

## **Sino-Russia Strategic Partnership: The Case Study of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)**

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Since the dissolution of Soviet Union, the US and its Western allies have dominated the global affairs through numerous political and economic organizations. In the same token China and Russia have established close ties after the termination of Cold War to attain regional security so that to minimize the US penetration in the Central Asian region. In this article, the area of Central Asia has been taken as a case study to demonstrate the China-Russia partnership through a multilateral organization; specifically the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. This article discusses the theoretical underpinnings of the Soft Balancing in the SCO. It further elaborates the Sino-Russian cooperation through SCO in terms of balancing the US preponderance. This paper evaluates historical competition among Great Powers in Central Asian region, and further elaborates on the formation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization<sup>1</sup>. While this article argues that the main focus of SCO was strengthening regional security issues, fight against terrorism, ethnic separatism and religious extremism. However it also aimed to counter the US influence in the region through multilateral organization.

**Keywords:** SCO, soft balancing, Central Asia, Russia, China

### **Central Asia, SCO and the Great Powers Competition**

Geo-strategic and geo-economic importance of Central Asian and Eurasian region cannot be even neglected in the 21<sup>st</sup> century global and regional theatre. According to Halford Mackinder Central Asian is a heartland region and those who controlled the heartland controlled the world (Mackinder, 2004, p.298-303). After the Soviet collapse the Central Asian

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Prof. Dr. Razia Sultana has worked on methodology and guided to improve the theoretical part of the study.

States achieved independence and hence global powers started penetration in the region. In addition to this the region also witnessed the emergence of nationalism and spread of religious ideology (Hynek, 2021, p.78). The US has minimal interests in the Central Asian region until 9/11. But 9/11 event changed this perception and later on it establish partnership with CARs which pave the way for the establishment of military bases in the region. It also provided an opportunity to establish military base in Pakistan. It was a turning point where competition for the control and domination of Central Asian energy resources, transportation routes and strategic maneuvering in region emerged among the big powers. The great power competition is pertinent to understand the nature of divergence and convergence of interests of different competitor such as US, China, Russia and also other regional powers ( Nasir , 2007, p.23).

As the Central Asian region was under the control of USSR and it still regarded this area as a part of its near abroad. While having China on its side; both countries are devising strategies and diplomatic ties to limit the US influence in the region to some extent. Russia-China strategic partnership meant to end the hegemony of the US as a unilateral power. The term Great Game was coined by Arthur Conolly and presented by Rudyard Kipling in his novel *Kim* (Lansford , 2002, p.127-140). In the common perspective the Great Game was 19<sup>th</sup> century political and diplomatic confrontation between Great Britain and Tsarist Russia supremacy over Afghanistan, Central Asia and South Asia (Ingram, 1980, p.165). Tsarist Russia aim was to flex its muscles into the region to control Afghanistan so that to control the warm water. In the same vein Russia conquered the Central Asian states one by one which later gave birth to modern states of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

According to Peter Hopkirk the Great Game has three distinct phases (Hopkirk , 2002). The Russian expansionism towards Caucasus and Central Asia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century created an alarming situation for the British Indian Empire. The first phase of this competition started in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century with the expansionist policies of Tsarist Russia towards the Central Asian region. This caused alarming situation for the British India. To counter the Russian eastward expansion, the British has devised different policies to stop the Russian expansion towards India which was consider as “Jewel in the Crown”. The first phase of this competition ended in 1907 when Anglo-Russia convention was signed (Edwards , 2003, p. 88). The second phase was also like the first phase to dominate Asia and to expel Great Britain from India. This phase ended after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 with the end of Tsarist rule (Edwards , 2003, p. 88). The third phase of the Great Game started after Bolshevik Revolution which aimed to kick out the imperial

power from Asia but the main objectives of the competition remained the same i.e. security and power ( Edwards , 2003, p.90). However, after the end of Cold War the old rivalry resurfaced where regional powers also start vying for power to get their share in the Central Asian minerals resources. The continuity of rivalry among different countries is termed as the New Great Game. Some scholars have described this competition as pipeline politics (Kleveman, 1996, p.155). On the other side of the equation, the newly emerged Central Asian States also faced inter- state conflicts, internal problems and economic crisis. Similarly terrorist tendencies also intensified after the Taliban occupation of Afghanistan which has produced a hope for the Central Asian militants to organize their own activities against the authoritarian regimes. After 9/11, the US arrival in Afghanistan in the pretext of War of Terrorism (WOT) both China and Russia supported the WOT but in long run it was seen as a strategic encirclement of the two powers (Smith, 1996, p.160). In this study new great game is contextualizes in the form of competition between the US and its allies (NATO plus ISAF) vs China, Russia and their allies.

