

China's Orientation toward the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in the Light of its New Foreign Policy (from 2013 to 2018)

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Abstract

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Beijing, while attempting to resolve border issues with the newly independent states of Central Asia, was seeking to confront the security issues of separatism, extremism, and terrorism, which during this period were the major challenges to Beijing. Therefore, the main foundation of China's approach to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was security-related issues, particularly the ones in the Xinjiang province, as the danger of the spillover of extremism from Central-Asian countries could pose a serious internal challenge. However, China's economic slowdown in recent years, and some developments in the international system, such as the American effort to focus on the Asia-Pacific region, has compelled Xi Jinping to pursue a new foreign policy.

As Xi Jinping came into power, he adopted an active foreign policy that some analysts describe it as a marked departure from the 'low profile' foreign policy of China. This new approach has some pillars such as the establishment of new multilateral institutions, more active participation in peripheral regions, the marching (geographical) west strategy, and new economic and financial initiatives.

This new foreign policy has rooted in two important factors. On the one hand, China does not want to be under the U.S. pressure in its peripheral region, and on the other hand, it has put forward new initiatives to keep its growth going. Examples of these initiatives include the "Asian Investment Bank" and "One Belt One Road". These new ideas and initiatives have caused some changes in China's approach toward the Central Asian region, as well as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a significant multilateral platform.

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Question

In the light of the new principles and guidelines in China's foreign policy, implying a more active approach, this question has been raised: what changes have been made to China's orientation towards the Shanghai Cooperation Organization?

Hypothesis

As a result of China's new foreign policy (an active foreign policy), the strengthening of the economic dimension of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has become a central agenda in Chinese foreign policy decision making.

Methodology

The present study examined the documentary approach and analytical descriptive method to better understand the issue of China's new foreign policy (from 2013 until 2018) and the country's orientation toward the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Conclusion

The effort to reduce the tensions with Central Asian countries, reducing risks of extremism, terrorism, and separatism; and meeting energy needs were China's main reasons for establishing the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. But, as China's growth has increased, China's expectations of the organization have changed.

The "Marching West" "Strategy of China and the new economic initiatives, such as "One Belt One Road", has made Central Asia a more important region for China than in the past. This has led to some changes in China's approach toward the SCO. First, China seeks the strengthening of the economic dimension of the organization more than ever, and it seems to be continuing in the future; so, Beijing sees the SCO as a platform for promoting new economic initiatives. Secondly, while in the past, Beijing's most important security concern was to maintain the stability of Xinjiang province, now as the result of China's quest for increased economic presence, maintaining the security of its investment and infrastructures has become China's priority. Also, due to the desire of the United States to reduce its presence in the region (Central Asia) the organization can supply public goods that were previously provided by the United States. Third, China-Russia relations have become more competitive in the organization. For example, although Russia has been seeking closer proximity to China since the Ukraine crisis, it has also sought to strengthen the security

dimension of the Organization. At the same time, China seeks to strengthen the economic dimension of the organization, especially due to new economic initiatives. It should also be noted that the new foreign policy of China, which seeks to link with the West through economic corridors, has made Iran's geopolitical position more important. So in recent years, Chinese Decision-makers have voiced their support for Iran's permanent membership in the SCO. Of course, the nuclear deal that abolished the UN sanctions eased this orientation.

Keywords: China, Economy, Iran, Russia, SCO, Security.