the issues of regional and world security, including the fight against terrorism, separatism and extremism, that dominated the agenda of the new international organization at the beginning of the 21st century.

Today, the SCO member states unite 60 per cent of the territory of Eurasia, where over 3.4 billion people live, which is more than 41 per cent of the world's population. The Organization includes countries that complement each other

due to the presence of extensive and self-sufficient raw materials, labour and intellectual resources. Their national economies account for about 30 per cent of global GDP (US\$ 38.5 trillion), more than 16 per cent of world trade (US\$ 5.5 trillion). At the same time, in 2021, mutual trade amounted to about US\$ 768 billion, showing an increase of 39 per cent. Particular attention is drawn to the role of the SCO as a 'model of the modern world', where virtually all world religions, various cultures and ethnic groups are represented.

In the context of geopolitical turbulence, the communication channels created within the framework of the SCO make it possible to build a balanced cooperation in the security, economic, cultural and humanitarian fields and to really determine the vectors for the development of the countries of the Eurasian continent.

At the present stage, the SCO has entered a complex and uncertain period of development, which is characterized by a dynamically changing and conflict-generating geopolitical environment. Thus, the 22nd meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai

Particular attention is drawn to the role of the SCO as a 'model of the modern world', where virtually all world religions, various cultures and ethnic groups are represented.

Cooperation Organization (September 15-16, 2022, Samarkand) was held in the context of an unprecedented aggravation of the geopolitical situation. The political background around the Summit was overshadowed by the Russian war in Ukraine, the aggravation of the situation in the Taiwan Strait, the deepening crisis in Afghanistan, clashes on the Kyrgyz-Tajik and Afghan-Pakistani borders, military conflicts between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Meanwhile, the SCO has become an important component of the overall regional security system. The focus is on building a security architecture independent of NATO and the formation of new centres of a multipolar world. The participation of major players - Russia and China - attracts new partners to the SCO. The organization has covered the vast region of Eurasia, making geography its strategic advantage. At present, there is no similar structure on the continent that would ensure a regular high-level dialogue between the countries of the CIS, the Middle East, South and East Asia.

Over the years of its existence, the SCO has achieved significant success in the

field of security, including the joint fight against the threats of terrorism, extremism and separatism. In particular, mechanisms were created for meetings of defence ministers, law enforcement agencies, heads of judicial authorities, secretaries of security councils of member states, within which consultations are held and actions are coordinated in order to maintain peace and security.

At this stage, it is extremely important to further strengthen the 'Shanghai spirit' based on mutual trust, equal and open dialogue, promoting effective cooperation in the fields of politics, security, economy and culture. The format of multilateral meetings on the SCO platform makes it possible to maintain close contacts, remove certain regional tensions, feel the mood in the region, the aspirations of the members and partners of the Organization, and also enlist support for their initiatives.

Therefore, the Samarkand Summit provided the assembled leaders an opportunity for the first time after the pandemic in real mode to 'synchronize watches' on accumulated issues, especially in the current conditions of

Over the years of its existence, the SCO has achieved significant success in the field of security, including the joint fight against the threats of terrorism, extremism and separatism.

growing geopolitical tensions. Against the backdrop of the global crisis, they focused not only on the great potential of the Organization for ensuring regional security and the importance of expanding regional cooperation in solving problems, but also on the need to establish a stable mechanism for trade and economic relations. At the Summit in Samarkand, 44 documents were adopted aimed at strengthening cooperation, including in the fields of industrial cooperation, green economy, digitalization and trade. A Comprehensive Action Plan for 2023-2027 was also adopted to implement the provisions of the Treaty on Long-term Good Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation of the SCO Member States. Another important result of the Samarkand summit was that the SCO member states, in accordance with their national laws and on the basis of consensus, will develop common principles and approaches to the formation of a single list of terrorist, separatist and extremist organizations whose activities are prohibited on the territories of the SCO member states.

Security

Among the wide range of issues voiced at the last Summit, such topical issues as the crisis situation in Afghanistan, fight against terrorism, radicalism and drug

trafficking, the joint development and use of transport and logistics corridors and transit opportunities, ensuring food security, energy interaction, response to global climate change were included. The SCO members advocated the establishment of Afghanistan as an independent, neutral, unified, democratic and peaceful state, free from terrorism, wars and drugs, and called it 'extremely important' the formation of an 'inclusive government', which includes representatives of all ethnic, religious and political groups in Afghan society. Thus, in order to maintain the regional security of the organization, the eradication of the causes, sources and manifestations of the 'forces of three evils' - terrorism, separatism and extremism - has been identified as a priority.

It is worth noting that it was on the margins of the SCO that a document was adopted - the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism, June 15, 2001, which defined the concept of 'terrorism'. Cooperation among member states in the field of security is always on the agenda of the organization as a major task, which in turn is the guarantor of sustainable socio-economic development of the entire region.

In this direction, the key role is assigned to the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) - a permanent body of the SCO,

carrying out consistent work in the fight against the threats of the 'three evils' - terrorism, separatism and extremism. One of the practical ways to increase the anti-terrorist potential of the SCO member states is to conduct annual joint anti-terrorist exercises since 2006, during which practical development of response mechanisms and interaction between competent authorities to neutralize various terrorist threats and acts of terror is carried out.

Important in ensuring the security of the SCO member states from transnational criminal activities, including illegal migration, smuggling of drugs, weapons and explosives, is the RATS mechanism for interaction between the border services of the competent authorities of the SCO members. Since 2013, eight joint border operations have been carried out at the borders of the SCO member states. The consistent measures being taken to prevent the use of the Internet for terrorist and propaganda purposes, to increase the personnel potential of the SCO anti-terrorist structures and to hold international scientific and practical conferences of the RATS to maintain their contacts, contributes to increasing the level of security in the region.

In order to improve the mechanisms for countering challenges and threats to the security of the SCO member states, it is important to implement the SCO

initiatives to create on the basis of the RATS the Universal Center for Countering Challenges and Threats to the Security of the SCO Member States, the SCO Information Security Center, the Center for Combating International Organized Crime, as well as Anti-Drug Center as a separate permanent body.

It should be noted that the RATS, as the coordinating centre of the Organization for Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism at the regional and global levels, makes a significant contribution to the development of the SCO. In particular, the application of preventive measures to combat traditional and new types of threats to the security of the SCO, as well as steps to eradicate the socio-economic causes that create the ground for terrorism, extremism and separatism, contribute to maintaining stability and sustainable development in the region.

Economy

Economic development is the most important factor in the context of countering the emergence of new sources of security threats and challenges, since the continuing disproportions in the economic development of various regions of the world are increasingly a cause of radicalization. In this context, the SCO advocates the development of broad international cooperation to give impetus

to the restoration of the world economy, ensure economic and financial stability based on the principles of transparency, mutual respect, equality, which will contribute to sustainable economic growth in the interests of preserving and maintaining peace and stability in the region.

Of key importance is the development of economic cooperation among the SCO member countries in various forms for a gradual transition to the free movement of goods, capital, services and technologies. In this regard, it is important to implement large-scale economic projects within the framework of the SCO in the transit and transport sector, food and energy security. In this direction, the SCO countries adopted a number of documents, including the Plan on Intra-Regional Trade Development for 2023-2025, the Concept of Cooperation of the SCO Member States in Developing Connectivity and Creating Efficient Economic and Transport Corridors, the Agreement of the SCO Member States for Creating Favorable Conditions for International Road Transport, Roadmap of the SCO Member States for Increasing the Share of National currencies in Mutual Settlements, the Agreement between the governments of the SCO member states on tourism cooperation. At the same time, for the development of economic cooperation, the Samarkand Summit also

focused on promoting digital literacy and the importance of the e-commerce sector in order to increase employment and prosperity. These steps contribute to the development of the regional economy, the creation of favourable conditions for the development of trade, investment, infrastructure, as well as improving the quality of life of the population.

Culture

An important area of cooperation of the Organization is the cultural and humanitarian sphere. The stable dialogue of various cultures and civilizations established within the framework of the SCO contributes to the further strengthening of mutual trust, friendship and good neighborliness between the member states, and the rapprochement of countries and peoples.

In this regard, the progressive development of cultural and humanitarian cooperation within the framework of the SCO, the strengthening of mutual understanding between peoples, respect for the cultural traditions and customs of the member states, the preservation and promotion of cultural diversity, the holding of international exhibitions, festivals and competitions, the intensification of cultural exchange and cooperation between countries, and also, the study and preservation of the

India's entry into the organization, with its huge economic potential and peaceful foreign policy undoubtedly strengthens the SCO.

cultural and natural heritage of the region remain among the key priorities of the practical work of the SCO.

At the Summit in Samarkand, the leaders of the SCO member countries decided to declare 2023 the Year of Tourism, as well as the Indian city of Varanasi as the tourist and cultural capital of the Organization for 2022-2023. These steps will contribute to the further popularization of the rich cultural and historical heritage of the peoples and the development of the tourism potential of the SCO member states.

India and SCO

India's entry into the organization, with its huge economic potential and peaceful foreign policy undoubtedly strengthens the SCO. India is making great efforts to establish a trade and transit system between South Asia and Central Asia,

including the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). Thus, the wider use of the Iranian port of Chabahar, which is being developed by India, and the inclusion of Iran as a full member in 2023, further expands the prospects for interregional communication in the SCO space, and also contributes to the development of the transit potential of the Organization.

India's initiatives to create a new Task Force on Startups and Innovation to share experience with SCO member countries, as well as the SCO Working Group on Traditional Medicine, will help strengthen economic cooperation in the SCO space with practical benefits for ordinary people.

Kazakhstan and SCO

Since the establishment of the Organization, the Republic of Kazakhstan

India's initiatives to create a new Task Force on Startups and Innovation to share experience with SCO member countries, as well as the SCO Working Group on Traditional Medicine, will help strengthen economic cooperation in the SCO space with practical benefits for ordinary people.

has been and remains one of the active founding states, which initiated many different ideas, projects, documents and programmes. In particular, at the suggestion of the Kazakh side, such significant initiatives have been taken as the signing of the Agreement on cooperation and interaction of the SCO member states on border issues, the adoption of the SCO Development Strategy until 2025, the SCO Program in the fight against terrorism, separatism and extremism, the Food Security Program SCO, anti-drug operation Pautina (Web) in 2019-2020, and others.

Kazakhstan is also the initiator of one of the important bodies of the SCO - the Council of Heads of Government, which resolves the fundamental issues of developing interaction in practical areas, especially in the economic sphere. Since 2006, the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the SCO Secretariat has been operating in Beijing. Interaction within the framework of the SCO is one of the important directions of the foreign policy of the Republic of

Kazakhstan. Constructive participation and focus on an equal dialogue with the SCO partner countries strengthens the position of Kazakhstan in the region, contributes to the growth of mutual trust and understanding between states. The main priorities of the Republic of Kazakhstan within the framework of the SCO are strengthening security in the region, developing economic partnership, unlocking the transit and transport potential, as well as deepening cultural and humanitarian bonds. From the very beginning of the Shanghai process, Kazakhstan has been an active participant in multilateral cooperation within the SCO format, making a great contribution to strengthening its legal framework.

Kazakhstan chaired the SCO twice - in 2010-2011 and 2016-2017. Each of the periods had its own characteristics and was marked by the adoption of important decisions that gave an additional impetus to the development of regional cooperation in the SCO. In particular, the Astana SCO Summit in 2017 became a new page in the development of

The main priorities of the Republic of Kazakhstan within the framework of the SCO are strengthening security in the region, developing economic partnership, unlocking the transit and transport potential, as well as deepening cultural and humanitarian bonds.

the association. For the first time in the history of the SCO, there was an expansion of the membership of the Organization through the admission of full members of two new states - India and Pakistan. Undoubtedly, the entry of new members into the SCO reflects the general attitude and commitment of the founding states of the SCO to the principles of openness and the desire to develop dialogue, as reflected in the 2001 Declaration on the Establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Along with this, the Heads of State adopted the SCO Convention on Combating Extremism, the main purpose of which is to neutralize radical movements, identify potential destructive forces, and promptly respond to the propaganda of various extremist ideas.

In his speech at the Samarkand SCO Summit, President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev stressed the need to strengthen regional security, continue the implementation of previously adopted documents in this area and the importance of combating cybercrime in order to create an infrastructure for protecting the information space of the Organization and strengthening interaction between the SCO and the Central Asian Regional Information Coordination Center, and also building

up cooperation in the military-political sphere between defense departments and special services. At the same time, taking into account the existing vast human resource and technological potential of the Organization, special attention is paid to economic cooperation within the framework of the SCO, including in the transit and transport sector, food and energy security. Thus, the implementation of promising projects aimed at ensuring the interconnectedness of the countries of the region, efforts to expand transport routes between Central and South Asia, the development of the North-South and East-West trans-Eurasian corridors, the creation of new and modernization of existing multimodal transport corridors are of great importance.

Conclusion

The activities of the SCO, based on such key principles as the fight against the 'three evils', the protection of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, non-interference in internal affairs, are aimed at ensuring security and maintaining stability, at jointly confronting new challenges and threats, strengthening trade, economic and cultural and humanitarian cooperation in the region. Due to the fact that the

modern world has entered a period of serious aggravation of the international situation, such areas of work of the SCO as: the strengthening mutual trust, friendship and good neighborliness among the SCO member states; development of multidisciplinary cooperation in order to maintain and

strengthen peace, security and stability in the region; joint counteraction to terrorism, separatism and extremism in all their manifestations; combating illegal drug and weapons trafficking, other types of transnational criminal activity, as well as illegal migration, gain additional significance. ■

SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION INFORMATION SECURITY COOPERATION

Current Status and
Policy Options

Zou Zhengxin



Since its inception, security cooperation is the core and impetus of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Combating cybercrime and maintaining the safety of international cyberspace are issues that the international community needs to face together, and they are also new challenges and new topics for SCO security cooperation. SCO attaches great importance to maintaining information security, and member states such as China, Russia and India fully recognize the special significance of information security to regional security and stability, and are committed to continuously improving the level of information security cooperation.

