



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

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**Russia's Perception of the Shanghai Cooperation
Organization:
“Real” Institution, “Counter”-Institution
Or “Pseudo”-Institution?**

Jóhanna María Þórdísardóttir

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Leiðbeinandi: Alyson Bailes

Nemandi: Jóhanna María Þórdísardóttir

Kennitala: 1201834519

Abstract

Russia is a country that is constantly at odds with the global community. Its intentions are never fully known and nowhere is this more apparent than with the under-studied and misunderstood Shanghai Cooperation Organization. A grouping of Russia, China, and four Central Asian states, it has been labeled a Sino-Russian alliance, a NATO of the East, and a mere talking shop. None of these labels has been successful at documenting just how Russia utilizes the SCO. This is largely due to the Western-dominated discourse of scholars who have been unable to pin down the exact purpose of the SCO, particularly in regards to Russia – not least because many of the writings emphasize China's presence to the detriment of understanding Russia's contribution. The theoretical framework for this thesis will be a combination of both International Relations theory and a new generalized framework for classifying and evaluating regional cooperation. This will be used to formulate three hypotheses on how a body like the SCO could act as a 'real', 'counter-', or 'pseudo'-institution. These definitions will then be used to explore Russia's perception of the SCO, as either a 'real'-institution with real multilateral behavior, a 'counter'-institution aimed at balancing a Western power through Sino-Russian cooperation, or a 'pseudo'-institution that uses the SCO as no more than a powerful shield for Russia's national ambitions and unilateral actions. The conclusion finds that although Russia's behavior towards the SCO has elements typical of a 'real' institution, both the anti-Western sentiments expressed by Russian authorities and a lack of resources doled out to the SCO indicate other more adversarial, insincere, and limited aspects to Moscow's vision of the organization.

Preface

This 30-credit thesis is in partial fulfillment for a Master of Arts degree in International Relations at the University of Iceland, under the supervision of Alyson J. K. Bailes. The idea behind it started as a naïve fascination with post-Soviet Russia. The finished thesis has been the culmination of my studies in international relations for the past eight years, an amalgam of my frustration over the condensed and simplistic treatment of complex states and cultures like Russia and my growing interest in regional organizations.

I would like to thank my advisor, Ms. Alyson J. K. Bailes. There are no words to express my gratitude for all the times she has pushed me along and encouraged me on a subject that has in no way been an easy one to research. Her helpful comments have ensured that this thesis has developed from a very rough thought to the complex result that follows. I would also like to thank Dr. Pal Dunay and Dr. Zdzislaw Lachowski whom I was fortunate enough to meet and discuss my thesis with thanks to Ms. Bailes. Their comments were utilized a great extent and were extremely helpful in investigating the secretive worlds of Russia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

I would also like to thank my fiancé Hlynur and my mother whose support has made this exhausting year bearable. Without their support, there is no way I could have finished this thesis. Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my grandfather who is not able to be here to see me finish this but without him I would not be here today. He remains my inspiration to this day.

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List of Abbreviations:

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
COMECON	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
CSBM	Confidence and Security Building Measures
CSTO	Collective Security Organization
EU	European Union
EuraSec	Eurasian Economic Community
FSB	Federal Security Bureau (Russia)
GUAM	Organization for Democracy and Economic Development
IR	International Relations
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
RATS	Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization

I. Introduction: Russia's Approach to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization:

"I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia. It is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma; but perhaps there is a key. The key is the Russian national interest."¹ These famous words were uttered by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill in 1939 in a radio broadcast and have been repeated numerous times since then, oftentimes without mention of the Russian national interest. Today's Russia, in the form of the Russian Federation, is no different in the challenges it presents, and one of the more confusing aspects regarding Russia is its foreign policy. This is especially evident when one is considering the Russian view of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), created in 2001, which brings together Russia with the People's Republic of China (hereafter China), and the Central Asia countries, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The SCO itself is one of the least studied and least understood organizations in the world. It is composed of authoritarian member states, so it comes as no surprise that it is not keen on divulging much information. Instead of making it one of the least desirable organizations to study, however, this obscurity combined with the SCO's evident strategic significance and demonstrated "staying power" provides exactly the reason why it should be studied more, not less.

A study of the SCO will be the core task of this thesis, and the basic research question is to gain a better understanding of just how Russia perceives and uses the SCO.² A further level of enquiry is provided by the recognition that there are many biases that accompany a decidedly Western perspective looking at Russia, since "problems of its image are still rather acute in the West."³ The Western literature has a tendency to focus on the negative aspects and some writers are quite openly hostile to the SCO. Thus, the approach adopted here is a two-level one of examining the facts and, in parallel, critiquing the foreign interpretation of these facts. The latter task is structured in terms of examining three possible theses that arise from the body of public information and international research carried out on the SCO so far. Does Russia see the Shanghai Cooperation Organization -

1 "Finest Hour: September 1939-1940," The Churchill Centre,

<http://www.winstonchurchill.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=219>, accessed 22 February 2009.

2 This is designed to offer another view of the SCO, as a lot of the work on the Organization concentrates on the role played by China since it is a rising power, both economically and politically, and believed to be the main proponent of the SCO.

3 Nataliya Zaderei, "Evolution of the Western Attitude Toward the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," *Far Eastern Affairs* 36(2), 2008: 54.

a.) as a real multilateral international institution, providing real added value for national interests to the extent where Moscow is willing to compromise with other members, pool its resources with them and even possibly pool its sovereignty, and in the process allow the organization to evolve as circumstances demand?

b.) as a counter-institution, in the sense that the organization's purpose is designed to balance or mirror one or more Western powers and organizations, and is seen by Russia as a way to gain militarily by allying itself with more powerful neighbors?

c.) as a pseudo-institution, i.e. a formal cover designed to trick the international community into thinking that Russia can be a "player" of the multilateral game, and no longer a threat to the world, while in fact it is acting unilaterally or bilaterally on all-important matters and ignoring international norms?

As with most things concerning Russia, it will take more than one angle of approach in order to fully comprehend what Russia's intentions are. This thesis starts with a short history of the SCO in order to provide basic background. Second, there will be an overview of the theoretical framework for this thesis, which will be an amalgamation of international relations theory and a generalized theory based on the role of regional security cooperation in the post-Cold War world. Third, the separate motivations and aims that Russia, China and the Central Asian⁴ members have for their participation in the SCO will be looked at. While most members of institutions elsewhere in the world are assumed to have largely overlapping goals and indeed common 'values,' the SCO is not a 'normal' case and each player may have differing reasons for its membership. Fourth, there will be a discussion concerning the definitions of 'real' institutions, 'counter'-institutions, and 'pseudo'-institutions that will be the foundation for the later and most detailed part of the study. Fifth, the three hypotheses about the SCO's nature as an institution will be compared with known facts in order to ascertain how the Russian Federation actually perceives and uses the SCO. It must be noted that, as stated above, nothing is truly certain with Russia and the search for a definitive answer may not be a real possibility, although a task worth the effort. Finally, there will be a conclusion that will draw all three aspects together to build an overall understanding of the composition and balance of Russia's role in the SCO.

⁴ Central Asia will be treated as one group, despite their many differences; a country- by country look will be too time-consuming.

1.1 LIMITATIONS

This study has quite a high level of ambition that includes understanding states that have been understudied and misunderstood. Prior to continuing, several limitations on this goal must be discussed. To begin with, this thesis will be based solely on English-language sources, which – as noted – could impose a certain bias given that existing authors, many of them ‘Western’, may fall into misperceptions by looking at Russia and the SCO through a decidedly Western viewpoint. However, after a careful search of available sources, Western and non-Western alike, the English-language materials were deemed sufficient to get an accurate grip on at least the main alternative depictions of the Russian viewpoint on the SCO. Another problematic aspect is that the secretive nature of the organization and its authoritarian members has obviously diminished the amount and quality of information available to the public at large. Unfortunately, this decreases the public awareness of the SCO, particularly within the West and can lead to misunderstandings.

Additionally the Shanghai Cooperation Organization website is another limitation in and of itself. Prior to 2009, the SCO website did contain some irregularly updated news, and pertinent information about the SCO and its history. However since early 2009, the SCO English-language website <http://www.sectsko.org/EN> has been ‘updated’ and a majority of the information has been erased, though with some current news still making an appearance. In addition, the security of the website can be called into question after having personally suffered from an attempted virus attack when trying to access the website on at least two occasions. While the website has been ‘cleaned,’ it is an issue that will loom large for anyone thinking of going back to it. The website, a popular form of information sharing and gathering, is an obvious link to the world that could make the SCO better understood but at present it offers a high risk of virus infiltration. Despite all these issues, this subject is deemed important enough to look past these limitations and attempt the study anyway.

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

As just noted, most of the easily accessed works on the SCO are from Western sources that take a skeptical or hostile approach,⁵ while the SCO’s own website is unreliable and limited. This study has however been able to draw on other websites associated with the

⁵ See for instance Richard Weitz, Ariel Cohen, and Stephen J. Blank on CACI Analyst website, <http://www.cacianalyst.org>

SCO, offering varying degrees of updates and analysis. Some of these are agencies built within the SCO, including the SCO Business Council <http://bc-sco.org/?lng=en>, and others are funded by the Russian Federation, such as the website of the 2009 Russian Presidency of the SCO <http://www.shos2009welcome.ru/eng>.

For the most current information, the (Russian) Central Web Portal of the SCO, <http://infoshos.ru/en/> and the news website RIA Novosti <http://en.rian.ru> and (Chinese) Xinhua <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/> websites were utilized a great deal in order to get the leading SCO members' perspective. Also, the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute <http://www.cacianalyst.org> has regular updates on issues dealing with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization from authors around the world. Many 'Western' news websites do not have information regarding breaking news of the SCO since much of the world's attention seems to be on the United States and its wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Therefore, the information used from such sources will be limited to background information and Western viewpoints, including from the International Herald Tribune and the Guardian.

The work of many academic authors has been utilized for this study in order to get as many viewpoints as possible. However, the work of certain scholars who provide truly useful assets for those studying the SCO will be used extensively here, including Marcel de Haas, Oksana Antonenko, Chien-peng Chung, Vladimir Portyakov and Nicklas Norling. Marcel de Haas has been working extensively on Russia and has focused on the SCO and the importance of recognizing its potential, something the West has overlooked since the SCO's inception, with the small exception around the SCO's 2005 summit (discussed below). Antonenko works at the International Institute for Strategic Studies and has focused her work on the SCO and the need for the EU to show interest in the organization. Chung is a professor at Lingnan University in Hong Kong specializing in Chinese politics and security issues. His works show a distinct ability to recognize the many faults of the SCO, while at the same time seeing the many benefits that it could entail. Portyakov is the deputy director of the Institute of Far Eastern Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences. His works give a Russian perspective of the SCO in English that will aid in the understanding of Russian aims for the organization. Norling is a Research Fellow at the Institute for Security and Development Policy in Stockholm; his research areas include Central Asian studies and can aid in the understanding of the workings of the SCO from yet another vantage point. In addition, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's (SIPRI's) work on the SCO is also incredibly helpful as it has put out several publications on the organization in the past few years, giving detailed analysis on the

evolution and importance of the SCO. Work by Alyson Bailes, Pal Dunay, Ren Dongfang, Pan Guang, Ruslan Maksutov, and Mikhail Troitskiy has proved invaluable to give an accurate reflection on a regional organization that has not been given the in-depth study it so richly deserves. It is the purpose of this thesis to provide not just another critique of what individual authors have written, but rather to challenge oversimplifications that have been championed for too long and to emphasize and build on the work that has led to more productive understandings of the SCO.

Figure 1.1 Map of SCO Member and Observer States



Figure 1.2. Basic data for the member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, 2005

State	Area (km ²)	Population (m.)	GDP (US\$ b.)	GDP per capita (US\$)	Military expend- iture (US\$ m.)
China	9 572 900	1 315.8	2 244	1 715	44 300
Kazakhstan	2 724 900	14.8	57	3 786	592
Kyrgyzstan	199 900	5.3	2	477	76
Russia	17 075 400	143.5	764	5 323	31 100
Tajikistan	143 100	6.5	2	364	..
Uzbekistan	447 400	26.6	14	521	..

.. = figure not available; GDP = gross domestic product.

Sources: **Area and population:** Turner, B. (ed.), *The Statesman's Yearbook 2007* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2006); **GDP:** International Monetary Fund (IMF), *World Economic Outlook Database*, Apr. 2007, URL <<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2007/01/data/index.aspx>>; **Military expenditure:** SIPRI Military Expenditure Database.

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Bailes, Alyson J. K., Dunay, P. Guang, P. and Troitskiy, M., *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Policy Paper no. 17 (SIPRI: Stockholm, May 2007), p. vii, <<http://books.sipri.org>>.

II. The Evolution of the Shanghai Spirit: From ‘Shanghai Five’ to ‘Shanghai Cooperation Organization’

2.1 THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SHANGHAI FIVE

The roots of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization go back to a border dispute between the now defunct Soviet Union and China. Relations between China and Russia have never been on an equal basis, despite common ideological commitments in the 20th century. Starting in the 17th century with tsarist Russia’s expansion to the east, the exact boundaries between the two countries have been in question; this only worsened in the 20th century when a superior Russia (in the form of the Soviet Union) was able to “extract unfair territorial concessions from China.”⁶ The Soviet Union was able to dominate the relationship between the two since China was weakened after an exhaustive civil war and the Japanese invasion during World War II. The Soviet Union’s superior attitude was evident when the two were laying the grounds for the border arrangements between the two Communist states, with the signing of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance in 1950 that was definitely in Moscow’s interest.⁷ The subsequent Sino-Soviet rift was well documented during the Cold War when the Soviet Union was one of the two major powers and China was thought of as no more than a junior partner.⁸

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the former Soviet states were in no way able to fully defend their border with China. Discussions on the border disputes started in 1987 after a thaw in Sino-Soviet relations so that there would not be a disagreement that could lead to all-out war.⁹ After an initial agreement in 1991 that was highly favorable for Russia, work continued up until 1997 with many difficulties coming up during the process not least due to the break-up of the Soviet Union. The creation, as a result, of three additional states on China’s borders did not ease the work for negotiators but made it all the more imperative to establish effective borders and the necessary security measures. Work was ongoing throughout this time, not only between Russia and China, but also Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as successors of the Soviet Union. These negotiations led in 1996 to the Shanghai Agreement on Mutual Reduction of Military Forces in Border Areas, and then a year later to the Treaty on Mutual Reduction of Armed

⁶ John M. Thompson, *Russia and the Soviet Union: An Historical Introduction from the Kievan state to the Present*, 5th ed., (Westview: Boulder, 2004), 259.

⁷ Thompson, 258.

⁸ Elizabeth Wishnick, “Russia and China: Brothers again?” *Asian Survey* 41(5), 2001: 799.

⁹ Akihiro Iwashita, “A 4,000 Kilometer Journey along the Sino-Russian Border,” *Slavic Eurasian Studies*, (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, 2004), 10.

Forces in Border Territories.¹⁰ The new grouping of Russia, China and the three Central Asians became known as the Shanghai Five and started the practice of annual meetings, where they proclaimed something affectionately called the ‘Shanghai Spirit’: an approach to cooperation based on “mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, consultation, respect for multi-civilizations and pursuit of common development.”¹¹ For the Shanghai Five, this also signaled their own preferred way of conducting international relations generally, with a concentration on national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Seeing a potential in banding together for a truly multilateral approach that would serve to enhance the region economically and security-wise, the members decided to continue the work of the Shanghai Process.¹² On the Russian front, the appointment of Evgenii Primakov as Deputy Prime Minister in 1997 cemented Russia’s turn to the East, giving Russia another option in its international relations and a new front for exploring its interests alongside the (often fraught) relationship with NATO and the West.

2.2 ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION

The Shanghai Spirit culminated with the creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2001 in Shanghai, at which time Uzbekistan also joined the grouping. In its declared program, the former areas of responsibility increased dramatically, including economic, political, social and security aspects. The SCO was to be based on a strict understanding of sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, eschewing the 'unipolar' vision of a world dominated by the US and by Western values. All six members consequently signed the SCO Charter in 2002 at the St. Petersburg summit. It was at this summit that work began towards the creation of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (‘RATS’), a body that would be given the responsibility of directing the SCO’s coordination of anti-terrorist activities. ‘RATS’ is the SCO members’ chosen tool for combating terrorism on a regional scale and signaling their common resolve against this growing threat. In addition to studying the region’s terrorist movements, it is also responsible for “assisting, coordinating and interacting the competent agencies of SCO

¹⁰ “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” *Official Website of the Russian Federation Presidency of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, http://en.sco2009.ru/docs/sco/sco_info.html, accessed 19 February 2009.

¹¹ “Full Text of the Declaration on 5th Anniversary of the SCO,” *China.org.cn* website, 15 June 2006, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/meeting/171589.htm>, accessed 19 February 2009.

¹² Wishnick, 799.

member countries on fighting with terrorism, separatism and extremism.”¹³ Though still quite a secretive body due to its mission, there are reports that ‘RATS’ has “already prevented hundred of attempted terrorist acts,” according to former spokesman of Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mikhail I. Kamynin.¹⁴

2.3 EXTENSION OF THE MEMBERSHIP SYSTEM

In 2004, Mongolia became the first state to join the SCO as an 'observer', with Iran, India and Pakistan gaining the same status in 2005. An application by the US for observer status was rejected, as SCO members declared their aspiration to deal with regional problems without undue interference by a non-regional power.¹⁵ This has not stopped others from wanting to become full-fledged members. The latest application that has been publicly acknowledged was the second attempt by the Islamic Republic of Iran to upgrade to full membership in 2009.¹⁶ A moratorium on expansion was in place until recently, and while this has reportedly been repealed, there has been very little information on just what criteria any prospective member would have to fulfill.¹⁷ Though there are rumors that there are a plethora of other states wanting to join the SCO, exactly which states that have applied or want to apply is not fully known. The chance of any current observer state reaching full membership soon is somewhat questionable, as Mongolia is the only rather safe choice with Iran, India and Pakistan bringing a whole set of problems that the SCO may not be prepared to handle. In addition the two larger members have their ‘favorite’ candidates that tend to block each other, with Russia pushing for India’s membership (a long-time partner of Russia) and China for Pakistan’s membership (as China and India have border disputes, Pakistan is an obvious ally due to its long dispute with India).

2.4 A NEW ERA IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Not long after the creation of the SCO, an event so momentous occurred that it would sway the whole post-Cold War international agenda. The terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001 woke the world up to a new reality. In the first reactions, US-Russian

¹³ “RATS Activity,” *RATS SCO Website*, 26 September 2006, <http://www.echrats.com/en/activity/>, accessed 14 February 2009.

¹⁴ Richard Weitz, “Reading the Shanghai SCO Summit,” *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute* website, 12 July 2006, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4049/print>, accessed 30 August 2008.

¹⁵ Alexander A. Pikayev, “Enlarging the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Is Iran a Viable Member?” *Eurasian Strategy Project*, August 2008.

¹⁶ “SCO Regional Security Group Considering Iran Membership-source,” *RIA Novosti* website, 17 February 2009, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20090217/120179795-print.html>, accessed 19 February 2009.

¹⁷ “SCO Regional Security Group Considering Iran Membership-source.”

relations were quite good and President Putin was the first foreign official to offer US President Bush his condolences. This new-found willingness for cooperation seemed to usher in a new era between the former arch-rivals, and Sino-Russian relations were put on the back burner. At first, there was great hope that Russia and the US could finally work together effectively, but it was not long before Russia concluded that the US would pursue its fight against terrorism in a basically unilateral style. After allowing the US to utilize Central Asian bases for its coalition invasion of Afghanistan without seeking the SCO's, or China's, permission, Russia expected greater cooperation for its own 'anti-terrorism' ventures. This was not to be; and with the US's behavior in Afghanistan and then in Iraq, "NATO's aggressive politics, the tendency of the US to seek military-technological superiority over others countries, attempts to undermine the missile Defense Treaty," were soon impelling Russia and China again to seek an alternative 'world order.'¹⁸ The SCO became newly attractive as an organization entirely free of US presence. Instead of being forced to act on the US's whims, Russia "saw the international system shifting to a multipolar order, which would be conducive to inclusive dialogue and take Russian interests into account."¹⁹

As the SCO member states all have their own problems with secessionism, the Russian-Georgian conflict in August of 2008 came as quite a surprise to the other members. Russian forces entered the disputed Georgian territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, two regions that contained a majority of Russian citizens and that had been disputed since the Soviet Union's dissolution. While Russia did effectively 'win', eventually recognizing the independence of the two breakaway regions, it suffered a loss of standing and some specific sanctions on the international scene. This was only exacerbated when the SCO met in August 2008 for their annual summit and the group refused to support or recognize the two territories' independence.²⁰ Other members, above all China, were very aware of the possibility of their own separatist regions seeking recognition for their independence movements. However, their lack of approval has apparently not moderated Russia's own continued involvement in the two breakaway regions, a point which again calls the true 'unity' of the SCO worldview in doubt.

¹⁸ "Heartland Expanding, or the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," *Info SCO* website, 1 January 2008, <http://infoshos.ru/en/?idn=3509>, accessed 12 March 2009.

¹⁹ Wishnick, 799.

²⁰ David L. Stern, "Security Group Refuses to Back Russia's Actions," *New York Times*, 28 August 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/29/world/europe/29russia.html?ref=world>, accessed 30 August 2008.

