

The Impact of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on Central Asia's Security

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Received: 22 Nov 2016 ; Accepted: 20 Oct 2017

Abstract:

This paper tries to address the impact of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on Central Asian security. This organization was established on April 26, 1996 to settle security and territorial disputes between China and Russia and Central Asian countries (other than Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan). After the accession of Uzbekistan to this assembly, the level of the organization was promoted, and its geographic scope has been expanded in the following years by the membership of new countries. Although significant changes have been made and economic issues have been raised in the process of developments in this regional security cooperation, this organization has paid attention to security-military disputes and problems. The main question of the paper is how does the Shanghai Cooperation Organization play a role in the Central Asia's security? This paper fully addresses the impact of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on Central Asia, and the effects of this organization on the security and stability of Central Asia with the settlement of regional conflicts, such as fighting against terrorism, separatism and extremism, drug and arms trade, organizational crimes, concerns about insecurity and domestic instability, and in particular the occurrence of color revolutions in countries and confronting with American influence and unilateralism.

Keywords: Regional security, Terrorism, Separatism, Extremism, Economic interactions, Organized crime, NATO, Domestic instability

Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the independence of its constituent fifteen

republics as independent political entities, and Central Asia became a "geopolitical hub" among countries like Russia, China, India,

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Pakistan and Iran. In this context, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was established among the member states in this region.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization's security approach is concentrated on Central Asia, because it is the most vulnerable region to the terrorism and extremism threats. Not only is the issue clear at the theoretical level, but the need for security in the region has repeatedly emphasized in the statements of the regional authorities.

In fact, training programs and counter terrorism operations as well as intelligence services are designed to protect Central Asian governments against new threats and enable them to encounter with their challenges. On the other hand, the two major powers of this organization are also concerned about their own security. There is a consensus among members of the Shanghai Organization that the region's security should be strengthened by strengthening the weak regional ties. This issue is also confirmed at the summit. However, the alignment of the interests of the Central Asian governments with the two great powers of the organization was not clear in the past, because larger governments want to control and confront the sources of threat in Central Asia for preventing the spread in their territory.

Another important change emerged since the joint anti-terrorist operation of China-Kyrgyzstan in 2002 is that the Central Asian countries and larger states understand the importance of multilateral relations on security issues rather than their bilateral approaches. However, bilateral relations with Russia are still important for some Central Asian governments due to the thinking remained from the Soviet period. Above all, the im-

portance of multilateral cooperation in the Shanghai organization is well understood. In this regard, multilateral cooperation in the security relations of the member states is a great help to small governments to protect their independence. In this article, single sample t-test has been used to study and analyze the research.

Improving the Security of Central Asian Countries

Territorial disputes are usually the most problematic issue between two or more countries. Throughout history, territorial disputes have led to military conflict and even war between countries. During the Cold War, these disputes led to an armed conflict between China and the Soviet Union at 4,600 miles of borderlines in the 1960s and 1970s. In the mid-1980s, along with the improvement of relations between Beijing and Moscow, the two sides began a serious dialogue to resolve border disputes and the negotiations reached the peak with the Gorbachev visiting China in 1989. Yet, until the collapse of the Soviet Union, territorial issues remained unresolved. Many residents in China and Central Asia were reluctant to compromise on the borders of their country, but despite this negative context, China and Central Asian countries continued border talks boldly curtail until permanent resolution (Shafiee, 2006: 59). Because of the agreements between China and Russia in 1991 and 1994, the borderlines were set up between the two countries. Following the above process, three newly independent countries bordering China, namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan participated in border talks between China and Russia. Finally, on April 26, 1996 in Shanghai, the five countries signed a treaty called

“Military Confidence Building Agreement” aimed at strengthening mutual confidence and disarmament along the lengthy borders of each other, and thereby established the Shanghai Five. According to 1996 Agreement called "Shanghai Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions", members pledged to avoid attack or conflict in border areas, to refrain from military exercises as a threat to each other, to decrease the scope and the number of military training courses, to inform each other of military operations that they intend to carry out within 100-kilometer of common border, and to invite military officials from neighboring countries to oversee (Tao, 2002). Based on the Shanghai 5 mechanism, China signed a border agreement with Kyrgyzstan in July 1996, which resolved the border issues of the two countries over 858-kilometer common border (Azakan, 2010, 398). A year later, in 1997, at a summit in Moscow, two other documents were signed with the aim of promoting the level of military security and reducing military force in the border regions. During the annual and regular summits, the issues of interest were gradually expanded from the security of borders into beneficial cooperation in the political, security, diplomatic, economic and trade sectors.

At the 5th Summit in Shanghai on June 15, 2001, the Shanghai Five Member States, with the proposal of Jiang Zemin, admitted the Republic of Uzbekistan - which was an observer state at the 2000 Summit - as a member state. Then, all six states signed the Declaration of Shanghai Cooperation Organization with the aim of strengthening confidence and encouraging the disarmament of the border regions (Oksuz, 2009, 715). At the St. Petersburg Summit in June 2002, the organizational structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was adopted, in which the

organization's legal, political, fundamentals and goals have been foreseen.

According to many experts, the reasons for the formation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization can be examined at two levels: international and regional. Factors such as the collapse of the bipolar system, the vague prospect of new international structure, the U.S. efforts to establish a unipolar system, the expansion of NATO to the East, the decisions necessary to formulate new rules and shaping the international system for maximum benefits are among the international reasons. On the other hand, the reasons such as the war in Afghanistan, Tajikistan's internal unrest, and the member states' common concern of the Islamic radical movements in their homeland and around their borders are at the regional level. According to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Charter, the goals of the organization are as follows: avoiding any dispute among member states due to the tense relations between China and the Soviet Union that led to the extensive presence of military forces on the borders of the two countries, the uncertainty caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union and formation of independent states with tense borders, strengthening regional security and domestic stability through fighting against the triple evil of separatism, terrorism, drugs and finally respect for the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

In line with statements by Russian President Vladimir Putin saying that the Shanghai Five is not a closed club and it is open for the membership of other countries, the organization has found wider scope by joining Mongolia in June 2004 as well as India, Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran in June 2005 as observer members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), subsequently with the admission of India and Pakistan as

permanent members in 2016 (Radyuhin, 2000: 1).

