

*THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION
ORGANIZATION (SCO) TO SECURITY INTEGRATION IN CENTRAL ASIA AND
ITS LIMITING FACTORS*

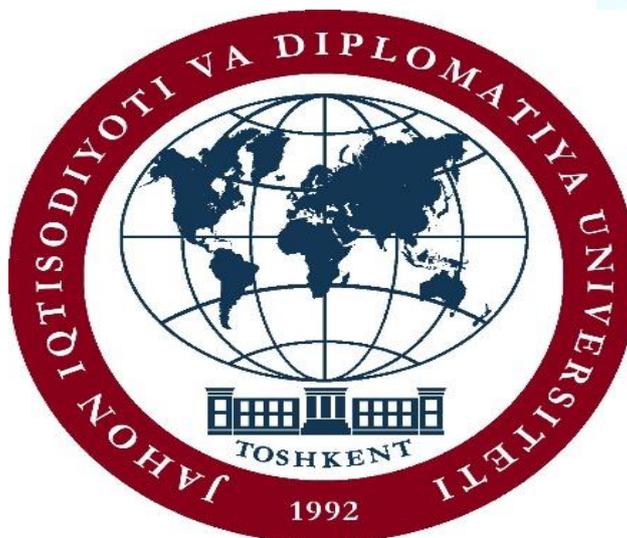
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Abstract:

This research will explore the contribution of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to security integration in Central Asia and its limiting factors. The period of defining the topic used theory of international relations realism and institutionalism. Within research activity of RATS, friendly military actions and diplomatic intercessions are highly rated, but something discovered in research that institutional weakness and different incomes of every country stopped the integrity of

each other. The role of Uzbekistan in SCO explored that special example in this article. In conclusion mentioned SCO have crucial role in security integration of Central Asia but it can not deeply integration means.

Keywords: Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Central Asia, regional security cooperation, counter-terrorism, regional diplomacy, security integration, political strategy, realism, institutionalism, political speech field Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), Uzbekistan foreign policy, China–Russia relations, regional governance, security activity.

1.Introduction:

All of us know about after failing Soviet era Central Asia had a lot of problems with security integration. “Central Asia faces complex security challenges including terrorism, separatism, and extremism”.¹ These bad situations demand one final solution for them. In this period or for clearly understand in 2001 year established Shanghai Cooperation Organization and it aimed to supply regional security and partnership between countries.² In this cooperation take part China, Russia and four countries of Central Asia: Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan like members. According to Stephen Aris “The SCO has evolved into a principal Eurasian regional organization comprised of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.”³ But it is contentiously thing that possible action of this cooperation and making real input for security integration of Central Asia so far. This research will explore how make input the Shanghai Cooperation Organization for security integration of Central Asia. This explore try to make concrete answer for how far did SCO reach to supply security integration of Central Asia and which based barrier have in this way? Mainly idea of research that the cooperation maybe main area of security

¹ Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, 2022, *Samarkand Declaration of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO*, September 16, Section 5, <https://worldjpn.net/documents/texts/SCO/20220916.D1E.html>

² Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, 2001, *Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*, Article 1, adopted June 15, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/LegalTreatiesDoc/000M3130.pdf>

³ Stephen Aris (2012) “*The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Its role and place in the development of Eurasia*” International Peace Institute, https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/ipi_e_pub_shanghai_cooperation.pdf

integration, but institutional weakness, different incomes and strong effect of China and Russia making limitations to real productivity.

Literature review:

There are a lot of scientific literatures about role in of SCO regional security. They have different views for this situation. Some scientists maybe evaluate organization as a active regional cooperation, others believes as an institutional weak and political uneven organization.

Rashid Alimov (2008) in his research emphasized that SCO is organization which can open door of chances for integration of Europe. In his opinion the organization plays crucial role to improve field of regional security and economy.⁴ Also *Stephen Aris* explored formation and action of organization and rated it as cooperation which limited structures and having flexible agenda. According to him institutional mechanisms of cooperation are not enough.⁵

Alison Bailes and partner authors said that in SIPRI political discussional paper in 2007 rated SCO activity in security field. According to their opinion the organization based on equality but against to this principle domination of Russia and China. Said that in the article: “The SCO is primarily a vehicle for China and Russia to manage their relations with each other and with the Central Asian states”. This approach shows that SCO is not only supply regional balance but also it is as tool of coordination in geopolitical benefits.⁶

One other author *Temur Umarov* rated the organization as unuseful cooperation. According to his opinion SCO changed to “political speech field” from competition powers of Russia and China. According to him there are many things

⁴ Rashid Alimov, (2012) “The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Its Role and Place in the Development of Eurasia,” *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 9, no. 2 : 114–124,
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1879366518300216>