The formation of SCO was China's top priority to enhance influence and stabilize the region for the sack of regional political and economic stability (Scott , 2019, p.1). In other words China is using SCO as a platform to get its share in the rich resources of the region. In the regional security parameters China main concerns are trying to curb and control the separatist elements in Xinjiang region of "XUAR" which has linked with the Central Asian militant organizations like IMU and ETIM. To avoid this danger China has initiated bilateral and multilateral collaboration with Central Asian states (Pradt, 2020, p.25). The Uighur community continued struggle for having independent province of East Turkestan was like an ulcer for China (Yuan , 2010, p. 856). That's why China is uses SCO as a legitimate tool for curbing the three evils through multilateral platform (Aris, 2009, p.457). According to Chinese scholars, SCO is an important forum for curbing the transnational non-traditional security threats (Aris, 2011, p.23). Consequently in 2001, the convention against the three evils of terrorism, separatism and extremism was signed (Chung , 2006, p.55). Later on, the establishment of Anti-Terrorist Structure was proposed by China which was successfully launched at Astana summit in 2005. Most of the SCO policies are formulated against the non-traditional security threats but there is an opinion among some academician that through this platform both Russia and China have formulated a joint structure to remove external powers from the region especially the US and NATO forces (Oldberg , 2007). In a nutshell, the study proposed that China is enhancing its leadership role in the global affairs through the formation of multilateral organization like SCO while it has also enhanced bilateral

relations with the resurgent Russia and Central Asian countries (Khetran , 2019, p. 84).

### **Shanghai Spirit and New Security Concept (NSC)**

Both Russia and China are propagating “soft balancing” which is a non-military alliance focused to limit the third party role from their spheres of influence (Ferguson , 2012). After 9/11, the American attack on Afghanistan and Iraq further strengthened the unilateral position of the US. President Bush doctrine of national security strategy has further symbolized the unilateral security policy of US which has produced immense consequences for the international relations. This attitude triggered the approach of soft balancing among the emerging global powers. Thus the emerging powers are pursuing soft balancing through international institutions, regional organization, economic development and other diplomatic initiatives to counter the US unilateralism (Pape, 2005). After the culmination of Cold War and particularly the US attack on Iraq (2003) the theory of Soft Balancing was popularized by T. V Paul and Robert Pape (Paul, 2018). They are of the view that the time of traditional balance of power is over and no state can actively balance the US unilateralism or threatening it. They have presented another theory in a contrast to hard balancing, which means there are other things; states are doing to counterbalance the US. Here T.V Paul proposed the theory of Soft Balancing which can be used as an alternative mechanism by “ Second Tier” state ( in this research two second tier states have been analyzed i.e. China-Russia). In traditional hard balancing approach state used military might or made military alliances against their rivals for example NATO and (CSTO) by Russia. The case of soft balancing is different in approach, where states used non-military tools like institutions, diplomatic activities and economic sanctions to counter the aggressiveness of another state. Similarly many countries for example China, Russia, France and Germany coordinate their opposition to war in Iraq at the Security Council. Historically two institutions like the Concert of Europe (1815-1853) and League of Nations (1920-1939) are best examples of soft balancing through institutions (Paul , 2018). Stephan Gill analyzed three basic elements of soft balancing i.e. to deny an area or a region to a powerful state, using multilateral organization and to expel state from any regional economic structure (Gill , 2011, p. 115). In this study the theory of soft balancing has been applied to demonstrate the Sino-Russia strategic partnership (Deng , 2007, p. 882) in Central Asia through the multilateral organization.