The US invasion of Afghanistan after the September 11 Incident and, most importantly, the common concern of the Eurasian countries about the spread of religious extremism and terrorism in the region have prompted the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to shift its focus from regional goal of reducing disputes and strengthening mutual trust in border regions of member states to the broader short-term goals, such as security cooperation to counter the spread of terrorism, religious extremism, separatism, as well as economic cooperation, and ultimately fierce stances against U.S. unilateralist efforts at the international level.

The maintenance of regional stability, which is the goal of all member states with a "common definition", has been threatened by several factors. The first factor called triple evils is terrorism, separatism, and fundamentalism, and it is the top priority of the organization to fight against them.

In order to achieve these goals, mechanisms have been developed to improve the security of the organization. The security mechanism means a set of security and legal institutions in a region to maintain peace. In the 21st century, no state can rely on its own forces alone; this means "creating collective structures and adopting collective strategies are absolutely essential. In this regard, regional mechanisms and security institutions are considered as effective international law instruments in peace and security, whose utility is mainly determined by the internal structure of governments and the availability of inter-governmental conflicts settlement instruments and mechanisms.

The security mechanisms in the Shanghai organization include:

Creating Collective Structures:

Collective structures are a logical response to the Shanghai Organization Member States. These structures aim at meeting the security needs of Central Asian countries, which are struggling to maintain stability in the region and pursue the following objectives.

- Ensuring continued cooperation in the field of security and defense in the region;
- Avoiding crises after the collapse of the Soviet Union, like Yugoslavia;
- Determining the fate of Soviet nuclear potentials;
- Establishing administrative borders in the international legal framework.

Adoption of new strategies:

Strategy is an operational plan for coordinating and organizing actions to achieve a goal. Nowadays, regarding the goals and vision that organizations and countries are designing for themselves, as well as the changes and developments that have emerged in the environment, organizational strategy analysis is of special importance. To this end, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has adopted strategies as follows.

- Active cooperation in the field of regional security and stability
- Mutual support in preventing the threat to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states
- Fighting against regional and transnational crimes (drug trafficking,

- organized crime, illegal immigration and terrorism);
- Coordinated measures in the area of rational and beneficial use of water and energy resources;
- Cooperation in other areas of mutual interest.

Joint Military Exercises:

Military exercises include the military cooperation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states to improve security and enhance operational capacity against terrorism and extremism. In April 2006, the Russian government announced that the Shanghai Cooperation Treaty did not intend to become a military organization (like the NATO treaty or the former Warsaw Pact). However, they acknowledged that the use of military forces from member states might be needed in order to cope with the growing threats of terrorism, separatism and extremism.

In this regard, the member states have implemented several joint military exercises. The first military manoeuvre in 2003 was carried out in two phases in Kazakhstan and China.

In August 2005, a major military exercise with the participation of China and Russia was launched, called "Peace Mission 2005". This is the first joint military exercise between Russia and China.

Following the success of this exercise, Russian officials have expressed an interest in India participating in next joint exercises, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization shall play a military role on the international scene.

Following the agreement of the member states' Ministers of Defense in April 2006, the military exercise of the member states was held in 2007 with the participation of four thousand Chinese army troops in the

Chelyabinsk region of Russia around the Ural Mountains and the Asian-European geographical borders. Similarly, in the following years, other joint measures were taken.

Joint Action to Counter Terrorism:

The Shanghai Five member states, two years before the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the United States, began the review of the Shanghai Convention in the fight against terrorism, which was ratified in 2001. However, the organization's approach to the issue of terrorism is much broader than that of the United States and its allies. While the United States emphasizes military action against international terrorism centres and attacks state sponsors of terrorism, the SCO member states establish a direct link between terrorism and separatism and fundamentalism. Although the members coordinated their counterterrorism actions with the United States after September 9, 2001, they can at the same time fight the triple evils according to their own plans and interests, and through a link between terrorism and separatism and fundamentalism (Lukin, 2007). In response to these considerations, the members set up a rapid reaction force as a counterterrorism centre in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, and established the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) in April 2003 to coordinate the members' activities. The SCO Member States also have held numerous military and security maneuvers against terrorism, due to their long shared borders (for example, Russia has a 7,500-kilometer shared borders with Kazakhstan, which is the world's longest common border) (Akhavan Kazemi, 2006: 99), including the joint exercise of China and Kyrgyzstan in 2002, the multilateral exercise of all members except Uzbekistan in 2003, which was held at the first phase in Kazakhstan with the presence of Kyrgyzstan, Ka-

zakhstan and Russia, and at the second phase in the Chinese province of Xinjiang by the forces of China and Kazakhstan. In addition, joint exercises of the Peace Mission in August 2005, the multilateral exercise hosted by Uzbekistan in 2006 with an emphasis on the role of special forces, and the maneuver of the Peace Mission in August 2007, which began from the autonomous Chinese province of Xinjiang and extended to Chelyabinsk Oblast in Russia are among these measures (Azarkan, 2010, 405). Joint anti-terrorist plans have also been signed by the member states on cooperation in discovering and blocking the penetration channels of those involved in terrorist attacks (Zahedi Anaraki, 2006: 63).