SCO places a growing emphasis on information security cooperation

The SCO has a long history of information security cooperation, and since its founding in 2001, more than 10 documents have been devoted to the topic of information security cooperation. At the fifth SCO Summit in 2005, information terrorism was first

The SCO has a long history of information security cooperation, and since its founding in 2001, more than 10 documents have been devoted to the topic of information security cooperation.

mentioned in the official document. The Statement of Heads of State of Member States of Shanghai Cooperation Organization on International Information Security, adopted at the 2006 Shanghai Summit, is a guiding document and the first of its kind in the field of SCO cooperation in information security¹. The statement also mentioned the intention to establish a group of experts of SCO member states on international information security.¹ Since then, almost all Summits have discussed SCO information security cooperation, and its connotations and extensions have become richer and more specific, including the threats to international information security cooperation, how to guarantee the sovereign right of each member state to internet security, how to promote cooperation among member states in the field of digitalization and information and how to be vigilant and prevent ICT from being used by terrorist, separatist and extremist organizations, etc.

In 2021, on the 20th anniversary of the SCO, the member states gathered in Dushanbe and drew up Plan of Interaction on ensuring international

As the presidency of SCO, India's 2023 theme is "Towards a Secure SCO", information security is also on the table. India has organized several international seminars on cyber security or information security with SCO member countries.

information security for 2022-2023, and issued Dushanbe Declaration on the 20th Anniversary of the SCO.² The Dushanbe Declaration, in its security chapter, extensively emphasizes the importance of information security, makes the guarantee of international information security a priority task in maintaining security and stability in the SCO region, opposes any discriminatory practices that impede the development of communication technologies, supports the use of information and communication technologies for the purpose of promoting peace and development, and actively promotes the use of information and communication technologies for the purpose of promoting peace and development. At the 16 September 2022 meeting of the Council of Heads of State in the city of Samarkand, the member states reaffirmed the significance of cooperation in ensuring international information security and proposed establishing the SCO Information Security Centre (Republic of Kazakhstan) on the basis of the SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS).

As the presidency of SCO, India's 2023 theme is "Towards a Secure SCO", information security is also on the table. India has organized several international seminars on cyber security or information security with SCO member countries. On 14-15 December 2022, National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS), Government of India, in association with Data Security Council of India (DSCI) as a Knowledge Partner organized a Two-Day Practical Seminar on "Securing the Cyberspace Frontiers" for delegates from SCO member states. The focus of the discussion was on how the social media is turning into "Toolkit" of terrorists along with its threats and challenges.³

Main Developments and Challenges

The SCO has made a number of accomplishments in information security cooperation over the past two decades, including the establishment and improvement of RATS, the formation of SCO Expert Group on International Information Security, the conduct of Exercises on Combating 'Cyber-

Terrorism', and the strengthening of cooperation with the United Nations.

Establishment of RATS: In the second year of the SCO's existence, the Agreement on establishment of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure designated as a permanent body of the SCO was signed during a meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO Member States on June 7, 2002, in St. Petersburg. Since its inception, the SCO RATS has made a significant contribution to the organization's development and has become the pillar and focal point of the organization's efforts to combat terrorism, separatism, and extremism at the regional, global, and international levels.⁴ The international prestige of the RATS has also grown each year, serving as a model for multilateral cooperation to achieve significant security results. According to the SCO RATS data, between 2013 and 2019, the SCO suppressed over 960 terrorist-related criminal activities and apprehended over 2,600 members of international terrorist organizations.⁵ The 38th meeting of the Council of the RATS was held in New Delhi on October 14, 2022. The meeting was attended by the delegations of India, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Executive Committee of the RATS SCO. The meeting adopted the

work plan of the Executive Committee, as well as special cooperation programmes in border defence and cyber-terrorism, and decided to continue joint border operations in 2023 to combat terrorist threats from regions. The parties adopted a series of resolutions regarding the organisation, personnel, and finances of the Executive Committee, as well as the enhancement of the legal basis of the member states in the area of combating the 'three evils' (terrorism, extremism, separatism).⁶

Formation of SCO Expert Group on International Information Security:

The Expert Group on International Information Security is a permanent body of the SCO. Since 2006, it has been in charge of coordinating relevant ministries and departments, holding expert group meetings with the participation of representatives of two permanent SCO bodies, namely the Secretariat and the Executive Committee of the SCO RATS. The primary function of the expert group is to conduct a comparative analysis of the legislation of the member states in this field, existing and potential threats in the field of information security, as well as the prospects for employing appropriate means and methods to combat them, and to make pertinent recommendations on the establishment of practical

mechanisms for threat monitoring and coordination of actions.⁷

By holding regular meetings to jointly develop and consider plans for safeguarding international information security, the expert group contributes significantly to the promotion of the formulation of an intergovernmental agreement on information security, as well as to the enhancement of the SCO's governance capabilities, policies, and regulations in the field of information security.

Conducting Exercises on Combating

'Cyber-Terrorism': In order to implement a series of legal documents on preventing and countering real security threats, such as the Convention of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization against terrorism and SCO Convention on Countering Extremism, the SCO member states have organised a number of cyber counter-terrorism exercises since 2015. These exercises are intended to test the laws and regulations, operational

procedures, technical means, and law enforcement capabilities of the competent authorities of each member state in detecting, handling and combating terrorist activities, which are of great significance for cooperation in preventing cyber threats and maintaining regional security. The latest cyber counter-terrorism exercise was held in December 2019 in Xiamen, Fujian Province, with the participation of delegations from the competent authorities of eight SCO member states and delegations from the Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure. The exercise assumes that an international terrorist organization publishes terrorist information on the Internet and attempts to carry out terrorist activities, and the SCO holds an emergency meeting to coordinate the investigation and research of the online information by the member states, locate and apprehend those involved in terrorism, and identify the structure of the terrorist organization,

By holding regular meetings to jointly develop and consider plans for safeguarding international information security, the expert group contributes significantly to the promotion of the formulation of an intergovernmental agreement on information security, as well as to the enhancement of the SCO's governance capabilities, policies, and regulations in the field of information security.

sources of funding, recruitment of members, and secret branches, and take corresponding measures.

The Interaction with UN: SCO has maintained good interaction with the United Nations since the very beginning of its existence. In the field of information security, the SCO and the UN support and cooperate with each other. The SCO highly recognizes the key role of the UN in addressing threats to international information security. The Joint Statement of the Heads of SCO Member States on Cooperation in Ensuring International Information Security was adopted in 2020 and reaffirmed that the maintenance of international information security, the development and use of information and communication technologies, and international and regional cooperation in this field should be based on universally accepted principles of international law, including the UN Charter, in order to establish a peaceful, secure, open, and stable global information space. The UN has also responded positively to the SCO's demands. On 25 March 2021, the 75th session of the UN General Assembly adopted by consensus Resolution 75/69 Cooperation between the United Nations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation during its 58th meeting. The resolution acknowledges

the constructive role of the SCO in securing peace and security and notes constructive cooperation between the SCO RATS and the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, including the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre, in implementing the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, as well as cooperation between the SCO RATS and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate within the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation between these two entities signed on 25 March 2019.⁸

As a regional organization spanning Europe and Asia, covering around 40 per cent of the global population and 30 per cent of the global GDP and with 8 member countries, 4 observer countries and 9 dialogue partner countries, its information security cooperation is still far from ideal. First, the implementation of information security-related documents is not in place. As stated previously, in recent years the SCO Council of Heads of State surely mention information security, and have also signed a large number of documents to carry out information security cooperation, but more is reflected on paper and not implemented, and no specific implementation strategy has been introduced, which is generally more

form than content, and more rhetoric than action, which directly impacts the organization's implementation efficiency. The lack of continuity in the operation of pertinent mechanisms is the second issue. The SCO has established numerous mechanisms for information security cooperation; however, the international information security expert group meetings have been postponed since the outbreak of Covid-19, particularly the cyber counter-terrorism exercises since the launch meeting in 2015, held only three times in China in 2015, 2017, and 2019, and then interrupted. India, as the chair, has no news yet that a new round of cyber counterterrorism exercises will be held, and this mechanism is at risk of disruption. Thirdly, member states' roles in the field of information security are asymmetrical. China and Russia, as information powers, have been the "leaders" in this field, while other Central Asian countries have played a more limited role in it.

The above-mentioned problems are easily explicable and closely related to the national conditions of each member state and the unique nature of information security itself. First, the special and sensitive nature of information security itself limits the construction of a unified information platform for each member

state. The different levels of economic and social development of the member states within the SCO and the cooperation on information security have raised the concern of some countries about the issue of cyber sovereignty.⁹ Second, the cyber management system, as well as the laws and regulations of member nations, are distinct. Taking the information security expert group meeting as an example, the Chinese delegation to the meeting is generally led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with members from the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Defense, and State Internet Information Office, while the Russian side is led by the Federal Security Service (FSB).¹⁰ The differences in cyber management systems do not facilitate institutional alignment and hinder the implementation and execution of the conference outcomes. Third, member states have different levels of cyber development and different expectations for cyber governance. Specifically, cyber powers like China, Russia, and India are more concerned with preventing terrorism from using the Internet to flow across borders to organize and commit organized crimes and other threats, while small and medium-sized member states with lagging cyber technology development are more

concerned with controlling the spread of terrorist ideas and activities at home.

The Way Forward

SCO's information security faces a number of challenges, while there is also great scope and potential for further cooperation. The first is to narrow the "digital divide" among member countries. Due to the varying levels of economic development, information technology, and cybersecurity governance capabilities of member nations, their resilience to information security risks and capacity to deal with them differ considerably. Therefore, as the SCO faces new challenges and threats in the field of information security, countries should take a more regional security and overall development perspective, abandon geopolitical bias and the inherent sensitivity of information security, continue to deepen information security cooperation, take advantage of new technologies such as 5G and AI to improve the level of technical security of information security, improve the construction of information technology infrastructure, improve the information data protection system, strengthen the exchange and mutual appreciation of experience in information technology, promote the formation of efficient

and secure information exchange mechanisms, and jointly develop practical countermeasures.¹¹ At the same time, countries should also consider differentiated contributions to further leverage the advantages of cyber powers. In comparison, China, Russia and India have stronger advantages in legal structure, technical equipment and operational capabilities, etc. In the face of possible information security challenges, the three countries need to assume more responsibilities and obligations to build a secure, efficient and collaborative information security network on the basis of the SCO consensus.

The second is to promote regional digital governance and build an information security community. It requires: each member country should accelerate the construction of "soft" and "hard" digital infrastructure, and strive to narrow the technology gap; strengthen communication and coordination at all levels of government, enterprises and the private sector, and promote the integration and development of digital platforms and digital strategies of each country; each country should also strive to reach consensus on issues such as the regulatory system, digital rules, data sharing and data security protection, so as to create favourable conditions for the construction of a unified SCO information

One of the most urgent tasks facing SCO is to legalize and institutionalize the consensus reached by member states on information security cooperation and to establish an efficient and complete information security cooperation mechanism.

and data platform and information security community.

The third is to improve the institutional mechanism of information security.

One of the most urgent tasks facing SCO is to legalize and institutionalize the consensus reached by member states on information security cooperation and to establish an efficient and complete information security cooperation mechanism. Ideally, countries should cooperate to build a comprehensive and systematic information security cooperation mechanism: a mechanism for high-level consultations on information security, the addition of more information security-related content to SCO summits, and regular implementation reviews; information security early warning mechanism, member states fully utilise their own and unified platforms to closely monitor network dynamics, provide advance warning on potential cyber-attacks and risk events, and provide timely notification and appropriate risk control; information security emergency handling mechanism, after the occurrence of network security incidents, there should be corresponding

standard operating procedures and aftercare management; the mechanism of information security exercises, that is, the relaunching of interrupted counter-terrorism exercises, which are held on a rotating basis in each member state; and Information sharing mechanism, strengthen the exchange of information security and experience sharing among member countries, strengthen the unified training of personnel.

Over the past 22 years since its establishment, SCO has gradually increased its centripetal force and international influence, strengthened political mutual trust among member states, sustained and deepened security cooperation, greatly expanded economic cooperation, and further expanded cultural exchanges, making a unique contribution to promoting regional security, stability and prosperity. In tandem with the development of information and communication technologies, new categories of security threats, such as cyber terrorism, transnational cybercrimes, and information weapons have emerged, which have put forward

new requirements for SCO security cooperation. The member states of the SCO have made a great deal of progress in the field of information security cooperation, but their shortcomings cannot be overlooked. In the new era, the SCO confronts new challenges and

opportunities, and it is anticipated that, through the concerted efforts of its member states, it will achieve greater success in maintaining regional information security and serve as a model for global multilateral cooperation. ■

Endnotes

- 1 "Full Text of the Joint Communiqué of 2006 SCO Summit," June 15, 2006, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/meeting/171590.htm>.
- 2 "Dushanbe Declaration on the 20th Anniversary of the SCO," September 17, 2021, <http://eng.sectsc.org/news/20210917/782639.html>.
- 3 "RATS SCO Practical Seminar on "SECURING THE CYBER SPACE FRONTIERS" Organized by National Security Council Secretariat of India," December 15, 2022, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaselframePage.aspx?PRID=1883880>
- 4 关于上海合作组织反恐机构, <https://ecrats.org/cn/about/history/>
- 5 推动构建更加紧密的上合组织命运共同体, 人民网, 2022年9月13日, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2022-09/13/nw.D110000renmrb_20220913_2-03.htm
- 6 "SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure approves measures to counter threats posed by zterror groups operating from Afghanistan," ANI, Oct 14, 2022, <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/scos-regional-anti-terrorism-structure-approves-measures-to-counter-threats-posed-by-terror-groups-operating-from-afghanistan20221014152014/>
- 7 张文伟, "上海合作组织信息安全合作: 必要性、现状及前景", 《俄罗斯东欧中亚研究》, 2016年第3期, 第101页。
- 8 "UN General Assembly adopts resolution on cooperation between the UN and the SCO," March 31, 2021, <http://eng.sectsc.org/news/20210330/737245.html>
- 9 李益斌, "上海合作组织的网络恐怖主义治理探究", 《网络空间战略论坛》, 2021年8月, 第88页。
- 10 张文伟, "上海合作组织信息安全合作: 必要性、现状及前景", 《俄罗斯东欧中亚研究》, 2016年第3期, 第104页。
- 11 张莹秋, "上合组织信息安全合作", 《信息安全与通信保密》, 2022年第8期, 第142页。

DISCOVERING COMMON GROUND, EMBRACING DIVERSITY

Common Future of
SCO Countries

Karagulov Batyr
Mukhammad Azamatovich



The common future of the SCO countries is a subject of many discussions, and much hope rests on the notion that dialogue and cooperation can foster economic growth and prosperity in the region. One of the defining characteristics of the SCO is the diversity of its member states, which is both a challenge and an opportunity. On one hand, diversity can lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and competition for resources and influence. On the other, diversity can also lead to creativity, innovation, and mutual learning, if the countries are able to find common ground and respect each other's differences. In order to build a common future for the SCO countries, it is essential that they find ways to overcome their differences and work together to achieve their shared goals.