2.5 WESTERN CRITICISM OF THE SCO

After several years of effectively ignoring the SCO, the West was forced to look more seriously at the organization with the Declaration adopted at the 2005 Astana summit, in Kazakhstan. The article that created such a stir stated that NATO's Coalition forces should establish a timetable for their withdrawal from the Central Asian region.²¹ As the Coalition forces were deemed a temporary presence and the security situation was improving in Afghanistan, the SCO saw no reason for this presence to continue. Previously seen by most Westerners as little more than part of the 'alphabet soup' of organizations in the former Soviet space with Moscow strictly at the helm, the SCO quickly gained another perspective and became something that must be dealt with.

Not surprisingly, outside attitudes towards the Shanghai Cooperation Organization have since tended to be quite dismissive, negative or openly hostile.²² With the Astana Declaration, the SCO was exposed to Western eyes as a would-be tool of China and Russia to overtake the US's place as world leader. This negative view came easily to Western scholars still stuck in a Cold War frame of mind, whose typically Realist-mindset sees Russia as an 'enigma', not easily controllable or predictable. The fact that the SCO's member states are all authoritarian in nature does nothing to help this misperception. The lack of information on the SCO also opens the way for responses based on an emotional state and 'enemy images' rather than cold, hard facts.²³

²¹ "Declaration of Heads of Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," *Official Website of SCO Summit*, 5 July 2005, http://english.scosummit2006.org/en_bjzl/2006-04/21/content_145.htm, accessed 29 August 2008.

²² Oksana Antonenko, "The EU should not ignore the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," *Centre for European Reform Policy Brief*, 11 May 2007.

²³ Zaderei.

III. Theoretical Framework:

It is by no means a simple task to explain the behavior of the Russian state, much less when there is the added burden of cultural and language barriers. To provide this study with the most complete foundation possible given these barriers, attention will be paid both to theory and to the real-life behavior of regional security organizations to get an accurate portrayal of Russia's view of the SCO. Purely theoretical understandings of the SCO have been attempted before, concentrating on Realist, neo-realist, and neo-liberalist readings. It is therefore necessary to add another level of analysis so as to not repeat the work that has already been done. Another reason, as already noted, is that much of the existing literature, and specifically the Western literature, has made explicit or implied judgments about the SCO's status without giving it the benefit of due process. The prejudices are obvious in many of these writings and a more neutral view of the SCO is overdue.

Accordingly, this thesis will apply a unique mixture of theory and analysis of the actual behavior of regional cooperation entities, made up of two-thirds International Relations (IR) theory and one-third generalized framework for comparing regional security cooperation. First, in order to understand how Russia perceives the SCO, there must be a look at the theoretical background that is the basis of much writing done on Russia. To appreciate the whole context in which Russia is portrayed in the world requires an in-depth look at International Relations theory, where Realism in particular must be discussed. However, it is the premise of this thesis that, as Realism has been taken into account with Russia many times before and has had very mixed results, a new approach is required.

There will be two other ways to look at and indeed classify Russia's vision of the SCO. One will be a (semi)-theory, Social Constructivism, which has criticized older IR theories for not concentrating on how social identities factor into the decision-making of the international system. It must be admitted that this approach has been attempted before in other theses, so it is important to add an even further new level of analysis. This will be done through a generalized framework designed for the study of today's regional cooperation, which can also be used to judge how the SCO functions. This tool is based on the work done by Alyson Bailes and Andrew Cottey of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). Their work is based on a 'comparative institutions' approach, which is empirical but more than Realist, because it uses multiple criteria, including ones of legitimacy, to classify institutional outputs and processes. They posit that while theoretical analyses of regional security organizations are helpful, these categories do not

accurately describe the evolution and type of work being done by these organizations in reality. Bailes and Cottey introduce four new categories of purposes served by regional security organizations that may help *inter alia* to get a better understanding of the SCO, and therefore, of Russia's designs for it. The tests they propose will be re-applied in this study to explore the three different views that current literature suggests could be held by Russia towards the SCO: namely a 'real' institution, a 'counter'-institution, and a 'pseudo'-institution – terms that will be fully defined in section V below.

3.1 REALISM: AN OUTDATED THEORY?

Realism as discussed here refers to the general Realism theory that Realists of all types will tend to agree with. There are several branches of Realism, but as this thesis aims to get an understanding of both Russian and Western viewpoints of Realism, discussing each variant would be too time-consuming. Fortunately, other works cover a wide range of Realist points of view regarding the SCO in detail.²⁴

As the most visible International Relations theory (regarding Russia), Realism must be explained in order to understand Russia perceives itself and also how the 'West' perceives Russia. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, it was assumed by the West that Russia would automatically join the 'Western' democratic, market-oriented camp. After a few years of liberalism seemingly taking hold in Russia (or at least the West's perception of Russia), there was a turnover of power, ushering in the era of Vladimir Putin, a relatively unknown former KGB official. It was soon apparent that Russia was still playing according to its own rules. With the increasing centralization of power by the Russian president, and an effort by the Kremlin at recapturing the Soviet Union's power, it seemed that Realism had gotten its clutches on Russia once more. The West's perception took a downturn as well, with statements of concern that a new Cold War has gripped the world.²⁵ Russia's fate is doomed to be associated with Realism as long as it is not understood or respected enough in the international system. So before continuing, a quick overview of Realism and the balance of power concept will be presented.

²⁴ For instance, Jefferson E. Turner, "Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Paper Tiger or Regional Powerhouse?" MA Thesis Naval Postgraduate School, September 2005, <http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/research/theses/turner05.pdf>

²⁵ This is evident in books currently published in the United States, along with many articles with that similar theme.

3.2 A QUICK OVERVIEW OF REALISM

Realism is arguably the oldest International Relations theory, with many Realists pointing to the works of Thucydides of Ancient Greece as the basis of modern-day Realism and its relevance to today's study of politics.²⁶ Realism is based on four main assumptions: "(1) states are the key actors in world politics; (2) states can be treated as homogeneous units acting on the basis of self-interest; (3) analysis can proceed on the basis of the assumption that states act as if they were rational; and (4) international anarchy - the absence of any legitimate authority in the international system - means that conflict between self-interested states entails the danger of war and the possibility of coercion."²⁷ These make up the basis of Realist thought and can be transferred to Russia's experiences in international relations. Whether they can stand alone is another story altogether. It is the perspective of this thesis that Realism (like other Rationalist theories that will not be delved into here) has a basis that stems from economics - a subject that is much easier to empirically test - while politics and international relations do not lend themselves to testing in a hard-science manner. Rather it will be necessary to look at Russia through other viewpoints that can account for the differences in human experience. But first, there must be a look at Russia through standard Realist terms.

First, as states are the main actors on the international stage, it would be easy to assert that Russia would organize its connections with the world purely in terms of bilateral relations. For any international organization to become as powerful as the state is still far from a reality as states make up these organizations and have transferred little if any of their own power and sovereignty to them. However, overreliance on the concept of states as the only or major power in IR cannot explain the plethora of international/regional organizations Russia has created both before and since the end of the Cold War. They would be completely redundant under a Realist view, as Russia could not reap much benefit from these creations. While nothing in international relations has evolved to a point of overtaking the state, many organizations can prove to be a competitor and/or supplement to the state in face of actual world challenges. This fact cannot be brushed aside and must be factored into international relations today.

²⁶ Jennifer Sterling-Folker, ed. Making Sense of International Relations Theory, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2006), 16.

²⁷ Peter J. Katzenstein, Robert O. Keohane, and Stephen D. Krasner, "International Organization and the study of World Politics," *International Organization* 52(4), 1998: 658.

Second, states cannot be seen as homogeneous actors any longer, especially in Russia's case. During the Soviet Union, many ethnic groups were relocated far away from their ancestral homes and so a great deal of ethnic mixing has become the practice in many former Soviet Republics, including Russia. Many fellow Soviet Republics also have a great many guest workers inside Russia and their influence on the Russian state is easily felt. Different interest groups within Russia also can split the direction of the state, as is quite obvious with the different stories coming out of Russia at times. For some time, *oligarchs* were in power in Russia, but with Putin's rise to power, *siloviki* have become the dominant force.²⁸ (A Russian term with no direct English translation, "*siloviki* is derived from *silovye struktury* to refer to individuals with prior careers in the military, the KGB, or the FSB, and the like.") This does not change the fact that there are different factions vying for power, and in the process, possibly influencing Moscow's stance on many issues.

Third, the assumption that states act rationally is easily dispelled. States are not always rational since they are run by human beings, operating on imperfect information and their own biases and belief systems. Moscow has an almost irrational fear of interference in its sphere of influence and reacts whenever there is an encroaching force in this sphere. Many Russian politicians believe this idea to be similar to the United States' Monroe Doctrine, which states that it has the right to interfere in the internal matters of states within its hemisphere. Also Russia's own history of strongmen in power can easily have an effect on how Russia sees itself and is viewed by others. In an ironic twist of fate, Russia announced it would recognize the disputed Georgian territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2008, while deploring the many governments that recognized the independence of Kosovo earlier that year. The reason for going against Kosovar independence was due to the precedent that it would have for disputed regions around the world, including Russia's own disputed province of Chechnya and even possibly Taiwan. What may be rational to one state may be completely irrational in another's beliefs and therefore the idea of rationality has little meaning to give to the understanding of international relations.

Fourth, in a truly anarchic system, it would be accurate to believe that Russia would act as it pleased, with no thought to international organizations designed to have oversight on international affairs. If that were truly the case, it could be asserted that Russia would

²⁸ William A. Clark, "The Presidential Transition in Russia, March 2008," *Electoral Studies* available online, 8 November 2008: 2.

not value and cling to its seat at the United Nations Security Council as much as it does. While some may point out that Russia creates international/regional organizations designed solely to protect its own interests, including the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), it would be hard to see what is the point of international/regional organizations if they do not bring some positive value to the member-states' interests. Russia's many references to the importance of the UN Security Council can also be seen as a move designed to increase Russia's own power, as it is one of five states with veto powers in the Council, but the importance goes beyond that. Both Russia and China desire a greater presence in international affairs combined with less interference by outside actors in their internal affairs. The US's unilateralist moves tend to be a frightening factor for Russia, as it believes that the US is largely responsible for the wave of 'color revolutions' that swept into the post-Soviet region in the mid-2000's. Russia thus craves a place at the UN partly in order to allow it to regulate international relations in such a way that it does not find itself next on the US's list of countries in need of a democratic change.

3.3 BALANCE OF POWER – CREATING A SINO-RUSSIAN ALLIANCE?

The balance of power in international relations refers to a desire by states to create a more even playing field in cases where there is a hegemon, or a dominant state, that has a preponderance of power. In these cases, two or more states may come together in an alliance in order to balance out that hegemon. An alliance will refer to "formal or informal arrangements that sovereign states enter into with each other in order to ensure their mutual security," being based on militaristic, ideological, or even economic factors.²⁹ Alliances are usually expected to be made within international systems that are multipolar, but the current system is a unipolar one. Trying to gain power at the expense of the current hegemon will often result in difficult relations between the hegemon and those states seeking to counter it, or even overthrow it.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union did not come with a violent war between the two ideological sides, as Realism was eager to predict. Rather the change came from within Russia and was based on an internal desire for better living standards. Realism indicates a tendency for states to be overly physical in their relationship with neighboring

²⁹ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., Understanding International Conflicts: An Introduction to Theory and History, (New York: Longman, 2003), 64.

states. Some neo-realists also emphasize that “because some states may at any time use force, all states must be prepared to do so - or live at the mercy of their militarily more vigorous neighbors.”³⁰ If this were true, China might have attacked Russia when it was at its weakest to gain the territory it covets and the abundant natural resources in this region. However, instead, greater cooperation has ensued between the two powers in several forums and on many levels, including the social, economic and political fronts. While there may be several elements of alliance that exist between the countries, it is nevertheless easy to see that there are some limits to how much the two will back each other up. For example, the story already mentioned of SCO reactions to Russia’s foray into the disputed Georgian territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in August of 2008 shows that China will not support all of Russia’s actions. Russia’s resort to force reflects a willingness to use its strength to bully its neighbors, in order to signal its strongman role in the region but also as a reflection of the fact that Russia will protect its citizens regardless of their location.³¹ Chinese tactics for handling comparable national interests have been significantly different.

In addition, the position of the military in Russia has remained on difficult bearings. While it remains necessary in Realist terms for Russia to have a strong military, reform has been incredibly slow in coming and it is difficult to see where the changes have occurred. If Russia truly were a Realist actor, it would place more emphasis on gaining more control of its military and ensuring its viability in the international sphere. Russia places a lot of emphasis on its military capabilities, but most of its efforts go into maintaining its nuclear capabilities. While the military itself is in shambles, with problems from rampant alcoholism to torture of enlisted men by their officers and everything in between, Russia’s dilapidated nuclear arsenal is still an arsenal nonetheless. Due to the global recession, there has been a need to decrease spending in all areas throughout Russia, including the military but not on “spending on armaments for the strategic nuclear forces.”³²

³⁰ Kenneth N. Waltz, “Anarchic Orders and Balance of Power,” in Making Sense of International Relations Theory, Jennifer Sterling-Folker, (Lynne Rienner: Boulder, 2006), 98.

³¹ South Ossetians and Abkhazians have shown a desire to be reunited with Russia after their inclusion into the Georgian state with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. As neither group tends to have Georgian citizenship, some still holding onto Soviet passports, Russia has granted them citizenship and effectively annexed the regions.

³² “Russian military to cut purchases,” *RIA Novosti* website, 5 March 2009, <http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20090305/120444243.html>, accessed 8 March 2009.

These facts add up to show that there are indeed some problems when simply looking at Russia through a Realist prism. Russia's actions are more complex and confused than a Realist could assume, not least since its loss of empire has had a profound subjective as well as strategic effect. Russian behavior is not truly rational and the paranoid conduct it displays can lead, and often has led, to further alienation in the West and the consolidation of an anti-Russian front. The setbacks it has experienced over the past two decades have had a profound effect on the country and its leaders, something that will only be rectified if Russia regains its superpower status or in the end will break up as the Soviet Union did. All these factors throw the limitations of Realist thought into relief and show that as Realists openly admit, their theory is not sufficient for all answers.

3.4 THE WEST

Before continuing, the viewpoint of the West must be taken into account, as it is Western authors and scholars that are shaping much of the Western debate concerning both Russia and Russia's role in the SCO. As noted, many Western scholars tend to mirror Russia's own behavior by adopting a zero-sum approach in which they assume that one side must gain, security-wise, at the expense of all others. Such approaches also reveal that the Cold War legacy has left an indelible imprint on most scholars in the West. The fact is that "political realism is deeply embedded in Western thought" and this cannot be discounted, as it will have an effect on how Russia is viewed.³³ It will be posited here that the Realist inclination of many of these scholars regarding Russia has affected the Western understanding of the SCO and Russia in a negative and hostile direction, with little consideration given to the possibilities that Russia's resort to multilateralism could somehow help the West (or at least be neutral in net effect). Following a brief respite during the 1990's, Realism has returned as the overarching theory reflected in the US's/West's perception of Russia. This is most likely due to the behavior and actions of the current Russian Prime Minister and former President, Vladimir Putin. The *siloviki* inspiration behind his actions has led many to believe that Russia is indeed attempting a bid to make itself, once again, a world-class power. Substantial effort has gone into analyzing the motivations behind such actions and much of it leads back to a Realist recipe for the West's own policy. Fear and ignorance of Russia has led to misjudgments in the

³³ Robert O. Keohane, "Neorealism and World Politics," in Neorealism and its Critics, Robert O. Keohane, ed., (New York: Columbia University, 1986), 4.

past. It is time to learn from past mistakes and look past Russia's veneer of toughness that tries to conceal and shield a state desperately seeking international acceptance.

Russia's historical and social context does have a great impact on its status today but unfortunately, has been left out of the Realist viewpoint. Russia's actions are not easily explainable with Realism alone; therefore, an emphasis on Social Constructivism will be added here to fill the gap. When Russia is the subject of inquiry, one theory simply will not suffice.

3.5 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM – A MORE 'REALISTIC' VIEWPOINT

Social constructivism is based on a sociological view and has only recently been adapted to the needs of International Relations, but in that short time has made quite an impact in how states and institutions are regarded. It was developed after the end of the Cold War most famously by Alexander Wendt and has been further developed by scholars such as John Gerard Ruggie, Peter Katzenstein and Emanuel Adler, to name but a few. Constructivism will give another viewpoint of institutions in all their shades of gray, a key point if one is to look at such a difficult case as Russia's SCO. How does Constructivism help illuminate Russia's perception of the SCO? How has Russia's change in roles affected its view of itself inside the SCO?

Despite the increasing importance of international institutions and nongovernmental institutions, Constructivists tend to believe that states are still the center of the international system.³⁴ However, they are quick to point out that interests and roles can change quickly as states are led by humans and humans are imperfect creatures. It is over long spans of time that the current international system was created, with the setting up of nation-states as a relatively recent phenomenon, even if Realism takes this for granted.³⁵ It is humans that create their environment and give it meaning, not a system that was simply found as it is and set in stone. The ideas of anarchy and sovereignty are human constructs that do not exist outside of the human mind and, "[exist] only within a framework of shared meanings that recognizes [them] to be valid-that is by virtue of collective intentionality."³⁶ According to constructivism, it is the interaction and reaction of states that is the basis of

³⁴ Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics," *International Organization* 46(2), 1992: 424.

³⁵ John Gerard Ruggie, "What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge," *International Organization* 52(4), 1998: 863.

³⁶ Ruggie, 870.

the international community.³⁷ Not only is it how states see themselves, but how others see them that can help to formulate their identities and it is these identities that can mould these states' interests and will influence how states behave. It is then these interactions that "can lead to the development of identities such as competitor and rival, or friend and ally, which can become entrenched over time and reinforced by continued interaction that appears to confirm the identity as true."³⁸

Every state has a specific role to play that tends to evolve with time.³⁹ When one role (in this case, the Soviet Union's 'aggressor' role of the Cold War) has been played for a long time and certain actions take away that role, as did the end of the Cold War, this is likely to result in confusion.⁴⁰ Unable, and perhaps unwilling, to act as it did during the Cold War, Russia struggled for years to find its new role. At the same time, many states did not know how to treat it, as a result of which some erroneous assumptions were made about the new Russia.⁴¹ Western states, particularly the United States, tended to believe that as they had won the Cold War, Russia's only option would be to move towards a democratic government. Such a view too hastily treated Russia as the newest member of the democratic club, while Russia itself was moving in an entirely different direction. As the US has realized Russia's true political direction, this has resulted in greater difficulties between the two. The largely unanticipated end of the Cold War and the ramifications of the confusion that resulted shows that it is important to take the human aspect into account as it is these statesmen who make the decisions that will lead to the further evolution of both the state and the international system.

The roles that states create for themselves can be hard to change from the outside. Russia believes itself to be a great European power, and it has been difficult for it to change its image of the eternal outsider. Many attempts over the last two decades have displayed a willingness by Russia to alter some behaviors to curry favor with the West. However, increasing Western criticism over the last few years of Russia and its policies, along with the encroachment of Western organizations into "Russia's territory" aiming to destabilize regimes loyal to Russia, has led to greater Russian antipathy towards the West. As it is not ready to change its role, it has been looking towards other states that have

³⁷ Wendt, 394.

³⁸ Jennifer Sterling-Folker, "Constructivism," in Making Sense of International Relations Theory, Jennifer Sterling-Folker, (Lynne Rienner: Boulder, 2006), 118.

³⁹ Wendt, 398.

⁴⁰ Wendt, 399.

⁴¹ Alyson J. K. Bailes, Pal Dunay, Pan Guang, and Mikhail Troitskiy. "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization." SIPRI Policy Paper No. 17, (Stockholm: SIPRI, May 2007), 30.

similar ideas and roles, mostly found in Asia. Russia still seeks a good relationship with the West; but its relationship with Asia seems more likely to provide the benefits that Russia is seeking with no normative judgment or internal interference. In other words there are few ‘conditions’ on Russia’s relationship with Asia, while the West still feels a strong need to get Russia to be more democratic and is ready to impose sanctions, physical and ‘behavioral’, on Russia when it behaves in non-democratic ways. The new roles that Russia has designed for itself vis-à-vis different partners prove that there is a way for it to adapt itself in order to make the best out of its current situation.

Another aspect that is important for consideration is the emotional aspect of Russia’s ‘loss’ of the Cold War. The impact that this loss has had on its identity is obvious, as Russia’s leaders repeatedly point to its size and nuclear status to impress Russia’s importance upon others. Russia believes itself to be an exceptional country, with a history and role that no other country could replace. Russia struggles to find exactly where it fits in, being neither fully European nor fully Asian, but a hybrid of its own geographic isolation and unique history. As Western powers have been quick to descend upon Russia since the downfall of communism to show them the correct, proper way to govern, there has been some resentment against this. It might even explain Russia’s increasing fear, and indeed its expulsion, of non-governmental organizations with too much foreign funding, which it all too easily sees as tools of a foreign power attempting to overthrow the Russian government.⁴² As if the loss of its fellow Soviet Republics was not enough, Russia now has to suffer the additional embarrassment of many of these countries being hosts to revolutions (many suspected of being triggered through Western funding) and leaving Russia encircled by pro-Western governments. These ‘Color Revolutions’ in surrounding countries are a fate that Russia would like to avoid for itself at all costs, if necessary at the cost of digging itself into a more isolationist strategy.

