

The Role of Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Making Balance of Power-Based order in Central Asia

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Abstract

The collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in formation of 15 new republics as independent political entities. Hence, being situated among countries such as Russia, China, India, Pakistan and Iran, the Central Asia has become a “geopolitical junction”.

In such circumstances, the “Shanghai Cooperation Organisation” (SCO) was created in this region. In order to examine the role this organization plays in the regional and international arenas, we have to study the factors that form the foreign policy behaviours of Russia and China as the most important players of this organization, that is, identity interests, their perception of threat sources, as well as their economic and security motivations.

In this paper, the main hypothesis is that Russia’s interests in becoming a great power and China’s interests in its long-term economic security in the Central Asia have directed them into forming a soft balance against the United States within the framework of the SCO. The main question is how this Organisation has led to a power balance in the Central Asia. The authors have conducted this study by

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descriptive-analytic method, using Persian and English books and articles as well as Internet resources.

In fact, it is asserted that as the two great powers, China and Russia, while cooperating in order to achieve some common goals in Central Asia, have their own approaches in this regard. Russia has adopted the hard version of balance of power and China has followed the soft version of that. This stance, of course, due to presence of China as a balancing force and also in the SCO framework, has been ameliorated and represented by Russia as the soft balance against the United States.

Although leaders of the organisation do not want it to adopt a controversial aspect as a result of the competition with the US (this can be proved by the disagreement with the requests of some countries for joining SCO whose membership might probably end up in some unwanted political issues), most of regional theorists concur that the relationships among today great powers, i.e. the United States, European Union, Russia Federation and China, imply that a new soft cold war is being constituted between NATO members led by US on the one hand, and SCO members led by China and Russia on the other. In SCO itself, the shared threats on the one hand, and the overlaps at regional and international desires, on the other, are the two pivotal variables that construct China-Russia relations in spite of their profound conflicts in different regional and international issues. This type of relationship could be defined as a “strategic participation” which has made SCO not to conceal its prospect toward the WEST interventions.

SCO's anti-American stance was culminated in the manifesto of the Organisation meeting: “SCO will actively contribute to establishment of the global new security structure based on mutual trust, mutual interests, equality and mutual respect. In addition, discerning the methods and mechanisms to guarantee the region

security is the right and also responsibility of the regional countries only". Moreover, it is pointed out that a special mechanism to preserve complete security of the region is the right and responsibility of the regional countries. Meanwhile, the SCO will provide a constructive contribution to building a new architecture of global security.

Recently, Crimea peninsula annexation to Russia and the recent tensions between the west, especially US, and this country, has once again redoubled the significance of Central Asia. The west realized, as he had done in Cold War Era, that if he were to control Russia, he would have to establish a so-called "New Iron Curtain" (of course, not as intense as the one in cold war) around it. Generally, American Leaders consider the SCO as a collection of several authoritarian countries being directed and steered by two nuclear powers including China and Russia. Some other researchers, on the other hand, think of the organization as a "Modern Warsaw" intending to reduce the America`s global influence and encounter its expansionism and prevalence in the region. SCO, of course, cannot amount to Warsaw, particularly in terms of security and military activities. However, this is according to Russia influence on these two organizations; particularly both of them have assigned US as their target to pose against.

Finally, although SCO is still far from necessary rules and features for turning into a structure similar to NATO in the east, its structure, goals and the composition of its members, especially in the period when the gap between US and Russia is widening, are in such a way that enables it to reduce the American hegemony in the region. It is expected that the organization will gradually turn into a prominent actor in the political and economic arena behind the boundaries of Central Asia. In other words, China and Russia tried to implement their own version of so-called Asian new order in which there is no

room for US presence and influence. But also, as evidence indicates, SCO will not reduce an explicit anti-American union in that its members have neither the tendency nor the power to directly encounter US. To put it in another way, according to some analysts' views, it is not advantageous for China and Russia to engage the organization in a straight political anti-American program and derail the organisation from its intended objectives.

Reviewing and explaining current processes in SCO as growing structures, this essay seeks to demonstrate that this organisation, unlike some other regional ones, during its short period of activity not only has not lost its dynamism, but it also offers a promising prospect for the regional countries; besides, it can be considered as one of the most conspicuous emblems for cooperation of independent countries aiming to create multi-lateral collaborations and a new axis against the United States unilateral strategy.

Keywords: balance of power, the Central Asia, China, Russia, security, Shanghai cooperation organization, the United States.