- Organizing a strategic-operational maneuver called "Saratov Anti-Terror 2010" in August 16-26, 2010 in Saratov, Russia.
- Approving the implementation of the major anti-terrorism exercise of the organization in Chelyabinsk of Russia, called "Peace Mission 2007"

At the June 2002 Summit in St. Petersburg, the heads of the member states signed three cooperation documents to maintain the process of cooperation. The most important document was the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Charter and the agreement on institutional cooperation against terrorism. With regard to the declaration of the leaders that emphasized the continued commitment of members, this document was very important; because it was not only an independent entity in front of the military and political presence of the United States, but also increases the level of cooperation, including counter terrorism cooperation.

On May 29, 2003, when international conditions entered into a new complexity after the occupation of Iraq, the SCO summit was held in Moscow. America's unilateralism had created a new condition that could burn everyone. At the summit, it was decided that the secretariat of the organization would be formed in Beijing, which began on January 15, 2004. Similarly, the counter terrorism centre in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, was set up to coordinate security and political measures.

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Combating Separatism:

The principle of combating separatism, which is one of the main triple principles of this organization, is very attractive to the member states because China has faced the riots of the Uyghur's, Muslim Turks, in Xinjiang province since the 1970s. It is while stability of this province is important for China. Xinjiang province includes three major oil spills, namely Turpan, Junggar and Tarim, which are estimated to have a large amount of oil. There are also many nuclear weapons test sites and bases for the Liberation Army, which will be threatened if the region is controlled by the Uyghur's (Taheri

Amin, 2002: 109). In addition, based on the principle of combating separatism, China can oppose Taiwan's separation and its independence, and prevent the interference of foreign powers, especially the United States. Russia has also the similar problem of separatism in Chechnya. However, the presence of radical Muslims in other autonomous republics in the North Caucasus, such as Dagestan, is also rising. Russian leaders are concerned about chain reactions among Muslims in the country. In addition, the threat of Muslim riots in Central Asia will increase.

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Russia around the Ural Mountains and the Asian-European geographical borders. Similarly, in the following years, other joint measures were taken.

Combating Extremism:

One of the obvious mistakes of the former Soviet leaders was the confrontation with religion, in particular Islam, and the limitation of religious activities. This led to the creation of radical Islamist tendencies in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In other words, the emergence and expansion of extremist Islam was the result of restricting people's religious affairs and creating an ideological vacuum across the region. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and freeing from ideological bondage chains, the religious interests rose sharply.

Causes and Origins of the Growth of Islamic Extremism in the Central Asian Region

The emergence of violent behaviors in the human society is the result of social, economic, political and ideological deficiencies and deprivations. At the level of the Central Asian region, the emergence and spread of religious extremism is caused by two categories of internal and external factors:

Internal factors:

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and freeing from ideological bondage chains, the religious interests rose sharply. One of the obvious manifestations of this issue is the development of mosques and other Islamic centres in those years. As a result of the atmosphere created after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 20th century, 1,566 Islamic organizations were developed in Uzbekistan and the number of mosques increased from 300 in 1989 to 6,000 in 1993. In Kazakhstan, more than 5,000 mosques were built by the end of the 20th century (Omidvarnia, 2002). In this context, the presence of Wahhabis and extremist Islamic groups has also increased in the Central Asian region and thus affected the security of its neighbours.

In addition to the ideological vacuum created at the regional level, the structure of the governments created in Central Asia after the collapse of the Soviet Union also had an undeniable effect on the growth of religious extremism in the region. The characteristic feature of the ruling states in the region is the adoption of a non-religious procedure. In this framework, these governments reject the implementation of religious law in the individual and social life of Muslims in the region by declaring a complete separation of religion from politics based on secularism. This practice has also led a significant part of the Muslims in the region to become religious extremists. Accordingly, many analysts consider the political structure of the region as the most important factor in the growth of religious extremism in the region (Gasimoglu: 1).

In addition to the above two internal factors, other factors such as economic problems, historical background of the regional nations and the geographic position of some regions in Central Asia to carry out extremist

religious activities have led to the development of religious radicalism in this region. Regarding the above factors, many analysts consider Islamist extremism in the region as a result of the socioeconomic and cultural conditions of Central Asian countries rather than the result of the promotion of foreign media outlets (Mousavi, 2004: 200). The social and economic problems of the countries, including increased unemployment, low levels of health care provision, impossibility of public education and the steady reduction in social services budget, have also exacerbated extremism in the region.

External factors:

The external factors affecting the growth of radicalism in the Central Asian region are, on the one hand, related to the intensification of transnational religious activities in the region, and on the other hand, to the policies and strategies of the Western governments, in particular the United States, about the region and the Islamic world. The goals and objectives of trans-regional religious groups in the Central Asia region were described, but with regard to the influence of Western governments' strategies on the growth of radicalism, it should be noted that these governments have provoked people and paved the way for radicalism due to interference in the political affairs of the countries and, on the one hand, the promotion of Western culture in these countries.

A group of analysts believe that the context for religious radicalism has been provided in the Central Asian region, due to the frustration of Western and worldly models. In this regard, the activities of Christian missionaries under the title of charity and educational organizations in the region have also

aggravated the sensitivities between religious classes and have intensified the religious extremism. The economic conditions of the regional communities and the abuse of these conditions for attracting young people through the provision of financial facilities and job opportunities have increased the young people's tendency toward Christianity. In this regard, although the activity of these groups has been decreased in recent years due to the vigilance of the people and some of the states in the region, this threat is still one of the main factors behind the growth of Islamic radicalism as a response to the above process. Many people also see the growth of extremism in the Central Asian region, like other areas, due to some of the inappropriate practices applied by the West against the Islamic world over recent years. In this context, according to a poll conducted in the region, about 40% of the Kyrgyz people disagree with the Afghan war and 52% consider it an undesirable process. The Economist Weekly, in early September 2006 in a special note devoted to the anniversary of the September 11th, noted that terrorist movements throughout the Islamic world have been significantly increased due to unfriendly policies and practices of the West against the Islamic world, after the events of September 11, 2001.