Within Constructivism, it is said “the process of creating institutions is one of internalizing new understanding of self and other, of acquiring new role identities, not just of creating external constraints on its behavior of exogenously constituted actors.”⁴³ Russia has had to seriously rework its own understanding of its self and its roles as “pre-existing self-conceptions” held by the Soviet Union were no longer available.⁴⁴ In all

⁴² Shinji Hyodo, ed., “Russia-Closer Relations with China,” in *East Asian Strategic Review*, (Tokyo: National Institute for Defense Studies, 2006), 173-174.

⁴³ Wendt, 416.

⁴⁴ Wendt, 419.

likelihood, it would have been not only internationally unpopular but positively dangerous for a depleted Russia to behave as the Soviet Union had in its heyday. New ways of behaving had to be constructed, starting with the stabilization of the strategic relationship with the People's Republic of China, which proved the impetus for the SCO. Given Russia's relative lack of power and capability shortly after the Soviet Union's dissolution, Realism would have posited that China would override the former Soviet space along the Chinese border. The volatile relationship with China (discussed below) did precipitate the need to create new roles for Russia and China in relation to each other, not to mention China's relationship with the other states of the former Soviet Union. Constructivism allows states to completely change their roles due to different circumstances in the international system.

However, Constructivism is still looking at the overall international system. A more narrow focus is also needed here, specifically dealing with what types of regional groupings are now evolving and how they can be classified, in order to get a real-world understanding of what purpose the SCO can serve for Russia.

3.6 REGIONAL SECURITY COOPERATION: NEW VIEWS OF RUSSIA

International Relations theories are helpful to an extent but, in the end, hinge on the ability of scholars to deduce how certain states will act in what conditions. Theories in IR tend to be based on the situation that a theorist is living in and what types of challenges he/she is tackling.⁴⁵ This is obvious through two instances when Thomas Hobbes wrote during the English Civil War that life is “nasty, brutish and short,” whereas less than a century later, John Locke was in a much more peaceful England and came up with liberalism.⁴⁶ As already noted, IR theorists have admitted that while they have attempted to formulate theories that can be tested according to hard science standards, IR theories will never be so easily empirically tested.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the international system changes quickly and it is important to note theoretical deficiencies and try to substitute a more pragmatic approach. Since many existing theories have been unable to predict correctly what Russia's plans are, an additional layer of analysis may help.

⁴⁵ Nye, 4.

⁴⁶ Nye, 4.

⁴⁷ Nye, 6, and Keohane, 5.

As theoretical approaches are based on incomplete information, given that ordinary people will never get their hands on items such as the true plans and goals of states, a new way to analyze the SCO will be included here. This new approach was developed by Alyson Bailes and Andrew Cottey of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute initially in SIPRI's 2006 Yearbook.⁴⁸ Their aim was to provide a more accurate, real-life picture to fill the gap left by theoretical methods, one that will categorize organizations based on their accomplishments and goals.

The past twenty years in international relations have seen wide-ranging changes of attitude, from an unrelenting optimism and a call for the end of history, to a confused and insecure state of the world where terrorism and transnational threats loom in every corner. Attempts have been made to classify the coming era and much confusion has resulted. The recently dominant trend of analysis seems to concentrate on the transnational nature of the international system, with terrorism being the main evil and many states struggling to find a systematic way to combat this evasive evil. Against this background, Bailes and Cottey have sought to classify the development of regional security organizations since the Cold War through defining and testing four new categories of purposes that such organizations can serve: security dialogue and conflict management, new forms of military cooperation, promoting democracy and human rights, the security function of economic integration and the wider non-military security agenda.⁴⁹

3.6.1 Security Dialogue and Conflict Management:

In many ways, security dialogue and conflict management represents a fundamental new approach to regional security cooperation. It builds on the premise that “regular meetings of heads of state or governments, ministers and lower-level officials, and the military arguably help to build trust between states, avoid miscommunication, resolve disagreements and develop a sense of common interests and identity.”⁵⁰ This type of contact is designed to open up lines of communication between those in the relevant ministries in order to reduce the chance of miscommunication. Indeed some of the world’s conflicts have developed in an atmosphere where there are misunderstandings as to the

⁴⁸ Alyson J. K. Bailes and Andrew Cottey, “Regional security cooperation in the early 21st century,” in SIPRI Yearbook 2006: Armaments, Disarmaments and International Security, Oxford: Oxford University, 2006.

⁴⁹ Democracy and human rights will be left out of this analysis due to the fact that there is little emphasis placed on either in both the works of the SCO and the Charter only specifically mentions human rights once and so will not be seen as a way for the SCO to function.

⁵⁰ Bailes and Cottey, “Regional security cooperation in the early 21st century,” 202.

intentions of some states. Some of these organizations have gone so far as to “[develop] more explicit and formal mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolutions of conflicts among their members.”⁵¹ The quality of these mechanisms may be called into question but the possibilities are there and it cannot be denied that they have come a long way in some cases.

The security dialogue and conflict management aspects of regional organizations actually have two divergent functions, including either “better projection of shared regional interests in world economic and functional negotiations orfending off unwanted external security influences by gaining better control of the region’s own internal weaknesses.”⁵² These functions arise when members have either a shared desire to integrate a region’s economic and political forces towards a certain goal, and/or a wish to stave off a particular influence that is affecting the region against their will and interests.

There is a hazard in judging these organizations in their early stages too harshly. Bailes and Cottey point to a disappointing response by the European Union’s Common Foreign and Security Policy to the conflict in former Yugoslavia while the EU’s CFSP was still in its elementary period.⁵³ While initial responses by the CFSP were lackluster, it has gained some momentum and is now more capable of handling crises and the possibilities are there for further development.

Based on these qualifications, certain elements of security dialogue and conflict avoidance do seem to pertain directly to the workings of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The SCO has an annual summit that sees the heads of states meeting yearly in different member state cities based on a rotating system giving every member a chance to hold a summit. In addition, representatives of various ministries, including the prime ministers, foreign ministers, heads of parliament, and ministries on an as-needed basis, also meet throughout the year in order to discuss pertinent subjects.⁵⁴ These regular meetings have increased the contact between these various countries’ government officials, opening up lines of communication that may not have been available prior to the establishment of the SCO. While Russia and Central Asia have had a relationship for several centuries, it has usually been to their detriment as Russia has always had the upper hand. This venue

⁵¹ Bailes and Cottey, “Regional security cooperation in the early 21st century,” 202.

⁵² Bailes and Cottey, “Regional security cooperation in the early 21st century,” 204.

⁵³ Bailes and Cottey, “Regional security cooperation in the early 21st century,” 204.

⁵⁴ “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization.”

gives Central Asian states the possibility to have an equal footing amongst their much more powerful neighbors.

The SCO's work so far has not explicitly involved plans or mechanisms to manage (potential) conflicts that may arise between the members as such. However, the very basis of the Shanghai process underlying the SCO is the resolution of disputes and stabilization efforts concerning joint borders, as reflected in specific confidence and security- building mechanisms (CSBM's). The Treaty on Strengthening of Trust between Military Authorities in Border Territories and the Treaty on Mutual Reduction of Armed Forces in Border Territories have been in force to restrain the number of troops in and around the member states' borders from the earlier days of the Shanghai Five. Added to the general provisions (e.g. on mutual non-interference) of treaties establishing the 'Shanghai Spirit,' there does seem to be some process at work at a fundamental level to reduce any military friction between the members. It is possible that the member states, should they encounter a concrete conflict arising e.g. out of Russian-Chinese coexistence and competing ambitions in Central Asia, would revert to the origins of the SCO or at least appeal to its principles to settle it. Indeed, despite of, or in spite of, the member states' authoritarian governments, the SCO has not had a conflict amongst its members to date. This can be construed in two ways: either the SCO has been successful in maintaining open lines of communication thereby preventing any conflict from erupting, or the SCO has yet to experience such a problem. With the difficulty in getting information regarding the SCO, either situation is a possibility.

As to whether the SCO aims to increase the members' economic and functional cooperation or to fend off external security influences, it is quite obvious that it is the latter. World economic negotiations were until recently focused in the World Trade Organization of which only China and Kyrgyzstan are members, and it is obvious that one of the goals of the SCO is not to aid fellow members in obtaining WTO membership. However, it is quite obvious that the SCO does aim to reduce the presence and potential of external security influences. The 2005 Astana Summit Declaration provided the moment that the West woke up and took notice of the SCO when it called for a timetable for NATO's coalition forces to withdraw from Central Asia.⁵⁵ This call was pushed by Russia but also supported vociferously by Uzbekistan, which had turned to an anti-Western course

⁵⁵ "Declaration of Heads of Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," *Official Website of SCO Summit*, 5 July 2005. http://english.scosummit2006.org/en_bjzl/2006-04/21/content_145.htm, accessed 29 August 2008.

after the West criticized its leaders' crackdown on internal dissent. Kyrgyzstan however remained willing to accept payment for US use of a base on its territory.⁵⁶ This seeming goodwill was short-lived, with the President of Kyrgyzstan calling for the withdrawal of US forces from Manas in February 2009. There has been some speculation that Russia's offer to "write off Kyrgyzstan's \$180 million debt and grant the country a \$2 billion soft loan and \$150 million in financial assistance" has affected Kyrgyzstan's judgment and spurred its leaders' desire to rid themselves of a power that has called for more democratic government in the region.⁵⁷ The outcome will have a deep impact both on how the West views the individual countries and the SCO's role, and on how the SCO views the West's presence in the region.

Russia's take on the SCO can be viewed by some as a rather elementary form of cooperation, which insures against the potential 'worst case' but does not take too much effort for the members to sustain. Security dialogue and conflict management does make sense for the basics of the SCO, although there are many more aspects that must be addressed before attempting the final evaluation in this study.

3.6.2 New forms of Military Cooperation

Military relations in regional groupings were historically based usually on "cooperation driven by and directed against (perceived) external enemies or efforts to contain the risks of such confrontation through regional arms control agreements and military confidence- and security-building measures (CSBM's)."⁵⁸ Though the first option is based on common goals and the latter on restraint between opponents, both approaches indicate a level of trust, or at least an attempt to build that trust, that will reduce the chances for war between the members. Arms control agreements on a large scale have tended to take years of negotiations and so they may be better designed in smaller regional settings. These agreements tend to not be based on altruistic reasons, but rather a need for decreasing the possibilities for conflict: and this kind of practical benefit has already been shown to lie behind China's border stabilization measures with its neighbors in the 'Shanghai process'.

Since the late 20th century, military cooperation networks such as NATO's Partnership for Peace have tended to become more inclusive, incorporating those states

⁵⁶ Martha Brill Olcott, "The Great powers in Central Asia," *Current History* October 2005, 332.

⁵⁷ "Kyrgyz Parliament approves foreign troop pullout from Manas," *RIA Novosti*, 6 March 2009, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20090306/120455979.html>, accessed 10 March 2009.

⁵⁸ Bailes and Cottey, "Regional security cooperation in the early 21st century," 204.

that covet involvement.⁵⁹ They are designed to be multi-purpose and open-ended rather than having a distinct goal (and still less, a single opponent) in mind.⁶⁰ This tends to be opposite of what happened during the Cold War, when alliances were built on opposition to a state or other organization and focused on hard security measures.

A typical new method of military cooperation is “defense diplomacy,” which encourages “multilateral and bilateral dialogue among defense ministries and armed forces aiming to foster confidence and transparency.”⁶¹ This type of cooperation would decrease the possibility of misperceptions concerning military movements, an obviously important goal for regions that suffer from security problems. Whether it would be plausible and effective is another matter altogether. It is possible for these groupings, however, to add to their capabilities by combining forces for “humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping and...peace enforcement.”⁶² The sovereignty of these members, in the event of such forces entering their territory, may be reduced to some extent but may be offset by the value of help from neighbors in combating their problems. Such cross-border, region-wide approaches may seem particularly appropriate for handling modern menaces – both human and of natural origin like disasters and pandemics - that typically arise and operate *transnationally*.

Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states have learned that new security issues must be dealt with multilaterally and have worked that into their organization. However, this has neither stopped the use of bilateral or unilateral acts in any form, nor has the SCO attempted to impede their use. There are articles in treaties of the SCO that underline the importance of members not acting in ways that would endanger the safety of the other members, or joining alliances that would be in opposition to another SCO member.⁶³ However, and as discussed further in section VI.2 below, the SCO has stopped short of become a formal ‘alliance’ either against the West or against local neighbors (which would be difficult anyway given Russia's and China's different perceptions of a state like India). On the other hand, it clearly makes no effort to provide a really inclusive regional framework like that of the OSCE in Europe – bringing together all possible military competitors – notably because it excludes both Japan and Korea.

⁵⁹ Bailes and Cottey, “Regional security cooperation in the early 21st century,” 205.

⁶⁰ Bailes and Cottey, “Regional security cooperation in the early 21st century,” 205.

⁶¹ Bailes and Cottey, “Regional security cooperation in the early 21st century,” 205.

⁶² Bailes and Cottey, “Regional security cooperation in the early 21st century,” 205.

⁶³ The SCO Charter and the Treaty of long-term neighborliness, friendship and co-operation both emphasize the importance of one member not counteracting other members.

That said, the SCO's evolving policies do reflect some understanding of the more positive roles military relations can play in the new international system. The members have an active military dialogue that encompasses both bilateral and multilateral cooperation of defense ministries. Several 'peace exercises' involving actual troop deployments have taken place between the members in both bilateral and multilateral frameworks. The 'Peaceful Exercises' of both 2005 and 2007 saw coordination of the member states' militaries through exercises designed to coordinate responses to transnational threats, though there have been some questions regarding the weaponry used during these exercises (discussed below). The possibilities that such actions could develop into a common SCO force used for humanitarian or peacekeeping reasons may be somewhat far-fetched, as the SCO does not have much regard for either humanitarian assistance or peace. The emphasis is placed on territorial integrity and sovereignty, so these exercises are best seen as easing the technical conditions for cooperation between the member states' forces while changing nothing in their sovereign control of military decisions.

3.6.3 Democracy and Human Rights

A relatively recent phenomenon, organized regional efforts for democracy and human rights have focused on the link between governance and security, asserting that democracies have lesser tendencies to commit atrocities.⁶⁴ There is a new term that encapsulates the idea behind these groupings, 'human security,' which is about "protecting individuals and communities from *any* form of political violence" (emphasis in original).⁶⁵ These agendas have flourished in Europe where states go to great lengths to improve their human rights and democratization in order to obtain membership in organizations such as NATO and the EU, but also the Council of Europe. Many of these groupings have increased their outreach to include states outside of their neighborhoods, particularly in the former Soviet Union. The Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is but one example that has spread its membership to states with less than stellar human rights standards in the hope that it will lead to steps for greater democratization, and by

⁶⁴ Bailes and Cottey, "Regional security cooperation in the early 21st century," 206.

⁶⁵ "What is Human Security?" Human Security Centre,
<http://www.humansecurityreport.info/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=24&Itemid=59>,
accessed 28 February 2009.

extension, human rights standards. They aim to increase standards, aid in “monitoring elections and providing advice and technical assistance to states.”⁶⁶

However, some regions of the world tend to look down on this type of organizational role and resent the implication of trying to impose outside conditions upon them. Asian states in particular “remain reluctant to give regional organizations any role in relation to democracy and human rights”⁶⁷ - though this is changing somewhat with the region’s most visible and respected organization, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), recently attempting to integrate a human rights body into its portfolio. ASEAN is however seeing some reluctance by members to include any type of enforcement mechanism, stating that it is a departure from its policy of non-intervention in member states’ internal affairs.⁶⁸ The historical and social mores of Asia have led it to a distinct anti-intervention ideal that will by no means be easy to break. As ASEAN is a consensus-based organization, it will be some time before its human rights committees will have any enforcement behind them.

The SCO Charter has one specific mention of human rights under its goals and objectives, with no mention of democratization.⁶⁹ The other declarations that have come out of the SCO summits also make it a habit to include aspects of human rights but little has come of it. Though human rights would possibly be a welcomed side-effect of one of their other policies, the aspect of (forced) democratization from the outside is not acceptable to the SCO. Indeed Russia and China have called for the West to stop its attempts to impose democratization in the regions they see as belonging to their own influence.⁷⁰ As noted, the color revolutions that swept through former Soviet republics became a real worry for Russia in particular when conspiracies spread that the United States CIA was attempting to extend just such a revolution into Russia.⁷¹ Many Western scholars have assumed that the SCO is designed, and can be utilized, inter alia as a force to counteract such democratic movements. Resisting acts of ‘terrorism, separatism, or

⁶⁶ Bailes and Cottey, “Regional security cooperation in the early 21st century,” 207-208.

⁶⁷ Bailes and Cottey, “Regional security cooperation in the early 21st century,” 210.

⁶⁸ “Myanmar opposes ASEAN rights body,” Al Jazeera website, 23 July 2008. <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/asia-pacific/2008/07/200872354545424228.html>, accessed 12 February 2009.

⁶⁹ “Charter of the SCO,” *Official Website of the Russian Federation Presidency of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, <http://en.sco2009.ru/docs/documents/charter.html>, accessed 21 February 2009.

⁷⁰ “SCO Members Issue Declaration, Pledging Constructive Contribution to New Global Security,” *China.org.cn* website, 15 June 2006, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/meeting/171585.htm>, accessed 19 February 2006.

⁷¹ Brian Whitmore, “Spinning the Kremlin: Russia's New Agitprop,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty website*, 5 November 2007, <http://www.rferl.org/content/Article/1079079.html>, accessed 10 March 2009.

extremism' is an open part of its aims; and this lumping together of possible forms of opposition reflects the harshness of its members' actual practice, as shown not only in Chechnya but for instance in the incident at Andijan, Uzbekistan where there was undue force used against non-violent protestors.

3.6.4 Economic Integration and the Wider Security Agenda

A new range of security issues have surfaced in areas not usually associated with security as such. These are principally transnational threats that are best fought through international and regional cooperation. Organizations that center on economic integration and the wider security agenda concentrate on comprehensive security, which includes all aspects from the environment to energy security.⁷² Many such organizations whose ostensible focus is to develop such economic cooperation, and thereby foster interdependence, "may be driven by the desire to reduce the likelihood of political or military conflict between the states involved."⁷³ Bailes and Cottey point to the two tendencies of open and closed economic cooperation, "with the first being essentially compatible with the liberalization of trade and finance with the latter representing an alternative model that limits the free flow of trade and finance."⁷⁴ Both are related to the effects of globalization and offer two very different responses, one serving to increase the impact and local exploitation of globalization and the other to stem the effects of it.

Increasing the interdependence of states has led to a greater need for comprehensive security that will secure supply lines and transit routes of goods essential to the functioning of states, including specifically energy.⁷⁵ Many of these threats emanate from non-state actors, and especially transnational terrorist groups that have become increasingly prevalent in Central and South Asia. The lessons of the terrorist attacks on the US in September 2001, plus subsequent pressures from the US itself have all induced "regional groups to develop common initiatives against non-state threats."⁷⁶ Instead of a military solution, most regional groups have looked at the underlying problems that have led to the proliferation of these non-state threats, including social problems like poverty and lack of education. They have tried to tackle the problem from its very root, believing that the violent manifestations will never be resolved without effectively dealing with the underlying problems. The SCO has aligned itself ostensibly with this agenda by defining

⁷² Bailes and Cottey, "Regional security cooperation in the early 21st century," 211-212.

⁷³ Bailes and Cottey, "Regional security cooperation in the early 21st century," 211.

⁷⁴ Bailes and Cottey, "Regional security cooperation in the early 21st century," 211.

⁷⁵ Bailes and Cottey, "Regional security cooperation in the early 21st century," 211.

⁷⁶ Bailes and Cottey, "Regional security cooperation in the early 21st century," 211.

one of its main tasks as fighting separatism, terrorism, and extremism, as well as aiding the members in their quest to fight cross-border crime and smuggling. As just noted, however, its most visible activities have involved exercises claiming to have an anti-terrorist scenario but actually using the exclusive and excessive means of military force.

The SCO is made up of members that have varying degrees of economic development, from the relatively underdeveloped Central Asian states like Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to the world's economic powerhouse, China. China's efforts to increase its development projects throughout Central Asia have reflected an ambition to successfully integrate the region into the world's (or rather China's) economy. While rich in natural resources, Central Asia has been rather unable to efficiently exploit them without outside assistance. As the SCO contains some of the largest producers and consumers of natural gas in the world, it is vital for the producers to have a safe and steady supply line to those consumers. Prime Minister Putin has indeed, during his time as Russian President, called for the creation of a gas cartel that would give the SCO the majority of power concerning setting the price of natural gas on the international market.⁷⁷ However much resented by other consumers, this would aid in increasing the security of the region by giving the SCO explicit responsibilities to ensure the viability and security of the natural gas trade.

3.7 CONCLUSION

In sum, the SCO can be shown to fulfill at least partly the first, second and fourth security purposes defined in the Bailes/Cottey model, but has no role or a negative role in democracy promotion. Its sincerity and competence in seeking security through economic integration is also open to debate. While the SCO is taking the first steps towards some form of economic cooperation, it is difficult to find real evidence of an effort to liberalize trade – which would expose both Russian and Central Asian producers to unwelcome Chinese competition. Rather the SCO is designed for the economic benefit of its member governments, with the SCO Interbank Association and Business Council designed to deepen cooperation, while ensuring there is still sovereign oversight. Trade has been increased amongst the members, but more on a bilateral basis rather than in a multilateral form.