One way to achieve this common future is through the promotion of economic integration and cooperation. The SCO countries have a wealth of natural resources, human talent, and economic potential, but they also face common challenges such as poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, and infrastructure gaps. By working together

to overcome these challenges, the SCO countries can tap into the full potential of their economies and improve the living standards of their citizens. For example, the SCO countries could collaborate on infrastructure projects, such as building cross-border highways, bridges, and pipelines, to connect their economies and facilitate the flow of goods, services, and people. They could also promote trade and investment by reducing tariffs, eliminating non-tariff barriers, and improving the legal and regulatory environment for business. By increasing economic interdependence, the SCO countries can create new opportunities for growth and development, and reduce the risks of conflict and instability.

Another way to achieve a common future for the SCO countries is through the promotion of cultural and educational exchanges. By learning about each other's cultures, history, and values, the SCO countries can deepen their understanding and appreciation of each other. This can help to build trust and foster cooperation in areas such as security, trade, and investment. Cultural and educational exchanges can also help to build a new generation of leaders and

In order to build a common future for the SCO countries, it is essential that they find ways to overcome their differences and work together to achieve their shared goals.

citizens who are more open-minded, tolerant, and cosmopolitan, and who are better equipped to navigate the complex challenges of the 21st century. Through dialogue and cooperation, the SCO countries can overcome their differences and work together to achieve prosperity and economic growth. By promoting economic integration and cooperation, and by promoting cultural and educational exchanges, the SCO countries can build a brighter and more secure future for themselves and for the world.

The SCO countries are located in a sensitive geopolitical region subject to various security threats. Several terrorist organizations, extremist groups and separatist movements operate in the region. These groups pose a serious threat to security and stability in the region. Therefore, it is important that the SCO countries together effectively counter these threats. Joint action and mutual interest can help member states develop a common strategy to combat terrorism, extremism and separatism.

The SCO countries have common economic interests directly related to

their security. The region is rich in natural resources and the member states are major energy exporters. The economic growth and development of the SCO countries depends on their ability to export their resources to other countries. Therefore, any disruption in the supply chains due to security threats could have serious economic consequences for Member States. Mutual interest in ensuring the economic interests of the region can ensure the stability of the SCO countries.

The SCO countries have a common cultural heritage and historical background. Member States have deep cultural ties that can strengthen their security cooperation. Cultural exchange programs, joint military exercises and educational exchanges can help Member States better understand each other's security concerns. A mutual understanding of security issues can help Member States develop a common strategy for dealing effectively with security issues. The security of the SCO countries directly depends on mutual interest and joint actions. Member States

The economic growth and development of the SCO countries depends on their ability to export their resources to other countries. Therefore, any disruption in the supply chains due to security threats could have serious economic consequences for Member States.

must work together to counter security threats, protect their economic interests and promote cultural exchange. The SCO countries have the potential to become a leading regional organization capable of contributing to global peace and security. Therefore, it is important for Member States to develop a common vision for the organization and work together to achieve it.

Kyrgyzstan is actively seeking peace and mutual cooperation with all member states of the SCO, including Tajikistan, with which it has had border conflicts. Kyrgyzstan has always maintained a position of goodwill and cooperation towards its neighbours, especially after border disputes with Tajikistan. Kyrgyzstan's efforts to maintain peaceful relations with its neighbours are rooted in its strategic geographic location in the heart of Central Asia. The country borders China, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Thus, its foreign policy is determined by the need to ensure regional stability, security and economic prosperity through cooperation with its neighbours. The country's approach to foreign relations is guided by the principles of mutual respect, equality and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries.

In recent years, Kyrgyzstan has had border disputes with Tajikistan that have led to clashes between the armed

forces of the two countries. These disputes mainly concerned land and water resources, which are critical to the livelihoods of local communities living in border areas. Despite the tension, Kyrgyzstan has always sought to resolve conflicts peacefully, through dialogue and negotiations.

Kyrgyzstan's approach to relations with other SCO member states is also shaped by its commitment to regional integration and economic cooperation. The country is a key participant in economic initiatives which aim to connect Asia, Europe and Africa through infrastructure development and trade. Kyrgyzstan actively participated in the development of regional transport networks, such as the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway project, which aims to enhance trade and economic ties between the three countries.

Kyrgyzstan's desire for peace and mutual cooperation with all SCO Member States, including Tajikistan, is due to its strategic position in the heart of Central Asia and its commitment to regional stability, security and economic prosperity. The country's approach to international relations is guided by the principles of mutual respect, equality and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, which have helped to strengthen strong ties of cooperation with neighbours.

The SCO countries are also trying to balance their relations with the US and China. They recognize the importance of economic cooperation with China, but also seek to maintain political and security ties with the US. This has led to a complex geopolitical environment in which the SCO countries have to navigate through numerous regional and global alliances.

The political prospects of the SCO countries are shaped by a complex set of factors, including geopolitical competition, economic integration, and challenges to regional security. The organization has made progress in promoting economic cooperation and regional stability, but there are also challenges that need to be addressed. As the geopolitical environment continues to change, the SCO countries must navigate multiple regional and global alliances to achieve their political goals.

One of the most significant geopolitical factors influencing the SCO is the competition between the US and China. As the US continues to pivot toward the Indo-Pacific, China is increasingly gaining influence in Central Asia, where the SCO is based. This has led to some tension between the US and the SCO countries, especially as China continues to expand its BRI in the region. However, the SCO countries are also trying to balance their relations with the US and China. They recognize the importance of economic

cooperation with China, but also seek to maintain political and security ties with the US. This has led to a complex geopolitical environment in which the SCO countries have to navigate through numerous regional and global alliances.

Economic integration is also an important factor shaping the political prospects of the SCO countries. The organization aims to promote trade and investment among its members and has made progress in this regard. However, there are also problems of economic integration within the SCO. Member countries have different levels of economic development, which can lead to disparities in trade and investment opportunities.

For specific strengthening of economic ties between the SCO countries, a banking union of the SCO countries with specific proposals can be created. A banking union is a form of financial integration that includes the creation of a unified supervisory mechanism, a deposit insurance scheme, and dispute resolution powers for banks in different countries.

The European Union (EU) has a banking union that aims to ensure financial stability and prevent future banking crises. The SCO countries could create their own banking union, tailored to their needs and specific circumstances.

The first step in creating a banking union for the SCO countries would be the creation of a legal framework that defines the goals, scope and management structure of the union. This can be done through a treaty or agreement signed by member countries. The legal framework should also define the union's regulatory and supervisory powers, including powers to license and supervise banks operating in the SCO countries. The second step will be the creation of a unified mechanism for supervision of the banks of the SCO countries. It will be responsible for overseeing the prudential supervision of banks and ensuring compliance with banking rules and standards. It can be located in the SCO Secretariat or created as a separate organization. It should also have the power to impose sanctions on banks that break the rules or pose a systemic risk to the financial system. The third step will be the establishment of a deposit insurance scheme to protect depositors in the event of a bank failure. Guarantees that depositors will be reimbursed a certain amount in case of bankruptcy of their bank. It may be funded by contributions

from member banks or a central fund set up by the union. It should also have the right to intervene in troubled banks and, if necessary, take over the management of the bank. The fourth step will be the establishment of a resolution body that will be responsible for the orderly resolution of troubled banks. The Settlement Authority will have the power to intervene in bank failures and take over their management in order to ensure the continuity of essential banking services. The settlement authority may also have the power to use public funds to recapitalize banks if necessary.

Finally, the SCO countries need to create a mechanism for exchanging information and coordinating the implementation of banking rules and standards. This may include the establishment of a committee or working group that meets regularly to exchange information and coordinate policy.

The creation of a banking union for the SCO countries would have several advantages. First, it would help improve financial stability by ensuring that banks in the region are subject to common rules and standards. Second, it will improve the efficiency of cross-border banking by reducing regulatory barriers and facilitating the movement of capital across borders. Finally, it will increase confidence in the banking sector in the

region and increase confidence in the security of the financial system.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the SCO countries have the potential to create a banking union that could deepen economic cooperation and contribute to financial stability in the region. Establishing a banking union would require the establishment of a legal framework, a unified oversight mechanism, a deposit insurance scheme, a dispute resolution body, and a mechanism for information sharing and policy coordination. While the process of building a banking union will be complex and require significant political will, the potential benefits make it worthwhile for the SCO countries.

Also, one of the ways to achieve the goals of economic strengthening of the SCO is the creation of a customs union. A customs union is a type of regional economic integration that involves the elimination of tariffs and quotas on goods sold within the union and the imposition of a common external tariff on goods imported from outside the union. Specific examples can be cited on how the SCO countries could create their own customs union.

The first step in creating a customs union among the SCO countries would be to agree on the terms of the union. This involves agreeing on a common external

tariff and defining rules for the free movement of goods within the union. Member States also need to agree on how to distribute the revenue generated from the common external tariff. One of the advantages of creating a customs union of the SCO countries will be an increase in trade between member states. By removing tariffs and quotas on goods sold within the union, businesses will be encouraged to expand trade with each other, boosting economic activity and creating jobs. Removing tariffs and quotas will also make goods cheaper for consumers, which will improve their standard of living.

Another advantage of creating a customs union of the SCO countries will be an increase in the region's competitiveness in the world market. By working together, Member States could create a larger market with more room for growth and business expansion. It will also attract foreign investment to the region, which will contribute to further economic development.

In addition to economic benefits, the creation of a customs union of the SCO countries could also improve political relations between member states. Working together to achieve economic integration, member states will develop closer ties and expand cooperation in other areas.

The SCO countries have the potential to create a banking union that could deepen economic cooperation and contribute to financial stability in the region

This could help reduce tensions and promote stability in the region.

However, there are also some challenges that the SCO countries need to solve in order to create a successful customs union. One problem is that Member States have different levels of economic development, which can make it difficult to agree on a common external tariff that is fair to all members. There is also the risk that some Member States may try to take advantage of the customs union to gain an unfair advantage over other members. Another issue is that member states have different legal and regulatory frameworks, which can make it difficult to harmonize rules and regulations for trade within the union. This can lead to inefficiencies and trade barriers within the union.

Despite these challenges, the creation of a customs union of the SCO countries could bring significant benefits to the region. To succeed, member states will need to work together to negotiate the terms of the union and resolve any issues that arise. In doing so, they could create a more prosperous and stable region that would benefit all member states.

In conclusion, it may be mentioned that all of the above is just the vision of the author of how the SCO countries could develop. While these ideas could bring significant economic and political benefits to the region, it is not the final plan. SCO member states will need to have open and honest discussions about the benefits and challenges, and come up with a solution that is best suited to all countries concerned. ■

THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANISATION IN A NEW GEOPOLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Becoming an Institution of
All-Eurasia Cooperation?

Dmitrii Pavlovich Novikov

SCO in the New Geopolitical Context

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization has been in existence for more than 20 years. The Declaration on its establishment was signed by the leaders of six states: China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan on 15 June 2001 in Shanghai. The day before, in the small assembly hall of the Jinjiang Hotel in Shanghai, then-Chinese leader Jiang Zemin met with Russian President Vladimir Putin to discuss the development of bilateral relations and the goals of the SCO. Interestingly, in the same hall, but almost three decades earlier, in February 1972, US President R. Nixon and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai signed the famous Shanghai Communiqué between the PRC and the US. This meeting can therefore be called doubly symbolic. Firstly, it demonstrated that it was Russian-Chinese strategic cooperation that provided the basis for the creation of the SCO; secondly, it showed that the Cold War years for Moscow and Beijing were far in the past and that Russia and China were seeking to lead the world away from bipolarity and US-dominated unipolarity towards real multipolarity.

The SCO has come a long way in more than two decades of work. From

the outset, its concept of a regional organization of the Eurasian space was based on three main areas of activity: intensification of security and foreign policy cooperation, deepening of economic cooperation and cooperation in the humanitarian sphere (culture, science, sports, etc.).

The geopolitical upheaval of 2022 has already led to major structural shifts in the international system, which further increases the importance of the SCO and opens up new opportunities for its development. However, these geopolitical changes should not be considered as just new challenges, but as a way to fundamentally new international structure. It might demand the SCO not only to adopt itself to a new reality, but reconsider its structural and institutional role in pretty fundamental way. The trend of these developments should be a major transformation of SCO from an Organization pretty much focused on Central Asian issues to an All-Eurasia cooperation institute. This institution could serve as a some kind of analogy of OSCE in the non-Western part of the continent, but less ideologized and more focused and effective. This meaningful development can proceed along three main tracks: ensuring regional security,

fostering economic cooperation and deepening scientific and expert dialogue.

The SCO Security Track: Adapting to a New Environment

Of these three areas, the organization's greatest achievements have been in the field of security. A number of major international treaties have been concluded and joint military exercises are regularly held.

Coordination in countering international terrorism is of particular importance.

All SCO member states are or have been attacked by international terrorists.

With the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force from Afghanistan announced by US President Biden, this threat has increased. Security issues also include such areas of SCO activity as combating drug trafficking, information security and problems of illegal migration.

Cooperation in the military sphere is developing, with joint military exercises of the member states' armed forces

“Peace Mission”, as well as exercises of special services and law enforcement agencies being held almost annually. An international counternarcotics operation “Web” was conducted in the territory of the SCO member states as part of the Programme for the Counternarcotics Strategy of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation member states for 2018-2023, adopted in Bishkek in 2019.

Coordination within the framework of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) in Tashkent has reached a high level. As Russian President Vladimir Putin noted in his speech at the Council of Heads of State meeting in Dushanbe in September 2021, “the SCO is rightly one of the most influential centres of multipolar international cooperation architecture, making a significant contribution to the security of the Eurasian region, its sustainable socio-economic growth, and to maintaining international peace and stability in general”.