In addition to the above factors, the US military operation in Afghanistan after the events of September 11, 2001 has been considered as one of the external factors exacerbating religious extremism in the region. One of the early implications of the US invasion of Afghanistan is the migration of a significant range of members of the Taliban and al-Qaeda to the neighbouring countries. The reason for these groups to reach Central Asia is, on the one hand, the geographical coexistence with the region, and, on the other hand, the ideological areas of the region.

Common Principles of Active Islamist Groups in the Region

Ideological dependency on the outside of the Central Asian region

According to the analysts of Central Asian affairs, most of the active Islamist groups' leaders are trained by radical groups in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan (Gasimoglu: 1). The International Crisis Group in an analysis of Islamic Extremism in the Central Asian Region noted that these organizations have been developed and created by the Wahhabi organizations in Saudi Arabia (International Crisis Group, 2006). The influence of trans-regional organizations and groups on the ideology of active groups in Central Asia begins with the training and education of religious leaders, and continues with activities such as sending religious texts and books, dispatching promotional groups to the region, attempts to capture the Imamate of people by individuals belonging to these groups, and even the confidential transmission of weapons and other necessary supplies.

Religious extremism and prescription of violence

One of the common principles among Islamist groups in Central Asia is their adherence to extremist and Takfiri beliefs. This issue stems from the intellectual origins between the leaders of these groups and active radical groups in some Arab countries and has sometimes led to actions such as bombings in some public places and the representatives of foreign countries. According to the regional reports, some Islamic extremist groups are currently organizing their military troops in the region to conduct military operations on the right situations (Elbaz 2006: 2). In addition, since the majority of these groups are ideologically fed by Salafi radical groups, the

use of violence to achieve political goals is one of the most accepted ideological axes of these groups.

Focus areas of Islamist groups at the regional level

A brief overview of the situation in the five countries of the Central Asian region shows that Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have had more difficulties with the rise of religious radicalism than Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Among the three countries, the Fergana Valley, located on the Tajik-Uzbek-Kyrgyz border is the central area of the activities of Islamist groups. The focus of extremist Islamist groups in this area is due to its suitable geographical conditions for secrecy, it's neighbouring with the three countries, and the strong beliefs of the residents. The Sogdiana and Khudzhand area in northern Tajikistan and Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan are other major centres of Islamist groups in the Central Asian region. Some experts cite the ethnic origins in the analysis of Uzbek, Tajik and Kyrgyz desires towards Islamic extremism and the weakness of this desire among Turkmen and Kazakh. According to them, tribesmen who have lived as nomads throughout history are more modest in religious beliefs than ethnic groups who lived together. Accordingly, Kazakh and Turkmen peoples have more flexible religious beliefs than Uzbeks, Tajiks and Kyrgyz because of their tribal history.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization has helped the member states to prevent the spread of religious fundamentalism in the region. Political development is an important step in preventing young people from moving toward militant groups. In a situation where it is possible to reform matters with democratic

and peaceful means, the propaganda of militant fundamentalists will not have much effect on attracting people. On the other hand, political development and the free media are responsible for public oversight on the performance of government officials and the curtailment and reduction of corruption, which in turn undermines the propaganda of these groups. However, I believe that political development is the first and most important step in this direction. As experience has shown in many countries, development in other sectors without political development is either basically impossible or partly fulfilled. It can be said that the Central Asian countries are ineligible and ineffective examples of this type of development, which, at least economically and socially, has brought inverse consequences. Among these consequences could be high levels of administrative and economic corruption, tribal and ethnic discrimination, which provided a suitable basis for the successful pursuit of radical Islamist groups.

After the end of the Cold War, Islamic extremism grew in the region and took on an aggressive face. It is while all SCO member states are affected by the development of Islamism in the region. As much as the Islamism rose in the region, its threat to political authority in the region increased too. Due to the proximity of this region to Afghanistan as the centre of Islamic fundamentalism, civil wars began in Tajikistan and gradually influenced Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and even Kazakhstan and China. The activities of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Hizb ut-Tahrir in the region are among the notable issues. For this reason, combating religious fundamentalism has become an important concern for these countries (Shafiee, 2006: 60).

Improvement of the economic situation and promotion of economic interactions in Eurasia

In 2016, the global economic trend is likely to be negative, and the most important global economies will grow slowly. Negative factors also affect this situation, including the Federal Reserve's monetary policies (Central Bank of the United States), the slowdown in China's economic growth, the continuing pressure on the European Union and Russia due to reciprocal sanctions, reduced demand for commodity and also noneconomic factors such as military conflicts, migration, environmental and climate change.

In the first half of 2016, the oil market will be affected by negative factors, such as the Federal Reserve's monetary policies, excessive supply, OPEC pressure on unconventional oil producers, the possible entry of the United States into the global oil market and increased export potential of Iran. Continued low prices in global commodity markets will have a negative impact on the Central Asian economy, and the development of these countries remains limited.

In 2016, the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) celebrates its first anniversary, and as a result, a preliminary assessment of the union's performance will be possible.

This will help shape an overall perspective for economic cooperation in Eurasia. The next year will be the period of intensive development of international cooperation for the Eurasian Economic Union, especially some new areas, such as establishing free trade zones with a number of countries and continuing cooperation with a number of international organizations. In 2016, Kazakhstan will be the president of the Eurasian Economic Union.