⁷⁷ Sergei Blagov, "Russian moves spark 'gas OPEC' fears," *International Relations and Security Network*, 10 July 2006, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Current-Affairs/Security-Watch/Detail/?ots591=4888CAA0-B3DB-1461-98B9-E20E7B9C13D4&lng=en&id=52134>, accessed 19 February 2009.

The overall negative image of the SCO gives not only its security roles but also its economic accomplishments a somewhat tainted flavor. As plans continue for an energy consortium, Western media have reported that the SCO has designs for blackmailing energy-consuming countries that go against the wishes of its members. The West would also criticize an approach to intra-SCO economic relations that ignores democratization and human rights (and for that matter, environmental) standards and makes no stipulations on the social application of profits, respecting the belief that states should have complete sovereignty over the territories. So while the SCO does have economic benefits and has succeeded in facilitating significant agreements for its members that contribute to “comprehensive” security in their own definition, it is not unfair to compare its economic workings more with those of the Cold-War COMECON than with free-market groupings of the type of the EU, or even MERCOSUR or ASEAN.

IV. National Roles and Interests of SCO Member States

This last section has clarified the aspects of modern security functions which the SCO can *prima facie* claim to serve as an institution, and has offered some initial evaluation of its claims. Before turning to probe more deeply the three different hypotheses on Russia's own vision of the SCO as an institution, a closer look at the motivations for Russia, Central Asia and China's membership of the SCO will be helpful. It is clear at the start that each player has different reasons for wanting to be a part of the SCO, and these differences can explain the inconsistencies and problematic areas that the SCO is facing and must deal with in the future. Russia will be dealt with first, as the impact of losing its empire, the China factor, the power struggle with the West, and its energy diplomacy all contribute to Moscow's motivation for building – and reluctance for strengthening! - the SCO. Then there will be a look at Central Asia, touching on its fear of a resurgent Russia, China's growing clout in the region, the economic potential of its involvement, specifically in the energy field, and the fight against internal strife. Finally, a look at China will reveal the intense competition between Beijing and Moscow in Central Asia, China's own battle with secessionist provinces, the plans for a more multilateral world, and the part that economic security plays in Chinese membership of the SCO.

4.1 RUSSIA

As Russia spent most of the 20th century as part of the Soviet Union, it was one of only two world-class powers. That all-pervasive power, psychologically and physically, has left a stamp on the Russian state that it is still seeking to recapture. With its conquest of Central Asia during previous centuries, Russia had annexed these territories into its collective psyche and losing its position as their hegemon would prove very painful. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, however, Russia became a fraction of its old self, losing territory and gaining a healthy dose of humility. The 1990's was a trying time for Russia and its people, involving a rapid transformation of its ideology, political system and government and a total revamp of its economy, all resulting in much chaos. Meanwhile, its former fellow Soviet republics and satellite countries were lining up for Western aid and entrance into Western organizations, with the Baltic states making it all the way into NATO and the EU. Not surprisingly, therefore, Russia has sought to increase its power in the one region that has not fully turned its back on Moscow, that region being Central Asia, with the SCO being just one tool to protect Russia's interests there. For Russia, the SCO is

perceived to be “a military-political structure for protecting its geo-strategic interests in the relations with the US and China.”⁷⁸ To combat its power loss, the Russian government has taken a look to the East in order to stem the rising tide of Western influence and to contain the resulting chaos that has become so prevalent both in Russia’s territory and many of its post-Soviet neighbors.

4.1.1 Loss of an Empire, Search for an Alternative

Faced with an encroaching Western presence and the risks of political change in its former Central Asian preserve, Moscow has attempted to reestablish its control through several ways, via bilateral relationships and the creation of regional organizations. Some have lambasted this ‘alphabet soup’ of organizations Russia has initiated in and around its territory, including the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and the Eurasian Economic Community (EuraSec), designed to help keep Russia involved in its fellow former Soviet republics. Two of these, the CIS and CSTO, deserve special mention as they are examples of just how Russia has been operating since the time of the Soviet Union’s downfall.

As a way to ease the process of disbanding the Soviet Union, the Commonwealth of Independent States was set up in 1991 with aims to cooperate in a wide variety of areas.⁷⁹ From peacekeeping to a united air defense, the CIS has great expectations on paper. The only problem is the lackluster support Moscow gets from its fellow members, some of whom – notably Georgia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine and Moldova – have made other moves and joined other organizations explicitly designed to distance themselves from Russian interference. Through their officials in charge of the actual work on the ground, the Russians largely run an organization that has failed to make a real impact on the world and is increasingly out of step with the real divisions and dynamics of the post-Soviet space.

The Collective Security Treaty Organization was originally designed as a part of the CIS as a regional security apparatus. While there was not unanimity within the CIS for its creation, it has still managed to become a separate organization, designed in part to

⁷⁸ Peter Linke, “Opening statement at the International Russian-German Seminar,” *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Its Role in the Establishment of an Alternative Security Architecture in Asia*, Moscow, Russia. The Russian Public Policy Center Foundation, 11 December 2007: 9.

⁷⁹ Alyson J. K. Bailes, Vladimir Baranovsky, and Pal Dunay, “Regional security cooperation in the former Soviet area,” *SIPRI Yearbook 2007: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2007), 171.

counter NATO.⁸⁰ It is currently only made up of six states of the former Soviet Union but this very exclusivity gives it a stronger base and more credibility than the CIS.⁸¹ With a clause guaranteeing military support in case of an attack, very similar to Article 5 of the NATO's Charter that states an attack on one member is the equivalent to an attack on them all, the CSTO comes eerily close to being a Russian-led NATO.⁸²

The CSTO's areas of responsibility have been increasing as Moscow has sought to increase its visibility, cooperating on transnational issues that affect all member governments. The SCO and the CSTO signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2007, with some questioning Russia's reasoning for this and China's reluctance to sign it.⁸³ The CSTO remains an important tool in Russia's foreign policy, but just how influential it can be is still unknown.

Critics have pointed out many weaknesses and decreasing viability of these organizations as they have achieved little of any consequence, including very little international recognition. These organizations are designed with Russia at the forefront and enable it to keep contact with Central Asia, "but the results have hardly been in line with their aims and expectations."⁸⁴ The plans for these organizations tend to be greater than the follow-through, and nationalistic temperaments – including Russia's own penchant for unilateral and bilateral maneuvers as further discussed below - have prevented them from accomplishing their aims. To an extent, it is natural to consider the SCO as but another tool that Russia can utilize to reestablish its position as the regional hegemon.

4.1.2 China: Friend or Foe?

While much of the SCO's work is secretive, the "clearest specific value of the SCO for Russia lies in regulating the uneasy mix of cooperation, competition and a gradually shifting power balance that characterizes its current dealing with China."⁸⁵ This however, does not guarantee worry-free relations between the two countries. For the first time in more than 150 years, Russia is the lesser power in Sino-Russian relations. Despite high oil

⁸⁰ John Pike, "Collective Security Treaty Organization," *Globalsecurity.org*, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/int/csto.htm>, accessed 19 February 2009.

⁸¹ Bailes et al., "Regional security cooperation in the former Soviet area," 175.

⁸² Bailes et al., "Regional security cooperation in the former Soviet area," 174-176; "The North Atlantic Treaty," *North Atlantic Treaty Organization* website, 29 November 2007, <http://www.nato.int/docu/basic/txt/treaty.htm>, accessed 18 March 2009.

⁸³ Marcin Kaczmarek, "Russia Attempts to Limit Chinese Influence by Promoting CSTO-SCO Cooperation," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute* website, 17 October 2007, <http://www.cacianalyst.org?q=node/4716/print>, accessed 30 August 2008.

⁸⁴ Ren Dongfang, "The Central Asian Policies of China, Russia and the USA, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Process: A View from China," Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2003: 2.

⁸⁵ Bailes, et al., "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization," 10.

prices for much of the last few years, Russia is economically in peril since much of its economy is tied up in raw materials and arms trade.⁸⁶ China's ever-growing economic prowess is a growing threat to Russia. As Russia's defense industry is turning more and more to China as its major customer, this has placed Moscow in a tough position. Russia's fears of growing Chinese power has led to some limitations being put on just what military technology can be exported to Beijing, but the result is merely to encourage Beijing to look for more arms trade with the West.⁸⁷

In face of these challenges, the border-dispute resolution mechanism that served as the basis of the SCO did aid in the new Russian Federation's stability in the first few years after independence. While Moscow believes the issue to be settled, however, the Chinese are still unhappy over the settlement and could be seen in Russian eyes to be biding their time until they can settle this issue more to their benefit. Russia's Far East, which borders China, is far less developed than its Western provinces. Rapid depopulation and economic isolation are mounting problems in an area relatively ignored by Moscow. What is an even bigger worry is that China's Northeast is overpopulated and only expanding. The Russian Far East has been experiencing a huge increase in Chinese day-shuttlers, increasing the worries regarding the 'Sinocization' of the Far East.⁸⁸ This is seen as a way for China to get back control of lands it lost in the 19th century - an issue that is still quite difficult for China to bear.⁸⁹ Many of the outspoken critics of Russia's partnership-oriented China policy are in fact political figures in the Far East who have to govern large swathes of territory with little external support.⁹⁰

As China's presence on Russia's Far Eastern border is becoming more of a pain for Moscow, the rapid depopulation in that region, which can be traced to a decreasing standard of health, with increasing results of heart disease, HIV-infections, and alcoholism,

⁸⁶ The overreliance on raw materials has led many to point out a major flaw in Russia's economic base. This can have major ramifications since the underdevelopment of the Russian economy could, in bad economic times, lead to civil unrest throughout Russia's territory, which could be devastating and possibly lead to the disintegration of Russia itself.

⁸⁷ Nikita Petrov, "Problems in Russian-Chinese military-technical cooperation," *RIA Novosti* website, 25 September, 2007, <http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20070925/80780903.html>, accessed 21 February 2009. and Richard Weitz, "Why Russia and China have not formed an Anti-American Alliance," *Naval War College Review* 56(4), 2003: 46.

⁸⁸ Nicklas Norling, "China and Russia: Partners with Tensions," *Policy Perspectives* 4(1), 2007: 41.

⁸⁹ Norling, "China and Russia: Partners with Tensions," 41.

⁹⁰ Tamara Troyakova, "Migration Situation in Primorskiy Kray: In Search of Stability," *ISE Center*, available: http://www.ino-center.ru/news/doc/tamara_troyakova.pdf, accessed 30 October 2008.

is also having an effect on Sino-Russian relations.⁹¹ The inability of the Russian government to combat this low standard of living, which stands out particularly clearly for citizens in the Far East as the Chinese government invests heavily on the Chinese side, does create a highly unbalanced border. As a country whose population is steadily decreasing surrounded by countries that happen to be experiencing population growth, Russia is obviously worried about Chinese intentions for the Far East. Some have even gone as far as saying that if Russia is not able to produce a developmental model suitable to its new geopolitical realities, “it will inevitably lead to the progressive deindustrialization, depopulation, and overall degradation of Asiatic Russia.”⁹² While demography may not be an open issue in the SCO, this issue is an essential one for explaining psychological aspects that, even subconsciously, may affect Russia’s behavior towards China.

4.1.3 “West vs. the Rest?”

The amazing power that the West (in the form of the US) currently has in the world has been more than most powers have hoped to accomplish for some time in international relations. Russia is desperate to find a way to balance the West in some form, and the results from those efforts have been hit and miss. In addition to creating organizations based on the make-up of the former Soviet Union (like the CIS), it has sided with growing international powers that can help project Moscow back to a world power seat. However, it also must envisage a way to do that without making Russia vulnerable to being overpowered by such more vigorous partners. The SCO has proven to be one such tool to effectively allow Moscow to team up with China, while encapsulating it in a multilateral framework so it cannot overpower Russia. For some Russian scholars, the SCO “does not only represent an alternative security architecture in Asia, it simply represents a unique platform that gives birth to new meanings, new theories, new concepts of the world view and world development upon which a whole lot of things will soon depend.”⁹³

Russia’s situation in the early 1990’s gave it a stark reality check that, by itself, it was no longer able to match up to the United States or the West in general and needed greater efforts and new solutions to obtain that same level of acceptance. The governance

⁹¹ Eugene B. Rumer, and Celeste A. Wallander, “Russia: Power in Weakness,” *Washington Quarterly* 27(1), 2003-2004: 65.

⁹² Dmitri Trenin, “Russian and Global Security Norms,” *Washington Quarterly* 27(2), 2004: 72.

⁹³ A. I. Muzykantskiy, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Its Role in the Establishment of an Alternative Security Architecture in Asia*. Moscow, Russia. The Russian Public Policy Center Foundation, 11 December 2007.

style favored by many states in Asia happens to be closer to the Russian preference for strong leaders and a managed democracy that has become the symbol for Russia's government. The US's presence in Afghanistan has indeed proved that implanting democracy in such a milieu is not a simple 'cut-and-paste' operation. Russia's ability to display another system of governance that attracts authoritarian regimes not only in Central Asia but also possibly in other regions, is but one way that Russia can try to regain its international leadership potential.

The final paradox for Russia in this context is that the SCO is an organization that is gaining more influence precisely due to China's membership. Though China belongs to other Asia-Pacific institutions, the SCO is both more exclusive and more openly security-focused (including military activities) than any other that Beijing has yet committed itself to. Compared with the limited success and credibility of regional organizations, such as the CIS and CSTO, that Russia has tried to build with weaker and recalcitrant neighbors, having another powerful state within its ranks gives the SCO a whole other status and dynamism. So while Moscow is fearful of the growing Chinese population and economy, China is a state that is preferably held inside a framework of international agreement where Russia can also hope to benefit from greater cooperation in economics and security.

4.1.4 Energy Diplomacy

As one of Russia's most important economic resources, hydrocarbons have become a reason in their own right for Russia's membership in the SCO. As the world's largest producer of petroleum while the prices were at extremely high levels, Russia became known as an 'energy superpower.' While a term that Moscow would like to distance itself from, this clearly helped Moscow to reassert itself as an international force and owner of an essential commodity.⁹⁴ Russia's use of oil as a political tool rather than an economic one has in the process become increasingly familiar and has created suspicion of Russia's true intentions.⁹⁵

In 2006, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin was quoted as saying that the SCO should "establish a joint venture to coordinate our efforts in third countries and work together on some deposits in both countries."⁹⁶ While he dismissed claims of a gas cartel, the power that such cooperation could possess is enormous, giving the SCO huge clout on the international scene and creating more worry for the West. Including its observers, the

⁹⁴ Goldman, 14.

⁹⁵ Goldman, 7.

⁹⁶ Blagov.

SCO has some of the world's biggest consumers and producers of natural gas with Russia and Iran making up 40% of the world's proved reserves of natural gas according to the CIA World Factbook.⁹⁷

Ultimately, Gazprom has near complete control over the natural gas that comes from Central Asia, a throwback to the days when Russia was at the center of the Soviet Union. The necessity of using Gazprom's pipelines does keep Central Asia hostage to a great extent on the company's willingness to transport their natural gas for the right price.⁹⁸ Gazprom has resold Central Asia's natural gas at much higher prices than it pays for the gas, creating friction between the region and Moscow. As the available and easily accessible oil and gas resources in Russia's territory are declining, coupled with greater international investment in Central Asia, Russia has some stiff competition that will require it to be more conciliatory to the region than it has been.

Russia's export of natural gas to Europe has been hampered (even if this is regularly denied by Russian authorities) by its own problematic external relations. The spat between Ukraine and Russia has been capturing headlines for years. The Orange Revolution, which led to the overthrow of a Ukrainian government sympathetic to Moscow, caused some hostility between the two governments. On 1 January, 2006, Gazprom cut off the gas to Ukraine due to contractual disputes when negotiations failed to agree on new pricing for the natural gas.⁹⁹ While it was deemed a one-time thing, the same happened again in early 2009 over the same dispute. This time it led to natural gas being cut off to parts of Europe since Gazprom believed Ukraine to be siphoning off gas for itself that was ultimately meant for European consumption.¹⁰⁰ Russia's image as a stable energy partner has been scarred but it is still a sought-after energy source due to the instability of other regions that have been big producers in the past.

As the issue of energy security becomes more paramount to national security, Russia's extensive power through the manipulation of energy resources has put it at the forefront of the discussion over energy security. This is one area that the SCO has

⁹⁷ "Comparisons - Natural gas - proved reserves," *CIA World Factbook*, 6 March 2009, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2179rank.html>, accessed 7 March 2009.

⁹⁸ Goldman, 7-8.

⁹⁹ Andrew E. Kramer, "Russia Cuts flow of Natural Gas to Ukraine," *New York Times*, 1 January 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/01/international/europe/01cnd-russia.html?partner=rssnyt&pagewanted=print>, accessed 30 August 2008.

¹⁰⁰ "Russia, Ukraine reach deal to resume gas supplies to Europe," *RIA Novosti*, 18 January 2009, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20090118/119673607.html>, accessed 28 January 2009.

accorded special priority, and its success in developing mutually profitable cooperation in natural gas would give the Russian government an advantage economically and politically.

4.2 CENTRAL ASIA

Central Asia will be taken as one entity for the purposes of this study, since exploring the motivation of all four Central Asian members would be too time-consuming for this thesis. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan all have a broadly similar reasoning for their SCO membership, though some aspects may be more or less important for individual states. As all four were part of the Soviet Union, they have many similar problems facing them after the downfall of the Soviet Union and of Communism. The elements that especially contribute to their logic for participating in the SCO include worries over another possible Union with Russia, the greater fear of China's intentions in the region, the potential economic benefits of their membership, including energy cooperation, and last but not least the fight against internal strife that they all face to varying degrees.

4.2.1 Worries over Another Union with Russia

Central Asian states have been dealing with powerful neighbors and conquests for centuries. Central Asia was Russia's historic domain and as such, was largely ignored by the rest of the world until there was a greater need for diversification of energy supplies.¹⁰¹ Central Asian states have had a difficult time in separating themselves from Russia, as it is particularly difficult to get away from Russian economic and political models that have been ingrained in their societies. Indeed much of the legislation in Central Asia is drawn from Russia, and many of their present leaders were part of the old Soviet political machine. While the relationship between these states and Russia has been rocky, the relationship seems an incontrovertible aspect of their foreign policies. The experience of being in the Soviet Union has left a permanent scar on the relationship between them and Russia, keeping Central Asia on guard against anything resembling a union of any type with Russia.¹⁰²

Central Asian leaders need to be able to balance between the desires of Russia to remain the region's most important player, and their own interests. They have come to prefer the SCO framework since it is not dominated by Russia, as the CSTO and CIS

¹⁰¹ Zaderei, 48.

¹⁰² Gregory Gleason, "Inter-State Cooperation in Central Asia from the CIS to the Shanghai Forum," *Europe-Asia Studies* 53 (2), 1078.

are.¹⁰³ The CSTO and the CIS have been viewed as a vehicle for Russia to regain direct power over former Soviet Republics, not least by significant military integration. As the SCO has an inherent balancer to Russia in China, it may be a great chance for the Central Asian states to maintain the very delicate balance between their two great neighbors while benefitting greatly from the investment by both sides – and not necessarily losing freedom to dally also with the West.¹⁰⁴

4.2.2 Economics

The relative anonymity of Central Asia has changed in the last few years amid the hunt for a more diversified energy supply by many states. The race for developing these natural sources has become quite fierce, arousing Russian concerns inter alia about rival customers and routes that would bypass Russia's own extensive pipelines. The region has attracted a great deal of investment on profitable terms. Central Asian leaders have taken advantage of this to the fullest, gaining investment for developing their infrastructure and “to develop relations simultaneously, with China and the European Union, Russia, the West and others.”¹⁰⁵ As stated above, the SCO is an asset that Central Asia intends to utilize to further its goals in order to balance out Russia and China. As China increases its investment in these countries, Russia is, by virtue of its jealousy, increasing its investment there as well. This delicate balancing act has allowed Central Asia to benefit from all sides. While this does come at some cost to the freedom of action of the leaders and their people, this has not suppressed their desire to get as many as possible involved in investment. In addition, China's economic prowess can be an incredible motivation for Central Asia's membership of the SCO. In fact, the economic benefits are probably far more decisive in making the Central Asian states gravitate to the SCO than the military integration that Russia is so fond of.

4.2.2.1 The Other Side of Energy Diplomacy

The main commodity that can help Central Asia in its development at the present is its energy reserves. The control over Central Asia's natural gas is more or less in the hands of the Moscow-controlled Gazprom. As the owner of the extensive gas pipelines throughout Central Asia, Gazprom holds more power than the actual gas companies within the

¹⁰³ Richard Weitz, “The CIS is Dead: Long Live the CSTO,” *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute* website. 8 February 2006, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/3725/print>, accessed 30 August 2008.

¹⁰⁴ Sean L. Yom, “Power Politics in Central Asia,” *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 6(4), 2002.

¹⁰⁵ Dongfang, 2.

region.¹⁰⁶ So with the true control over the transport of this commodity in the hands of the Russian government, and until there is greater investment in the pipeline network to other suppliers, they will remain at the mercy of Gazprom. The greatest possibility for Central Asia is if an outside investor had resources to create an extensive pipeline network and this would most likely be the SCO's other major power, China. Beijing has actively been trying to develop gas fields in Kazakhstan in order to diversify its own energy supplies and hopes to involve others. This, along with the potential investment by the West, has created a great potential for Central Asia to gain economically and, in the process, increase its independence from Moscow.

