

THE IMPACT OF THE NEW MEMBERS OF THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION ON POWER BALANCE IN CENTRAL ASIA

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Abstract. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Central Asia has become the center that intersects the interests of many external players. For the last 30 years, Russia has been trying to keep its place as the key player in the region, but China has also become a very influential country in the region. There are several international organizations that link and oblige in some circumstances all these Central Asian countries and one of them is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Except for Turkmenistan, all other Central Asian countries are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, where Russia and China share their interests as key players in the region. But the recent new members, India, Pakistan, and Iran, are also trying to connect with the Central Asian states, and their efforts will show their influence on the redistribution of the power balance in the region. Apart from member states, there are other countries like Turkey, the United States, and European Union that are searching for a way into the game.

Keywords: *Central Asia, Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Power Balance.*

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ШАНХАЙ ЫНТЫМАҚТАСТЫҚ ҰЙЫМЫНЫҢ ЖАҢА МҮШЕЛЕРІНІҢ ОРТАЛЫҚ АЗИЯДАҒЫ КҮШ БАЛАНСЫНА ӘСЕРІ

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Андатпа. Кеңес Одағы ыдырағаннан кейін Орталық Азия көптеген сыртқы күштердің мүдделері қиылысатын орталыққа айналды. Соңғы 30 жыл ішінде Ресей аймақтағы негізгі күш ретінде өз орнын сақтап қалуға тырысты, бірақ Қытай да аймақтағы өте ықпалды елге айналды. Түрікменстаннан басқа Орталық Азияның барлық елдері Шанхай ынтымақтастық ұйымының мүшелері болып табылады, онда Ресей мен Қытай аймақтағы негізгі күштер ретінде өз мүдделерін бөліседі. Бірақ жақында жаңа мүшелер Үндістан, Пәкістан және Иран Орталық Азия мемлекеттерімен байланыс орнатуға тырысуда және олардың күш-жігері аймақтағы күш тепе-теңдігін қайта бөлуге әсерін көрсетеді. Аталған мүше мемлекеттерден басқа бұл процеске қосылудың жолын іздейтін Түркия, Америка Құрама Штаттары және Еуропалық Одақ сияқты басқа елдер бар.

Түйін сөздер: *Орталық Азия, Ресей, Қытай, Қазақстан, Өзбекстан, Тәжікстан, Қырғызстан, Шанхай ынтымақтастық ұйымы, күш теңгерімі.*

ВЛИЯНИЕ НОВЫХ ЧЛЕНОВ ШАНХАЙСКОЙ ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВА НА БАЛАНС СИЛ В ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ

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Аннотация. После распада Советского Союза Центральная Азия стала центром, в котором пересекаются интересы многих внешних игроков. В течение последних 30 лет Россия пыталась сохранить свое место ключевого игрока в регионе, но Китай также стал очень влиятельной страной в регионе. Есть несколько международных организаций, которые связывают и обязывают при определенных обстоятельствах все эти центральноазиатские страны, и одной из них является Шанхайская организация сотрудничества. За исключением Туркменистана, все остальные страны Центральной Азии являются членами Шанхайской организации сотрудничества, где Россия и Китай разделяют свои интересы как ключевые игроки в регионе. Но недавние новые члены, Индия, Пакистан и Иран, также пытаются установить связи с государствами Центральной Азии, и их усилия покажут влияние на перераспределение баланса сил в регионе. Помимо государств-членов, есть и другие страны, такие как Турция, Соединенные Штаты и Европейский союз, которые ищут способ вступить в игру.

Ключевые слова: *Центральная Азия, Россия, Китай, Казахстан, Узбекистан, Таджикистан, Кыргызстан, Шанхайская организация сотрудничества, баланс сил.*

Introduction

Central Asia is a region where the interests of many external players intersect. Today, Central Asia is undergoing rapid changes since the world has begun to pay more attention to this region rich in energy resources (*Vakulchuk and Overland 2021*). Capital inflows and expansion of trade are causing large-scale infrastructural changes, the movement of goods, and the flow of people across the region - a phenomenon that has been aptly compared to the waves of transformation that occurred earlier in Europe and Southeast Asia.