Combating Drug and Weapon Trafficking and Organized Crime:

The second cause of instability in the region after the triple evils is drug and weapons trafficking as well as organized crimes. It is while Central Asia is a transit route for the export of drugs from Afghanistan to Europe and Russia, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) members are concerned about the huge profits of drug trade as the most important source of funding for Islamic militant groups (Azarkan, 2010: 405). According to the member states, the production of drug has been increased after the coalition forces entered the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan. As well, the Kabul government and its allies either do not have the will to resolve this problem or do not have the ability to change these conditions. Hence, the increased flow of drugs from Afghanistan to neighbouring countries has raised new threats to their security. Accordingly, the members signed an agreement on cooperation to combat the illicit trade of drugs and psychotropic drugs in 2004 (Lukin, 2007).

In 2017, international organizations will pay more attention to Afghanistan. Insecurity and terrorist attacks will continue in this country. Therefore, strengthening the Afghan government's ability to deal with terrorist groups, including the Taliban and ISIS, as well as combating the cultivation and trafficking of drugs in the current situation, is very important for the international community and the countries of the region. Increased terrorist activity and, consequently, increased use of violence urge foreign interventionists to take more active measures for settling the situation in Afghanistan.

Confrontation with NATO and military adventures of the United States

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there has been an imbalance in global affairs in such a way that there is no counterweight against the only global superpower, the United States. Therefore, this country uses its unilateralism wherever and whenever it wants, including the use of force in pursuit of its legal and illegal ends. This factor increases the need to a counterweight against the only unilateral superpower, and the SCO represents a powerful authority in global affairs and it can establish a balance in the region while not claiming to be a military bloc and not targeting any country (Rakhmon, 2006: 127) In this regard, some scholars argue that although it has been stipulated in the declaration of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on June 20, 2001 that the organization is not an alliance against another country or region, there are obvious reasons suggesting that the SCO is increasingly opposed to US unilateralism and expansion of its presence and influence in Central Asia.

The final statement of the Shanghai Five Summit held in Dushanbe, Tajikistan in 2000, highlighted the opposition to Western hegemony and the emergence of a multipolar world. The member states also supported the priority of the UN Security Council and opposed with the principle of humanitarian intervention. The main reason for this reaction was the NATO war in Yugoslavia without the approval of the Security Council (Anaraki, 2006: 143). Indeed, China and Russia, which are the main founders of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), seek to overcome the power gap created in Central Asia after the Soviet Union's collapse and the United States was trying to fill it. In

other words, China and Russia intend to establish a new Asian order, where there is no place for the presence and influence of America or American democracy, human rights and values (Akhavan Kazemi, 2006: 114). According to the statement of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit in June 2002, these countries expressed their dissatisfaction with double standards on the issue of human rights and interference in the internal affairs of other countries under the pretext of defending human rights. At Moscow's two-nation summit in June 2005, Vladimir Putin and Hu Jintao, Russian and Chinese presidents published a joint statement entitled "A World Order for the 21st Century", in which warned foreign powers sought to exercise their domination on global trends and also opposed the imposition of sociopolitical development models from abroad. The two sides also reiterated their common will to form a multipolar world. Analysts consider this statement as a clear warning to the United States and its unilateralism. According to such issues, Stefan Blank regards the SCO as a primary multilateral instrument of China and Russia for implementing their obvious anti-American policy in Central Asia; because he believes that there is little doubt about the purpose of the SCO to drive the United States out of this region (Blank, 2006).

In the process of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization members' stance against the United States, the member states at the summit in June 2005 in Kazakhstan's capital Astana called on the United States to present a timetable for the withdrawal of its military bases in the member states in order to reduce the disputes in Afghanistan. In this regard, the Uzbek government announced that the

US air base in Khanabad should not be used for any purpose other than supporting US combat operations in Afghanistan, and the Karshi-Khanabad Air Base on the Uzbek-Pakistani border should be dismantled within six months. Russia's Minister of Defense also said earlier that Russia accepts the presence of NATO military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan only for the time it takes to fight terrorism in Afghanistan, not anymore. This clearly signalled that Russia, China and the Central Asian republics would be willing to take responsibility of the regional security within the framework of the SCO. The peak of anti-American stance can be observed in the 2006 Summit's final statement. The statement said that Central Asian countries should choose the ways of development according to their needs and interests. Civilization diversity and development models should be considered and supported. Differences in cultural traditions, sociopolitical systems, values and models formed throughout history should not be considered as an excuse to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. The SCO members will constructively participate in building a new global security architecture based on mutual trust, benefits, equity and respect. Determining the methods and mechanisms for ensuring the regional security is a right and responsibility that is only related to the countries of the region. The main feature of the 2006 Summit was the strengthening of security dimensions, and the declaration highlighted a trend towards strengthening security interests. It was stated that the designation of specific tools to preserve the regional security is the right and responsibility of the countries in the region, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization will contribute to the creation of new global security architecture (Dwivedi, 2006: 146).

Regarding the members' opposition to the presence and influence of the United States in the region, it should be noted that the reason for this opposition is not the same for the member states. The two powerful countries of the organization (Russia and China) consider the presence and influence of the United States as a strategic threat. They believe that it limits their strategic space and sphere of influence. Although the four smaller countries of the organization (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) seek to strike a balance between America and the Russian-Chinese axis, they oppose the presence and influence of the United States for two reasons:

- 1) The economic, political and security dependence of these countries on Russia, which in most cases leads to their compliance with Moscow's policies.
- 2) The concern about US interference in regional regime change and replacing them with pro-Western regimes.