An approach by Central Asia that focused solely on its own development needs would, however, be incredibly difficult for Central Asia to reconcile with Moscow's own plans for the region. The actions that are taken by governments and businesses in the region are viewed by Moscow as part of its internal security, as it still views the region as part of Russian territory. Central Asia must walk a fine line when it comes to its own energy industry and must take Russia into account before going into any venture.

4.2.3 Internal Strife: Separatism, Extremism and Terrorism

After the sudden demise of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian states needed to quickly develop a 20th Century concept of a nation-state. This was done through "a policy of 'traditionalization' by the leadership of a number of countries, which in turn, contributed to the Islamization of the population."¹⁰⁷ The stress on Islamic identities coupled with the internal chaos that accompanied the Soviet Union's dissolution allowed a radicalized element from neighboring regions to infiltrate across Central Asian borders. Losing the economic safety net of Communism left the entire populations, save a tiny elite, facing a downward spiral in social standards. This created a large pool of people to recruit for secessionist and terrorist activities, reflecting also the lack of better opportunities for these countries' growing young populations. Transnational crime is an increasingly difficult area for states to tackle by themselves and Central Asia's unfortunate location has been the scene of a cauldron of terrorist activity that has devastating repercussions for the entire region. For many states, it constitutes their largest immediate security headache and one that will not go away soon. The internal problems that led to the Tulip revolution in Kyrgyzstan and the Andijan uprising in Uzbekistan are ever-looming threats that do not

¹⁰⁶ Goldman, 7.

¹⁰⁷ Portyakov, "Conference on Problems of Central Asia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," *Far Eastern Affairs* 36(2), 2008: 146.

fade with time.¹⁰⁸ Through greater SCO cooperation including ‘RATS’, the Central Asia states can gain a greater deal in technology and information that can help them combat these growing problems.

Central Asian states’ motives for increasing their contact with the West also include an element of advice on new security threats but above all, the hope of gaining financially. As the democratic and political conditions for Western aid have stiffened, the Central Asians have come to see the SCO as an easier way to achieve similar goals with no democratization attachments.¹⁰⁹ There are articles in the SCO basic documents that guarantee non-interference in internal affairs and that extol state sovereignty to a much higher level than is usual in the current international trend. The way the SCO defines its major task of combating separatism, extremism and terrorism has proven to be easily amenable to excusing the toughest actions taken by Central Asian leaders against any kind of internal disturbance. SCO thus offers just the type of organization that the Central Asian states find most congenial to fight both internal and external threats.

4.2.4 Conclusion

The current security challenge for Central Asian leaders is tied up with trying to gain control of the radical elements in their society. Their method of achieving greater security may be genuinely more attuned with the Russian way of doing things, given the latter’s long dominant influence in the region. Even though the states of Central Asia have increased its ties to the West, the SCO allows them to approach their most intimate problems in ways more coherent with their culture and history.

4.3 CHINA

The emphasis China puts on the SCO is part due to selfish motives, including the aim of raising its own international reputation as a peacefully growing power. As China’s population and power increase, it understands the need to be “more proactive in shaping its neighborhood.”¹¹⁰ China seeks to become a global player and help “shape the rules of the game for regional cooperation”; it also seems to feel “an increasing level of comfort in subscribing to norms of predictable and interdependent behavior among states.”¹¹¹ China

¹⁰⁸ Portyakov, “Conference on Problems of Central Asia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” 145.

¹⁰⁹ Richard Weitz, “The OSCE and Political Disputes in Central Asia,” *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute* website, 19 April 2006, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/3725/print>, accessed 30 August 2008.

¹¹⁰ Chien-peng Chung, “China and the Institutionalization of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 53(5), 5.

¹¹¹ Chung, “China and the Institutionalization of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” 4.

has come a long way in these respects, considering that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is its first attempt at creating a multilateral security organization.¹¹² By integrating, arguably, one of its longtime allies into a security framework China is indicating that it sees some purpose for the SCO that goes beyond border dispute resolution. It has seen that the new transnational threats are very real and has helped shape the purpose of the SCO accordingly. The SCO now aims to increase the security of the member states through a combination of economic, political and social cooperation that is very rare for the region. Integrating Russia into a regional framework that will reduce tensions between the two powers, combating its own internal secessionists and terrorists, and guaranteeing its energy security through diverse sources in Central Asia are all part and parcel of China's membership of the SCO.

4.3.1 Russia - Eternal Friend? Eternal Enemy?

As Russia is the old power of Central Asia, with many historical, political and social currents linking it to the region, China must find a balance between getting the most out of Central Asia while finding a way to co-exist with Russia in the region. The SCO is one such way to integrate the two contending powers. Building on the work done between Russia and China on the resolution of border disputes in order to stabilize the relationship more generally helps Beijing to concentrate more on other pertinent issues like its economy. In addition to possibly gaining greater access to the region's energy resources, Beijing could cooperate with Moscow in order to minimize one large potential dimension of its hard security concerns. Further, the SCO can serve as a vehicle for China to show the world that it can organize a bloc based on non-Western principles.¹¹³ Though less directly affected, China has been caused some worry by the supposition that the US has been behind color revolutions aiming to bring democracy to the exact region where China would like to get more involved on a long-term basis. While Russia has shown some reticence in its cooperation in the SCO, China understands that Russia's presence is necessary to create some balance so that the SCO is viewed (at least locally) as legitimate.

4.3.2 Internal tranquility

As stated above, the spread of democratic movements largely believed to be inspired by the US in West and Central Asia has led to greater fear over China's own restless Western regions. One of the greatest assets the SCO offers is cooperation for China in getting these

¹¹² Chung, "China and the Institutionalization of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," 5.

¹¹³ Bailes, et al., "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization," 13.

areas under control. It has grown from a border-security confidence-building measure into an organization dealing with all aspects of security, from transnational crime to social projects, which can actively aid in developing China's Western provinces. Indeed, the increased cooperation of the SCO member states is believed to help China increase the feeble economic situation of these regions. Additionally, questionable elements in China have in the past exploited the less than adequate border-checks between the former Soviet Union and China as a way to escape from Chinese law. For some time they did find shelter in these countries, but with increasing cooperation in the SCO, including within 'RATS', much of this activity has stopped. While seeking greater economic cooperation, Beijing has managed to crack down on this dissent that is to be found on both sides of its border. The Chinese government has found an organization that is able to place on terrorist watch lists those organizations deemed to be a threat to the Chinese state, something it can find to be difficult when dealing with Western organizations.

Specifically, the SCO can serve as a vehicle to help Beijing "gain the cooperation of the Central Asian governments in reducing the threat of Muslim Uyghur separatism in Xinjiang province."¹¹⁴ Beijing has been fighting against the Uyghur separatist organizations and has turned to the SCO to underwrite its stance. The Uyghurs have strong ethnic connections to tribes in Central Asia where, prior to greater SCO cooperation, those accused of unlawful or terrorist acts were able to find safe havens. Now the entire SCO has recognized the alleged terrorist groups involved, including several groups from the Uyghur population. With greater cooperation of the SCO, including "new intelligence-sharing and cooperative counter-terrorism measures," this has strengthened the official control of China's troubled Western province and has decreased the mobility of these secessionist groups.¹¹⁵

4.3.3 Energy Security

In order for China to retain its high growth rates, its energy procurement must be guaranteed. As the world's second-largest consumer of oil, and quickly rising to become number one, China must find a way to ensure a steady flow of energy to satisfy the public demand.¹¹⁶ As Beijing was in the past able to satisfy much of its oil demand on its own, it is only recently that the question of energy security has been broached. As the SCO is in a

¹¹⁴ Chung, "China and the Institutionalization of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," 5.

¹¹⁵ Andrew McGregor, "Chinese Counter-Terrorist Strike in Xinjiang," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute* website. 7 March 2007, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/3872/print>, accessed 30 August 2008.

¹¹⁶ Pak L. Lee, "China's Quest for oil Security: Oil (wars) in the pipeline?" *Pacific Review* 18(2), 2005: 266.

good place to supply China with oil and other energy sources, it may be assumed this is an aspect that Beijing would like to exploit to the fullest. While the Middle East has a substantial US presence and US warships patrol the main sea lines of energy transit, the possibility of developing greater ties across land to the SCO's energy producers, in a region relatively free of US interference, would come as some relief for Beijing.¹¹⁷

This is not to say that the path of cooperation within the SCO on energy security has been a simple one. Russia's reliability as a partner is somewhat unclear, with the actions it took regarding Ukraine just being the tip of the iceberg. In addition, Russian reticence to supply China with greater oil supplies has been quite evident in the last few years with many delays in pipelines destined for China. Despite this reticence, an agreement was reached in February 2009 for the construction of an oil pipeline that would deliver 15 million metric tons of oil to China for 20 years.¹¹⁸ In addition, China has been actively investing in the Kazakh energy fields since 1994 though it has been slow in cementing a foundation for sufficient energy supplies to be delivered to China.¹¹⁹ The approach that China has taken in regards to securing its energy supply is still mostly conducted on bilateral terms with little sign of moving onto a multilateral basis or handing that power over to the SCO.

It is only through economic and social development that China can hope to quell the internal dissension that has been so difficult for its regime to fight militarily. With greater economic development, there is more need for energy and this creates a strain on the country to assure that its energy supply is safe. So for China, the SCO is but one way that it can try to stabilize its own future power and control including in its own Achilles heel, Xinjiang, as well the security situation in its newly-independent neighbors, and the peaceful handling of the slowly shifting power relation with Russia.

4.3.4 Conclusion

It has mostly been up to China to dictate the direction of the SCO since there has been some hesitance in the Russian camp and to a lesser extent Central Asia as well. The funding and leadership that Beijing provides hints at the amount of effort China is willing to exert to increase the organization's presence. It is Beijing's desire to incorporate into

¹¹⁷ Lee, 270.

¹¹⁸ "Russia, China sign energy accords-Deputy PM Sechin," *RIA Novosti*, 17 February 2009, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20090217/120181944.html>, accessed 19 February 2009.

¹¹⁹ Lee, 270.

the SCO the vital resources needed for comprehensive security so that the organization can become a fundamental pillar in the international community.

V. ‘Real’-, ‘Counter’- or ‘Pseudo’-Institution?

Now with a firm grip on the motivations and accomplishments of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, gained through both theoretical and empirical reviews, this section turns to the topic of how to define ‘real’ institutions, ‘counter’-institutions and ‘pseudo’-institutions as the three hypotheses on how Russia may ultimately view the SCO. These definitions will not be taken directly from International Relations theory, but will rather reflect a mixture of traditional theoretical IR frameworks with the general theoretical framework put forth by Bailes and Cottey. They will be tested against the behavior of the member states of the SCO, as seen in its historical overview and the varied reasonings for different states’ membership. Each of the three categories of institution must to start with satisfy some technical conditions including the requirements that they will be made of members that are nation-states, they must be based on a formal treaty or other legal document that establish the institution’s foundation, and will have established a permanent body, such as a secretariat, to deal with the daily duties of running the institution.¹²⁰ If defining the SCO as an institution would only be that simple, the task would already be over as it clearly shares all these features. However, the purpose here is not to simply label the SCO but rather to investigate exactly *how* Russia uses the SCO, hence the need to explore more detailed and alternative definitions.

5.1 DEFINING A ‘REAL’ INSTITUTION

Most institutions from their creation will consider themselves to be ‘real.’ The members hope to create an institution that will allow them to gain collectively what would be quite impossible, or at the least very difficult, for them to do single-handedly. For the purpose of this thesis, it will be the actions of these institutions that will dictate what their status is, rather than their words. They will have to fulfill several criteria that will qualify them as ‘real’. As defined in the Introduction, such an institution will give real **added value** for its members: will induce them to **compromise** and raise their level of **cooperation** through a process of mutual understanding and convergence; and will allow them to **pool** their resources for the utmost shared influence and benefit. In most cases, such an institution will also have the dynamism and leeway to **evolve** further to meet changing needs and ambitions: in the most advanced cases extending to some pooling of sovereignty itself.

¹²⁰ Paul F. Diehl, *The Politics of International Governance International Organizations in an Interdependent World*, 3rd ed. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005), 9.

5.1.1 Real Added Value

The most basic of these criteria is that an institution should provide real added value in a form acceptable to the members. This includes alleviating both internal and external security concerns that may plague a specific set of states. With more people crossing borders and ineffectual border checkpoints, the internal security threats facing particular members can become a threat for the entire neighborhood if they are not taken seriously. A further typical source of an institution's value is to reduce the possibilities of conflict amongst its members.¹²¹ 'Real' institutions will actively tackle their issues of concern, in whatever combination they arise, through a variety of ways that will suit the beliefs of the members. Without going out of the members' comfort zones, these institutions will increase the possibility of further cooperation since the members gain more politically, economically and socially than they lose in sovereignty. The conditions for achieving this include, however, moving on from mere coherent communiqués and goals to provide the institution with authority and tools to execute its tasks. So states must implant in their institutional framework a mechanism that will effectively implement any agreement made by the institution.

5.1.2 Compromise and Cooperation

A 'real' institution will be centered on the level of cooperation between the members and increase **compromise** between them, seeking to get the best possible outcomes out of the process. This will result in visible achievements that give member states the desire to further increase their **cooperation** and help in the **evolution** of the institution. They will aim to be inclusive in their membership to maximize coverage and resources. They will have the flexibility to deal with issues that may suddenly arise, as with the new forms of military cooperation and widening of security agendas discussed above.¹²² This will require a regular series of meetings between those in charge of policy-formulation in the spirit of security dialogue and conflict management, including a range of meetings between heads of government to various heads of ministry and business leaders. This increased contact will allow the members to have steady lines of communication, which in turn can decrease the possibility of miscommunications that have in the past led to conflicts. Whether through meetings, or explicit confidence-and security-building measures, a 'real' institution has the same basic aim: to increase the cooperation and reduce risks of conflict

¹²¹ Bailes and Cottey, "Regional security cooperation in the early 21st century," 204.

¹²² Bailes and Cottey, "Regional security cooperation in the early 21st century," 205.

or zero-sum behavior amongst the members. In this context new-style military cooperation offers double value as decreasing the chances for a regional conflict, while increasing the power and scope of the region's military i.a. since the members' military resources will not be tied up in securing their common borders. If these inward-looking conflict control roles are not understood, however, there is a chance of a militarily active institution being understood as a threat to the rest of the world (in fact, very much as Moscow sees NATO!). There is a thin line that a real institution must not cross if it intends not be seen as such a threat by others that it actually draws new challenges down upon the region.

5.1.3 Transnational Threats

During the Cold War, the majority of institutions were focused on 'hard', military security issues. Since then attention has shifted towards transnational threats that include not only the traditional hard security, but dimensions of 'soft' security covering not only other threats to physical security but also social and economic security. These security threats are different from those in earlier times because no country can simply exclude them, and no country can handle them strictly on their own. This new concentration on transnational threats has created a willingness to tackle issues on a more transnational level. This is a major task of a 'real' institution today. Two of the most prominent new threats are extremism and terrorism, which due to globalization and technological improvements are finding support in every region in the world. To be able to fight this requires a new transnational approach that has been embodied by 'real' institutions in several continents. A new agenda based on comprehensive security, which will incorporate the entire range of the new security spectrum, is necessary for any institution with security ambitions to be fully effective in its goals.

5.1.4 Western Ideas and 'Bad Multilateralism'

Institutions are usually thought to be of a benign nature but that does not always happen in the real world. As the global order is no longer dominated solely by Western institutions and states, members of other regions with other cultures and values can and do come together for cooperative purposes that are different, and achieved by different governance methods, than those developed to meet the needs of states within the Western civilization. The 'added value' that they achieve in their own terms could then be regarded as something negative from a Western viewpoint, challenging the typically European assumption that multilateralism is always a good *per se*. Instead of jumping to such conclusions – which have among other things shaded the negative views of the SCO – a more nuanced approach

is to try to figure out just what goals the states share and what values they agree prior to forming an institution. If they cooperate to gain goals seen as suspect by others, that does not necessarily detract from the fact that there is 'real' cooperation going on and the goals that were set out to be met are being accomplished. Irrespective of the specific output, other powers then need to ask themselves frankly if they would prefer the cooperating states to be at each others' throats with perhaps even the risk of actual war.

5.1.5 Conclusion

'Real' institutions are not as clear-cut as one would like to think. There has to be real thought and effort to weed out what truly distinguishes a 'real' institution from 'counter'-institutions and 'pseudo'-institutions. Here the 'real' institution will be defined in a way that emphasizes the real added value that members can gain, mostly through cooperation and integration based on values that are specific to a certain region. It will focus its efforts on allowing states to fight a battle together with each other, instead of against each other, through various bodies or programs aimed i.a. at common transnational threats.

5.2 DEFINING A 'COUNTER-INSTITUTION

A **counter**-institution was defined above as being designed to **balance** or **mirror** one or more external powers and organizations – regarded as threats, intruders or competitors for a given region - which it seeks to match by letting local states **ally themselves** with more powerful neighbors. This is an essentially limited, perhaps time-limited purpose, which does not imply that the states involved are friends or have further common agendas and values. Their main purpose will be to reduce the impact of another power and, at the limit, to have the capacity to expel through military means any superfluous influence that might jeopardize their sovereignty.

5.2.1 Realism Embodied

At the basic level, a counter-institution will be steeped in Realist thinking, placing a greater emphasis on 'hard' security, i.e. in militaristic terms, than anything else. The members will vie for influence, usually at the expense of the security of other states or organizations. The membership will be exclusive in nature, as the group is defined by fighting an external enemy. This is distinctly reminiscent of institutions formed during the Cold War, with the mind frame of fighting against an ideology and/or another state militarily. It is not entirely plausible that the members will be able to cooperate to such an extent that the good of the group will always be the path chosen. The work in a 'counter'-institution will tend to be

based on inter-governmental consensus as each of the members' aims to maximize its own interests. While there is an attempt at some amount of cooperation, it will usually follow the path of least resistance since states will be reluctant to give this type of institution any superfluous power. They will typically retain the maximum of freedom of action in other matters, not least in order to extract themselves if the grouping betrays their expectations.

5.2.2 Alternative Framework: Mirroring or Balancing?

A 'counter'-institution will promote itself explicitly as an alternative to another organization, although what type of alternative will be up to the particular organization. This could be dealt with in two ways, in the first of which the counter-institution will seek to mirror the behavior and activities of another organization it believes itself to be in competition with, while at the same time attempting to balance the other organization and create another source of world power.

In the mirroring approach, the institution will stress its equality with the institution it is mirroring and will offer seemingly comparable services. This type of competition can be one-sided as it is the one attempting to upstage that must prove itself, with the mirrored institution either ignoring the mirroring institution. On the other hand, the mirrored institution can be complicitly in competition with the rival in order to keep its own *raison d'être*. (It is an old recognition in international affairs that a clearly defined enemy assists one's own cohesion.) A situation where each competitor seeks to gain recognition by other international organizations, which are recognized and respected, either in its own right or as a counterpart to another institution, is direct evidence of this type of behavior.

In contrast, a counter-institution that seeks to reject, block and balance another institution will provide a slightly different profile. Instead of being a direct equal to another institution, it will embody itself as a direct and in some ways contrasting alternative. This will be accomplished through supporting ideals and values that are in direct competition with the other institution. As one institution aims to spread its particular ideology, the counter-institution will seek to find ways to advertise itself as its alternative.

When a counter-institution seeks *both* to mirror and balance another institution this will create an ambiguity that no communiqué will be able to elucidate. While distinct, both possible purposes in fact imply some aspects of international inferiority complexes that may lay heavily on a state's (or region's) psyche. The desire to be seen as a power may force states to act in certain ways that may or may not be helpful to their cause. It is this type of institution that can create international worry, since it implies a power-grab

away from another power or organization but without the clarity that would allow the possibilities of coexistence to be reliably assessed. The consequences will be unpredictable and in the worst case quite devastating.

5.2.3 Limited Liability, State Control

The work of the counter-institution is inherently based on an uneasy cooperation between states that may or may not have the same ultimate goals in mind. With that, it is easy to see that the members may be reluctant to give the institution any independence to evolve in ways would be detrimental to the explicit sovereignty of the members. There will be attempts at creating a way forward that puts the members plainly at the helm, no matter what the consequences for organizational success. Even if the institution may attempt to move to other areas of cooperation, for example social areas, the underlying basis for the institution will stand or fall on militaristic, security-related concerns.

5.2.4 Conclusion

A 'counter'-institution will be limited not just in its inherent purposes but in ability to tackle the typical post-Cold War security agenda, which includes transnational threats, more power for non-state actors, and new forms of conflict often aggravated by the proxy manipulations of the Eastern and Western blocs before 1990. These problems cannot be fought solely through military means, but this will be difficult for a 'counter'-institution to recognize since its rationale is still steeped in the realities of the Cold War and hard security. National sovereignty will be placed above cooperation to such an extent that little can be accomplished without the explicit permission and acquiescence of the members. Evolution of these types of institutions can be quite difficult and they may have difficulties adapting to the new types of threats that may surface.