The geopolitical turmoil, which started in 2022 will unavoidably broaden the SCO security agenda. It will unavoidably bring to the table such issues as strategic

The Organization's greatest achievements have been in the field of security. A number of major international treaties have been concluded and joint military exercises are regularly held. Coordination in countering international terrorism is of particular importance.

reassurance and some kind of dialogue on military issues and military-to-military cooperation – what SCO traditionally tried to avoid. Two other important aspects are predetermined by enlargement of the Organization. Membership of Iran unavoidably brings Middle East regional security as one of the essential topics for SCO, at least in some aspects, such as counter-terror practices. Involvement of Russia in confrontation with the West and expansion of SCO to Belarus moves SCO agenda to European security issues – once again at least in some aspects. It all creates a basis to transform SCO into a more comprehensive all-Eurasia security and cooperation institution. But to avoid too strong focus on security while expanding and deepening its practices, SCO should also develop the track of economic cooperation.

SCO Economic Track: From Declarations to Actions

Economic cooperation within the SCO is probably the most difficult topic. Here the organisation has not yet been able to make significant progress. For years, experts and politicians in the member states have been talking about the need for an SCO Development Bank that could finance multilateral inter-state economic projects. But so far only a treaty basis

has been established: only a handful of multilateral projects, mostly in the transport and logistics sectors, are being implemented on that basis.

However, in the new geopolitical environment, when it is imperative to preserve all the positive things that the SCO has built up over two decades of existence, the intensification of multilateral economic cooperation became quite necessary if not to say existential for further development of the Organization. Firstly, it might create a new impulse for further institutionalization of SCO and a clear non-confrontation agenda for partnership. Secondly, it can serve as a necessary field of cooperation to somehow cover the overwhelming focus on security issues. In the current climate, in which the SCO countries look on with some apprehension, attempts to promote a common security agenda are unlikely to be met with the same enthusiasm as before. In this situation strengthening of security agenda, including possible (in fact necessary) intervention of a dialogue on hard security should be accompanied by boosting economic cooperation.

Logistics should be the key field of cooperation, as it is probably the most objectively necessary aspect, which has a long history of discussion within the SCO framework. In fact, logistics always stayed in the center of economic agenda.

For instance, the last joint communique following the 21st meeting of the SCO Prime-Ministers clearly stated that “new and upgrade existing international routes for road and rail transport, multimodal transport corridors and logistics centers, as well as to introduce digital, innovative, and energy-saving processes, to streamline cross-border procedures in accordance with best international practices, as well as to implement joint infrastructure projects that ensure mutually beneficial use of the SCO Member States’ transit potential”².

With almost all the stakeholders on the ground, SCO is the most natural international institution to discuss such projects as the North-East and East-West logistical corridors as well as potential synthesis between them. The key problem is that for years SCO was rather a source of declarative support rather than a real ground for negotiations and deals. But in terms of rising interconnectivity and objective necessity in development of regional logistics, the Organization has a great potential to play a leading role in institutionalization and promotion of such projects.

Another important aspect of the economic agenda is the energy dialogue and cooperation in energy security, probably within the framework of the SCO Energy Club. The main task for the SCO Energy Club is its full-fledged

institutionalisation. At the moment, this structure within the SCO is mainly advisory in nature, acting as a kind of additional platform for the discussion of various energy issues by the Deputy Energy Ministers of the SCO Member States and associate members of this organisation. In November 2022, at a meeting of the SCO Council of Heads of Government, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin stated that the SCO Energy Club should be used more actively “to deepen practical cooperation in the energy sphere.”³

SCO energy cooperation implies harmonization of energy strategies and strengthening of cooperation between hydrocarbon-producing countries Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and consumer countries - China, India, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. In fact, according to a number of experts, the SCO Energy Club could contribute to the transformation of the SCO into a self-sufficient energy system.⁴ Plans to turn Turkey into a gas hub through which pipeline and liquefied natural gas will be traded, both in the European direction and at the regional-Eurasian level should also contribute to the further development of the SCO Energy Club.

The second aspect of the energy dialogue is development of the rules in this sphere. With the rise of geopolitical confrontation in 2022 the global regional

SCO energy cooperation implies harmonization of energy strategies and strengthening of cooperation between hydrocarbon-producing countries and consumer countries. In fact, according to a number of experts, the SCO Energy Club could contribute to the transformation of the SCO into a self-sufficient energy system.

order also started to decline. The Western energy sanctions against Russia in fact could serve as precedent for a forceful transformation of the global energy market for developed Western economies advantage. SCO which includes two major energy consumers – China and India – and one of the leading energy producers – Russia – could become an important ground for rule-making in the energy field. In fact, it fully correlates with the current SCO discussion on the energy security which also develops around these ideas. For instance, the last statement of SCO Heads of States on energy security put a clear emphasis on necessity to develop “open, transparent and efficient international energy market, to reduce trade barriers, avoid excessive volatility of global prices on exchange commodities in the energy sector” and “strengthening interaction between the supplying countries, transit countries and consumer countries”⁵. A particular coordination and synthesis of SCO policies with BRICS might make these efforts even more effective. Especially taking consideration

a proactive wish of Saudi Arabia to develop partnership with both formats. The dialogue on the new rules could be essential in a broader sense as an order-making organization. Especially in a situation where some of the SCO states are suffering from Western sanctions and others fear secondary sanctions, as well as declining economic performance due to general problems in the global economy, deepening economic cooperation to curb these threats is necessary for all.

Experts on the SCO in Russia and other member states have advocated the accelerated development of the economic component of the SCO as its activities as a regional organisation. China and the Central Asian states have always supported economic cooperation at the official level, albeit in different ways: China has insisted on the early creation of conditions for the “gradual implementation of free movement of goods, capital, services and technologies” - a goal set out in the SCO Charter⁶ - that is, in fact, the creation of a Free Trade Area. This is only natural, since the

powerful Chinese industry requires the expansion of markets. The Central Asian states have taken a more cautious stance.

In practice, however, these ideas of seriously expanding multilateral economic cooperation have often run up against the inertia of thinking in a number of countries, including Russia. It is now abundantly clear that if there were more major multilateral economic projects within the SCO, it would be much easier for Russia to respond to the sanctions challenges it faces today.

It is to be hoped that the accession of several new major economic powers, some of which are also under Western sanctions, will stimulate the intensification of international projects of the SCO, which will further strengthen it and make it more practically relevant to the general public.

SCO Science and Expert Track: Serving as a Ground for New Ideas

While SCO needs quite a fundamental reconsideration of its structural role in the new geopolitical environment, the expert dialogue becomes essential for the Member-States to come up with a new strategy of SCO institutional development. Over the course of its existence, the SCO has developed an extensive ecosystem of public structures

around it. Several international public and business structures have emerged around the organization to facilitate its work. These include the SCO Business Council, the SCO Youth Council, the SCO Interbank Association and some others.

However, perhaps one of the most in-demand is the research-expert ecosystem. There is probably no serious international organisation in the world today that does not use the mechanism of the “second track” - an association of scientific centers and experts dealing with the organization’s problems and providing it with scientific and analytical expertise. Such structures exist, for example, under the UN, ASEAN, APEC, CSTO and other international organizations.

In the case of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the SCO Forum plays this role. According to its founding documents, the Forum is a multilateral, public consultative and expert mechanism established to promote and scientifically support SCO activities, develop cooperation between the research and political science centers of SCO Member States, conduct joint research on topical issues in the Organization’s competence, clarify the objectives and principles of SCO activities, expand its links with academic and public circles, and encourage exchanges of views between scholars and experts in the fields of political science. The Forum

will build its activities on the principles of the SCO Charter on the basis of the legislation of the SCO Member States and the SCO rules. The Forum works in close cooperation with the SCO Secretariat, the Council of National Coordinators and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the SCO Member States.

The Forum was founded in 2006 at its founding meeting in Moscow, and already that year, in an article entitled ‘The SCO - a new model of successful international cooperation’, Russian President Vladimir Putin wrote that “the recently established SCO Forum, which brought together representatives of expert and academic circles, is intended to become a kind of non-governmental expert mechanism of the Organisation”.

And two years later, speaking at the Forum’s third meeting in Beijing, the then Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi noted: “Over the course of two years, by organizing various types of exchanges, discussions and bilateral events, the Forum has carried out a comprehensive exchange of information, opinions and put forward various proposals. By providing government agencies with useful suggestions and grounds for decision-making, it has greatly contributed to the development of the SCO. The Chinese side appreciates it”⁸.

Each Member State is represented in the Forum by one research center that

is the most authoritative in the field of SCO research. It is designated as an SCO National Research Centre and, as such, is a member of the Forum. Today, there are eight SCO members, and eight national research centers within the Forum. The first to join the Forum were the Institute of World Economy and Politics under the Foundation of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the China Institute of International Affairs under the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Institute of Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, the Institute of Strategic and Interregional Studies under the President of Uzbekistan, and the Center for East Asian and SCO Studies of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations of the Russian Foreign Ministry. Following the formal accession of India and Pakistan to the SCO in 2018, the Indian Council of World Affairs in New Delhi and the Institute of Strategic Studies of Islamabad were admitted to the Forum.

Further, development of the scientific-expert track seems likely to follow two main directions. First, the SCO Forum can and should become a platform for elaborating a strategy for the organization’s further development, aimed at strengthening its institutional role in the region. This implies not only strengthening the role of the SCO Forum itself, but also fundamentally increasing

An important area is the strengthening of scientific and educational ties within the second track to form a broader network of specialists in SCO competencies. A good example is the Indian Foreign Ministry's 2023 Chairmanship fellowship programme for young scholars, specialists in SCO and regional security and development issues. Developing and deepening such a network of contacts will not only improve the quality of expertise, but also strengthen ties between civil societies.

the intensity of ties between SCO scientific and expert institutions within the second track.

A second no less important area is the strengthening of scientific and educational ties within the second track to form a broader network of specialists in SCO competencies. A good example is the Indian Foreign Ministry's 2023 Chairmanship fellowship programme for young scholars, specialists in SCO and regional security and development issues. Developing and deepening such a network of contacts will not only improve the quality of expertise, but also strengthen ties between civil societies. This, in turn, may become the basis for the development of other SCO tracks - areas of activity.

SCO as the Institutional Backbone of Greater Eurasia

The new round of the Ukrainian crisis, which started in February 2022, has seriously changed the geopolitical

situation of the world as a whole. Today, the world is facing new challenges.

These challenges are associated with a sharp polarization and consolidation of forces advocating a multipolar world, on the one hand, and those supporting US hegemony, on the other. States and international organizations that had previously taken an intermediate position and tried to maintain constructive relations with the supporters of both tendencies have had to make a clearer choice and join one of them while taking a more hostile stance towards the other.

The new context also raises the question of the fate of international organizations and security and economic cooperation formats in Asia and Eurasia: the APEC Forum, the East Asia Summit and, of course, the SCO. Suffice it to recall the recent disputes over Russia's representation at the Summits of some of them. As a result, the work of these forums could be significantly weakened, which could leave the region without

effective multilateral formats at all.

Under these circumstances, the effective and efficient work of the SCO takes on new significance.

The development of the areas described above is only part of the possible unlocking of the SCO's potential as a key global and regional platform. The key strategic task for the further development of the Organisation should be its organic inclusion in the mainstream development processes of regional and global processes that have accelerated significantly in 2022. The key process is the shaping of a mega-regional international order in Eurasia that would be aimed at strengthening security and developing the huge potential of the non-Western part of the continent.

In this context, the main Russian mega-initiative on the Eurasian continent, aimed at realizing this potential, has in fact already become the idea of forming a Greater Eurasia co-development and security community - from the ASEAN countries and the Republic of Korea and possibly Japan to the East, India to the South, Turkey and Iran, with the main pillars being Russia, the EAEC and China, as well as the SCO of course.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation appears to be the best political backbone of this space and a forum for discussing common security issues, especially after

its expansion into India and Pakistan and potentially into Iran. At the same time, as illustrated above, it can also play an important role in the development of the international economic order, for example in the field of energy. It can also be an important forum for discussing the rules of the game in other areas of economic cooperation, which seem certain to increase inevitably. In the new pattern of international trade organisation, which is shaped in part by Western sanctions on Russia, China and Iran are isolated and will inevitably gravitate towards each other with a few exceptions. The least developed countries in the region - Pakistan, the Central Asian Republics - have prospects of rapid economic growth due to the low-start effect. The same applies to Iran, which after many years is emerging from the sanctions regime and is almost "doomed" to rapid growth. And the huge economies of China and India provide the new space of co-development with an economic "safety cushion".

To a large extent, a number of Russian initiatives were aimed at creating such a space, for example, the initiative to conclude the EAEU-PRC Comprehensive Trade and Economic Agreement, and the intensification of cooperation with ASEAN. The central initiative in this area is the initiative launched in 2016 by the President of Russia. Russian President Vladimir V. Putin's proposal to form a

The emergence and development of a Greater Eurasia community is not solely a Russian plan or aspiration. It is an objective process based on major global geopolitical trends. Its basis is Russian-Chinese rapprochement, driven by the rise of China, the collapse of the USSR and the strengthening of the new Russia, as well as the active stimulation of attempts by the US and its allies to restrain the development of both states within the framework of the establishment of Western domination of international politics.

Greater Eurasian Economic Area (GEEA) was a central initiative in this direction as also his proposal to form a Greater Eurasian Partnership⁹. This initiative has already been recognised by the SCO Member States, as reflected in joint interstate Declarations. However, it still needs to be concretely fleshed out for further implementation.

The institutional environment that has emerged in Eurasia, consisting of a multitude of partly overlapping and partly conflicting initiatives, does not currently fully meet the needs of the states in the region: ensuring sustainable growth, political stability and security. This environment is patchwork and needs more articulation/conjugation.

The emergence and development of a Greater Eurasia community is not solely a Russian plan or aspiration. It is an objective process based on major global geopolitical trends. Its basis is Russian-Chinese rapprochement,

driven by the rise of China, the collapse of the USSR and the strengthening of the new Russia, as well as the active stimulation of attempts by the US and its allies to restrain the development of both states within the framework of the establishment of Western domination of international politics. Other states in the region have their own interests, which also encourages them to become more involved in the creation of a new Eurasian system free from interference from outside forces.