Despite cooperation with the United States in the fight against terrorism, China and Russia are worried about the influence and probably permanent presence of the country in the region. Russia has a permanent desire to regain its influence in the region and sees Central Asia as a zone along its southern borders. Based on a defense strategy in the front; Russia believes that defending the borders of Russia begins from the borders of the Commonwealth of Independent States (Shafiee and Mahmudi, 2007: 134). Therefore, they try to confront the expansion of NATO to the East by consolidating economic and military ties with regional countries. China is also worried about extending US presence and influence along its borders, fearing that it would be

under the strategic siege of the United States (Snyder, 2008: 17). However, the two countries agreed to the presence of US and NATO bases in the region and the fight against terrorism, as neither of them was able to take on this task alone. One of China's foreign policy experts believes: America's presence in the region guarantees the unity and cooperation of Russia and China, and the countries in the region will never fully accept American values. But on the other hand, the United States needs support from Russia and China, as well as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, for its success in the fight against terrorism (Oldberg, 2007: 30). According to the above reasons, some of the organization's stances that are interpreted contrary to American interests can be verified. However, it must be acknowledged that the SCO will not become an uncontroversial anti-American alliance, because its members do not currently have the desire and power of direct opposition to the United States. According to other analysts, it is not expedient for the diplomacy of China or Russia to engage in a clearly American political agenda within the Shanghai Organization (White, 2005: 29).

In contrast to the comments made by the members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on US policies, the awareness of the American views about the organization is also a matter of concern. From the Americans' perspective, the SCO consists of members with authoritarian governments under the leadership and control of two atomic powers, China and Russia. The power of the organization, which spans a quarter of the world's population - especially with the spread of anti-American sentiment in the region - has signalled alarm to the United

States. Some American analysts assessed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as the sacred alliance of Austria, Prussia and Russia in 1815, a conservative and anti-liberal alliance. Others also regard this organization as a modern Warsaw treaty that seeks to reduce the global influence of the United States and oppose the expansionist agenda in Central and Middle East (Akhavan Kazemi, 2006: 117).

However, the SCO Statute emphasizes its operational transparency and military impartiality. Despite this, there is no doubt that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization plays a balancing role in the international scene, especially against the NATO treaty and US military adventures.

For example, the United States had submitted a request for membership as an observer member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, but it was rejected by the organization in 2005.

However, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization achieved significant security gains during its operation. In recent years, the organization has urged the United States to withdraw its bases and troops from the territory of all member states. Following this request, the Kyrgyz government officially requested the United States to quickly withdraw American troops and shut down the K-2 military air base.

The Shanghai Summit in July 2005 also called on the United States to schedule a departure from Central Asia's military bases. According to this request, US forces left the Khanabad military base in Uzbekistan at the end of 2005. Western media regarded this change as the emergence of a new power in the region.

Management of internal insecurity and instability

The third common security concern among the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's members is internal insecurity and instability, especially the occurrence of color revolutions in the countries of the region. According to Shlyndov, one of the important security concerns of the members is preserving the stability of governments and political system against the flow of velvet revolutions, inspired by the support and values of the United States (Amberosio, 2008: 1322). This concern was exacerbated with the occurrence of Georgian Velvet Revolution in November 2003, Orange Revolution of Ukraine in December 2004, the Kyrgyz Mujdei Revolution in March 2005, and the Andijan events at the same year (Shafiee and Mahmudi, 2007: 134). Following these incidents, Central Asian statesmen were convinced that the United States was seeking to establish pro-Western regimes instead of authoritarian regimes in the region. Therefore, pursuing a multifaceted foreign policy was an unrealistic approach; because the worry caused by the domino effect of color revolutions in the Central Asian region has alarmed the leaders of the Central Asian republics about the democratic program of Western powers in the region (Dwivedi, 2006: 142). Since none of these countries alone were capable of confronting the United States and its allies, the SCO is considered as an appropriate mechanism to achieve this goal. As well, the consolidation of ties between Moscow and Beijing through this organization is emphasized more and more.

From the perspective of Central Asian countries' leaders, the SCO meets four important goals:

- 1) In addition to balancing the two powerful neighbours, Russia and

- China, it restricts the ambitions of Uzbekistan for regional hegemony;
- 2) It is a factor in maintaining regional stability and security;
- 3) It promotes the cooperation among members;
- 4) It supports regional political regimes. To this end, the SCO has always emphasized the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of states (Azarkan, 2010: 403). For example, emphasizing respect for the right of nations to choose their development paths in the declaration of the establishment, the 2003 Moscow declaration, the statement of the leaders at the 2005 summit, non-interference in the internal affairs of each other and non-commitment to the spread of democracy - By Western definition - have been emphasized that give governments a special privilege to regulate domestic policies and defend the political system. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, along with the adoption of policies by regional countries to protect their political power, has increasingly used multilateral cooperation to address regional or global democratic aspirations (Amberosio, 2008: 1322).

Confronting US influence in the region, which is manifested as opposition to the US unilateralism, is no longer a common security concerns of the member states.

Along with the independence of Central Asian states, they laid the foundations of democratic society as one of their goals, that holding elections and referendums was one of the main ways to achieve this goal. However, most experts and commentators have confirmed that unfortunately, no free, demo-

cratic, transparent and fair election has taken place in these countries during 16 years of independence.

The chairman of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, "Ebad al-Din", who was the president of the country's parliament and then the presidential candidate in the first years of his country's independence, relied on the experience of Kazakhstan and said:

"Not only free and fair elections have not taken place in Kazakhstan, but the story is the same throughout the Central Asian region. Therefore, parliamentary or presidential elections were similar in all regional countries. In his opinion, as the head of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, the most important similarity of the election is that these events are supervised and headed by the first person of the country, the president.