The Chinese Communist Party in its 17<sup>th</sup> Congress declared that it would focus to establish a harmonious world to promote peace at global affairs. This statement clarifies that all countries should come together to solve the various national and international problems through dialogue and

## SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION (SCO)

harmony. During the mid-1990s the global and regional security program of China has changed significantly. After the 9/11, China has increased its diplomatic relations with different countries and region in the world through the NSC. In 1998 the Chinese information office issued a statement which stated “the world is undergoing profound changes and the Cold War mentality need to be discarded and to develop NSC, in the prevailing zero sum international relations (Nasir, 2007,p.40). Originally Chinese scholars of IR presented the foreign policy concept in 1996 which is called New Security Concept. They rejected the era of Cold War antagonism and alliances system as it was outdated. According to NSC the new era belongs to peace and development which should be the core values of international relations (Larus, 2005, p.221). Accordingly this also embraces a liberal security concept which is cooperative in nature based on confidence building measures (Larus, 2005, p.222). It is rooted in the traditional Chinese culture of peace and harmony based on five principles of peaceful coexistence firstly appears in 1954 (Larus, 2005, p.222). The basic ingredients of NSC were mutual trust (basis of SCO), mutual benefit (approach of cooperation), equality (guarantee mutual cooperation (aim of SCO) and common development. The UN charter also supported these five principles of NSC. (China’s Information Office, 2000). For understanding the nature of NSC and Chinese approach towards establishing new world order of multilateralism and its penetration towards the Russian peripheries has been expanded through SCO. After the Cold War the US has evolved into a sole super power and it also strengthening military alliances with other countries which is threatening China peaceful rise that’s why it has trying to popularize New Security Concept (Larus, 2005, p.224).

The essence of SCO is termed as ‘Shanghai Spirit’ which is ingrained in the organization’s founding charter (<https://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx?rgn=3851>). Mutual trust, shared benefit, equal rights, talks, respect for each other cultural values and development for all are the internal normative characteristics, while non-alignment and non-targeting of any country is the external norms of SCO. According to Timur Dadabaev “it has also included rhetoric on anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism” (Dadabaev, 2014, p.111). This shared norms and common values also help in the elimination of external influence or influence of other cultural in the region. The Shanghai Spirit and ‘Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence’ in Chinese international relations perspectives are analogues to each other (Pradt, 2020, p. 64). Thus both China and Russia through SCO prevents the cultural values of other states (Ferguson , 2012). The charter of SCO contains these components as it signifies the guiding principles of the organization. This spirit aims to unite different political system and diverse ideologies in a single forum. All the members of SCO have different political, economic and social system and even some analysts questioned the long term sustainability of the

organization. However, the SCO forum embraces this diversity which creates harmony and solidarity among the member countries (Aris, 2011, p.11). The Shanghai Spirit is a set of core values which has enabled the group members to demarcate the borders in a very short span of time. In the same token Shanghai Spirit provides guaranty to the smaller states against the powerful states of the organization (Edwards , 2003, p.87). Russia and China uses Shanghai Spirit as a tool to establish political, economic and security connections with Central Asia and great powers (Kavalski, 2010, p.149). According to Alexei Borodavkin, the Russian Federation Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.

All the signatories of SCO are committed to the openness and equality in the SCO which has been established through the Shanghai Spirit. The diversity of cultural values and system among the SCO members have speed up and bolstered the main activities of the forum so that to transform it into an important organization for regional and global power politics (Aris , 2011, Ibid).

Inter-ethnic and inter-state conflict that emerged after the Soviet withdrawal was minimized due to the formation and development of SCO. There was a possibility of many inter-state conflicts that would be very difficult for them to control bilaterally but SCO enabled them to communicate and cooperate on regular basis. In this regard the S-5 mechanism facilitated agreement on resolving the border issues (MacHaffie, 2021, p.4).

Broadly speaking the NSC means equality, dialogue, trust and cooperation in relations with other countries. The NSC was specially developed to advance Chinese views on multilateral world order in a response to the US global dominancy and its military alliances with other countries (Finkelstein , 2005, p.12). Although China has security relations with many countries but it also opposes the enlargement of military alliances at global level (Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, China's National Defense in 2008).