5.3 DEFINING A 'PSEUDO'-INSTITUTION

It is difficult to believe that any state will actively construct an institution solely to use it to obfuscate its true goals. However, it has actually become typical for states in several regions with less evolved relationships to set up what look like institutions without actually linking them to any of the changes in behavior and values that others would expect. Above, a **pseudo**-institution was defined as one that makes its members look like players of the **multilateral** game, and hence implicitly less of a **threat** to the world, while in fact leaving them free to act **unilaterally or bilaterally** on all important matters and to ignore international norms as wished. In this situation, states' Realist views of and reactions to

their specific threats remain paramount under a thin cover, which may be dangerous for others if it gives them a false sense of like-mindedness and security. In practice, members' decision-making will concentrate on the use of either unilateral and/or bilateral agreements as the main instruments at their disposal. In consequence, the institution will tend to be unable to effectively transform its proclaimed, and perhaps very ambitious, agreements into actions; due to lack of follow-through and budgetary allowance, any plans will remain in their infancy with little hope of being implemented.

5.3.1 Russia's Ulterior Motives

Any state today that works outside the relevant international and regional frameworks will likely be seen as a greater threat than those inside them. Convention says that rogue states are those that pose the most threat to the international community and the nations in question are in fact members of very few international groupings. International isolation can be quite dangerous for any regime that faces enemies within or without its borders. Therefore, to seek greater international approval or ward off actual attack, some states may find that faking their interest and role in a particular institution helps to bolster their credibility and reliability. They may of course join a 'real' institution, albeit likely to hamper its work and its effectiveness. Further tests of states' behavior are therefore needed to determine whether the institution they are involved in is utilized as a 'pseudo'-institution. Most institutions have guidelines and treaties that will emphasize the importance of international law and states will agree to abide by them. However, these signs are still not sufficient to gauge real intent since international law is quite new and there are many loopholes allowing states to evade their promises.

5.3.2 Solely Unilateral or Bilateral Moves

Whether or not all SCO members share the idea of a 'pseudo'-institution, it will influence how the grouping will act. The concentration on using unilateral or bilateral means to obtain real national goals will keep a majority of the power, if not all of it, in the hands of the individual states. This will prevent a state from being forced against its will to abide by agreements enacted by the institution. The use of unilateral moves shows that a state is not hampered by the institution when it attempts to construct its domestic and foreign policies, even when they may go against particular tenets of the institution. It will be even more obvious that it is indeed a 'pseudo'-institution if the institution attempts in any way to have a say in whatever action that the state took with no results. The use of bilateral moves can be seen as an attempt at a divide-and-rule tactic, which will allow for old

animosities to get the better of members within an institution and create rifts within it. Although institutions generally can also be built on and strengthened by bilateral agreements, the use of such agreements in pseudo institutions will have a more sinister effect in that the members will be competing against each other or other states in the world.

5.3.3 A Toothless Institution

In addition to shying away from truly multilateral moves, the members of a ‘pseudo’-institution will tend to ensure that the bodies that such an institution creates will be toothless and unable to act on their own in any way. No action will be taken, whether through a communiqué or plans for a new mechanism, that infringes the importance placed on the members always having the final say. This approach fully preserves the ideal of the Westphalian state, with state sovereignty being all-important and placing strict parameters on territorial integrity. Also, there will be no effective enforcement mechanism that can castigate members as the consensus-based mode of decision making gives anyone a veto at any time. Whatever declarations are put forth, the resources devoted will be inadequate to effectively accomplish them. Without proper funding, the institution will be unable to implement any of its objectives to the full effect.

This type of institution can also be viewed as a simple way to provide a cover and defense for the regime survival of states. As some states will find it difficult to face the increasing calls for democratization, there is some logic to creating institutions that will give status and backing for the regimes in power. Hiding behind an institutional background can give credence to states that may have internal dissent on such a scale that large protests have potential to overthrow the government. This is eminently true of the former Soviet region among others.

5.3.4 Conclusion

While its hollowness may not be outwardly obvious, a ‘pseudo’-institution will be exposed when it is faced with a crisis. It will be entirely unable to respond to crises faced by its members on a national, regional or global scale. Even if nominally competent, it will not have been given the authority or tools for real assistance to its members. Bodies of this type will lack any type of cohesion and respectability since they will simply be used to validate (however opaque) the desires of the member states. While espousing the importance of international law, the member(s) can be working behind the scenes to facilitate their own brand of justice at the expense of the institution and of legal norms. The aims and actual accomplishments of such an institution can be far apart and the

members can be at odds with each other. A distinction still needs to be made, however, between on the one hand institutions that desire to make a difference yet lack the capability to enforce their aims, and on the other hand the cases where states have created an illusion of an institution with no intention of abiding by their obligations. It may be difficult to accurately spot such a difference but the subtleties in the behavior of states will enable a judgment to be made.

VI. What are Russia's True Intentions for the SCO?

It is now time to bring together all the above themes by asking in what way or ways Russia understands and makes use of its membership of the SCO. Does Russia envision the SCO as a 'real' institution in the same light as other multilateral international institutions, with cooperation between members, similar goals for the institution, and pooling of resources, and even possibly the pooling of sovereignty? Or is it using the SCO to mirror or balance NATO and Western powers' presence in Central Asia with an emphasis on traditional hard security? Or does it see it as a 'pseudo'-institution, a false pretense for organizing its neighbors and potentially impressing enemies, while allowing Moscow privately to initiate objectives that suit Russia's needs with little or no regard to the SCO's ultimate goals?

6.1 HYPOTHESIS 1: THE SCO AS A 'REAL' INSTITUTION

While the definition of a 'real' institution above was framed in culture-neutral terms, it has also been noted much of the scholarly work on institutions is based on European and Western institutions and defines 'multilateralism' solely on the basis of those models, leaving out many cultural factors that do not conform directly to European ideals. This cultural egotism has led to institutions that do not abide strictly by Western ideals being touted as not real, but rather machinations for the ulterior motives of authoritarian states. This is apparent through the constant criticism of Russia's so-called 'managed' democracy and the many difficulties that it has been faced with since the end of the Soviet Union. Here, an attempt will be made to judge Russia fairly, without the cultural and political biases that have plagued a lot of the Western scholarship, on what it has accomplished and its future plans for the SCO.

In this light, Russia's dealings with the SCO prove in many cases that Moscow believes it to be a 'real' institution. To start with, the expanding formal structure and mechanisms of the SCO indicate to a large extent the effort Moscow is willing to put to the organization. Second, Russia seeks to create a steady foundation for further cooperation through confidence-building measures, thus ensuring the coexistence is a peaceful one with particular emphasis on Sino-Russian relations. Third, the SCO is a 'real' institution in the sense that the members share a similar understanding of the new transnational threats they face and recognize the need for transnational solutions to them. Fourth, Russia recognizes the possibility of profitable pooling by combining the members' many natural resources that could bring them a level of prosperity higher than they could manage on their own.

Finally, the question of whether the SCO constitutes 'bad multilateralism' will be looked at, using the test of what real added values it may bring.

6.1.1 Formal Structure

At the time of its founding, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization started with the creation of an emblem, a flag and a formal Charter. As with any other institution, the members had hoped the display of institutionalization would give it international respect and create momentum for further cooperation. Established in 2004 a full three years after the SCO was set up, the SCO Secretariat is one of two permanent bodies that the members have entrusted with the further work of the organization. The Secretary General meets with various organizations and states to project the SCO on the international scene. The Secretariat has contacts with various bodies that have been set up under the auspices of the SCO, including the SCO Business Council, the SCO Interbank Consortium and the SCO Forum.

The other permanent body of the SCO, the 'RATS' has been fundamental in accomplishing one of the most important goals of the SCO, which is to fight extremism, separatism, and terrorism. 'RATS' has been given several functions, including educating member states about terrorist movements inside the region, facilitating the exchange of information about these threats, and coordinating "exercises among SCO security forces and ... efforts aimed at disrupting terrorist financing."¹²³ The successes of 'RATS' are of course highly secretive, but there are claims that the structure has "prevented hundreds of attempted terrorist acts thanks to the information exchanged through the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure ('RATS') in Tashkent."¹²⁴ The viability of this information is questionable, but it is evident that Russia and the other members want to see this structure continue and work to deepen the cooperation, as terrorism remains high on both the local and international agenda. 'RATS' is a useful device for Russia to cooperate with neighboring states to fight one against one of the growing threats to global security. Victimized by terrorist incidents such as the Moscow theater siege in 2002 and the Beslan school hostage crisis in 2004, Russia's need for 'RATS' is quite evident. Obtaining information and extradition orders for terrorist elements who have used the oftentimes porous borders with Central Asia and China to escape Russian jurisdiction, is a major step to reduce the effects of terrorism and help stabilize Russia's national security.

¹²³ Weitz, "Reading the Shanghai SCO Summit."

¹²⁴ Weitz, "Reading the Shanghai SCO Summit."

In addition to the two permanent bodies, the SCO has created several others with the aim to increase contact between the member states. These include a disaster relief fund, both for manmade and natural disasters, the SCO Business Council, the SCO Interbank Association, and the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group. These bodies are all at different stages of development, but they have been doing some work to facilitate further benefits for the members. Russia has hosted many of the meetings for these groups and has shown its willingness to help support their development. Cultural cooperation has increased dramatically within the SCO and this is especially evident when looking at Sino-Russian relations. The relationship between the two powers is a pivotal one for the SCO and ensuring an understanding of their two distinct cultures can serve as a way to ease relations generally.

One of the more important SCO innovations for Russia was the establishment of a troop of election observers. The election observers are a tool to validate elections that others believe to be full of electoral fraud, as OSCE and other organizations have been critical of elections throughout the region. With the OSCE boycott of the 2007 Russian parliamentary elections due to restrictions put in place by Moscow on the Organization, the SCO came as another group of electoral observers that would verify the election.¹²⁵ A non-Russian dominated organization can prove to be an asset, not only for Russia but also for all SCO states, to oversee elections and give a show of respectability to the outcomes.

The array of bodies has grown dramatically since the SCO's creation and has made it more "institutionalized than any other Asian organization."¹²⁶ In fact, with this increased institutionalization, the SCO has become the most influential regional multilateral organization in Central Asia.¹²⁷ Given the previous virtual absence of institutionalization in the region, this may not be the greatest accomplishment, but it does speak to the sustained effort to increase cooperation. As neither Russia nor China can effectively point to a long history of multilateral work, both can in fact use the SCO to fill gaps, learn lessons and make up for lost time. It can also serve as a release valve for any misunderstandings that may arise, whether they arise through cultural, political, economic or military frictions.

¹²⁵ "World leaders congratulate Russia's President-Elect," *RIA Novosti*, 3 March 2003, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20080303/100533122.html>, accessed 19 February 2009.

¹²⁶ Susan L. Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 121.

¹²⁷ Antonenko, CER policy brief.

6.1.2 A Confidence-Building and Stabilizing Factor

The basis of the Organization, as stated above, was the desire to reduce the possibility of conflict on the borders around Russia, Central Asia and China. The security dialogue that has resulted has ensured that there have been no outbreaks of major fighting in this highly volatile region. Meetings between the members' heads of state and government and at various ministerial levels have brought a new level of understanding at least between elites. Russia, as arguably a very weak state during the last two decades, has benefited greatly from both the Treaty on Strengthening of Trust between Military Authorities in Border Territories and the Treaty on Mutual Reduction of Armed Forces in Border Territories. These treaties have aimed to increase communication at the necessary levels and can aid in reducing national security concerns about Russia's borders in the East, at a time when worries have been plentiful on the Western and Southern fronts. With less emphasis on trying to secure their borders against possible attacks, the relationship between the two greatest SCO members is now more stable and will provide a solid ground for further cooperation.

The relationship between Russia and China has in fact progressed steadily from the time of the Sino-Soviet split in the 20th century. The SCO has served as one way to integrate the two governments and the societies to a point where war between them will be highly unlikely. The SCO can also be viewed as a defensive or cautionary tactic by both Russia and China, with Russia seeking to re-establish its place in Central Asia and profit from the growing Chinese economy even as it faces the prospect of a gradual overall power shift in Beijing's favor. This is evident in the increasing desire by both to build a steady foundation for their relationship, both within the SCO and outside of it. The effort started with small steps aimed at increasing the trust on a bilateral level, and in time allowed their cooperation to flourish on a multilateral basis within the SCO. The SCO could turn out to be an important organization in that it could result in the cementing of better relations between Russia and China for the long term.¹²⁸ This could entail a large pooling of power that could mean an alternative source of global power or at least, a powerful influence in the eventual world power balance among multiple poles.

However, this is not to say that the Sino-Russian relationship is free from any vulnerability. Rather the two sides have to some extent been forced to cooperate due to their long border, their economic relationship and their similar interests in Central Asia. As

¹²⁸ Antonenko, CER policy brief.

the largest country in the world, Russia would spend much of the country's budget on defense if Moscow was forced to actively guard every kilometer of it, and at the same time to worry about the weaker post-Soviet neighbors' borders with China. The SCO has the ability of accomplishing something that the individual states have been unable to do for centuries, which is "smoothing over contradictions between rivals and in integrating differing interests of Russia, China and Central Asian states."¹²⁹ Even if Russia faces hostility on its Western borders from states that are either part of NATO or seeking to become members, the borders on that front are more firmly drawn and controlled than other borders that Russia must contend with. The borders with Central Asia have only recently been formalized and there is more reason to invest in securing them and hence increasing cooperation within the SCO. Border control with China has a further rationale to stop an unmitigated flow of people entering from there. Instituting a multilateral relationship between all these states is helpful in ensuring a peaceful border and reducing the possibility of Russia having to spend valuable resources on defending it.

Russia, the former regent of Central Asia, and China, the new, growing power seeking to increase its presence, must work together whether they like it or not. China's overwhelming power when it comes to economic growth is bound to be a worry for Russia whose post-Cold War economic development has been slow and is still reliant on its export on oil and weapons. Russia's relationship with China has also been slow to develop despite its historical and ideological ties. As China makes up 12.2% of Russia's imports, and exports being miniscule, Russia does not enjoy as great a position in the Chinese economy as other states.¹³⁰ Much of the products that Russia does export to China are in the form of weapons and its sale of arms to China is imperative for Russia's underdeveloped economy. This does not mean that there is a deep trust in Russia of China's intentions on using this weapons technology, as shown by the way that Moscow has limited exactly what technology is allowed to be sold to Beijing.

Out of several reasons why Russia must maintain close ties to China, culture and economics are but two of them. The past border disputes and the possibility of the two countries going to war have weighed heavily on Sino-Russian relations.¹³¹ As stated earlier, China has continuously stated its desire for more peaceful, multilateral ways to

¹²⁹ Portyakov, "Conference on Problems of Central Asia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," 149.

¹³⁰ "Russia," *CIA World Factbook*, 6 March 2009, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rs.html>, accessed 7 March 2009.

¹³¹ Stephen G. Brooks and William Curtis Wohlforth, *World out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy*, (Princeton: Princeton University, 2008), 73.

achieve peace and Russia has been taking advantage of that. They have sought to create an international presence together that is both positive and stable for themselves and the region. Under the surface, however, their relationship is anything but stable. The SCO is a necessary tool that will keep the peace and integrate their roles to ensure that there can be no misunderstandings between the two.

6.1.3 Transnational Threats—Transnational Solutions

Russia has faced many difficulties since the end of the Cold War, not least of which is the threat from many non-state actors in the form of terrorism, extremism, and separatism. Moscow takes pride in its self-sufficient arms industry and has one of the largest militaries in the world. However, the new international agenda is one where arms alone are not capable of fighting against actors that do not abide by international rules and norms. This issue has become a transnational one increasingly difficult to solve via traditional military means, and is forcing Russia to look to other solutions in order to deal with it.

Russia has seen that international cooperation is essential to combat the biggest threat to its own national security, and those of its closest neighbors. Its mountainous southern border is extremely fraught with terrorist activity which is becoming more extreme in its methods as states try to combat it. Terrorism is one of the three main threats the SCO is directed at, and Russia is committed to utilizing the SCO as a tool to combat this very real danger. The threat of non-state actors obtaining weapons of mass destruction and using them against the governments in the region has become an all too real possibility. With such threats apparently on the increase, there is a new sense of urgency to find solutions to these pressing problems and Russia's own history of terrorist attacks has shoved this issue into the limelight. SCO summits have accordingly tackled many of the threats that are being posed by non-state actors utilizing the porous borders and internal strife of the region to their advantage. The risk of terrorists and other non-state actors acquiring nuclear weapons, for instance, helps explain the Dushanbe declaration in 2008, which called for a nuclear-free Central Asia in hopes of staving off that possibility.¹³² 'RATS' is but one SCO vehicle that has become an essential cooperative body aiming to reduce the impact of non-state actors on the national security of the members.

Central Asia is a region that is in great need of cooperation against the root causes of terrorism and the SCO can serve as a medium to do just that. While Russia can try to

¹³² "Dushanbe Declaration of Heads of SCO Member States," *Official Website of the Russian Presidency of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, http://en.sco2009.ru/docs/documents/dus_declaration.html, accessed 21 February 2009.

contain many of these problems, it will not be able to handle the crises without a concentrated effort at fighting them and some form of support from neighboring states that may not be so adept at controlling the growing non-state threats. Russia has seen that it must invest in international cooperation in order to combat the biggest threat to its national security. The mountainous southern border has been a security problem for Moscow for some time and without support from Central Asian states, Russia will not be able to fully fight against these non-state actors. As one of the three main threats the SCO is directed at, Russia is committed to utilizing the SCO as a tool to combat this very real danger.

6.1.4 Pooling Resources

The SCO members have many plans that foresee a pooling of their resources and their knowledge in order to gain more than they would on their own. The pooling of resources and expertise within the 'RATS' framework is aimed at combating security threats and has given the SCO some returns on its investment. In addition to pooling security resources, there has been increasing cooperation in areas of finance. These acts of cooperation include the SCO Development Fund, the SCO Business Council, and the Interbank Association. The economic cooperation of the SCO seeks to augment the assets of the member states, increasing trade for the entire region. A goal was set forth in 2003 for the "free movement of goods, services, capital, and technology by 2020."¹³³ The SCO has thereby decided to create an economic union on a step-by-step basis, grouping together more than a third of the world into a free trade area and creating intense competition for the rest of the world. Work on the goal has however been somewhat slowed and negotiations have been difficult, pushing the end date back to 2025.¹³⁴ While similar attempts at pooling resources have been attempted under Russia's sole leadership in other institutional frameworks of the former Soviet Union, they have been dysfunctional and not producing bona fide results. The SCO's at least partial success and its ability to draw on the huge resources of China puts it ahead in the comparison.

As already noted, one of the greatest resources that exist in the SCO is the large reserves of hydrocarbons in Russia and Central Asia. As one of the greatest consumers of energy, China wants and needs access to Russia's energy reserves located just across the border in Siberia. There are limitless possibilities for the SCO in regards to the pooling of hydrocarbons if it were given the responsibility of regulating the trade of those

¹³³ Weitz, "Reading the Shanghai SCO Summit."

¹³⁴ Ingmar Oldberg, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Powerhouse or Paper Tiger?" (Stockholm: Stockholm Defense Research Agency, 2007), 18.

hydrocarbons both amongst the member and with the outside world. The possibility of creating an energy club within the SCO has been brought up several times in the past few years. It was in 2006 that Russia's former President Vladimir Putin called for the creation of an energy club.¹³⁵ The Kazakh President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, also "told the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) meeting in Bishkek that it should form an energy club."¹³⁶ Nazarbayev saw this as a distinct possibility whereby the pipelines established during the Soviet Union "could form the basis for an energy market—adding that Kazakhstan had already drawn up a draft strategy for an SCO energy club."¹³⁷ The SCO's prospect of overseeing the region's increasingly important energy wealth, gives it the distinct possibility of becoming an important economic bloc on a world-wide scale. The ability to utilize the hydrocarbons as a positive aspect in the cooperation of the SCO would help in establishing the Organization at a global level and cementing it as a 'real' institution.

The SCO has made some effort to reduce the possibility of this being viewed as a 'cartel' in the same class as the Organization for Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), expressing it rather as a cooperative effort to help develop the region. There is, however, a greater chance of this type of cooperation being seen as an attempt to fix natural gas prices throughout the world, and even potentially to use it as a political tool in the same vein as Gazprom's cutting off the gas to Ukraine – which brings us to the more negative view of SCO purposes.

6.1.5 'Bad Multilateralism'

The rules that guide institutionalization are bound to be guided by cultural underpinnings; hence, different cultures may have different ideas as to how institutions should function. When there is institutionalization in forms that are contrary to Western institutions, many scholars may be blindsided to the positive aspects and declare that an enterprise like the SCO is not 'real' multilateralism as a result. As history has shown, however, things are never clear-cut with Russia and this enigmatic quality extends to the SCO. Outside of the West, other rules guide institutionalization that correspond better to local states' plans for their cooperation than a Western ideal. Behind the issue of institutionalization, we may also trace a process of 'norm-localization.' This occurs when a norm from another culture

¹³⁵ Blagov, "Russian moves spark 'gas OPEC' fears."

¹³⁶ "Energy Dominates Shanghai Summit," *BBC News Online*, 17 August 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6949021.stm>, accessed 30 August 2008.

¹³⁷ "Energy Dominates Shanghai Summit."

