

## **"Intelligence Brief: Shanghai Cooperation Organization"**

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Overshadowed in the Western press by the G8 summit of leading industrialized nations and the complications to it caused by the London transit bombings, another summit -- the July 5 meetings in Astana, Kazakhstan of the heads of government of the six members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (S.C.O.) -- promised to have greater geostrategic significance than the more widely reported events.

Created with its present membership of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in 2001, the origins of the S.C.O. date back to 1996 when Beijing initiated the Shanghai Five, which included all the current S.C.O. members except for Uzbekistan. The official purpose of the alliance, according to its founding declaration, is to form a comprehensive network of cooperation among the member states, including military security, economic development, trade and cultural exchange.

Translated into geostrategic terms, the S.C.O. arises from a confluence of interests among the major power centers of China and Russia, and the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, with the exception of Turkmenistan, which pursues a foreign policy of studied neutrality and isolation.

The overall strategic aim of the alliance for Beijing and Moscow is curbing Washington's influence in Central Asia in order to establish a joint sphere of influence there. For Beijing, the most important goal is to get a lock on the considerable energy resources of the region, but it also seeks markets for its goods, outlets for investment and collaboration against Islamist movements. Moscow has leagued with Beijing in order to restore some of its influence over its "near abroad." The regimes of the Central Asian states want support for their survival against opposition movements, economic development assistance and increased trade and investment.

Up until the June summit, the S.C.O.'s effectiveness as a strategic alliance had been limited by the reluctance of the Central Asian states to abandon their multi-directional foreign policies geared to gaining maximum advantage by playing off the West -- particularly the United States - - against the incipient Moscow-Beijing axis. The picture changed in 2004 and 2005 as the result of successful regime changes in the former Soviet republics of Georgia and Ukraine, and, most importantly, Kyrgyzstan, which awakened Central Asian leaders -- including the new regime in Kyrgyzstan, which faces determined opposition -- to their vulnerability.

Realizing that Washington and Brussels would prefer pro-Western market-oriented regimes to the authoritarian, clan-based and crony systems currently in place in the region, Central Asian leaders began to perceive that multi-directionality might be a luxury too expensive to afford, and moved towards casting their lots with Moscow and Beijing through the S.C.O., paving the way for the alliance to act for the first time with political effect. The key figure in the shift was Uzbek President Islam Karimov, who had faced Western censure for his violent suppression of an Islamist rebellion against his regime in the city of Andijan May 13-14, 2005.

### **Geopolitical Outcomes of the S.C.O. Summit**

The path to the summit was smoothed and cleared by a meeting in Moscow between Chinese President Hu Jintao and Russian President Vladimir Putin on July 1. Advancing their vision of geopolitical multipolarity, which includes removing or at least diminishing Washington's influence in Central Asia, the two leaders issued a joint declaration on "world order" rejecting efforts by

any powers to achieve a "monopoly in world affairs," divide the world into "leaders and followers," and "impose models of social development" on other countries. The declaration was clearly aimed at perceived attempts by Washington at regime change that would establish a world of market democracies arbitrated by U.S. power.

With the Sino-Russian declaration setting its theme, the report issued at the end of the S.C.O. summit and signed by all participants included a clause rejecting attempts at "monopolizing or dominating international affairs" and insisting on "non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states."

Applying the general principle of non-interference specifically, the S.C.O. declaration called for a timetable to be set for the closure of U.S. military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan that support Washington's operations in Afghanistan, but are also elements of Washington's strategy of creating a permanent arc of bases spanning East Africa and East Asia. Following the summit, the Uzbek Foreign Ministry issued a statement that the U.S. Khanabad airbase could serve no other purpose than support operations for the Afghan intervention: "Any other prospects for a U.S. military presence in Uzbekistan were not considered by the Uzbek side." Washington responded that were Tashkent to insist on closure of the Khanabad base, the U.S. had other options.

Satisfying Beijing's interests, the S.C.O. also became the first regional bloc to oppose the bid by Japan, Brazil, Germany and India to enlarge the United Nations Security Council's permanent membership. Calling for consensus on U.N. reforms after careful consultation, the S.C.O. declaration rejected deadlines for those reforms and early voting on draft proposals.

Despite the slap at New Delhi, India, along with Pakistan and Iran, sought and was granted observer status in the S.C.O., an acknowledgment of the organization's growing geostrategic importance. Joining Mongolia, the three new observers see the S.C.O. as a permanent presence that will increasingly affect their security and economic interests.

### **The Bottom Line**

After an initial period of halting growth, the S.C.O. has emerged as an alliance serving as an effective vehicle for Beijing's and Moscow's geopolitical aims.

Look for the alliance to continue to further the interests of the Moscow-Beijing axis as long as those two power centers are careful to maintain their accord and the regimes in Central Asia depend on the axis for political support. As the S.C.O. grows in strength, Washington's influence in Central Asia will diminish.

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