Contrary to this, the Shanghai Spirit is considered by the US and Western scholars as antithetical because most of the members are ruled by authoritarian regimes which could not provide individual freedom (Tisdall, 2006). That's why they have lower ranks on the list of human right watch (Bailes & Dunay, 2007, p. 13). The colour revolutions in Central Asia aimed to install democratic government were allegedly US backed after that Askar Akayev the Kyrgyz president tender resignation. At the same token the revolution in Uzbekistan was crushed with brutal force. Soon after the Andijan massacre the Uzbek government in 2005 SCO summit at Astana

demanded the withdrawal of US bases from its soil (SCO Annual Summit, Astana, 5 July 2005). This move of the SCO has created suspicion among Western and US scholars regarding the SCO anti-Western approach. According to their views, Russia and China has been using SCO as a mechanism to oppose Western principles of democracy and human rights (Ambrosio , 2008, p.1324). “SCO can be seen as China and Russia opposition to the US unipolarity” (Ambrosio , 2008, Ibid). Similarly NSC according to some critics is Russo-Chinese tool to counter the US presence in the region. They are of the view that Chinese security policy will have no profound impacts on economic developments and peaceful environmental changes. It is indeed a great policy in paper only that cannot be implemented particularly (Larus, 2005).

### **The Evolution of Shanghai Five**

Shanghai-5 is the milestone of multilateral cooperation in Central Asia led by China with Russian backing, along with other members such as, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. It was started with a low profile but over the period of time, it has grown into a high profile multilateral regional organization. Due to the success and progress of SCO many other states from Central Asia and South Asia had shown willingness to have membership of the organization. In 2001 Uzbekistan and in 2017 India and Pakistan joined the organization as new members.

After the termination of Cold War and dissolution of USSR in 1991 the main aim of Beijing was to secure its western borders especially Xinjiang. The Uighur community in the region wanted an independent state that created insecurity in the whole region. The Chinese government has been trying to suppress this movement and termed the Uighurs as separatist. After the Soviet breakup more than 300,000 Uighurs were living in Central Asian Republics. Moreover, China also desires to boost its interest globally to have say in the external environment (Lanteigne , 2005, p.1). Its opening to international institution in the late 1980s was a driving force and the emergence of multilateral approach towards its foreign policy (Lanteigne , 2005, p.1). According to China’s foreign policy the unipolar world has seriously affected the security management around the globe. For China developing confidence building measures in the region was necessary to enhance its internal security and also to ensure peaceful and stable borders. That is why it has initiated the idea of S-5 to create CBMs to solve border disputes with Russia and Central Asian States (Odgaard , 2009, p.182).

On 26 April 1996 in Shanghai the heads of states of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan formally agreed to set up Shanghai Five mechanism. The first document of the S-5 aimed to develop Confidence

Building Measures (CBMs) among its member countries after a decade of mistrust and acrimony and hence the way was paved for dialogues (*Xinhua News Agency*, 27 April, 1997). Since the culmination of Cold War it was one of the most important developments in the Central Asian region for the restoration of peace and stability. Several meetings S-5 were held to formulate strategies for bringing stability in the region. Initially 22 agreements were signed among the S-5 members. China share 7000 km long border with these states and the history of these borders were often complicated. Historically there were very few disputed areas along the border regions. Both Soviet Union and China have deployed large number of armed troops in the border region during the Cold War, because of some disputed areas as well as ideological confrontation (*Beijing Xinhua*, March 16, 1993). In the 1970s the border between USSR and China was heavily armed where mutual threat perceptions characterised this relationship (Pradt, 2020, p .23). For example in the Damansky<sup>2</sup> Island military clashes occurred that resulted in the killing of 59 Chinese soldiers (Lewis and Litai , 2006, p.134). An expression of the political détente was the mutual withdrawal of 80,000 troops from their borders. In 1990s both countries normalized their relationship which led to subsequent border talks among the Shanghai Five members. The diplomatic thaw of the 1980s continued with the same pace and later in 1996 Boris Yeltsin and Jiang Zemin signed a “strategic partnership” (Nasir, 2007). This partnership was based on pragmatic interests of both the states and was not directed against any third country (Nasir, 2007, p.76). These positive developments between the two countries almost minimized the tension and borders disputes. In a result, Beijing got approximately 340 sq kilometers of disputed territory while it also dropped all other land claims against Moscow in the region (Stronski and Ng, 2018, p.6). Similarly, in the United Nations both countries started coordination and in 1997 they jointly presented deceleration in the UN for the establishment of multipolar world (<http://www.un.org/documents/ga/docs/52/plenary/a52-153.htm>).

In this connection, the revival of relationship between Russia and China can be linked to the exclusion of US influence from the region. This new strategy not only strengthen Sino-Russia ties but it also help the smaller states of the region. For many analysts this means a Russo-Chinese bloc, based on overlapping views of geo-political reality. Such as break up from uni-polar to multipolar system, because they did not see their security and economic interests in the US and Western dominated world (Lukin , 2018, p.78).