⁵ Stephen Aris, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Future of Eurasian Cooperation 2013* (International Peace Institute,), https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/ipi_e_pub_shanghai_cooperation.pdf

⁶ Alyson J. K. Bailes, Pál Dunay, Pan Guang, and Mikhail Troitskiy, (May 2007) *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, SIPRI Policy Paper no. 17 (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute,), p. 2,
<https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/files/PP/SIPRI17.pdf>

caused to decrease real effect of SCO in security field. These are have not internal balance and faith between members.⁷

Opinions show that researchs of SCO in field of security is not unilateral. While some scholars see it as a new model but others rated it as weak organization so these conflicting assessment make it urgent to study the real success and limitations of SCO. During this research explored some other opinions and personal opinions also expressed.

2.Theoretical Freamework.

Theories that realism and institutionalism will serve like crucial exploring instrument. Under concept realism every country try to defend their own benefits and also firstly lodge their gain over international cooperation. This concept clearly appear in cooperation within activity of China and Russia. For example Chine from this cooperation try to promote for its “One belt – One road” initiative or Russia use from this for save its political effect in former Soviet area. I think this things make limitation to administer free political activity in security partnership for Central Asian’s countries. On the other hand a concept institutionalism based on view that countries can establish strong partnership with international organizations. If we faced to this concept, countries should try to real activities for stable institutional mechanism, for example friendly military acts, news integrity and constant committee. In other words of Stephen Aris “The SCO has evolved into a principal Eurasian regional organization comprised of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan”.⁸ SCO already have this structures, for example RATS (Regional Antiterror Structure) in Tashkent, but we can say its real effects and vivaces are slightly low, a lot of decisions stay at statement level so far. Next statement try to show real achievements of this structures.

3.Main Analysis.

⁷ Temur Umarov, July 2024, “The SCO Is Ineffective and Irrelevant,” *Carnegie Politika*, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2024/07/sco-summit-china-russia>

⁸ Stephen Aris Stephen Aris 2012 ‘‘The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Its role and place in the development of Eurasia’’ International Peace Institute, https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/ipi_e_pub_shanghai_cooperation.pdf

Firstly in the Regional Antiterror Structure (RATS) which contain SCO established news integrity between partnerships. Every year within RATS countries hold friendly military acts and this situation can help to share qualify, reinforce faith and military improvement. For example Central Asian's countries present the activity which called "Peace Mission" in 2021.⁹ Besides that as noted in SIPRI Policy Paper¹⁰ SCO established partnership against trade of drugs, contraband of guns, border problems and transnational threads. In some cases these tries make real good effects, for example information exchanged about terror activity, between intelligence service of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Also the cooperation plays crucial role in diplomatic mediation area. As an example, the period of border problems between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, within SCO established negotiation on the issue can help to in coordinating the actions of both parties.¹¹ Although there are still some misunderstandings, can be say SCO played crucial role in controlling this problem. Also SCO make regulatory frameworks which aimed to improve friendship and faith between partners. During every summit statements mentioned partners to cleave "mutual respect", "territorial integrity" and "non-interference" principles. Can be say this principles played a major role for save balance between powers. And so achievements of SCO in Central Asia: developing diplomatic relations, establishing coordinated security activities and Forming partnership in security field between partners. But this achievements was in many cases superficial and there was no deeply integration, that things discussed in next part.

Despite partnership and security principle which shown in SCO statements, the real integration efficiency of the organization have some limitations in Central Asia. First of all institutional weakness – almost there is any enforcement mechanisms. Most of time accepted decisions, declarations and strategies stay in paper namely at

⁹ SCO "Peace Mission" in 2021 http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/2021special/node_114300.htm

¹⁰ SIPRI Policy Paper no. 17 (2007) <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2007/sipri-policy-papers/shanghai-cooperation-organization>

¹¹ SCO discussion about border problems between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

<https://www.asiaplustj.info/en/news/tajikistan/politics/20250314/sco-and-csto-welcome-the-signing-of-the-border-agreement-between-tajikistan-and-kyrgyzstan>