According to the experts, this attitude of the government to election, which is one of the foundations of democracy, is the legacy of the Soviet era that is still continued, despite the collapse of the Soviet Union. Hence, the attempts of these countries for independence are yet on the process, i.e. all tasks must be under the control and leadership of the party elites or the secretary-general. In the current circumstances, this wise person in post-Soviet countries is president.

- What is the difference between the elections of the Soviet era and that of the independence era with a democratic society?

The experts also consider these elections to be the same, meaning that their purpose is one thing which does not express the wishes and votes of the people but also serves the elites. The only difference is in the structure of the election. That is, the election of the

Soviet era was an election without any option, and the people vote for one person. It is while there is a form of election in the so-called free and democratic elections of the legitimate Central Asian states. But this type of election is not endorsed by experts; they actually choose instead of you or make your choice to their advantage.

Therefore, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization decided to monitor the elections of the member states. It helped to promote democracy, as well as to prevent color revolutions in Central Asian countries. To this end, the coordinators and representatives of the member states of the organization Shanghai Cooperation at its last meeting held in Beijing on September 20-23, decided on the dispatch of an observer delegation for the Uzbek presidential elections scheduled for December 4, 2016, and accordingly a secretariat was launched at this organization to from this delegation.

Conclusion

The end of the Cold War, the collapse of the bipolar system, and the vague prospects of the new international system, made it necessary to make decisions and establish mechanisms for the formulation of new rules and shape the international system in order to maximize the benefits. In the meantime, the development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was the most important mechanism for balancing the interests of its member states to preserve all of them against common threats and to encourage peace and cooperation in the region. The sponsors of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization agree unanimously that this organization was established and developed to meet the needs of the regional people and their willingness to peace

and improve post-Cold War conditions. The organization has evolved since its establishment, with regard to regional and international issues such as regional peace and stability, border issues, and terrorism.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization was able to create a kind of secure community among the member states by eliminating the war option. With the focus of the organization on common security concerns, such as combating terrorism, separatism and extremism, drug and weapon trafficking and organized crime, fears of internal insecurity and instability, and especially the occurrence of color revolutions and the confrontation with US influence and unilateralism, this secure community became strengthened more and more.

One of the most important issues that the Shanghai Organization faces, like any regional cooperation organization in the Third World, is the lack of trust among the ruling elites. They find it difficult to delegate their powers and competencies to a cooperation organization, but security cannot be achieved by Central Asian leaders lonely due to the lack of financial resources and the lack of sufficient military assets. As in the era of unity, they need to gain support from the great powers, but in the absence of the Soviet Union. This role has now been taken by Russia and China to respond their specific security considerations.

An important issue in providing security in Central Asia and the role of the Shanghai Organization is the activity of regional and international organizations under the influence of Russia or the United States. The OSCE, like the NATO that has been pursuing a program called "Partnership for Peace" for former members of the Warsaw Pact, has taken some efforts to help secure the region.

Russia, as it has promoted the regional security pact to the level of the organization in 2004, sought to strengthen this regional security cooperation, whose objectives are not necessarily consistent with the goals of the Shanghai Organization. Even in the Central Asian Economic Union, military defense and counter-terrorism issues have been raised. For members of the alliance who have tried to pursue joint counter-terrorism efforts, some of the threats are completely different. Basically, the republics of Central Asia need Russia and China in the form of this organization, but they also follow different perspectives on security in the region. Uzbekistan, for example, has considered the pact as a framework for getting help from China against Russia, while they had shown willingness to America to play a balanced role against Russia before the events in Andijan. In any case, the fight against terrorism, religious extremism and separatism has been the common focus of all these countries to remove the existing threats.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization has potentially huge forces that can become actual over time. As well, a shared fear of the West that exists between its members can accelerate the process of moving forward and becoming the most powerful regional organization in Asia.

According to the above, the future of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is still relied on the political and diplomatic power of Russia and China against a definition of the international political system and the role each of these two powers holds for themselves and hopes for a global leadership and their coalition. It is too early to call it a political organization, and even sooner to define it as a globally harmonized security and military organization.

Table 1.
Exports and Imports of the SCO member states
(\$ billions)

Description	Exports			Imports		
	2000	2007	2014	2000	2007	2014
China	249/2	1218	2343	225/1	955/8	1960
Russia	105/6	355/5	507/5	49/1	245/4	324
Kazakhstan	8/8	46/9	74	5	32/8	49
Kyrgyzstan	0/5	1/1	1/85	0/6	2/4	7/24
Tajikistan	0/8	1/5	0/741	0/7	2/4	4/06
Uzbekistan	2/8	7/5	6/86	1/8	4/5	12
India	42/4	145/4	290	51/5	215/5	422
Pakistan	9	17/4	28/2	10/9	31/2	44/8
Iran	28/3	78/4	73/6	15/2	43/2	70/6
Mongolia	0/5	1/9	2/1	0/6	2	6/24
Total	447/9	1873/6	3327/8	360/5	1535/2	2899/9
World	6455	13833	23654/6	6653/7	14056/6	23589/7