The demise of the Soviet Union resulted in rising of the five independent states in Central Asia as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan. The independence of these states immediately got admitted by United Nations and was accepted as member states. All of them were recognized as independent states but they still needed the recognition of their territories. The current borders of Central Asian countries were drawn by the Soviet Union and even changed several times (Arne Haugen 2003: 180-184). After getting independence Central Asian countries faced territorial disputes with their neighbors. So, they had to find a solution to get rid of any conflicts with neighbors.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Soviet-Chinese border turned into the borders between China and four new sovereign states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Russia, with which it was not slow to establish diplomatic relations: on December 27, 1991, the governments of China and Russia signed the "Protocol on Bilateral Relations"; On January 3, 1992, an agreement was signed with Kazakhstan, on January 4 with Tajikistan, and on January 6 with Kyrgyzstan. At the end of October

1992, a meeting of the joint delegation of the four states with the delegation of the Government of the People's Republic of China took place in Beijing. The parties confirmed their readiness to "resolve the border issues remaining from history based on the previous Russian-Chinese border agreements ..." (*Myasnikov 2001: 272*). On October 24, 1992, documents were signed on the basic principles of creating a topographic map of the terrain on the borders of China with Russia (the western section), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

On April 26, 1996, the first meeting of the leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China, Russia, and Tajikistan was held in Shanghai to discuss possible ways to resolve border issues between the PRC and the former Soviet republics. As a result, the first joint document was signed, the Agreement on Confidence-building in the Military Field in the Border Area, which is known as the Shanghai Declaration (Shakliena 2002: 476). Since then, these five have been called the Shanghai Five. At the meeting of the leaders of the five countries in Shanghai, it was decided to hold annual meetings of the Shanghai Five, which indicated the creation of a mechanism for regular meetings and the beginning of its functioning. The mechanism of meetings within the framework of the five participating countries was called the Shanghai Five Forum (Summit). On April 24, 1997, a meeting of the Shanghai Five was held in Moscow. During the meeting, a five-party "Agreement on the mutual reduction of armed forces in the border area" was signed, which became a specification and supplement to the Shanghai document. According to many analysts, the Agreement is a document of great military and political significance. Thus, the initial stage of the

Shanghai Five's activities was a real step towards eliminating the prerequisites for conflict situations on the border, and also laid down structures for further cooperation between states.

From July 3 to July 4, 1998, the meeting of the leaders of the Shanghai Five countries took place in Alma-Ata. The focus of her attention was on such issues as promoting peace and stability in the region and enhancing economic cooperation between the five countries and in the region. The meeting resulted in the signing of the "Joint Statement of the participants of the Alma-Ata meeting". The participants of the Shanghai Five agreed "to convene, as necessary, meetings at the level of experts, foreign ministers, heads of government and heads of State to consider issues of ensuring security and expanding cooperation in Central Asia and on the Asian continent as a whole."

On June 14-15, 2001, a meeting of the heads of six states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, which joined them, took place in Shanghai. The main outcome of the summit was the transformation of the Shanghai Five into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a new regional association that proclaimed as its goals "strengthening mutual trust, friendship and good neighborliness maintaining and ensuring peace, security, and stability of the region".

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has retained the function of the main guarantor of security in the region and has been the main partner of the region (*Robert E. 2021*). Russia's policy in Central Asia can be assessed in different ways. But Russia remains the most important country on which economies, security, diplomacy, and many other factors in the countries of

Central Asia depend. The key interest of Russia in the Central Asian region is the desire to keep and increase constantly its economic and political positions.

It is worth noting that many states have their interests in the region: Russia, China, Turkey, Iran, the EU, the USA, India, and others. Nevertheless, the greatest influence on the region is exerted by such powers as Russia, with which the Central Asian countries were part of the same state, China, which is gaining ever greater economic and political power, and the United States, pursuing global interests.

Russia and China are actively involved in regional cooperation processes in Central Asia because the countries of Central Asia in certain economic and political aspects are much more closely connected with Moscow and Beijing than even with each other (*Kazantsev A. et al 2021*). The role of a connection bridge for China to Central Asia played by Russia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is an example (*Stronski and NG. 2018*).

The interests of these countries often do not combine and are also opposed to each other. Thus, problems in relations between the US and Russia, China and the US, and the integration projects of China and Russia are being translated into the interaction between the Central Asian countries.

Recently, it is typical in expert circles to consider the SCO as a counterweight to NATO. Although, unlike NATO, the organization under study has distinctive features. From the issues of cross-border cooperation, today the SCO has become a full-fledged international organization that is rapidly expanding and the fears of Western experts "about China's desire to form a new anti-Western alliance based on the SCO" are quite understandable.

On the one hand, the strengthening of the SCO can be regarded as an expansion of opportunities for establishing dialogue between member countries, but the fear is the strengthening of Chinese influence within this organization.

The relevance of this topic is because against the background of the growing confrontation between Russia and the West, the SCO is turning into an instrument of political maneuver between Russia and China.

The purpose of this work is to analyze the current state and prospects of the SCO development. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to study the formation and development of the SCO.