level of statement. For instance, announced every year statements have a lot of general sentences, also mechanisms which perform this sentences are not visible. Work of RATS is constant but it is not opened, transparency is poor. Secondly, every partners have different benefits. As an example most of time Uzbekistan choose neutral position, Kazakhstan try to achieve good partnership with China, Tajikistan closer to Russia in terms of benefits. As a result there is any one approach in terms of security so most of time general decisions are not perform. Thirdly, within SCO have dominations of Russia and China. As an example opinions “The SCO is primarily a vehicle for China and Russia to manage their relations with each other and with the Central Asian states.”¹² This two country see the organization as a political tool. China used from organization for “One belt – One road” project, or Russia used form organization for reinforce in form area of Soviet era. That things turn this organization as centre of power than regional organization, or if we consider opinions of Temur Umarov “Russia-China competition and an expanded membership have turned the Eurasian security grouping into little more than a talking shop”¹³. Or Stephen Aris said that “It was often cast as a joint Russian-Chinese attempt to counteract the geopolitical influence of NATO and the US in Eurasia and beyond.”¹⁴ Fourthly extension of SCO, all of us know about new members of SCO India, Pakistan and added country in 2021 year in 21 summit which Iran. This countries have internal conflict and this thing maybe cause more weakness in organization. Fifthly, focus of organization distracted, why? Because the organization engage in not only security also culture, art and tourism now. If we faced Bolat Nurgaliyev for this reason “The SCO plays an increasingly

¹² Alyson J. K. Bailes, Pál Dunay, Pan Guang, Mikhail Troitskiy May 2007 “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization” Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Policy Paper No. 17, <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/files/PP/SIPRI17.pdf>

¹³ Temur Umarov 2024 “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization Is Ineffective and Irrelevant” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2024/07/sco-summit-china-russia?lang=en>

¹⁴ Stephen Aris 2024 “The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Its role and place in the development of Eurasia” International Peace Institute, https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/ipi_e_pub_shanghai_cooperation.pdf

important role in dialogue among different civilizations and cultural exchanges.”¹⁵ You can say it is not bad, this is good thing, yes on the other hand you are right, the comprehensive development of organization is good. But I think today that things decrease on second level based mission of organization which in security field. In my personal opinion generally can be say the organization lodge a lot of initiatives on road of security integration of Central Asia but institutional weakness, different benefits and political domination fix limitation be a real integrational mechanism. I want to say if this problems do not solved real security integration and deeply partnership can only remain in a piece of paper. During the next statement we stopped activity of Uzbekistan in SCO.

Uzbekistan plays a major role as a innovators of organization SCO in regional security integration. In started period of SCO the country active participate political and military initiatives within organization. Especially based structure of SCO which RATS is located in the capital of Uzbekistan Tashkent, shows that “Uzbekistan plays a pivotal role in the SCO through hosting the RATS centre in Tashkent.”¹⁶ Uzbekistan have active participation in RATS between 2001-2005 period but after event of Andijan in 2005 under pressure of west Uzbekistan revised international policy and it fixed some limitations in action in SCO. Next times in 2016 actions become much more lively. Uzbekistan is hosting summits of SCO¹⁷. Also it participate every actions within RATS, but it saving its cautions on military, security field in SCO . The country faithful its strategic neutrality principle, Uzbekistan never add military blocks and it neutral between powerful countries always. Most of time Uzbekistan used from this organization for regional diplomacy, economy and saving political balance. In other words “Uzbekistan emphasizes a balanced, sovereign foreign policy while engaging in

¹⁵ Bolat Nurgaliyev 2023 “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and ‘Oriental Wisdom’” “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and ‘Oriental Wisdom’” SpringerLink, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-19-8057-2_30

¹⁶ Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, 2022 **About the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure**, https://ecrats.org/en/partners/international_organizations/

¹⁷ SCO summit in Samarkand in 2022 <https://www.eurasian-research.org/publication/2022-sco-summit-in-samarkand-key-takeaways/>

SCO security efforts.”¹⁸ Generally can be say participation Uzbekistan is example of care approach.

4. Conclusion.

At the end of research I should say Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) have good tries to improve security integration in Central Asia but its real integrational effects have limitations. Within organization have many achievements through friendly actions, diplomatic relations and regional meetings but on the other hand this achievements stay outward and symbolic. Institutional weakness of SCO, there is any binding vivace mechanisms and dominatic positions of Russia and China fixing limitations on free and legal integration of Central Asia. So can be say many of decisions of organization stay at level of statement an have not practical performance. Countries in Central Asia cooperated SCO with caution, but they try to save balance of their international politics and their sovereignty. Something visible from this which countries do not ready for deeply integration. In the future SCO will want to change real regional security organization it should prepare strong institutional mechanism, create balance of powers, improve vote of weak countries and not only statements but also it do real important activities. In my personal opinion otherwise the organization continue stay on declaration field and problems connected security, integrity of Central Asia do not solve yet.

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2. Bailes, Alyson J. K., Pál Dunay, Pan Guang, and Mikhail Troitskiy. 2007. *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*. SIPRI Policy Paper No. 17. Stockholm

¹⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2022, *Uzbekistan's Position in the SCO*, <https://china.mfa.uz/news/2210?language=en>

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