In the new context, the SCO needs to define its role in the processes of Eurasian consolidation. Most of the proposed visions of a Greater Eurasia assume that this new community will build on the existing and well-established organizations and groups here: EAEU, SCO, CSTO, ASEAN and possibly APEC. This implies a significant role for the SCO as one of the most authoritative Eurasian structures. However, whether this role is

more political, economic or cultural and civilizational is a matter of serious debate.

It seems to us that the SCO could play the role of a second circle in the concentric circles of Eurasian cooperation, which would differ in intensity. Different Eurasian states are unevenly prepared to engage in Eurasian cooperation: some seek integration and even a political alliance, while others would like only to expand trade and economic cooperation and cultural ties. And in this regard, at least initially, rigid criteria should be avoided, as is the practice, for example, in the EU or NATO, where serious internal problems have already arisen because of this.

Under these circumstances, a system of concentric circles, allowing each state to connect to the Eurasian system as and when it is ready, seems very constructive. Here too, the SCO could play a significant role. It is now clear that the core of the Eurasian system will be the close interaction between the EAEU and China. However, it is unlikely to become possible without the active involvement of other major players, such as India, ASEAN, and, in the future, possibly the EU or its individual members. And here the role of the SCO will be invaluable. This role would be that through the SCO some states that are not part of the EAEU, but are either full members of the SCO or observers and dialogue partners, could

join the system of Eurasian cooperation. And the next, third circle, would consist of states that are neither members of the SCO nor of the EAEU. The SCO experts could engage in a detailed elaboration of this concept.

Conclusion

The SCO's 20 years of work have shown that the organisation has become not only a result, but also one of the most important engines for the development of international cooperation in Eurasia. In that time it has come a long way and is now attracting considerable interest around the world. At the same time, this interest is in some ways even greater than that which the organization's actual achievements could generate. Recent developments, increased global turbulence and sharply intensified geopolitical competition may give impetus to the SCO's further development and transformation into one of the central institutional pillars of the global and regional order.

Over the past two decades, the SCO has managed to grow in stature significantly, becoming one of the key international organisations in the non-Western world. The reason for interest in the organisation is that it has, along with a number of other non-Western structures, taken on the role of counterbalancing Western

influence in the world, which was left vacant after the collapse of the USSR¹⁰. However, its own activities have also played a significant role, proving the effectiveness of Schofield structures.

At the moment it is very clear that, regardless, the security domain is the most developed and most advanced in the SCO. However, the situation in the world has since deteriorated significantly. Therefore, while critically assessing what has been created, we believe that although political dialogue has reached a high level within the organisation, the practical implementation of decisions made has sometimes stalled, and political and economic agreements made by Heads of State have often failed to materialize. In this regard, all SCO bodies need to pay attention to the quality and feasibility of the adopted documents, rather than their quantity, and perhaps reduce them to key strategic documents.

As concrete measures of logical internal development, it would be useful, for example, to implement the previously envisaged reorganisation of the RATS into

the SCO Universal Centre for Countering Challenges and Threats to the Security of SCO States.

Speaking in Dushanbe in 2021, President Vladimir Putin noted that Russia considers it useful “to strengthen the functional capabilities of the regional anti-terrorist structure RATS by including experts in combating money laundering, terrorist financing and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in its staff”¹¹. There are constructive proposals from Member States in all of these areas. For example, Kazakhstan has proposed the creation of an Information Security Centre in Bishkek and Tajikistan has proposed the creation of an Anti-Drug Centre in Dushanbe. All these proposals are welcome, but in order not to disperse forces and to maintain overall coordination, it would be wise to have all the new structures work as units of the Universal Centre.

In the field of security, the SCO has a number of areas of work. First of all, it is the overall coordination of efforts to

Speaking in Dushanbe in 2021, President Vladimir Putin noted that Russia considers it useful “to strengthen the functional capabilities of the regional anti-terrorist structure RATS by including experts in combating money laundering, terrorist financing and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in its staff.”

counter forces seeking to impose the hegemony of one civilization center on the world. This policy of new colonialism is met with growing opposition from many non-Western states, including SCO Member States. In this sense, we should welcome the plans to further enlarge the Organization - to include Iran as a full member, to upgrade the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia to observer status, and to grant observer status to Egypt, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. At the same time, when considering the expansion of the organisation, it is necessary to strictly take into account Article 4 of the 2007 Treaty on Long-Term Good Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation of the SCO Member States, according to which SCO members must not support 'any actions that are hostile to other contracting parties'¹².

Coordination of security work between the SCO and the CSTO, joint meetings and events remain important. Closer cooperation is also needed on the issue of Afghanistan. The situation in Afghanistan is somewhat calmer today, but the declared goal of the SCO in Dushanbe to promote an inclusive inter-Afghan peace process while blocking the threat of terrorism, drug trafficking and religious extremism emanating from that country has not yet been fully achieved.

The coronavirus pandemic caused considerable damage to international cooperation in general. In the face of the pandemic, many countries chose to act nationally and the role of international agencies declined. The SCO countries also faced serious difficulties. The spread of coronavirus infection throughout the Shanghai Cooperation Organization created a highly complex public health and epidemiological situation. In these conditions, the member countries were forced to take restrictive measures, which could not but affect many aspects of practical cooperation between them, as well as the intensity of contacts between relevant ministries, agencies and other structures.

In this challenging environment, the task of adjusting ways of working together has come to the forefront, not only to preserve but also to give added impetus to multilateral cooperation, despite the challenge of the pandemic. And the SCO has largely met this challenge, withstanding the test of endurance and demonstrating its ability to respond appropriately to emerging risks and challenges.

During the pandemic, considerable experience has been gained in operational collaboration to combat COVID-19 and the preconditions for deeper

Only closer Russian-Chinese cooperation, including within the SCO, can maintain relative stability and development in Eurasia.

cooperation in the field of sanitary and epidemiological well-being and biosafety have been created. Many activities, including meetings of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, heads of sanitary and epidemiological services and tourism administrations, as well as expert consultations in the areas of health, transport and finance, have moved to a new online mode for the SCO.

Overall, the SCO Member States have shown a high level of solidarity and mutual support. As SCO Secretary-General Vladimir Norov said in December 2020 that the organisation had managed to reformat the work of the main sectoral cooperation mechanisms and prepare a mutual set of documents regulating a number of important political and economic decisions. The

first part of this period fell during the Russian Presidency, which played a significant role in this reformatting¹³.

No less important in the new situation is strengthening the role of Russia and China in the SCO. In the emerging bipolar structure of the world, the US and its allies trying to maintain global hegemony are confronted not only by Russia, but also by the much more economically powerful China. Under these circumstances, in case of successful interaction between these two countries, the chances of maintaining security and preserving peace in the SCO region on conditions acceptable to all are much greater. Only closer Russian-Chinese cooperation, including within the SCO, can maintain relative stability and development in Eurasia. ■

Endnotes

- 1 <http://en.kremlin.ru/catalog/persons/351/events/66706>
- 2 Documents | SCO (sectsko.org)
- 3 Meeting of the sco heads of government council. (2023, June 3). <http://government.ru/en/news/46943/>
- 4 SCO energy club: what it should be? / SCO Shanghai Cooperation Organization [Digital Resource]. URL: <http://infoshos.ru/en/?idn=9616> (accessed: 04.06.2023).
- 5 Documents | SCO (sectsko.org)
- 6 <https://sco-russia2020.ru/images/17/25/172532.pdf>
- 7 SCO – A new model of successful international cooperation. (2006, June 14). President of Russia. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23633>
- 8 <https://www.asiaplustj.info/en/news/tajikistan/20080520/sco-forum-meets-beijing-discuss-cooperation-issues>
- 9 Plenary session of St Petersburg International Economic Forum. (2016, June 17). President of Russia. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/52178>
- 10 Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Looking for a New Role // Russia in Global Affairs [Digital Resource]. URL: <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/shanghai-cooperation-organization-looking-for-a-new-role/> (accessed: 04.06.2023).
- 11 Meeting of the SCO Heads of State Council // President of Russia [Digital Resource]. URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66706> (accessed: 04.06.2023).
- 12 Agreement of SCO on long-term neighborliness, friendship and cooperation [Digital Resource]. URL: <https://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx?rgn=20606> (accessed: 04.06.2023).
- 13 Shanghai Cooperation Organisation | SCO [Digital Resource]. URL: <http://eng.sectsko.org/news/20201208/702292.html> (accessed: 04.06.2023).

ADVANCING A MULTIDIMENSIONAL STRATEGY

A Comprehensive Response to
Drug Trafficking Challenges in the
Digital Age

Rahimov Faridun



This paper presents a comprehensive response to the evolving challenge of drug trafficking, especially in the digital era, within the scope of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). As the drug trade adapts to technological advancements, traditional counter-narcotics strategies such as border control and punitive measures prove insufficient. Recognizing the need for a holistic, multifaceted approach, this paper proposes strengthening regional cooperation, enhancing law enforcement capabilities, advocating for policy and legal reforms, and promoting public health interventions. This includes advancing surveillance of precursor chemicals, incorporating artificial intelligence and data analytics for predictive enforcement, and adopting innovative technology. The study further emphasizes addressing the root causes of drug use and trafficking, such as poverty and inequality, advocating for a preventive stance over a punitive one. The paper concludes by urging a collaborative,

sustained effort from all SCO member states and other global organizations, recognizing that only through such endeavors can the devastating impact of drug trafficking be effectively mitigated.

An Overview of the Global Drug Situation

From the vast poppy fields of Afghanistan to the fertile coca plantations of South America, the global drug situation is underpinned by interplay of human nature, societal dynamics, and economic drivers. Humans, unlike any other species, possess the unique ability to foresee the potential outcomes of their actions. Despite this capacity, history shows us a compelling tendency to challenge boundaries, often directly transgressing prohibitions. This human propensity ranges across a broad spectrum - from corruption and tax evasion to drunk driving and loan abuse. Notably, it also prominently features in the realm of drug trafficking, which, despite harsh prohibitions, continues to flourish.

Afghanistan, propelled by persistent poverty, and social inequality, has emerged as the world's leading producer of heroin. The recent return of the Taliban to power in 2021, following the departure of American troops, has only further muddied the waters.

Afghanistan, propelled by persistent poverty, and social inequality, has emerged as the world's leading producer of heroin. The recent return of the Taliban to power in 2021, following the departure of American troops, has only further muddied the waters. Despite formal bans on opium poppy cultivation, the crop's value has soared, leading to an increase in production and a surge in drug trafficking^{1,2}.

Similarly, Latin America, specifically Colombia, has become the epicenter of global cocaine trade. Cocaine production has thrived there, leveraging the region's fertile lands and historical factors, including the legality of coca cultivation until 1963. Today, Colombia maintains a significant hold on the global cocaine market, generating an estimated annual revenue exceeding US\$ 100 billion³.

As we delve into the complexities of the global drug trade, it becomes evident that traditional counter-strategies, relying primarily on punitive measures and border controls, are falling short. In

the face of this ever-evolving challenge, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), with its diverse membership and wide-reaching influence, is uniquely poised to confront the issue of drug-trafficking head-on.

Production & Transportation

Drug trafficking involves intricate networks and various transportation routes. Afghan heroin follows multiple paths, including the Balkan route through Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and Europe. Another significant route is the Golden Triangle⁴, encompassing Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, and southern China. This region has witnessed an increase in the production of crystal methamphetamine and methamphetamine-containing tablets in recent years. Criminal syndicates, such as the Canton criminal super syndicate Sam Gore also called "The Company", have played a pivotal role in fueling this growth⁵. Transportation of Afghan heroin relies on methods like small fishing

Traditional counter-strategies, relying primarily on punitive measures and border controls, are falling short. In the face of this ever-evolving challenge, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), with its diverse membership and wide-reaching influence, is uniquely poised to confront the issue of drug-trafficking head-on.

boats from Myanmar to neighboring countries, caravans traversing regions, and shipments from port cities.

Similarly, the transportation of Latin American cocaine primarily begins in Colombia and targets various destinations, including Russia, Central Asian region and other countries⁶. To minimize risks, cocaine shipments are divided into smaller cargoes loaded onto different ships. After reaching Europe, the cocaine is transported through various means, such as trucks and rail, constantly changing routes and modes of transport to evade law enforcement. To enter Russia and Central Asia, borders with neighbouring nations are crossed, ensuring the successful distribution of cocaine within these regions.

It's worth noting that drug trafficking operations may involve various strategies to overcome border controls and evade law enforcement. These strategies often exploit weaknesses in border security, including smuggling methods that are constantly evolving and adapting to changing circumstances. The precise details of these strategies can vary, but criminal syndicates employ tactics to facilitate the movement of illicit substances while minimizing the risks of detection and interception.⁷

Emerging amidst the complex challenge of traditional drug trafficking is the increasing prevalence of illicit laboratories. Operating clandestinely, these laboratories, equipped with sophisticated technology, manufacture and distribute vast amounts of illegal substances. These labs contribute significantly to the shadow economy, thereby posing a multifaceted threat to governments^{8,9}.

Moreover, advancements in science and technology have enabled the future development of cluster systems for drug production. Such systems incorporate robotic, remote-controlled reactors, significantly reducing human involvement and risk. The system functions autonomously, with carriers performing a singular function of adding specific ingredients to corresponding containers. The shift to such cluster reactor systems poses an additional challenge as it reduces the need for human labour and makes detection exceedingly difficult. Such systems can be inconspicuously installed in homes, cars, or any location, making detection an unlikely event. Consequently, the fight against drug trafficking has entered a new era where innovation and vigilance are more essential than ever.

In addition to these challenges, the implications of the production of illicit substances are extended to include

considerable risks and potential harm that supersede the apparent legal and public health problems. Quality and safety are often compromised in pursuit of profits, with consequences that can be devastating. Purity of drugs, a critical factor in the production process, is often ignored leading to significant quality issues. Factors such as the purity of precursors¹⁰ used and the effectiveness of purification and filtration methods during production are often disregarded due to inexperience or negligence. Consequently, these underground operations produce and distribute subpar substances, further endangering consumer health. This disregard for health and safety standards, coupled with inadequate storage and transportation conditions, can compromise the product quality further, posing even greater risk to the end consumer. Ultimately, these clandestine laboratories and their associated networks present a systemic issue that extends beyond mere flouting the law; they actively risk citizen health and safety in the pursuit of financial gain, underscoring the urgent need for escalated efforts in their detection and prevention.