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<sup>2</sup> Zhenbao in Chinese.



China and Russia the sole representatives of non-Western world in the Security Council can play a better role as an equalizer the US and both have similar stance on issues, like Iranian Nuclear programme. Similarly, both wanted to reform the Western and American dominated international financial system. That is why both are struggling to introduce regional currencies in trade. They also agreed to enhance the role of non-Western countries in the financial affairs of world system like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

After the USSR dismemberment the unsettled borders created uncertainty and security issues among Russia, China and the newly emerged Central Asian Republics. It was also a potential threat to the relationship of China and CARs (Rashid , 2000, p.186). In this regards the China-Russia détente played important role and thus began the process of collaboration with a hope to put their relationship on a peaceful track (Hyer, 1996). The Russian President Boris Yeltsin second visit to China was very important development (Garver , 2016, p.544).

In initial meeting of S-5 the main task was to develop confidence building measures and friendly relations among the neighbouring states. All the member states agreed that they would not engage military force in the border region neither would they conduct military exercises against each other. In case of any military activities, another member country should be kept informed. Similarly, in case of military exercises the member states will also be invited to observe their planned military exercises. This agreement boosted the spirit of peaceful collaboration and helped to prevent the chance of conflicts in the border regions.

The S-5 second summit of S-5 was held in Russia on 24<sup>th</sup> April 1997. It was an important summit in a sense that the Head of States of S-5 agreed to reduce the military forces at their respective borders (Shambaugh , 2002, p.288). Further, an agreement was signed to reduce and limit various weapons installations on borders and they also pledged to not use force against each other. Furthermore, the military equipments at borders were solely defensive in nature. It was agreed that their patrol forces will stay one hundred km away from the borders (*Renmin Ribao* .eng April 25, 1997). This was an encouraging agreement between China and CARs. After the summit a joint control group was formed to inspect military units deployed at borders (Altymashev , 2011). This agreement was important in a sense because of it the tensions at borders were reduced (Lanteigne , 2005, p.34).

On the invitation of Kazakh President, the Chinese President visited Kazakhstan to attend the third summit of S-5 in Alma Ata on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1998.

All the leaders pledged to oppose separatism; terrorism and drug trafficking that have jeopardized the regional security. The member states also agreed to improve economic cooperation. This summit also reflected the expansion of its role to include counter-terrorism after the significant increase in terrorist activities in China and Central Asia (Nasir, 2007, p.76). In the statement which was issued after the meeting the member states agreed not to encroach in other's sovereignty and non-intervention in the internal affairs of another state. Their main concern was to oppose terrorism, separatism and drug trafficking (Mahmud , 2001, p.1). The Alma-Ata summit was held in the backdrop of shared desirability for security and cooperation (Tao , 2001, p.10). For Chinese government the main concerns were to delink the Uighur separatists and the Islamic Movements of Uzbekistan (IMU).

The fourth summit of S-5 was held at Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) in 1999. In this summit the member states expressed their satisfaction over the previous achievements and they also reiterated their firm opposition to ethnic separatism, religious extremism and terrorism in the region (Mahmud , 2001, Ibid). It led to formulate friendly trade and economic policies of member countries towards each other due to which the volume of their bilateral trade enhanced. For example trade between China and Central Asian States increased from 465 million dollar to 1.5 billion dollar in a very short span of time (Garver , 1998, p.122).

On 5<sup>th</sup> July 2000 the next summit of the S-5 was held at Dushanbe (Tajikistan). Once again the five countries reiterated their desire to establish friendly relations and international cooperation in the Central Asian region. They collectively opposed conflicts, threats and external intervention as it has complicated security situation of the whole region. The Dushanbe Summit also discussed and expressed stand on several key international issues especially uni-polarity and multilateral nature of the world system. They also agreed to declare Central Asia region as nuclear weapons-free zone (Bakshi , 2002, p.267). This multilateral cooperation led to the settlement of China border with Tajikistan in their bilateral agreements. In retrospect, the process of multilateralism in the form of S-5 was step by step development.