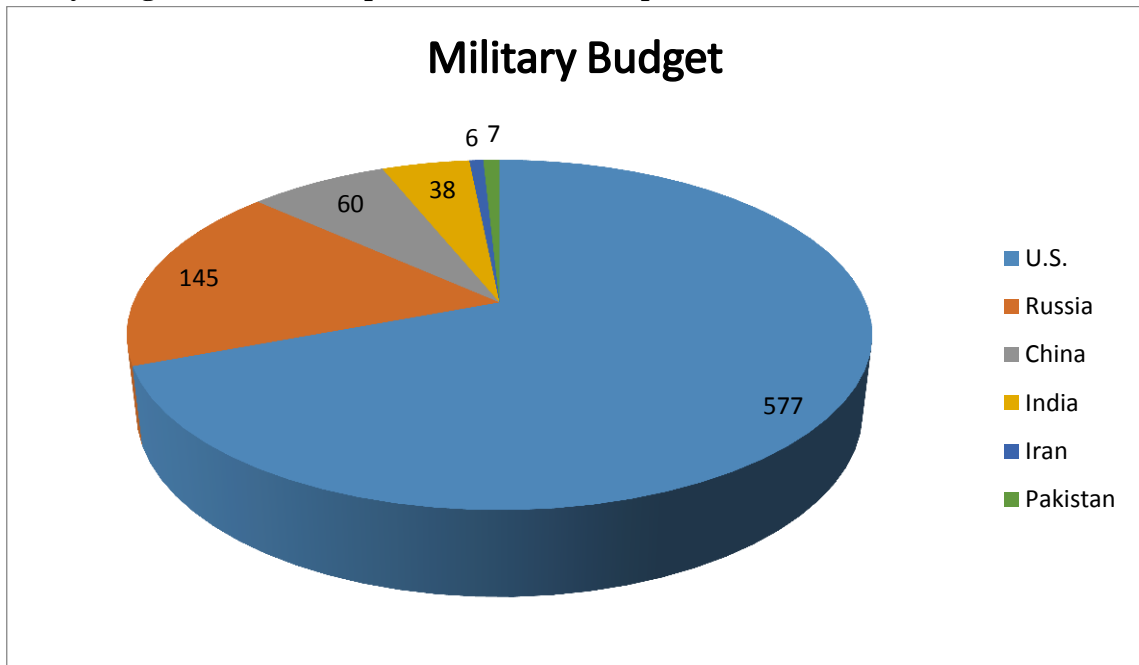
Table 2.
The oil and gas reserves of the SCO member states

Country	Oil reserves			Natural gas reserves	
	Billion ton	Billion barrel	% of the world reserves	Trillion m ³	% of the world reserves
Russia	10/8	79	6/3	43/3	23/4
Iran	18/9	137/6	10/9	29/61	16
Kazakhstan	5/3	39/8	3/2	1/82	1
China	1/2	15/5	1/2	2/46	1/3
Uzbekistan	....	....	....	1/58	0/9
India	0/8	5/8	0/5	1/09	0/6
Pakistan	....	....	....	0/85	0/5
Total	1708	1258	22/1	185/02	43/7

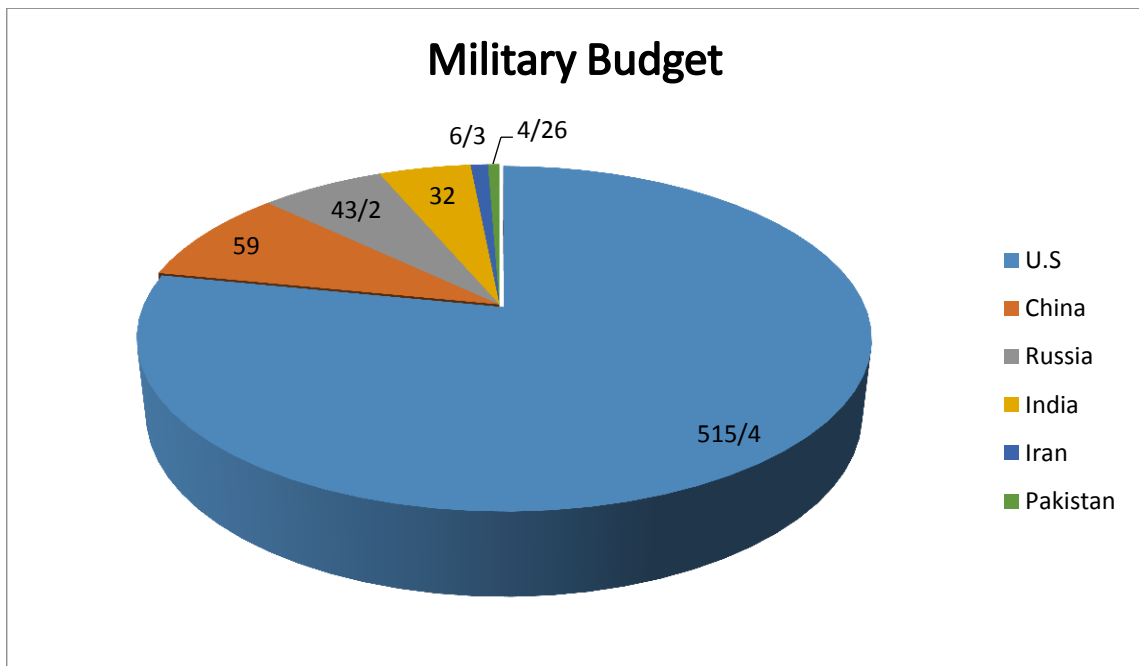
Table 3.
Area and population of the SCO member states

Country	Area	Population		
		2000	2007	2015
China	959/8	1247/8	1305/7	1383
Russia	1709/8	144	142/5	146/3
Kazakhstan	272/5	15/2	15/4	17/4
Kyrgyzstan	20	5/2	5/3	6/04
Tajikistan	14/3	6/6	6/7	8/1
Uzbekistan	44/7	26/6	27/4	31/5
India	328/7	1046/2	1169	1274
Pakistan	79/6	144/4	163/9	190
Iran	174/5	66/1	71/2	79/9
Mongolia	156/4	2/5	0/04	4/9
Total	3760/3	2704/6	2909/7	3225/9

Military budget of the SCO important members compared with United States (\$ billions)



2016



2008

Figure 1. Military budget of the SCO important members compared with United States (\$ billions)

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