“may be initially feared and resisted” but if found to “enhance the legitimacy and authority of their extant institutions and practices,” there is a chance of its being adapted to the locals’ own way of living.¹³⁸ In the same ways, the useful parts of Western multilateral experiments have been taken and integrated with a type of governance naturally found in other regions to create a new type of institution suiting each case’s historical and cultural needs. Russia’s understanding of the SCO can and should thus be related to Russia’s own history and other aspects of its local context. While Russia has lived under democracy for almost 20 years, its history prior to 1990 was far from being democratic. It will be difficult for any state to simply ignore its historical memory and adapt to a completely Western concept that will have little meaning for its elites, let alone peoples.

Russia’s emphasis has been heavily placed on the territorial integrity of states, which is very likely due to the many separatist causes in Russia. At the same time, it has found that there needs to be integration of some type to reap the benefits that institutions can bring. While in the Western view the SCO members’ approach may be deemed ‘value-free,’ they do have their own type of common values that bring them together and achieve a modicum of integration while maintaining sovereignty to a degree that is in line with their norms and traditions. Article 2 of the SCO Charter explicitly commits the members to:

“Mutual respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the states, inviolability of state borders, nonaggression, non-interference policy toward internal affairs of other nations, non-use of force or any threat thereof in any international relations, waiver of any unilateral military superiority in the neighboring territories.”¹³⁹

This formula signals the intent to avoid a degree of integration and intrusive regulation that the SCO members are patently not ready for, and implicitly rejects the Western rationale for intervention; but it also has real strategic content in a regional setting where powers’ tense relations would make mutual ‘interference’ a highly hazardous option both for themselves and the world. It also reflects a state-based philosophy that (as noted before) is more generally and typically ‘Asian’, and from which even the most West-imitating groups like ASEAN have moved away only cautiously. It is noteworthy here that India, ‘the world’s largest democracy’, as well as Pakistan and Iran has felt comfortable

¹³⁸ Amitav Acharya, “How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism,” *International Organization* 58(2), 2004: 248.

¹³⁹ “Charter of SCO.”

enough to become an active observer in the SCO. At the same time, the SCO's Charter does keep open the possibility for greater steps towards integration to be taken in the future as a "step-by-step transition."¹⁴⁰

In sum, the best diagnosis of the SCO is not that it is 'value-free' but that it stands and falls by values different from, and sometimes frankly inimical to, those of the West. This does not make it any the less 'real' or indeed reduce the Organization's potential for genuinely altering regional circumstances. As the states outside of the 'West' emerge as possible competitors to the current international order, their 'value-free' institutionalism may suit their cultural and political systems quite well and may – whether we like it or not – at least in the near term enhance their entire region's ability to compete.

6.1.6 Conclusion

The signs that the SCO is a 'real' institution are many. However, this does not detract from the many glaring points revealing a side of the enterprise that would be counter-intuitive if its claims were entirely genuine. As discussed below, Russia's continuous use of bilateral and unilateral moves to accomplish its goals runs against the multilateral aims of the SCO. In addition, the SCO organs have been given insufficient power and resources to fully plot out the faithful execution of its plans. This along with many other patent contradictions will be outlined in the next two sections that will show how other aspects of Moscow's use of the SCO do not treat it as a 'real' institution at all.

¹⁴⁰ "Charter of SCO."

6.2 HYPOTHESIS 2: THE SCO AS A COUNTER-INSTITUTION

The idea of a ‘counter’-institution is steeped in Realist thinking and is an easy notion to link with Russia’s perception of the SCO. Not only does Realist thought highlight the balancing tactics likely to be used by a state seeking power, but it is also based on the ‘zero-sum’ view of a state gaining security at the expense of others. The first feature that relates to this in Russia’s treatment of the SCO is Russia’s well-known concern about and opposition to the growing power of NATO – and going with and beyond it, the USA as ‘sole superpower’ – in the post-Cold War age. Russia, unable to fight this presence single-handedly, must find other avenues to climb back into its desired position as a superpower. This endeavor has proven quite difficult, with Russia’s own assemblage of organizations relatively ineffective to halt change within the post-Soviet region, let alone projecting its power on a global scale. The device of the SCO which also brings in the massive weight of China may thus be seen simply as a way to challenge and balance the Western bloc at a global level, and more specifically to help block further Western encroachments in the members’ own territories and backyards – a hypothesis supported e.g. by the already mentioned story of the Astana declaration and also the SCO’s Afghanistan Contact Group established in 2004. Success in this aim for the SCO would not prevent the institution from sharing the essential limitations and potential weaknesses (as discussed in the definitional section above) of any organization whose sole or main rationale is opposition to another.

To test this ‘counter’- hypothesis this section will need first to explain the necessity for ‘balancing’ the West and how far the SCO fits the bill; then, in what ways the SCO genuinely ‘mirrors’ its Western competitor – is it a real ‘alliance’ of Russia and China? – and how and why it may not. If some elements do not fit with the simple ‘counter’ hypothesis, it could be because the institution’s motives and claims are hollow (‘pseudo’), but also because – as suggested in the previous section - it serves other Realist purposes not intrinsically connected with the Western rival.

6.2.1 An Alternative Framework: An ‘Eastern NATO’

As explained above, after the breakup of the Soviet Union Russia lost a great deal of standing and a substantial part of its territory. As NATO expands to encompass many countries that were once part of Russia’s backyard, Russia is becoming more and more worried about NATO’s presence there. Russia’s former Central European satellites have fully embraced Western ideals and organizations and others within former Soviet territory are doing much in their power to become members, with Ukraine and Georgia to the fore.

Although NATO may protest that these actions are not taken against Russia but for everyone's security benefit, there is no denying that the Alliance and many of its members have been quite critical of Russia and many of its policies. The process is thus easily seen from Moscow as chipping away at Russia's security.

Against this background, for Russia to create its own grouping that also brings in extra forces (compared with the old Warsaw Pact or Soviet Union) fits with a competitive, zero-sum logic at several levels. First, it provides a further way (beyond the smaller post-Soviet groups, discussed again below) for Moscow to try to hold together its remaining more loyal neighbors. The color revolutions that seemed to be spreading like wildfire in the mid-2000's ran through both Ukraine and Georgia, as well as Kyrgyzstan, a traditional Russian 'ally' and SCO member. The first two of these with Azerbaijan and Moldova formed a grouping, GUAM, openly dedicated to minimizing Russia's grip on their territory and strengthening links with the West. In attempts to re-consolidate its position, Moscow has increasingly pulled back from any serious attempt to make a pan-post-Soviet framework (like the CIS) work and has instead concentrated on those states where it can still exercise some influence. The SCO includes, and enhances the status of, four former Soviet Republics that value (in varying degrees) their relationship with Russia. This would at least give some validation to Russia as a still strategic, sought-after power. From a Western viewpoint, of course, it also strengthens the view that the SCO is an autocrats' club, and that the pledge that "member state secret services will cooperate may not only mean improving needed anti-terrorism cooperation, but further crackdowns on non-violent democratic forces in Eurasia."¹⁴¹

Secondly, Russia together with these states and China can present the SCO as an equal and alternative to NATO (and in some respects, the EU) at global level. This explains inter alia the effort the members have made to get it recognized as an institution at the UN and OSCE, and - with less success - to establish a direct 'dialogue of equals' with NATO. Both of the SCO's two main states, Russia and China, have stated their desire for greater multiplicity in the centers of power in the world. This is very easy to see as a critique of Washington's unipolar status and their willingness to offer themselves as alternative centers of power. The emphasis their own organization places on sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs harkens back to a day when the world was forever split up into two camps, Democratic Capitalist states versus the Communist Authoritarian

¹⁴¹ Cohen, "After Shanghai: Geopolitical Shifts in Eurasia."

states. The behavior of both powers, whether conscious or not, suggests a return to a division of the world into right and wrong, black and white. The offering of an SCO platform of principles, rather than just pitching it for practical and local aims, fits in with this motivation: and some aspects of the ‘Shanghai spirit’ might indeed resonate with states in other parts of the world more than the West would like and allow for.

Thirdly, the SCO can be used and has been used to try to block and even reverse Western incursions in its own backyard. The behavior of the SCO can easily be read as a “Sino-Russian military and political bloc through which both Beijing and Moscow hope to counter the increased US presence in the region.”¹⁴² While at first supporting the US’s war on terror that led to the Western presence in and around Afghanistan, Russia has come to be very uncomfortable with its decision. Now, instead of supporting the US by allowing it to station coalition forces in Central Asia, the “priorities of the SCO member states have shifted.”¹⁴³ As the presence of US troops has multiplied and includes the forces now stationed in Iraq as well, the Russian government has sought to reduce the effect of the Americans on its traditional sphere of influence. It is in this light that we can see the SCO’s 2005 Astana Declaration calling for a timetable for the withdrawal of Coalition forces from Central Asia. Though it was Uzbekistan that first made the call, the surmise has been circulating extensively that it was at the urging of China and Russia.

As also noted, it was the Astana Declaration that made the West finally pay attention to the SCO and start seeing it as a threat, giving greater currency to the ‘counter-’ view of the organization as a traditional Realpolitik venture aiming to reduce the influence of the West.¹⁴⁴ As a bloc based solely in the East with no ‘Western’ power in it, the “SCO attracted criticisms and mistrust due to the ambiguity of its international status.”¹⁴⁵ Specifically, attempts by the US to obtain observer status in the organization have been denied repeatedly by the SCO which tends to undermine the claim of being an organization with purely constructive aims for Asian security.

As to Astana follow-up, and with the Western outcry over Uzbekistan’s treatment of its internal dissidents in the Andijan uprising increasing, Uzbekistan did indeed rid itself

¹⁴² Taleh Ziyadov, “The Battle of Forums: Transformation of Regional Organizations in Eurasia,” *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute* website. 12 July 2006. <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4047/print>, accessed 30 August 2008.

¹⁴³ Ziyadov.

¹⁴⁴ Zhao Huasheng, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization at 5: Achievements and Challenges Ahead,” *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 4(3), 2006, 107-108; Taleh Ziyadov, “The Battle of Forums: Transformation of Regional Organizations in Eurasia.”

¹⁴⁵ Huasheng, 107.

of the US presence on the Karshi-Khanabad military base. Although Kyrgyzstan for the moment re-approved (for more money) the US military base located in Manas, in early 2009 - when Russia offered debt forgiveness and loans - the Kyrgyz President signed a decree to end the US's presence there, and the Parliament quickly voted for it.¹⁴⁶

A further example is the development of SCO policy on Afghanistan itself. The SCO-Afghanistan contact group was set up in 2005 due to the importance of Afghanistan for the security of the entire region. Russia in particular understands the difficulty of fighting a war in Afghanistan having invaded the country in the late 1970's. Having effectively crushed the Soviet army, the Afghan warriors who were supported by the US were able to claim victory. With its own history, Moscow realizes the hard work that is needed to stabilize the country and to bring in a functioning government. In addition, it is also very apparent what affect the war in Afghanistan has on the entire region, with the cross-border drug- and human-trafficking that is reeking havoc on the population throughout Central Asia and beyond. The SCO has opted to increase its work with Afghanistan, realizing that in order to have any effect its neighbors must be actively involved in fighting the war¹⁴⁷ - but also sensing that gaining the trust of the future Afghan regime itself could be a strategic prize. While their past relations have been quite stormy, Russia is willing to show that the SCO can offer the Afghans another way of governing, seeing how democracy has had quite a brutal start and the waning influence the US has in the country.¹⁴⁸ Creating a new way for Afghanistan to develop would allow Russia, via the SCO, to extend its influence Southwards as once more a formidable power that has another way of governing to offer the world.¹⁴⁹

In fact, the Afghan government has bought Russian weapons and has its personnel trained in Russia, no doubt as reinsurance in case the US decides to pull out before things are settled in Afghanistan.¹⁵⁰ These activities, along with the behavior of the SCO, member states in many other forums, have raised the prominence of the organization, profiling it for some as a serious "challenge to American interests."¹⁵¹ The possibility of the US investing billions of dollars and countless lives to fight a war on terror to throw out

¹⁴⁶ "Kyrgyz Parliament approves foreign troop pullout from Manas."

¹⁴⁷ Oldberg, 17.

¹⁴⁸ Bailes, et al., "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization," 2.

¹⁴⁹ Oldberg, 18.

¹⁵⁰ Dmitry Shlapentokh, "The Afghanistan-Russia Rapprochement and its Geopolitical implications," *CACI Analyst*, 30 May 2007. <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/3872/print>, accessed 30 August.

¹⁵¹ Rizwan Zeb, "Pakistan's Bid for SCO Membership: Prospects and Pitfalls," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute* website. 26 July 2006. <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4085/print>, accessed 30 August 2008.

the Taliban in Afghanistan, only to be thrown out of the country in favor of another power that has done little work in fighting the actual war on the ground and has opposing strategic aims is quite frightening. In this particular context, the US has a quarrel with the SCO, in particular Russia, as trying to usurp the work it has already done.

Last and not least, it may be noted that the SCO's energy ambitions discussed above can also and largely seen as built in a competitive spirit against Western, and especially US, ventures in the Eurasian energy market or even the interests of European consumers more generally. As an organization, it has been argued that the SCO "must also be seen as part of a policy aiming to use its energy resources as a weapon to exert pressure on its neighbors."¹⁵² With control of the pipelines that are found throughout Central Asia giving it more or less full control of a major resource that is becoming an essential aspect of any country's national security, Russia has sought to utilize the SCO in such a way that will team it up with other energy-rich states to make it part of a club that can dominate the new century.

6.2.2 Bilateral Relationship

Russia believes itself to be constantly on the defensive to protect not only its national security, but also its very existence as a nation-state. It needs a powerful ally in order to regain some of the power it has lost, and in the early 21st century that ally is China. However, China is rapidly becoming not just a regional presence but also a global leader due to its giant economy that is growing at astronomical rates, dwarfing many of its regional competitors, which include Russia. The 'real' institution hypothesis stressed how, as a result, Russia needs both to contain Beijing through partnership and glean what economic profit it can in the process. In the 'counter-' connection, however, Russia has also sought to use China's international clout for its own benefit. By joining China in a regional organization free from interference from other world powers, Russia has opened the possibilities of Russian and Chinese cooperation leading to the creation of an alternative pole of power to the United States.

Many Western (and non-Western) sources have jumped to the conclusion that the SCO is therefore a Sino-Russian alliance, designed as a way "to counter the increased US presence in the region."¹⁵³ It is easy to assume this with the history and behavior of these two states, but the fact remains that there is no formal agreement within the SCO literature

¹⁵² Khatuna Saukvadze, "Russia's New Doctrine of Neo-Imperialism," *CACI Analyst* 8 February 2006. <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/3724>, accessed 30 August 2008.

¹⁵³ Ziyadov.

that says in case of an attack, any state within the SCO can expect the full support of its fellow members. In addition, it is understood that “China and Russia are well aware that (a full scale-military alliance), such a move would provoke in Washington,” and “while Russia might risk it, China would not.”¹⁵⁴ Russia’s erratic behavior is also something that China is obviously worried about. The Russian war with Georgia in August 2008 and the subsequent Russian recognition of the two breakaway provinces created a dangerous precedent in terms of secessionist provinces. Fighting secessionist movements is exactly one of the fundamental purposes of the SCO and for Russia to unilaterally recognize two such secessionist movements ran counter to the purpose of the organization. The unwillingness of the SCO as a whole to recognize the breakaway provinces during the 2008 Dushanbe summit shows the strength of feeling and resolve on this point of other members, and China in particular. So although Russia and China are in fact allies, the two have a very tense relationship and this will have a major effect on any type of work that the SCO attempts.

Even so, there are some respects in which the SCO’s profile does resemble a political-military bloc, with both major states claiming to be “resurgent powers, alternatives to US dominance in international affairs.”¹⁵⁵ This is obvious when one looks at the SCO’s counterterrorist exercises. For the first few years, they were based on bilateral terms and it was not until the 2007 ‘Peaceful’ Exercises that the entirety of the organization was involved. While publicly tied to the SCO’s devotion to counter-terrorism, the actual exercises are based much more on traditional military concepts and scenarios, using heavy equipments more appropriate for high-intensity war. Some believe that these exercises are “an attempt to boast Russian and Chinese military capabilities, as well as the growing ties between the two countries.”¹⁵⁶ The inclusion of aircraft maneuvers, submarine exercises and tanks is certainly more than a typical counter-insurgency maneuver would entail. The ‘RATS’ has also trained Special Forces for potential nuclear situations.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ “Shanghai Grouping moves centre stage.”

¹⁵⁵ “Russia and China’s mutual interests.”

¹⁵⁶ Erica Marat, “Russia and China Unite Forces in Peace Mission 2007,” *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute* website, 5 April 2007. <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4586/print>, accessed 30 August 2008.

¹⁵⁷ Nicklas Norling, “RATS Exercise in Tashkent: Concern over nuclear terrorism?” *CACI Analyst*, 5 April 2006, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4470/print>, accessed 30 August 2008.

In addition, the military exercises of the SCO are sometimes believed to be warnings for states/secessionist areas around them.¹⁵⁸ The ability to try and scare off any possible secessionist movements would indicate that the SCO is designed to be a tool, and potentially a military one, for both the domestic and international policies of the members. Russia in particular needs a sustainable, peaceful region surrounding it in order for its economic situation to stabilize and it can quell the many independent and secessionist regions on its borders.

6.2.3 Limits to the NATO/West Parallel

It has been argued that the SCO is not necessarily discredited as a counterpart for Western institutions simply because it has different values from, for example, NATO. In fact part of its whole point is to offer a political, and governance, alternative. Even so the SCO's credibility - and usefulness for Russia - as a 'counter'-device may be (i) limited by the other purposes it must put energy into fulfilling, such as stabilizing Russia's and China's own relations, and (ii) undermined by differences and lack of solidarity that go far beyond the kind of internal divisions NATO itself has to contend with. Such differences can be particularly treacherous for a 'counter'-institution since many of its members have little to agree over in the first place except a common enemy. While SCO statements try to gloss over the many problems between the two powers, Russia and China have an antagonistic history that will not be soothed over easily. The two may in fact have very different goals, "which the SCO may in the long run not be sufficient to manage."¹⁵⁹ The evidence of this is growing and greater worries have surfaced regarding the stability of this organization. It has already been noted how Moscow's insecurities have prevented it from allowing trade in its more sensitive arms to China, its ostensible ally, fearful that these sales would endanger the national security of Russia.¹⁶⁰

It also seems likely, though impossible to argue through fully here, that there is difference of quality between Russia's and China's whole world-views including sincerity about 'real' multilateralism. Russia has a history of standing its ground on foreign and domestic matters, whether it goes against the international community or a particular state, with little thought to the long-term consequences. China, however, as a rising power has been attempting to recreate its image as a peaceful, cooperative partner in international

¹⁵⁸ Norling, "China and Russia: Partners with Tensions," 40.

¹⁵⁹ Ariel Cohen, "After Shanghai: Geopolitical Shifts in Eurasia" *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute* website, 28 June 2006. <http://www.cacianalyst.org?q=node/4024/print>, accessed 30 August 2008.

¹⁶⁰ Petrov.

relations, and has the self-confidence to enter into even quite deep international commitments where it feels sure of remaining in control. For the moment, China must utilize Russia if for nothing more than just the sheer size and influence that it has in the region that they share. However, there is a great deal of natural resources that Russia has that China needs to fuel its own economic and population growth. This creates an existential tension between the two neighbors that will prevent Russia from utilizing the SCO to the fullest, and which also limits any chance the two would get together to antagonize the US to the point of a military confrontation.

Aside from not having any type of institutional guarantee of military aid in case of attack, such basic rifts deny the SCO the ability to fully mirror its supposed counterpart. The confidence-building measures have, to some extent, increased the security of the region, but have not settled the age-old issues that plague the major powers' relationships still today. The SCO area is still far from being a complete and guaranteed no-war zone of the kind NATO has achieved and sustained for 60 years – still less the single integrated space and degree of supranational unity that the EU can offer.¹⁶¹

A further very fundamental weakness is that there is no guarantee Russia and China will always be, or even are today, more important to each other than certain other powers are for each of them. Russia's relationship with China is really an offshoot of the relationship Russia has with the US. It is a distinct possibility that both states would sacrifice the relationship with each other for a healthy relationship with Washington or with the Euro-Atlantic bloc more broadly.¹⁶² It would be quite simple for the US to gain support from either side to dwindle down the cooperation between Russia and China. The recognition sought from the West by Russia and the increased economic cooperation, of which there is so much more experience in East-West relations than in Sino-Russian history, can easily put a rift in the SCO

6.2.4 Conclusion

The work of the SCO can definitely be seen in large part as a 'counter'-institution from Russia's viewpoint, with both defensive and self-assertive aims. The desire of the SCO to both mirror and balance out the US is apparent, claiming the same status as NATO, but at the same time offering an alternative framework based on a culture that is decidedly non-

¹⁶¹ There are of course other huge differences in the performance of the SCO compared with NATO, such as its failure to carry out any actual operations so far (including outside its own area) and the lack of a full equivalent to enlargement.

¹⁶² Norling, "China and Russia: Partners with Tensions," 40.

Western. The two main powers of the SCO, Russia and China, have repeatedly stated their desire to live in a multipolar world, making no secret of the fact that they disapprove of the US's unilateralist moves and total disregard for the United Nations in cases like Iraq. The local 'countering' effect is also transparent: both the Astana episode and the SCO-Afghanistan Contact group deserve special mention as an overt attempt by the SCO to counter the US's and NATO's activities in the region, proving itself to be an alternative social and political structure.