### **Emergence of Multilateralism: The Formation of SCO**

After the Uzbekistan entry to the forum as a new member the S-5 was transformed into a new multilateral regional organization named after Chinese city "Shanghai". Presently it has 8 permanent members both from Central Asia and South Asia.<sup>3</sup> SCO has very clear stands against the three evils of

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<sup>3</sup> China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India and Pakistan.

terrorism, extremism and separatism as well as other organized crimes and drugs trafficking (Aris, 2009, p.476).

According to Stephen Aris, the main task of the SCO is: strengthening mutual confidence, friendship and good neighborly relations between the participating states; encouraging effective cooperation between them in the political, trade-economic, scientific-technical, cultural, educational, energy, transportation, ecological and other areas; joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the entire region to build a new democratic, just and rational political and economic international order (Aris, 2001).

The processes and interactions are institutionalized through different organs of SCO especially Heads of State Council, the Secretariat, and the anti-terrorism structure (MacHaffie, 2021, p.8). In that regards SCO is the only such organization which has a counter terror unit RATS, established in November 2003. RATS is a permanent body of the organizations with its headquarters at Tashkent (Article 10 RATS Agreement, Article 3, 6, 2). The importance of RATS has been increasing since the US announcement to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan. RATS play an important role in combating terrorism and other emerging security challenges in the region. It also helps to enable the states to coordinate their national legislation and internal security measures. It has enabled the individual states to coordinate their national legislative and internal security measures with the SCO members so that to develop operative body against terrorist elements that operates in the region. (Aris, 2001, p.469). Many analyst thinks, that the withdrawal of NATO and ISAF forces might be help the Taliban revival, which in turn would have spilling over effects on other countries of the region including China and Russia. RATS work and coordinate with the relevant organization of the member states and with other important international organization tackling the three evils (*Xinhua*, 17 June 2004). It also took assistance from the member states in the preparation of organizing joint anti-terrorist exercises and the conduction of operations against the three evils. All the legal drafts to cover the three evils of the organization are saved in RATS data bank. In addition to this, RATS also organizing seminars, conferences and workshops for creating awareness and sharing assistance in fighting the three evils (Xiaodong, 2012, p.18). RATS has its own decision making body comprises of a leading officials from the member countries which are appointed by the Head of States of SCO. It also shares information nexus for which think tank are dedicated to study the matter of terrorism (<http://ecrats.org/en/>)

### **Organizational Structure of SCO**

For smooth functioning different bodies have been added to the organization which are working under the auspices of SCO charter. In this regards the following bodies have been established so far:

- ▶ The Council of Heads of State (SCO Charter, Article, 4)
- ▶ The Council of Heads of Government (Prime Ministers) (SCO Charter, Article, 4)
- ▶ The Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (SCO Charter, Article, 7)
- ▶ Meetings of Heads of Ministries and/or Agencies (SCO Charter, Article, 8)
- ▶ The Council of National Coordinators (SCO Charter, Article, 9)
- ▶ The Regional Anti-terrorist Structure (RATS) (SCO Charter, Article, 10).

SCO document came into effect in 2001 and became legal base for the formation of the organization. All the signatories solemnly declared the creation of SCO with the aims of strengthening mutual trust, mutual cooperation for peace and security in Eurasia and to strengthen regional security (SCO charter ). According to SCO charter, the highest decision body is Council of Head of States. Its main tasks are to identify the policies and to provide directions to different activities of the organization. It also determines the principles of concerning the internal structure and working of the organization, how to cooperate with other states/organizations and to examine the emerging international problems (Nasir, 2007, p. 42). The heads of states gatherings are held annually according to rotation system or alphabetic order of the member states, where the hosting state holds the presidency of the Organization for a whole year (SCO Charter, Article 5).

The second organ of the SCO is Council of Head of Governments / Prime Ministers conference. This body aims to adopt the budget; to determine the important areas in SCO countries for economic policies; this council meets once in a year (SCO Charter, Article 6). Foreign Ministry Council is mainly responsible for the prevailing issue inside SCO operations along with the preparation of SCO Council of Head of states meeting and the enforcement of its resolution and debates on emerging international issues (SCO Charter, Article 7). The foreign minister of the host country acts as the chairman of the foreign ministry council meetings, who also represent the external affairs of the organization. Another important organ of the organization is head of agencies, which deals with specialized area that would be discussed before the meeting by the members. The member countries send their respective members of different ministries to attend the meeting. Usually these meetings are attended by the attorneys generals, ministers of defence, economy and commerce, transport, culture and law enforcement agencies of