Research Methods

The methodological basis of this study is based on the principles of scientific objectivity. The topic under consideration is analyzed using a systematic approach, which makes it possible to solve the problem on the basis of scientific analysis. The empirical basis of the study is information taken from various sources. The "balance of power" is one of the most widespread and universal concepts in the theory of international relations. An extensive literature is devoted to its description and analysis, but the issues of determining the balance of power, its connection with the security of individual states, and the stability of the system remain the subject of scientific discussion up to the present.

Discussion

The exit of the Soviet Union from the world stage had a profound impact on the entire system of international relations. Newly independent states such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan,

Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan formed a new region in the heart of Eurasia - Central Asia.

Central Asia has always been a territory of geopolitical rivalry between the leading countries. Today Central Asia is a region not only with great development potential but also with challenges on the way to its implementation. Huge reserves of mineral resources, demographic opportunities, and transit potential are combined with fragile democratic institutions and a poorly diversified and poorly financed economy. The Central Asian states are threatened by proximity to unstable Afghanistan, weak border security, and the growth of radical Islamism. The region attracts external players who are primarily looking for benefits from economic cooperation. The mentioned threats are a destabilizing factor for also neighboring countries, which requires the involvement of external actors in regional affairs.

The international legal basis of the SCO was formed by the member states of the so-called "Shanghai Five": China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, forced to solve the problems of the former Soviet-Chinese state border after the collapse of the USSR. This shows that Russia and China are the key players in the region. But the new members of the organization like India, Pakistan, and Iran also have a valuable position in world politics. India with the world's second-largest military force and has the world's largest volunteer army (*John Pike, 2016*) It also has the third-largest defense budget in the world (*Nan Tian et al, 2020*). In 2020, 2021 and 2022 GlobalFirepower report lists it as the fourth most-powerful military (GFP, 2022). The triangle relationship between China – India – Pakistan also shows its effect on the power

balance in the region. India has territorial disputes with both countries and also sees China as its competitor. Despite these factors and disagreements, SCO unifies all 8 officially members and 1 new member Iran (*Nazila Fathi 2021*).

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is an international organization of the Eurasian continent under the leadership of China and Russia, created to meet the strategic needs of six states. Although the "Declaration on the Establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization" contains a provision that the basic principles of cooperation between the SCO member states are equality, mutual trust, and mutual benefit, but it is obvious that China and Russia occupy a leading and leading place in this organization. The success of the Shanghai Five mechanism and the creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization largely depended on investments and efforts from China and Russia.

For nearly three decades, relations between China and Central Asia have been extremely dynamic. Even though the traditional partner - Russia - has a huge dominance over Central Asia, China's economic presence is currently the most extensive. In the beginning, China established trade and economic relations with Central Asian countries. By investing in macroeconomic projects in Central Asia, China eventually became the largest investor in the region and gained direct access to the natural resources of these countries (*Jon Yuan Jiang 2021*). But China's plans do not want to end with this, according to the latest information, China plans to build a military base in the region. Earlier it became known that the Chinese authorities are planning to build a special base in the Wakhan Gorge

of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region of Tajikistan (*Reuters 2021*). At a parliamentary meeting, the government of Tajikistan approved a project to create a base in GBAR near the Afghan border. It was noted that it will be built by agreement between the Ministry of Public Security of China and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Tajikistan. But the appearance of the military in Central Asia is already being harshly criticized by political scientists in Russia and the Central Asian countries.

For India, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the new republics of Central Asia showed several opportunities to expand its geopolitical and economic impact in historically connected countries. In order to strengthen its position in the region and indicate its intentions, Delhi has put forward the strategies "Connect Central Asia" and "Extended Neighborhood" (*Nishtha Kaushiki 2013*). Both strategies are based on active political, economic and human interaction with the countries of Central Asia, but still require stable ground communications. Meanwhile, India's willingness to provide grants and loans is a telling example of India's intentions and growing capabilities. Today we can say with confidence that India has managed to strengthen its presence in the region and make it competitive. Moreover, after India acceded to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2017 and the creation of the India-Central Asia dialogue platform in 2019, Delhi received some opportunities for projecting its weight on the region, multilateral cooperation, and implementing projects (*MEA, Government of India 2021*).

Immediately after the collapse of the USSR, Iran realized that it makes no sense to strive for dominance in the region (*Grajewski N. 2019*). First of all, Tehran

was aware of Russia's concern about such serious geopolitical changes. Since the early 1990s, Iran's foreign policy has been traced to the authorities' intention to establish comprehensive regional cooperation within the framework of such institutions as the ECO, and a little later - the SCO. Demonstrating loyalty to the course toward multilateral regional cooperation, Iran seeks to create an image of a rational and serious regional player. The reason for such an attitude was a good relationship with Russia and recognition of its influence in the region (*Grajewski N. 2019*).