Even though the SCO states have not offered legal guarantees regarding their backing of each other in times of war, nothing excludes the possibility that if attacked, the members would indeed come to each other's aid – perhaps above all against non-state enemies. The counterterrorism exercises have usually involved military might that would otherwise only be necessary in traditional wars. However the SCO (Russia in particular) cannot escape the animosity that is felt amongst and between the members themselves. Instead of being an open bridge for further cooperation, there is little fortify their relationships outside of their mutual dislike of the Western way of governing. If that threat were to suddenly disappear, there is a high chance that the fractures that have been steadily building up over the years will completely break and reduce the chance of the powers being able to work together again.

As has been shown, the image of strategic equivalence between the SCO and NATO also fails to fit the way these institutions relate to each or the total pattern of geopolitical relations. All the while that the NATO and the SCO are portrayed as being in competition (whether NATO knows this or not), the USA and other NATO members are cooperating extensively with both China and Russia. The scant attention paid to the SCO as a whole by NATO, and the SCO's concentration on business only slightly linked with West-East quarrels, undermines the idea that each is the other's main target. If a real East-West dialectic exists in the region, it is more about "rivalry and competition for sources of energy and pipelines that carry it."¹⁶³ This leads us towards the third thesis, that there is actually far less to the SCO than meets the eye.

¹⁶³ Zeb.

6.3 HYPOTHESIS 3: THE SCO AS A PSEUDO-INSTITUTION

The use of an institution by one or more of its members to conceal a unilateralist and even an uncooperative stance is the basis of a ‘pseudo’-institution. This idea is not a likely one for many states due to the sheer amount of work required to create an institution for no real reward. However as stated above, Russia is not like any other state in the world and has material reasons to find a ‘fig-leaf’ of multilateralism useful. How then may the ‘pseudo’-elements in a venture like the SCO be measured? First, there will be a difference between what the stated purpose of the institution was and what the members really feel about it or are using it for; particularly, its positive declarations will lack sincerity. Second, it will be distinguished by the reliance on unilateral or bilateral actions, and/or resort to other available institutions, shying away from the institutionalization of multilateral deals. Finally, the states will be unable to produce enough funding and enough goodwill to see through their pronouncements due to insufficient resources. The ‘pseudo’-institution will also have issues over cooperating with the other members fully and the organization will lack any real international standing.

6.3.1 Different Motives

The ability to utilize an institution in such a way as to hide unilateralist, selfish motivations behind decidedly multilateralist, cooperative actions is a rare ability, but one that Russia would be able to master quite well. Russia has used the SCO as a proxy to advance its own interests in the region, in contrast to the stated goals of using it as a way to multilaterally battle the many challenges that faces the region.¹⁶⁴ The state of the Russian military, the safety of the Sino-Russian border and its attempt to hold onto its power in Central Asia all testify to Russia’s ulterior motives for building up the SCO as a ‘pseudo’-institution to mask both its weaknesses and its surviving ambitions. As part of the unending predicament that Russia finds itself in, its “international position will continue to be that the country is too big to be integrated in other clubs, but too small to play a first order role itself.”¹⁶⁵ The device of a ‘pseudo’-institution is a way out of this, and describes Russia’s intentions to use the multilateralist framework of the SCO to mask a more sinister behavior behind the scenes, in which bilateral relationships will be cemented at the expense of other members and the institution’s own development.

¹⁶⁴ Tim Murphy, “East of the Middle East: The SCO and US Security Implications,” CIAO, <http://www.cdi.org>, December 21, 2006, 1.

¹⁶⁵ Trenin, 77.

The Russian state since the Soviet Union has been self-reliant in its defense, particularly the weaponry and is very proud of this fact.¹⁶⁶ However, the current disarray of the Russian military is another reason that a peaceful neighborhood is imperative if Russia is to survive in its current state in the long-term.¹⁶⁷ Failure to fully project its power in its region through military means would allow its former fellow Soviet republics to seek outside assistance and even allow greater US and Chinese military presence. If Russia continues along its current path of letting its military atrophy, it is likely to be marginalized in regional security affairs even around its periphery. This would be an unacceptable thought for Moscow and it is ready to employ different tactics to ensure its status there as the regional power, including utilizing the SCO for this purpose.

The fundamental mistrust between Russia and China, which makes the SCO's disciplines necessary and belies their apparently friendly nature, has already been underlined. The Russo-Chinese border has been set for the most part, but its defenses are in horrible shape and need to be overhauled on the Russian side. Russia has been promising this since the end of the Soviet Union but very little has been done.¹⁶⁸ It must therefore rely on its neighbors more than would be necessary if Russian border checks could be strengthened. The possibility of an Eastern neighbor encroaching on its vastly deserted Eastern side has been a fear of many living in Russia's Far East, as well as Russian politicians. Moreover, Russia has not been as active as China has in developing the border between the two, as well as the border regions. While Russian cities lack funding, the Chinese government and Chinese businesses have been increasing their development in the area. This is evident when comparing the growth of the two where in one instance on the Russian side, there is a hospital and a hostel, while the Chinese side has developed malls and four-star hotels.¹⁶⁹

Overall, little has been done on the Russian side in order to seriously pump resources into the area to give the Far East the tools needed to remain Russian. This has been problematic as many Russian politicians have a hard time imagining that Russia does not end with the "Moscow Ring Road" and that development should be expanded to outside the Western populated areas.¹⁷⁰ Yet it has been stated repeatedly by many Russian

¹⁶⁶ Trenin, 70.

¹⁶⁷ Rumer, 62.

¹⁶⁸ Viktor Larin, "Interregional Cooperation between Russia and China at the Beginning of the 21st Century: Experience, Problems, Prospects," *Far Eastern Affairs* 36(2), 2008: 7.

¹⁶⁹ Larin, 11.

¹⁷⁰ Larin, 14.

scholars that if Russia does not develop this region, then China will.¹⁷¹ They see China as only biding its time until Russia becomes weaker, allowing China to draw its own borders according to its historical memory.¹⁷² In this light, the SCO can be seen as a framework that will enable Russia to challenge any moves by China into its territory, but which in itself neither curbs Chinese strength nor establishes the real Sino-Russian friendship needed to exclude such negative options.

6.3.2 Bilateral/Unilateral Actions and Rival Frameworks

Strong bilateral relations can exist both within ‘real’ and ‘counter’- institutions but their functionality differs from that under ‘pseudo’-institutions. A ‘real’ or ‘counter’-institution would like to see bilateral deals and reconciliations build up greater power for the institution to create an alternative power source. In a ‘pseudo-’ situation, bilateral relations usurp the institution’s declared roles and may even undermine it, especially when they have an element of divide-and-rule.

The use of bilateral negotiations has in fact remained the default mode of the SCO member states, particularly Russia. Despite the many calls for multilateral approaches to the problems to be tackled, there is much less evidence of such cooperation in the actual output of the SCO. Russia’s clear preference is to work bilaterally and if possible within spheres that it can easily control. Whether Russian issues arise with China or with individual Central Asian states, the mode of handling them is not developing towards a multilateral framework.

The cooperation between Russia and China is the very foundation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. They both have distinct civilizations that have even been viewed as potential threats against the West. Their history as allies has been a difficult one and it is unlikely that the two would like to see their relationship become one based strictly on a multilateral framework – where others could witness and interfere in it. The agreement that gave Russia and China the steady foundation for the continuation of their work within the SCO, the Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation, was based solely on bilateral negotiations. It did not contain the rest of the members nor did it consult with them openly.

Likewise, the relationship that Russia has with the Central Asian states of the SCO is more complicated than the SCO alone is capable of handling. Along with history and

¹⁷¹ Trenin, 72.

¹⁷² A. K. Mohanty, “A Russian Understanding of China’s SCO Policy,” *China Report* 43(2), 2007: 253.

cultural connections, Russia's relationship with these states is interconnected through vast nets of institutionalization using many other organizations (see below). Much cooperation is done either on a bilateral basis, or simply through work in the other organizations. Russia has individual ties and agreements with each of these states on economic, security, military, and social levels. None of them has acted on the words that have been repeated many times throughout communiqués and declarations from the SCO about raising their relations to a multilateral level.

Similarly, in the economic sphere, trade deals remain bilateral. Despite the possibility of an SCO energy club and the increasing calls for more cooperation, there has been less than enthusiastic support for going forward with such cooperation within the confines of the SCO. An agreement between Russia and China has finally been reached after many years of tough negotiations for the construction of a pipeline to deliver oil to China.

Specific issues aside, there is some concern that Russia does not want the SCO to gain too much control over its relations with Central Asia and will keep treating them on a bilateral basis. One aspect that may make it shy away from utilizing the SCO to the fullest is that China is there to stop any self-serving Russian plans if there is nothing to be gained by other members, and indeed China and the others might overrule Russian hopes as they did in the Georgia episode discussed above. This explains the vote procedure for the SCO, which also reflects the members' governments' authoritarian nature. The states are not required to vote on any single issue that comes up, but rather there must be a consensus through negotiation before any work can go through.¹⁷³ While Russia cannot solely be blamed for this way of working, it is very clear that nothing will happen in the SCO without the cooperation of all the members.

More generally also, for Russia to give the SCO too much power would be a double-edged sword. Moscow wants to be more powerful to compete on the international stage and would accept the SCO to a vehicle for that purpose, but on the other hand, it is frightened at just what the organization may become. Russia is certainly not enthusiastic about giving the SCO supranational powers and may also be hedging its bets in consolidating the SCO militarily, as compared with other institutions.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ "Charter of the SCO."

¹⁷⁴ Bailes et al. "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization," 6.

This brings us to the other frameworks existing within the SCO's zone. While openly advocating using the SCO, Moscow has also exhibited signs that it would rather keep the CSTO and CIS as the principal institutions in its repertoire – not least because China is not there to share power and interfere. Russia has sought, through the CIS and CSTO, to regain some of its former military and strategic control of the states concerned. The CSTO unlike the SCO is based on clear military guarantees, and includes defense equipment programs and common strategic projects e.g. on air defense.¹⁷⁵ Pronouncements from the Russian government give the impression that the CIS and CSTO, along other Russian-dominated organizations, are at the forefront of Moscow's foreign policy. In many declarations found on the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/main_eng, there are relatively fewer mentions of the SCO when compared to the pronouncements of the CIS and CSTO. The constant reference to these organizations as counterparts to Western organizations like the EU and NATO, and the fact that Russia has pushed the CSTO's claims for status vis-à-vis NATO more strongly in Brussels and the OSCE than it has for the SCO, show that Russia prefers to keep its own brand of bloc leadership not so much different from the former Warsaw Pact model.

In sum, as the majority of work done by the SCO is in bilateral format, not much can be expected from an institution that is supposedly based on multilateralism. It is more like that what one would get from the SCO is a forum for bilateral deals between the member states.¹⁷⁶ While this does facilitate greater cooperation on some level, the stated purpose of the SCO is to provide a multilateral framework for a multipolar world and the observed practice goes directly in the face of that.

6.3.3 A Toothless Body

A 'pseudo'-institution is only as strong as the power its members allow it to be, and in material terms, the SCO is quite weak despite its grandiose statements. The SCO has a long list of ideas that it would like to execute but less to show for their actual execution. Announcements of the organization are staged and do not go beyond what the member states are comfortable with. The SCO summit meetings "take place behind closed doors, and so far, none of the public statements have gone beyond the general praise of friendship

¹⁷⁵ Bailes et al, "Regional security cooperation in the former Soviet area," 175-176.

¹⁷⁶ Nicklas Norling and Niklas Swanstrom, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, trade, and the roles of Iran, India and Pakistan," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute* website 26(3), 2007: 435.

and deepening ties.”¹⁷⁷ What goes on there is far from the public eye and so is safe from scrutiny.

The SCO has claimed that one of its main purposes is tackling the threat of extremism, terrorism, and separatism, but the majority of its known work is centered on economics.¹⁷⁸ The SCO lacks the cohesion and capabilities to fight against ‘harder’ common problems. This was evident in the reaction of the SCO’s members to the attacks against the United States on 11 September 2001 by forces located in their own region of interest. The Taliban presence in Afghanistan was allowed to fester with little effort made to rout them out. After 11 September and despite their new commitment to fighting terrorism, there was no action taken by the SCO to combat the Taliban that was in fact creating a very dangerous situation for its own members. The aim to increase military cooperation has likewise failed to create a common military force or combined planning staff to fight together.¹⁷⁹ The energy being diverted to bilateral ties partly accounts for this but it is not the whole explanation. One noteworthy factor is that Western partners, especially the US, have also had a strong engagement and influence on local states in the area of military reform, armament, and of fighting new threats, and this is but one sign of how limited the ‘Astana’ idea of excluding outside influences has been.

The budget is a further point highlighted by Western scholars and does indeed evoke skepticism, as the SCO’s aims are highly underfunded.¹⁸⁰ One of the few ways to see if an institution is authentic is the amount of funding it allocates to its goals. As the members keep bringing up new areas to cooperate in, they have forgotten to invest greater monetary cooperation to bring those areas to fruition. Without proper budgets and the “necessary technical capacity and contribute the financial resources needed,” the Organization will remain little more than a speaking forum for six authoritarian states.¹⁸¹

Another test for ‘hollow’ institutions suggested by Bailes and Cottey is whether different members have patently different levels of commitment.¹⁸² It has already been underlined here that Russia has not been the SCO’s biggest proponent, putting much more effort into its own institutions that it can control with greater ease. Much of the literature points to the extensive work done by Beijing in creating the permanent bodies and

¹⁷⁷ “Energy Cooperation dominates Shanghai Summit.”

¹⁷⁸ “Shanghai grouping moves centre stage.”

¹⁷⁹ Oldberg, 21.

¹⁸⁰ Weitz, “Reading the Shanghai SCO Summit.”

¹⁸¹ Johannes F. Linn and Oksana Pidufala, “The Experience with Regional Economic Cooperation Organizations: Lessons for Central Asia,” *Social Science Research Network*. 31 October 2008. 5.

¹⁸² Bailes et al, “Regional Security Cooperation in the early 21st Century,” 218.

encouraging further work. In fact the “permanent secretariat building [was] entirely funded by the PRC.”¹⁸³ The focus of Russia’s strategy and resource drive has lately been drawn back to its near abroad in the CIS, not just because of Western and ‘color’ challenges but because these areas “are seen as a reserve to be tapped for economic development and security management as well as gradually and eventually achieving a more significant, great power role for Russia internationally.”¹⁸⁴ It is this ability to control Central Asia’s great natural resources that will give Moscow more leverage abroad, leaving Europe and the rest of the world few options for their natural gas supplies.

It is interesting to contrast this limited degree of Russian commitment with the approach of the rest of the member states. As mentioned above, it is arguable that the SCO brings genuine new advantages for the smaller Central Asians.¹⁸⁵ However it has been China that has truly been the pushing point for institutionalizing the Shanghai Cooperation Organization from the Shanghai Five. If the SCO evolves further in an economic sense it will be at the behest of China.¹⁸⁶ While Beijing has put forth great expectations and plans for the proposed free trade zone, the realization of this concept and its attempts to gain more power over the natural resources in Central Asia have been stopped by Moscow repeatedly.¹⁸⁷ The explanation for these differences of course includes the Russian mistrust of China stressed above, but it also fits with the thesis of many scholars that China is genuinely interested in exploring the potential of multilateralism and integration in cases where its control can be assured and it sees real benefit for national, regional and global stability.¹⁸⁸

6.3.4 Conclusion

Simply creating an institution does not necessarily mean that cooperation will come easily. The members are still sovereign nation-states and this is a fact that will dictate their entire behavior. It still remains difficult for some states to cooperate effectively in some areas and this is definitely the case for Russia in the SCO.¹⁸⁹ Ultimately that will be counterproductive to Russia’s aims for the SCO as an organization, but will still be a symbolic of Russia’s stubbornness and independence.

¹⁸³ Chung, “China and the Institutionalization of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” 10.

¹⁸⁴ Trenin, 72.

¹⁸⁵ Yom.

¹⁸⁶ BBC Shanghai Grouping moves centre stage.

¹⁸⁷ Weitz, “Reading the Shanghai SCO Summit.”

¹⁸⁸ Bates Gill and Yanzhong Huang, “Sources and Limits of Chinese ‘Soft Power,’” *Survival* 48(2), 2006: 22.

¹⁸⁹ Linn and Pidufala.

As a result, the SCO clearly embodies many aspects of a 'pseudo'-institution, from lack of insincerity through undermining by more powerful alternatives to lack of money. But its accomplishments make it hard to believe that Russia wants it to be an entirely hollow and unsuccessful institution. Russia may simply be along for the ride, pushing the political and diplomatic value of the SCO group but fearful of slowing down economic and military aspects that may protect it from completely losing its international status. At the very least, there are signs that Russia will neither withdraw from the SCO, nor will it seek to reduce the organization's powers in the current framework. The SCO is a reliable and low-cost way for Russia to keep an eye on China within a safe atmosphere and no matter what the ultimate goals of Russia, it cannot allow the SCO to flounder.

VII. Conclusion

Russia has always been and will remain an enigmatic figure in international relations. That will be a concept that will not go away easily, and Russia's behavior on the international scene does nothing to disprove it. The secretive nature of the Russian government and of the SCO gives more credence to those who believe that both are agents against the West. Pronouncements coming out of the SCO, specifically the 2005 Astana Declaration, that are distinctly against the West have only given those opposed to or fearful of the SCO more ammunition to use against the Organization.

The idea of a 'real' institution means that the SCO give real benefit to its members, while working to give them a multilateral framework for cooperation. While the evidence goes against the truly multilateral character of this particular cooperation, there is something to be said regarding the benefits that the SCO can offer. The member states' beliefs include the supreme value of territorial integrity and respect for sovereignty. Few institutions around the world have defined these aspects as so fundamentally important as the SCO has or have pledged to do anything in their power to keep it from being plundered. Both Russia and China hold dear their permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council, and have been using their veto to hold back many attempts by the UN to interfere in internal matters of another member state. Russia is also very aware of the transnational threats that are ripe throughout its own territory and directly surrounding it. The increase in these threats since the downfall of the Soviet Union and the appearance of a growing tide of democracy may be forever linked for many in Russia. The constant criticism by the West regarding Russia's own 'managed' democracy perpetuates the concern about encroachment that might topple Moscow's own regime.

The 'counter'-institution aspect is confirmed by the clear desire by Russia to utilize the SCO as a possible alternative source of power to NATO and the West, designed to push back democracy movements and any attempt at strategic intrusion in the members' backyard, but also for more general and global 'balancing' purposes. Whether it tries to balance or mirror NATO on a given point depends to a great extent on the current relationship Russia has with the US. With an antagonistic relationship, Moscow will try to show that the SCO is indeed equal to NATO and just as deserving of recognition as such. When the relationship is steady, Moscow will show some latitude to the US and, for instance, allow the US to use Central Asian bases for its mission in Afghanistan. In either case, however, the device of cooperation with China is for Moscow more of an attempt at

creating equilibrium in their relationship than a true attempt at friendship. There is a great possibility of the two falling out and if there is no antagonism between the two it will be due to China striving to keep its status as a peaceful rising power rather than Russia trying to keep the peace.

As a 'pseudo'-institution, the SCO reflects Russia's basic hang-ups about international cooperation combined with the practical need to use a show of multilateralism as a shield. Having had to compete in recent years with other powers in Central Asia, its former backyard, Moscow needs to oversee all aspects of Central Asian governance and that includes where the investment is coming from. Russia needs to ensure a peaceful region, but it does not seem to desire a very powerful and developed region. The power that Gazprom has over the region is at stake and Moscow cannot afford to allow Central Asian oil and gas companies to have a truly independent base. However, Moscow has come to the realization that there is no longer the possibility of being entirely outside of international commitments. It does need a shield from the growing sense of international community rising up around Russia. If Russia has to fake it, then so be it. The SCO could be nothing more than an attempt by the Russian government to shield its own strategic steps towards gaining more power.

None of these three institutional hypotheses can actually describe what Russia's perceptions of the SCO are. All of them embody different aspects of Russia's behavior, which can be quite frustrating for those studying this enigmatic state. Just as one example of the ensuing contradictions, it has been seen that Moscow can invest real effort in the multilateral undertaking in cases when the SCO can serve to project its power on a global scale. However, overall Moscow has clearly given a second-class status to – and imposed deliberate handicaps on – the SCO as it hopes that its own institutions can serve its basic needs better and keep more power to itself.

It may be concluded that Moscow will keep the benefits of its membership of the SCO, while trying to decrease any losses that it may accrue. Russia will use whatever tool is at its disposal for the benefit of Russia with no special regard either for the genuine spirit of multilateralism or of consistency. How well it is able to do that is questionable, and the loss of trust and standing it can entail are quite evident in the current view of Russia held by many throughout the world.

On the other hand, the extreme Western critical view of the SCO has been shown to be a simplification and in some regards unfair – especially in underestimating the sheer difficulty of managing the Sino-Russian relationship. Moscow has been misunderstood for

quite some time and the Realist lens that it is viewed through can blight whatever good may be coming from Russia's Eastward strategy. In the end if Russia can benefit from the SCO, it will be used as a 'real' institution but with aspects of a 'counter'- and a 'pseudo'-institution blazingly clear. Nothing regarding Russia will ever be unambiguous, and the SCO is but one example of that.

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