SCO members (SCO Charter, Article 8). Another body of the organization is the Council of National Coordinators which usually meets thrice in a year. Its basic jobs are managing and coordinating day to day activities as well as taking necessary action in the preparation of SCO high level meetings (Nasir, 2007). The National Coordinators is appointed by the organization members according to the internal rules and procedures. The member of the host country becomes the chairman (SCO Charter, Article 9). Secretariat is located at Beijing which is the permanent executive body of the organization and headed by secretary general which is nominated by foreign minister council. The main decision of the organization is taken by this body which formulates and coordinates organizational, legal and technical support among the member states. Secretary General of the organization is appointed from the permanent states for the period of three years on rotational basis based on Russia alphabetical order (Qahtani, 2006 p.135). Secretary General is assisted by many other officials in the secretariat (SCO Charter, Article 11). With the passage of time SCO has established links with other organizations and in 2004 the UN has granted observer status.

### **Areas of Cooperation in the SCO**

To cater the increasing priorities and requirements of the member states new organs were established within the organization. After the demarcations of borders the focus of the organization widens to other transnational issues especially in the security fields because such issues can be addressed collectively. Initially the main focus of the organization was non-traditional security threats but over the decades priorities have been shifted towards other areas (Charter of the SCO, Article 3). The Taliban controlled of Afghanistan and the continuing unrest in Central Asia has created insecurity for the S-5 members which were further aggravated after 9/11. Three months later the members of S-5 signed and adopted resolution *Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism*. This resolution was signed by all members so that they may share and exchange cooperation (Aris, 2001, p. 465). The decision to establish anti-terrorist body was also taken in this meeting; however it was formally established in 2003. This counter terrorism treaty was the first one implemented in the new century (Guang, 2009, p.165). For implementation of *Shanghai Convention on Terrorism*, RATS play key role regarding the terrorist activities and it works as a nucleus for sharing intelligence against the terrorist networks of the region (Aris, 2013). Similarly extreme poverty in the Central Asia region is another concern of the SCO which in turn creates insecurity because many people have joined militant organizations for economic purposes. In that sense the organization has economic priorities by encouraging mutual trade (Nasir, 2007).

Another concern of the organization was to control arms and drug trafficking in the region (Lukin , 2004). SCO focuses on economic activities has been persistent and has enhanced over the first few years. During the 2002 SCO summit, the Minister of Chinese Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation stated “our future negotiation will be based on the trade facilitations, investments and to set up Free Trade Agreement (Leland , 2005, p.41). The member of the organization also signed a framework of multilateral trade agreements in 2003.

Security paradigm was the main impetus for SCO creation however economic cooperation is emerging future concerns of the member states. SCO charter has the agenda to improve regional economic cooperation in different fields and to create favorable environment for trade and technologies (Charter of the SCO, Article 3).

To improve practical interaction among the members financial policy of the organisation, SCO business council and SCO interbank association was also initiated. Besides security and economic cooperation, other areas of cooperation in SCO are social and cultural cooperation. Many members are trying to add another element in SCO i.e. to create common culture space among its members (Aris, 2013, p.4). In the Bishkek summit held in 2007 the member states also proposed common education system across the region, such as SCO University.

### **Conclusion**

In this globalized world under the umbrella of liberal institutionalism theory of international relations the inter-state organization are the main tools to advance the interests of states and counter their political opponents with soft balancing. In this connection, about Twenty years ago China and Russia along with CARs made wise decision to establish a regional multilateral organization which effectively copes with the emerging non-traditional security threats that besets the region. This strategic partnership by China and Russia was aimed at countering US influence. This paradigm shift after the disintegration of USSR gave birth to Shanghai -5 which was later on renamed as SCO. It was China policy of soft power that enhances cooperation among the smaller and powerful states of the region, because the organization treated smaller and bigger powers on equal terms. It has collectively solved the border problems peacefully which was escalating into wider conflicts. With the passage of time cooperation among the SCO members enhanced from security to economic one which was later also expanded to culture, science and technology and education. After the Bishkek Summit in 2005, it became an integral part of world affairs. With the rise of China its importance is equally increasing. In 2017 India and Pakistan membership has further

broaden the scope of the organization. This organization has successfully projecting soft balancing against the US led international world order.

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