The influence of Pakistan on the countries of the Central Asian region is very limited today. Due to the fact that the vectors of economic and political interaction between Pakistan and the states of Central Asia have historically been directed in different directions and, in general, to this day remain such by inertia. Strengthening trade and economic ties between the states of Central Asia and Pakistan is a matter of time. Separate successful economic projects, particularly those listed by you in the question, are already taking place. Cooperation in the field of logistics, business, and education is also gradually developing. The fact that both the Central Asian states and Pakistan are cooperating closely with China may play a role (*Chulkov 2020*). This says that Islamabad will support China in increasing its impact on Central Asian countries.

Russia's interests in Central Asia are conditioned, firstly, by its desire to maintain influence in the region, to keep the remnants of the post-Soviet space under its aegis, and confirm its role, if not as a global, then at least as a Eurasian power. Such claims remain one of the primary motivations of the Kremlin's foreign policy, suffering from an

inferiority complex due to the widespread weakening of its influence. At the same time, the post-Soviet countries are the only part of the world where the Kremlin can reasonably claim leadership, albeit with reservations. But this space can also be likened to shagreen leather.

Secondly, Russia's interests require the preservation and maintenance of regimes that are loyal to it and are ready to develop relations with it. It is becoming increasingly difficult to solve this problem. The foreign policy of the Central Asian countries is multi-vector - so the Russian direction has long ceased to be the only one.

The construction of the ideological concepts of the Central Asian states in relation to the common history with the Russian Empire and the USSR differs significantly. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan retain a certain continuity of the Soviet period, while Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan go to a complete break and deny any positive role of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union in their history. These periods are associated with colonization, oppression, and forced Russification. Kazakhstan has chosen the path of "reconciliation" of the Slavic and Turkic past of the country, the path of smoothing ethnic contradictions and building a "united Kazakh nation".

Depending on the role assigned to Russia in choosing an ideological course, the Central Asian states can be conditionally grouped into three groups.

The first group of countries includes Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, where the Soviet past organically fits into the construction of new ideological foundations with an emphasis on national symbols.

The second group should include Kazakhstan with its contradictory attitude towards the period of the Russian Empire

and the USSR. At the same time, the general history is interpreted to a greater extent in a neutral and positive way, which makes it possible to build the concept of Eurasianism.

The third group of countries — Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan — have a negative attitude towards the Soviet and imperial past as a time of hegemony, Russification, and colonialism.

It is worth emphasizing that the period of cooling relations with Russia and rapprochement with the West is accompanied by a reassessment of the common past in a negative way, which is broadcast by the official authorities through the education and culture system, through the approval of relevant school textbooks on history, the opening of museums in memory of victims of repression.

One of the most representative organizations is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization emerged in 2001 from the "Shanghai Five" – an organization uniting Russia, China, and the countries of Central Asia bordering China (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan). The main purpose of the Shanghai Five was to settle territorial disputes between China and the countries of Central Asia. After Uzbekistan joined the organization, the Shanghai Five was transformed into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Within the framework of the SCO, Russia, and China are checking their policy in Central Asia, avoiding through this interaction a possible open clash of interests (*Plotnikov D.S., 2020*). The organization works in various areas, such as security, the fight against drug trafficking, and economic and cultural interaction. Each of the participating countries of the organization is interested in maintaining

stability and economic well-being in Central Asia. At the same time, there are priority topics for each country. China, for example, is interested in expanding its economic presence in Central Asia and jointly fighting the Uighur separatists (preventing them from creating strongholds in Central Asia from where they can carry out subversive work in the XUAR). Uzbekistan is very selective about joining certain international organizations, fearing to lose part of its sovereignty. According to Tashkent, the presence of Russia and China in the SCO is the key to a balance between these two centers. This circumstance was one of the main reasons for Uzbekistan's entry into this international organization. In 2015, India and Pakistan joined the SCO as full participants.

Conclusion

All members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization which are non-Central Asian countries have their interests in the region, some of them political some are interested in natural resources. Russia has been a hegemony for centuries in the region and now has to share this role with China which has risen as a strong and serious competitor. Shanghai Cooperation Organization is the only organization where China has a direct influence on the region and year by year strengthens it. India sees itself as a newly emerging power and potential superpower of the world and it must join the organization to compete with China for the role of leadership in the region. China will need an ally to compete with Russia and India for the position of leader country in the region and had chosen Pakistan for this role which is joined the organization at the same time as India. Russia, in turn, sees a weakening of its influence and has also

adjoined its friend Iran to the organization. All these changes in the region and within Shanghai Cooperation Organization remind Great Game but in round 2 where has already arisen big new players in the region.

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