Addressing the systemic challenges posed by illicit laboratories is a daunting task. Implementing broad bans on precursors could inadvertently impact the pharmaceutical and chemical industry¹¹,

given the legitimate uses of many of these substances. Harsher penalties, extending to the death penalty, may ironically enhance the industry's appeal due to increased profitability, potentially drawing competent specialists into the illicit drug trade.

Emerging Challenges for Law Enforcement in the Digital Age

The darknet is so developed that in terms of the efficiency of their work and general competence, the participants in this business can compete with the special services, and in terms of the degree of security of the network infrastructure and the approach to information security, they surpass many state institutions of strategic purposes.

The advent of technological advancements like anonymous networks (Tor and I2P¹²), the development of Web 3.0¹³, and anonymous payment methods further complicate matters. These tools threaten to render traditional state control over drug trafficking increasingly ineffective, and it is uncertain if the magnitude of this challenge, and the strategic measures needed to protect society from the escalating menace of drug-related issues, are fully understood.

The complexity of the drug trade is exemplified by the current market trends on darknet marketplaces, which cater to

a wide variety of substances with varying levels of popularity¹⁴.

- **Mephedrone:** Mephedrone is the most popular drug, with 32 per cent of total deals and an average price of US\$ 22.50 per gram. This drug, which can be cheaply produced in countries from imported precursors, has gained a wide customer base due to its affordability compared to other substances like cocaine, MDMA, or methamphetamine. In addition to the economic aspect, the relatively fast elimination from the body and the perceived safety have contributed to its popularity. However, it's crucial to note that after the downfall of Hydra, the market witnessed a surge of homemade mephedrone, often containing toxic impurities such as bk-4 or MDPF, which have been associated with most health issues and deaths related to mephedrone use.
- **Hashish:** With 31 per cent of total deals, Hashish comes a close second in popularity. The accessibility of this drug and its psychoactive properties contribute to its preference among users. The average price per gram stands at US\$ 25.00. Yet, overuse can lead to psychological dependency and cognitive impairment.
- **Cannabis:** Accounting for 19 per cent of total deals, Cannabis is another well-liked drug due to its mild psychoactive effects and wide availability. Like Hashish, Cannabis also has an average price of US\$ 25.00 per gram. However, frequent use can lead to mental health issues such as anxiety and paranoia.
- **Alpha-PVP:** This drug holds 9 per cent of total deals, known for its strong psychoactive effects and long duration of action. The average price per gram for Alpha-PVP is US\$ 27.50. Exceeding recommended dose can lead to psychotic states, negative behavior, and even heart failure.
- **Cocaine:** Despite its high cost (US\$ 112.50 per gram) and comparatively low percentage of deals (5%), cocaine remains in demand due to its prestige and the thrill it provides. High doses can lead to a loss of control, aggressive behaviour, and serious health complications, including heart attack and stroke.
- **Amphetamine:** Ranking sixth in popularity, amphetamines also make up 5 per cent of total deals, with an average price of US\$ 18.75 per gram. Known as the “work drug,” it is popular for its stimulation and increased energy effects. Yet, excessive use can result in

psychosis, unpredictable behaviour, and long-term damage to brain function. However, the popularity of amphetamines has seen a decline due to rigorous law enforcement actions and the rise of newer market drugs like Alpha.

These rankings highlight the changing dynamics of the drug market, with popularity influenced by factors such as affordability, effects, safety, and law enforcement activities. It's also worth noting that the shift in the trading platform and emergence of new markets significantly impact the availability and demand for these substances.¹⁵

The illicit drug trade's intricacies, especially within the labyrinthine confines of the darknet marketplaces, highlight its complexity. A vast network of suppliers, intermediaries, and consumers collaboratively engage in this cryptic system, all concealed by the shadowy veil of the dark web. High profitability underpins this trade, with earnings ranging from monthly incomes of US\$ 800 - 9,600 for couriers, US\$ 1,280 - 1,600 for webstore operators, and even soaring

to US\$ 50,000 - 60,000¹⁶ for the owners of these darknet shops.¹⁷

At the moment, the domestic special services are only watching a jar filled with snakes and collecting bit by bit any information that can lead them to the trail of the leaders of a particular site, but as practice shows, it is much more profitable and convenient for the special services to fight the tentacles than the head of the squid itself. Despite the enticing returns, the industry is fraught with peril, often entangled with corruption as cartels strive to penetrate political and law enforcement circles, employing an array of strategies from bribery and threats to blackmail.

The complexity at the point of sale reflects the wide spectrum of participants, from conventional street dealers to covert online operatives. Technological advancements have spurred a transition from physical to online marketplaces, causing an appreciable inflation in drug prices. Currently, drugs have become a sphere of criminal activity bordering on cybercrime. Consequently, the departments of the secret divisions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) are engaged in combating these

Technological advancements have spurred a transition from physical to online marketplaces, causing an appreciable inflation in drug prices. Currently, drugs have become a sphere of criminal activity bordering on cybercrime.

crimes. Employees of operational and technical departments spend their working hours at computers and other sophisticated electronic equipment to identify dealers and prevent cyber-attacks, such as hacking and DDoS attacks. However, their success in this area is limited by a lack of knowledge, funding, and technical capabilities.

The trade's evolution now sees consumers directly interacting with dealers on these platforms, making untraceable cryptocurrency payments and receiving goods at designated delivery locations. This metamorphosis underlines the obstacles authorities confront in suppressing this clandestine commerce.

This quandary faced by decision-makers is akin to a “Zugzwang” situation in chess, where any move seems to worsen the situation¹⁸. This predicament raises the critical question: do authorities fully grasp the scale of the problem and the impending threat they are confronted with? It's unclear if they truly comprehend the magnitude of this challenge and the strategic measures required to safeguard society from the

accelerating scourge of drug-related problems. The challenge faced by law enforcement is akin to the ancient Hydra myth: shut down one illegal site and three more appear in its place. The drug market, once formed, persists resiliently, bolstered by patronage from elements within the state elite. It morphs into an eternal problem that seems to lack a definitive solution.

Promoting a Multi-faceted Response to the Drug Trafficking Challenge

Understanding the intricate details of the drug trade, including the market dynamics, participants, and drug preferences, is the first step towards developing effective counter strategies. Given the evolution of the drug trade and its migration to digital platforms, it is clear that traditional methods of countering drug trafficking, such as purely punitive measures and border control strategies, may no longer be adequate.

The SCO has a unique position to address these challenges due to its diverse membership and regional influence. To effectively counter drug trafficking within the SCO sphere, we need to take a holistic approach that integrates a wide array of tactics - from strengthening regional cooperation, enhancing law enforcement capabilities, advocating for policy and legal reforms, to promoting public health interventions.

The SCO has a unique position to address these challenges due to its diverse membership and regional influence. To effectively counter drug trafficking within the SCO sphere, we need to take a holistic approach that integrates a wide array of tactics - from strengthening regional cooperation, enhancing law enforcement capabilities, advocating for policy and legal reforms, to promoting public health interventions.

Strengthening Regional Cooperation:¹⁹

Collaboration among SCO member states is vital in fighting the transnational issue of drug trafficking. Sharing of intelligence, harmonization of legal frameworks and procedures, and joint operations can contribute significantly to disrupting drug trafficking networks.

Enhancing Law Enforcement

Capabilities: As the drug trade moves into the digital realm, law enforcement agencies must be equipped with the necessary knowledge and tools to navigate this new frontier. This means investing in training for cybercrime investigations, digital forensics, and the use of advanced technologies in law enforcement.

Advocating for Policy and Legal

Reforms: Addressing the demand side of the drug trade requires a shift from punitive to preventive measures. This

includes policy reforms that prioritize drug use as a public health issue, such as harm reduction strategies and drug treatment programmes.

Promoting Public Health Interventions:

Ensuring the availability of health services for drug users, including overdose prevention, harm reduction, and drug dependence treatment, can contribute to reducing the demand for illicit drugs. Public health interventions also include awareness campaigns to educate the public about the risks associated with drug use and the dangers of illicit substances.

Considering the diversity of substances in circulation, it is also important to address specific challenges posed by individual drugs. For instance, addressing the surge in Alpha-PVP popularity involves not only law enforcement actions but also public health interventions to reduce its demand. By implementing such measures, we can start to reduce the number of overdose deaths, shift the market towards lighter drugs, and promote a culture of adequate use.

Also crucial is enhancing surveillance and control of the precursor chemicals used in drug manufacture. Regulations and control mechanisms must be put in place to monitor and regulate the sale of such substances, particularly when they have legitimate industrial uses, to prevent their diversion to illicit drug production. Governments and the

The utilization of artificial intelligence and data analytics could also be revolutionary in the battle against drug-trafficking.

pharmaceutical industry must collaborate to devise innovative solutions that could, for instance, make such precursors less desirable or useful to illegal laboratories, without impeding their legitimate use.

The utilization of artificial intelligence and data analytics could also be revolutionary in the battle against drug-trafficking. Predictive analytics could be used to identify patterns and anticipate the potential emergence of new drug trafficking routes or laboratories, based on factors like crime rates, socioeconomic conditions, and local drug use trends²⁰. AI could also be leveraged in the identification of online drug trafficking activities, such as through the analysis of digital footprints²¹ and transaction patterns on the dark web.

Additionally, the integration of innovative technology into law enforcement agencies could be transformational. The use of blockchain technology for instance, could provide an immutable record of all transactions and communications, making it harder for criminals to cover their tracks. Drones and advanced surveillance equipment could be deployed to monitor potential drug trafficking routes and detect illicit activities.

Above all, addressing the root causes of drug use and trafficking – poverty, inequality, lack of opportunity – should be a core part of any effective strategy. A sustainable solution would necessitate providing viable alternatives to those who might otherwise be drawn into the drug trade, whether through lack of other options or as a means of coping with difficult circumstances. This would involve a range of measures, from education and job creation to the provision of social services and opportunities for social mobility.

In conclusion, the global drug trade has evolved to become an increasingly complex, multifaceted challenge. Tackling it effectively will require a similarly nuanced and multi-dimensional response. While law enforcement and punitive measures have a role to play, we must also recognize the need for prevention and intervention strategies that address the social and economic root causes of drug use and trafficking. In this regard, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and indeed all nations and organizations, have a pivotal role to play. It is only through a comprehensive, cooperative, and sustained effort that we can hope to mitigate the devastating impact of this global scourge. ■

- Atlantic Council. "Afghanistan's Drug Trade Is Booming Under Taliban Rule." South Asia Source. Retrieved from: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/southasiasource/afghanistans-drug-trade-is-booming-under-taliban-rule/>
- Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission. "Illicit Drug Data Report 2015-16: Clandestine Laboratories and Precursors." Retrieved from: https://www.acic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-08/iddr_2015-16_clandestine_laboratories_and_precursors.pdf
- Darknet.org.uk. "Privacy Implications of Web 3.0 and Darknets." Retrieved from: <https://www.darknet.org.uk/2023/03/privacy-implications-of-web-3-0-and-darknets/>
- I2P. Retrieved from: <https://geti2p.com/en/>
- INCB. "Red List of Precursors 2020." Retrieved from: https://www.incb.org/documents/PRECURSORS/RED_LIST/2020/Red_List_2020_E.pdf
- Palantir. Retrieved from: <https://www.palantir.com/index.html>
- ScienceDirect. "Drug Purity." Retrieved from: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/nursing-and-health-professions/drug-purity>
- ScienceDirect. "Exploring the Dark Web: A Retrospective Analysis of Linguistic Patterns in Cryptomarket Transactions." Retrieved from: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1879366518300216>
- ScienceDirect. "The Future of Cryptomarkets in Terms of Privacy, Security, and Trust." Retrieved from: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S2666281720303954>
- Springer Link. "Selling Drugs on the Darknet: A Typology of Drug Cryptomarkets." Retrieved from: <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s10610-016-9329-7.pdf>
- Substance Abuse Policy. "Understanding illicit drug supply networks: A systematic review of the international evidence." Retrieved from: <https://substanceabusepolicy.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13011-021-00375-w>
- Swansea University. "The Rise and Challenge of Dark Net Drug Markets." Retrieved from: <https://www.swansea.ac.uk/media/The-Rise-and-Challenge-of-Dark-Net-Drug-Markets.pdf>
- The Conversation. "Darknet Markets Generate Millions in Revenue Selling Stolen Personal Data: Supply Chain Study Finds." Retrieved from: <https://theconversation.com/darknet-markets-generate-millions-in-revenue-selling-stolen-personal-data-supply-chain-study-finds-193506>
- The Conversation. "Darknet Markets Generate Millions in Revenue Selling Stolen Personal Data: Supply Chain Study Finds." Retrieved from: <https://theconversation.com/darknet-markets-generate-millions-in-revenue-selling-stolen-personal-data-supply-chain-study-finds-193506>
- TRT World. "After Decades of War, Afghanistan's Drug Trade Booms Like Never Before." TRT World Magazine. Retrieved from: <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/after-decades-of-war-afghanistan-s-drug-trade-booms-like-never-before-46284>
- UNODC. "Announcing the Launch of the Livelihoods, Security, and Service Programme (LSS)." Retrieved from: <https://www.unodc.org/LSS/Announcement/Details/4349a4ee-cac4-440e-9d39-d2c21869e49a>
- UNODC. "Global Cocaine Report 2023." Retrieved from: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/cocaine/Global_cocaine_report_2023.pdf

- UNODC. “Global Cocaine Report 2023.” Retrieved from: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/cocaine/Global_cocaine_report_2023.pdf
- UNODC. “Over One Billion Methamphetamine Tablets Seized in East and Southeast Asia in 2021 as the Regional Drug Trade Continues to Expand.” Retrieved from: https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2022/June/unodc-report_-over-one-billion-methamphetamine-tablets-seized-in-east-and-southeast-asia-in-2021-as-the-regional-drug-trade-continues-to-expand.html
- UNODC. “World Drug Report 2021: Clandestine laboratories detected and dismantled.” Retrieved from: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/WDR2021/9.1_Clandestine_laboratories_detected_and_dismantled.pdf
- World Today News. “Caught, and Then the Godfather: Sam Gore, a Giant Drug Dealing Across Asia.” Retrieved from: <https://www.world-today-news.com/caught-and-then-the-godfather-sam-gore-a-giant-drug-dealing-across-asia/>

Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/southasiasource/afghanistans-drug-trade-is-booming-under-taliban-rule/>
- 2 <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/after-decades-of-war-afghanistan-s-drug-trade-booms-like-never-before-46284>
- 3 https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/cocaine/Global_cocaine_report_2023.pdf
- 4 https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2022/June/unodc-report_-over-one-billion-methamphetamine-tablets-seized-in-east-and-southeast-asia-in-2021-as-the-regional-drug-trade-continues-to-expand.html
- 5 <https://www.world-today-news.com/caught-and-then-the-godfather-sam-gore-a-giant-drug-dealing-across-asia/>
- 6 https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/cocaine/Global_cocaine_report_2023.pdf
- 7 <https://substanceabusepolicy.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13011-021-00375-w>
- 8 https://www.acic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-08/iddr_2015-16_clandestine_laboratories_and_precursors.pdf
- 9 https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/WDR2021/9.1_Clandestine_laboratories_detected_and_dismantled.pdf
- 10 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/nursing-and-health-professions/drug-purity>
- 11 https://www.incb.org/documents/PRECURSORS/RED_LIST/2020/Red_List_2020_E.pdf
- 12 <https://geti2p.com/en/>
- 13 <https://www.darknet.org.uk/2023/03/privacy-implications-of-web-3-0-and-darknets/>
- 14 <https://www.unodc.org/LSS/Announcement/Details/4349a4ee-cac4-440e-9d39-d2c21869e49a>
- 15 <https://theconversation.com/darknet-markets-generate-millions-in-revenue-selling-stolen-personal-data-supply-chain-study-finds-193506>
- 16 <https://www.swansea.ac.uk/media/The-Rise-and-Challenge-of-Dark-Net-Drug-Markets.pdf>
- 17 <https://theconversation.com/darknet-markets-generate-millions-in-revenue-selling-stolen-personal-data-supply-chain-study-finds-193506>
- 18 <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s10610-016-9329-7.pdf>
- 19 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1879366518300216>
- 20 <https://www.palantir.com/index.html>
- 21 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S2666281720303954>

STRENGTHENING REGIONAL AND INTER-REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY IN SCO

Davlatov Kamronbek
Sanjarbek ugli

Background

Connectivity has emerged as a crucial factor in promoting economic integration and fostering regional cooperation. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), comprising eight Member States, recognizes the significance of connectivity in achieving its goals of regional stability, economic development, and people-to-people exchanges. This paper explores the importance of strengthening both regional and inter-regional connectivity within the SCO framework. It examines the current state of connectivity in the region, identifies challenges, connectivity, including infrastructure development, digital connectivity and policy coordination.

Introduction

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) encompasses a vast geographical expanse and a diverse membership, China, India, Russia, Pakistan and four Central Asian states (Iran from this year), making connectivity a crucial enabler of regional development and cooperation. Today, the SCO covers more than 34 million km² (that's more than 60% of the landmass of the Eurasian continent). The total population of the SCO countries is more than 3.2 billion, which is equivalent to almost half of the world's population. It is worth noting that India alone has a

population of 1.425 billion (2023), and China has 1.411 billion (2023)¹.

Three countries have the status of SCO observer states - the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Republic of Belarus and the Republic of Mongolia.

Six countries are SCO dialogue partners - the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, the Republic of Turkey and the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, enhancing connectivity within the SCO region has emerged as a strategic priority. This paper aims to explore the role of connectivity in the SCO's regional and inter-regional cooperation and discuss its future trajectory.

The objectives of this paper are twofold. First, it seeks to provide an overview of the current state of connectivity within the SCO region, highlighting the achievements, challenges, and gaps in various areas such as transport, energy, and digital connectivity. Second, this paper aims to explore measures and initiatives that can strengthen regional and inter-regional connectivity within the SCO. It will examine the potential for enhancing transportation infrastructure, developing multimodal transport

corridors, promoting trade facilitation, and streamlining customs procedures.

By exploring these key aspects, this paper aims to contribute to the understanding of the SCO's role in regional and international cooperation through the lens of connectivity. It seeks to provide insights into the opportunities, challenges, and potential future trajectories for enhancing connectivity within the SCO region. Ultimately, a stronger and more integrated SCO will contribute to regional stability, prosperity and mutual cooperation.

Regional connectivity

Even though Afghanistan is only an observer state at SCO, still it is important to note that initially SCO was created with the intention of dealing with the possible threats to the regional stability arising from destabilized Afghanistan. Thus, this factor is one of the fundamental aspect of connectivity of the regional and non-regional members of the organization.

Besides a political, economic and cultural platform, it is also an alternative regional platform to delve into the rapidly changing situation in Afghanistan and the centrifugal forces arising from religious extremism and terrorism in the region which threaten not only Uzbekistan's and India's security and development but all the SCO members' on the whole.

Aside from the physical connectivity provided by infrastructure, the SCO platform allows government officials from countries that may not have extensive ties to come together, interact, and share their perspectives. This contributes to the stability of the region. For example, during the 2021 SCO meeting, the Foreign Ministers of China and India met and discussed their concerns regarding bilateral agreements related to the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Similarly, the Prime Ministers of Pakistan and Uzbekistan engaged in discussions, reconfirming bilateral cooperation in various areas such as tourism, railways, military expertise, and vocational training.

It should be noted, that regional and inter-regional connectivity are being in SCO's agenda for a quite a long period of time. At the 2018 SCO summit, for instance, the Indian Prime Minister had articulated the foundational dimension of Eurasia being 'SECURE'. The letters in the word SECURE are:

- S - Security** of our citizens,
- E - Economic** development for all,
- C - Connecting** the region,
- U - Unite** our people,
- R - Respect** for Sovereignty and Integrity, and
- E - Environment** protection².

In turn, on 15-16 July 2021, Tashkent hosted a high-level International

As noted by President Mirziyoyev in his speech at the “Voice of Global South” Summit on January 12, 2023, Uzbekistan fully supports the development of the “North-South” international corridor, which is one of the leading transport arteries in the Eurasian region and also promoted by India.

Conference “Central and South Asia: Regional Connectivity. Challenges and Opportunities”. The forum, initiated by Uzbekistan, brought together high-ranking officials from 40 countries, as well as delegations of major partner international organizations and financial institutions³.

In addition, in the 22nd Summit of the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on September 17, 2022 in Uzbekistan, the Heads of States have approved 28 different decisions and agreements. The decisions concern the Comprehensive Action Plan for 2023-2027 for implementation of provisions of the Treaty on Long-Term Good Neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation, to develop Interconnectivity and Create Efficient Transport Corridors⁴.

These facts and measures can be a clear confirmation of the statement about SCO Member States’ interest in connectivity and unity.

Cooperation in such kind of spheres as **transportation, energy, digital and**

trade, plays a vital role in enhancing regional connectivity.

Transport Networks

Almost all Member States have invested in the construction and improvement of road, rail, and air transport networks, facilitating the movement of goods, services, and people.

The completion of major transport corridors, such as the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway, has significantly improved connectivity within the region. These initiatives have not only enhanced trade and economic exchanges, but have also strengthened people-to-people connectivity.

India is a significant country located at the centre of sea lanes in the Indian Ocean that connects Asia and Africa. In this vein, strengthening the connectivity of Central and South Asia through the Trans-Afghan railway project contributes to the global logistics and value chains. It serves the benefit of both the Eurasian region and its neighboring countries.

As noted by President Mirziyoyev in his speech at the “Voice of Global South” Summit on January 12, 2023, Uzbekistan fully supports the development of the “North-South” international corridor, which is one of the leading transport arteries in the Eurasian region and also promoted by India⁵.

In his speech at the 22nd meeting of the Council of Heads of States of the SCO, President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev emphasized the importance of wider use of the transport and transit potential, development of transport connectivity of the Organization’s member countries for the intensification of trade and economic ties, strengthening industrial cooperation and expanding access to global markets and announced a number of initiatives in this direction⁶.

Such close attention of the Head of State of Uzbekistan to the issues of expanding transport connectivity in the SCO space is not accidental. Our state, together

with partners, seeks to effectively use the geographical features of the vast SCO space, when countries can act as the main connecting links between East and West, North and South.

To put it differently, this region resembles a bridge that presents exceptional opportunities for expanding trade, economy, energy, cultural, and humanitarian connections among SCO member countries. This acts as an important factor in the rapprochement of the states that are members of the Organization.

It should be noted that currently there are positive trends in strengthening relations between the SCO countries. At the level of the Heads of States of the Organization, political trust and mutual understanding have been established, there is a commonality of approaches in various areas of interaction and a desire to bring countries and peoples closer together. All this creates ideal

At the level of the Heads of States of the Organization, political trust and mutual understanding have been established, there is a commonality of approaches in various areas of interaction and a desire to bring countries and peoples closer together. All this creates ideal conditions for strengthening transport connectivity through the formation of new international transport corridors in the SCO space.

conditions for strengthening transport connectivity through the formation of new international transport corridors in the SCO space.

Annually there is a Meeting of the Transport Ministers of SCO Member States held in one of the Member States. For example, on 12 May 2022, the Ninth Meeting of Transport Ministers was held in Khiva, Republic of Uzbekistan, chaired by Uzbekistan⁷. And, on 28 April 2023, the Tenth SCO Ministerial Meeting of Transport Ministers was held in New Delhi, Republic of India, chaired by the Minister of Road Transport and Highways of the Republic of India, Nitin Gadkari⁸. These meetings play a vital role in sharpening and constructing transport policy of SCO member states

In addition, India promotes the idea of using the Iranian port of Chabahar. In his speech in International Conference “Central and South Asia: Regional Connectivity. Challenges and Opportunities” (15-16 July 2021, Tashkent), Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar supported the idea of wider involvement of the Iranian port of Chabahar in regional connectivity. “We have proposed to include the Chabahar port in the framework of INSTC. The formation of India-Uzbekistan-Iran-Afghanistan Quadrilateral Working Group

on the joint use of Chabahar port is a welcome development”, he noted⁹. It is expected that the inclusion of Iran (this year) in the organization will bring these possibilities into life.

In the future, further growth in the number of full-fledged participants in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization at the expense of states with observer status, as well as dialogue partners, will also allow the consistent development and implementation of new projects in the transport and transit sector. All this requires a certain rethinking of the nature of transport interaction within the framework of the SCO, updating its strategic paradigm, and entering new promising areas.

Energy Cooperation

Energy connectivity is another critical aspect of regional integration within the SCO. The Member States have recognized the importance of energy cooperation and have engaged in various initiatives to promote collaboration in the energy sector. The Central Asia-China gas pipeline, for example, has strengthened energy connectivity between Central Asian countries and China, contributing to regional energy security and economic cooperation.

Furthermore, the development of renewable energy projects, such as wind

and solar farms, has the potential to further enhance energy connectivity and sustainability within the SCO. However, there is room for improvement in terms of diversifying energy sources, promoting cross-border energy trading, and harmonizing energy policies among Member States.

The countries in Central Asia, such as Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, known for their abundant hydrocarbon resources, have emerged as accessible energy markets for Pakistan and India. These two nations in South Asia face significant energy deficits, making the energy resources of Central Asia particularly valuable for them.

In other words, SCO's emphasis on promoting economic cooperation, trade, energy and regional connectivity can, perhaps, unblock India's access to Eurasia, and provide a fillip to projects like TAPI and CASAREM which seek to bridge the gap between an energy-rich and energy deficit region.¹⁰

Notably, India imports close to 80 per cent of its hydrocarbon requirements, the majority of it from the volatile

West Asian region. This has led India to seek energy security in the resource-rich Central Asian region, and build its trade and transport linkages through bilateral and regional mechanisms¹¹.

Digital Connectivity

In the era of digital transformation, digital connectivity is emerging as a critical factor in regional integration. The SCO Member States have recognized the importance of digital connectivity and have taken steps to enhance cooperation in this area. Efforts have been made to improve broadband connectivity, expand internet access, and promote e-commerce within the region.

Additionally, initiatives such as the SCO E-Commerce Platform have been launched to facilitate digital trade and collaboration. These initiatives aim to facilitate e-commerce activities, digital connectivity, and the exchange of digital technologies and innovations among the Member States¹².

The SCO E-Commerce Platform seeks to serve as a dedicated online marketplace

SCO's emphasis on promoting economic cooperation, trade, energy and regional connectivity can, perhaps, unblock India's access to Eurasia, and provide a fillip to projects like TAPI and CASAREM which seek to bridge the gap between an energy-rich and energy deficit region.

for businesses and consumers within the SCO region to engage in cross-border e-commerce activities. It provides a platform for businesses to showcase and sell their products and services, while also enabling consumers to make online purchases conveniently.

The SCO E-Commerce Platform initiative contributes to promoting digital trade, collaboration, and economic integration among the Member States of the SCO, ultimately facilitating regional development and cooperation in the digital era.

Trade Facilitation

Promoting trade facilitation measures is essential for enhancing regional connectivity within the SCO. Member States should work towards streamlining customs procedures, reducing non-tariff barriers, and harmonizing trade regulations. Simplifying and digitizing customs processes can significantly improve the efficiency of cross-border trade. The establishment of Single Window Systems can further enhance trade facilitation by integrating and automating customs, logistics, and regulatory processes. Moreover, enhancing coordination among customs authorities and implementing mutual recognition agreements can

help expedite trade flows and promote seamless connectivity.

Economic cooperation between Central and South Asia holds significant potential for enhancing trade, connectivity, and development in the region. The geographical proximity of these two regions offers opportunities for increased collaboration in various sectors, including trade, infrastructure, energy, tourism, and agriculture.

Efforts are being made to strengthen economic ties between Central and South Asia through regional initiatives such as the Central Asia-South Asia (CASA) 1000 project, which aims to establish a power transmission network for electricity trade between the two regions. Additionally, the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project seeks to promote energy cooperation and supply natural gas from Central Asia to South Asia¹³.

Trade facilitation measures, such as the simplification of customs procedures and the reduction of trade barriers, are being explored to enhance economic integration. Regional economic organizations, such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC), provide platforms for dialogue and cooperation

in areas such as trade, investment, and transportation.

Enhancing transportation and connectivity infrastructure is a key focus, with the development of road, rail, and air links to facilitate the movement of goods and people between Central and South Asia. This includes projects like the International North-South Transport Corridor and the Chabahar port in Iran, which can provide alternative trade routes for landlocked Central Asian countries.

Over the past decades, economic cooperation between Central and South Asia have been intensified, due to the transport corridors. For instance, if in 2017, trade turnover between Uzbekistan and India was US Dollars 323.6 million, in 2021, it amounted to US Dollars 490 million. According to preliminary data, the total trade volume between Uzbekistan and India reached approximately US Dollars 700 million in 2022¹⁴.

Uzbekistan is open to Indian investments and welcomes cooperation in producing chemical goods, ICTs, pharmaceuticals, medicines, textiles and other spheres by creating favorable conditions. In turn, the interest of Indian investors in Uzbekistan is also growing, and strong cooperation has been established in these directions. Currently, there are around 400 enterprises with the participation of

Indian capital in Uzbekistan. Uzbek-India Trade House was established in New Delhi, and Uzbekistan-India Entrepreneurship Development Centre was opened in Tashkent¹⁵.

Meanwhile, because of the absence of direct ground communication between Uzbekistan and India (Central and South Asia in general), countries can not realize their total trade and economic potential.

Therefore, Uzbekistan and India are interested in solving transportation problems and intend to develop transport and communication interconnectivity.

Overcoming challenges

While progress has been made in enhancing regional connectivity within the SCO, there are several challenges and gaps that need to be addressed. Infrastructure disparities exist among Member States, with some countries having more developed transport networks than others. This imbalance in infrastructure development can hinder smooth connectivity and limit the full potential of economic integration. Furthermore, regulatory inconsistencies and differences in standards can create obstacles to seamless cross-border movement of goods and services. Addressing these challenges requires closer coordination, policy harmonization, and investment in

The SCO's efforts in promoting inter-regional connectivity are essential for expanding its influence and creating synergies with other regional organizations and initiatives.

infrastructure development to bridge the gaps and ensure equitable connectivity across the SCO region.

The lack of integration between South and Central Asia persists as a significant challenge, primarily attributable to conflicts and border disputes in the region.

With India having the world's largest population, Pakistan ranking fifth, and Bangladesh seventh, the South Asia market offers immense opportunities for intra-regional economic integration. Additionally, the inter-regional integration relies heavily on the development of infrastructure and the geographic connections between the regions. In this regard, Pakistan plays a crucial role.

The author also suggests that countries from the two neighboring regions are interconnected in terms of climate, as both regions primarily suffer from rising temperatures and water scarcity.

Uzbekistan, as all other Central Asian countries, is confronted with degradation of natural resources that is unlikely to be arrested in the near future. Creating resilient and sustainable agricultural and

natural ecosystems is, therefore, urgently needed. This demands a comprehensive concept, coordination, cooperation and vision and inclusion of all stakeholders from education and science to practice and decision-making¹⁶.

In this context, the author deems it appropriate to launch a project of "brother cities" between Uzbekistan and India, where similar challenges and issues are prevalent. For instance, the Khorezm and Muynak regions in Uzbekistan, that located close to Aral Sea basin and where local policies are mainly focused on combating climate-related challenges.

Promoting Inter-Regional Connectivity

The SCO recognizes the importance of inter-regional connectivity and has actively engaged with external partners, such as the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), to enhance connectivity across regions. Aligning connectivity initiatives and harmonizing standards and regulations can facilitate seamless trade, transportation, and digital connectivity. Additionally, promoting people-to-people exchanges and cultural cooperation

can foster mutual understanding and strengthen ties between different regions. The SCO's efforts in promoting inter-regional connectivity are essential for expanding its influence and creating synergies with other regional organizations and initiatives.

The SCO can strengthen inter-regional connectivity by actively engaging with other regional organizations, such as the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), ASEAN, and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). This engagement can foster collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and policy coordination in areas of common interest, such as transportation, trade facilitation, and digital connectivity. By aligning strategies, sharing best practices, and creating platforms for dialogue, the SCO can create synergies with these organizations and promote a more integrated and connected Eurasian space¹⁷.

So far, SCO has signed multiple MOUs (Memorandum of Understanding) with different international and regional organizations to achieve its objectives. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the United Nations and SCO to prevent human trafficking, drug smuggling, and organized transnational crimes. SCO signed a MoU with ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) to cooperate over issues of arms trafficking, money laundering

and transnational terrorism in the region. Furthermore, CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) and SCO signed a memorandum to combine efforts to maintain regional stability, security and counter terrorism. To increase cooperation over trade, economy, transportation and infrastructure, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between ECO (Economic Cooperation Organization) and SCO¹⁸.

Strengthening ties with abovementioned regional organizations can create synergies and promote inter-regional connectivity.

Conclusion - Future of SCO

In conclusion, the SCO's current state of connectivity reflects a mix of achievements, challenges, and opportunities.

Enhancing regional connectivity within the SCO requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses transportation infrastructure development, multimodal transport corridors, trade facilitation, energy connectivity, and public-private partnerships. By prioritizing these areas, the SCO can foster seamless movement of goods, services, and people, promote economic integration, and strengthen regional cooperation.

Promoting inter-regional connectivity is also essential for the SCO to expand its influence, strengthen regional integration, and create synergies with other regional organizations and initiatives. By aligning connectivity initiatives, harmonizing standards and regulations, and promoting people-to-people exchanges, the SCO can foster seamless connectivity across regions. Active engagement with external partners and regional organizations will enhance cooperation and coordination, leading to a more integrated and connected Eurasian space. By prioritizing inter-regional connectivity, the SCO can play a pivotal role in shaping the future of regional cooperation and promoting mutual prosperity and development.

Such regular and intensive political dialogues provide a solid basis for bringing mutually beneficial relations to new heights. Additionally, close coordination and collaboration among member states, as well as engagement with external partners, will be crucial for realizing the vision of a well-connected and prosperous SCO region.

The future trajectory of the SCO in regional and international cooperation will depend on the collective efforts of its Member States. By addressing challenges, seizing opportunities, and deepening collaboration, the SCO can play a more significant role in promoting stability, economic integration, and people-to-people exchanges in its region. Through sustained commitment and cooperation, the SCO can achieve its vision of a connected and prosperous region that contributes to global peace, stability, and development.

In less than two decades, the SCO has emerged as a prominent Eurasian construct. Its primary focus on addressing security threats has remained a lasting foundation for its membership. While the organization has expanded its objectives to include economic development, connectivity, and energy cooperation, the outcomes have been varied. The SCO now aims to increase its regional and global strategic and economic profile. The inclusion of new members reflects growing acceptance of the organization beyond Eurasia. As global economic and

The SCO now aims to increase its regional and global strategic and economic profile. The inclusion of new members reflects growing acceptance of the organization beyond Eurasia. As global economic and political influence shifts from the West to the East, the SCO has become a relevant pillar of this change.

The on-going Indian Presidency of the SCO has shown that the organisation is transforming into a cultural-humanitarian and transport-economic cooperation. This approach undoubtedly serves to bring the SCO Member States closer together, to reinforce mutual trust and respect with partner countries, and to ease tensions and build good neighbourly relations between countries with which they have clashes of interest. This approach will remain on the foreign policy agenda of the SCO Member States in the near future.

political influence shifts from the West to the East, the SCO has become a relevant pillar of this change. However, for the 21st century to truly be recognized as an Asian century, an effective regional cooperative mechanism must be a key component, and arguably, the SCO can serve as a vital organization for Asians, by Asians, and for Asians.

Cooperation within the SCO is likely to prioritize areas where the interests of the majority of Member States converge and they can leverage their strengths. This includes combating terrorism, extremism, and drug trafficking.

Although the SCO was originally set up as an organisation for resolving socio-political life in Afghanistan and for combating terrorism, extremism and separatism, its functions and tasks have undergone significant changes to date. In addition to peaceful settlement of Afghan problem, today it has become a universal platform for Member States for economic

cooperation, cooperation in almost all spheres of life.

It is no secret that SCO membership is gradually increasing and the international community's interest in the organization is growing. It means that its interests will be changing. Changes and trends indicate that SCO, once the socio-political life in Afghanistan is settled, will serve different functions, as no country of this organization would likely use SCO as a prototype of a military bloc. The on-going Indian Presidency of the SCO has shown that the organisation is transforming into a cultural-humanitarian and transport-economic cooperation. India has mainly focused on "soft power" and "image-making", and organising and supporting cultural and humanitarian projects and intercultural communication. This approach undoubtedly serves to bring the SCO Member States closer together, to reinforce mutual trust and respect with partner countries, and to ease tensions

and build good neighbourly relations between countries with which they have clashes of interest. This approach, also, strengthens interconnectedness within the organisation as well as between regions. The author suggests that this approach will remain on the foreign

policy agenda of the SCO Member States in the near future.

While the SCO's potential remains immense, its true impact is still being assessed. The organization is likely to continue as a principal element of Eurasia's strategic architecture. ■

- Nurimbetov, R. (2022). "Changing world and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation". ART VERNISSAGE press. 4-6.
- <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/india-and-the-sco-a-vision-for-expanding-new-delhi-s-engagement/>
- https://www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=3&ls_id=8919&lid=5817
- <https://uzdaily.uz/en/post/75649>
- https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342916396_The_Expanding_Role_of_the_Shanghai_Cooperation_Organization_in_the_Context_of_Inter-Regional_Integration_between_Central_Asia_and_South_Asia_Prospect_and_Challenges
- <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/role-shanghai-cooperation-organization-counteracting-threats-peace-and-security>
- <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2019/01/31/sco-external-relations-and-focus-on-regional-cooperation/>
- <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/india-and-the-sco-a-vision-for-expanding-new-delhi-s-engagement/> https://www.ciis.org.cn/english/ESEARCHPROJECTS/Articles/202112/t20211203_8276.html
- <https://kun.uz/en/news/2022/05/07/sco-member-states-to-discuss-prospects-for-strengthening-international-transport-connectivity-in-khiva>
- <https://kun.uz/en/news/2023/04/24/uzbekistan-delegation-takes-part-in-xi-meeting-of-department-heads-of-sco-member-states-involved-in-preventing-and-eliminating-emergencies-in-delhi>
- <https://kun.uz/en/news/2023/03/09/mirziyoyev-approves-international-agreement-on-irans-accession-to-the-sco>
- <https://articlekz.com/en/article/34676>
- <https://www.eurasiareview.com/09082021-the-recent-shanghai-cooperation-organization-sco-meeting-outcomes-and-implications-oped/>
- <https://uwidata.com/26675-the-scoss-samarkand-declaration/>
- <https://thekabultimes.com/the-recent-shanghai-cooperation-organization-sco-meeting-outcomes-and-implications/>
- <https://www.newscentralasia.net/2021/07/19/international-conference-on-the-possibilities-of-comprehensive-connectivity-between-central-and-south-asia-outcomes/>
- Inna Rudenko, John P.A. Lamers, Sanjar Davletov and Sardor Khodjaniyazov. Sustainable Development in Rural Uzbekistan through Education, Science and Beyond // International Theretical and Practical Conference Education and Science for Sustainable development. Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 6-8 april 2016. P. 119-120.
- CAREC Program – CAREC Institute
- <https://articlekz.com/en/article/34676>
- Shanghai Cooperation Organisation | SCO (sectsco.org)
- policy.asiapacificenergy.org

Endnotes

- 1 Nurimbetov, R. (2022). "Changing world and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation". ART VERNISSAGE press. 4-6.
- 2 https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29971/English_translation_of_Prime_Ministers_Intervention_in_Extended_Plenary_of_18th_SCO_Summit_June_10_2018
- 3 <https://www.newscentralasia.net/2021/07/19/international-conference-on-the-possibilities-of-comprehensive-connectivity-between-central-and-south-asia-outcomes/>
- 4 <https://uwidata.com/26675-the-scos-samarkand-declaration/>
- 5 <https://daryo.uz/en/2023/01/12/voice-of-global-south-summit-uzbek-president-promotes-initiatives-aimed-at-supporting-developing-countries>. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b6SfLcHiERs>
- 6 <https://uzdaily.uz/en/post/75649>
- 7 https://uza.uz/en/posts/uzbekistan-hosts-the-ninth-meeting-of-sco-transport-ministers_371839
- 8 <https://news.bharattimes.co.in/nitin-gadkari-chairs-the-meeting-of-transport-ministers-of-shanghai-cooperation-organization/>
- 9 <https://www.newscentralasia.net/2021/07/19/international-conference-on-the-possibilities-of-comprehensive-connectivity-between-central-and-south-asia-outcomes/>
- 10 The two energy projects – the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline, and the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project (CASA-1000) which is expected to bring Tajik and Kyrgyz hydropower to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and evolve into the Central Asia-South Asia Regional Energy Market (CASAREM), once the planned Central Asian hydro potential comes on stream, can facilitate a region-wide energy exchange.
- 11 <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/india-and-the-sco-a-vision-for-expanding-new-delhi-s-engagement/>
- 12 https://daviscenter.fas.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/files/2021-10/Digital_Silk_Road_Report_2021.pdf
- 13 <https://cabar.asia/en/tajikistan-and-south-asia-how-does-the-multi-vector-foreign-policy-work>
- 14 https://www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=3&ls_id=8919&lid=5817
- 15 https://www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=3&ls_id=8919&lid=5817
- 16 Inna Rudenko, John P.A. Lamers, Sanjar Davletov and Sardor Khodjanizov. Sustainable Development in Rural Uzbekistan through Education, Science and Beyond // International Thoretical and Practical Conference Education and Science for Sustainable development. Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 6-8 april 2016. P. 119-120.
- 17 <https://articlekz.com/en/article/34676>
- 18 <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2019/01/31/sco-external-relations-and-focus-on-regional-cooperation/>

About ICWA

The Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) was established in 1943 by a group of eminent intellectuals led by Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Dr. H.N. Kunzru. Its principal objective was to create an Indian perspective on international relations and act as a repository of knowledge and thinking on foreign policy issues. The Council today conducts policy research through an in-house faculty as well as through external experts. It regularly organizes an array of intellectual activities including conferences, seminars, roundtable discussions, lectures and brings out a range of publications. It has a well-stocked library, an active website, and publishes the journal India Quarterly. ICWA has over 50 MoUs with international think tanks and research institutions to promote better understanding on international issues and develop areas of mutual cooperation. The Council also has partnerships with leading research institutions, think tanks and universities in India.

