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The article of Dina Malysheva, DSc(Political Sciences), IMEMO RAS, [1] defines the main directions of activity of the SCO in the field of maintaining regional and international security. The role of this organization in the fight against terrorism, religious extremism and drug trafficking is analyzed.

SCO (2001) is an intergovernmental international organization formed on the basis of the Shanghai Forum (Shanghai Five) consisting of four Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China, Tajikistan) and transcontinental Russia. Uzbekistan joined the five participants of the forum, which then played a prominent role in creating the SCO agenda in the field of maintaining regional stability. There was the trend towards its

expansion at the expense of the leading countries of Asia in the organization. In 2005, a Memorandum of Understanding between the SCO and ASEAN was signed in Jakarta. The document identified areas of cooperation such as combating terrorism, drug and weapon smuggling as strategic. In 2017, India and Pakistan became full participants of the SCO; Afghanistan, Iran and Mongolia remained in observer status, while Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey and Sri Lanka were partners in the SCO dialogue. Turkmenistan, CIS, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), UN had guest status in the SCO.

Thus, the SCO – taking into account the population of the member states, their military-political potential – has every reason to turn into an influential organization, the participants of which face similar challenges in the field of security. This circumstance determines the SCO's important role in maintaining peace and stability in the Asian region.

The participation of Central Asian and South Asian states in the SCO, according to the author, with a favorable development of events, could create an atmosphere of complementarity in the SCO, stimulate intraregional cooperation, help ward off the terrorist threat, interact in the field of energy security, when the Central Asian states rich in hydrocarbon resources (mainly Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan) become an attractive market for the power-hungry countries of South Asia.

In strengthening security in the Asian geopolitical space, the SCO pays special attention to resolving borderline problems. While border issues with China have largely been resolved, they are still relevant between the Central Asian states themselves up to now. This phenomenon, which has a destructive effect on interstate relations in the region, is due to the fact that in Soviet times, borders were not clearly defined between the allied Central Asian republics, and their delimitation in the post-Soviet period, when these states became independent, was delayed. Theoretically, the SCO could mediate border disputes in post-Soviet Central Asia. However, in its framework, in addition to the

border problem with China, it was possible to complete only the process of delimiting the former state border of the USSR. And the border issues that existed in Central Asia between the five states of the region remained unresolved. At the same time, the SCO, according to some experts, is unlikely to be able to assume the mediation function, because Russia enjoys much greater confidence of the parties involved in border disputes in the region (in particular, between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan): for it, border uncertainty is a destabilizing factor that aggravates relations between the states of Central Asia.

Statements adopted on the basis the results of the meeting on November 10, 2020 in the form of a videoconference of the SCO Council of Heads of State chaired by Russia are aimed at maintaining security: on cooperation in countering the spread of terrorist, separatist and extremist ideology, including on the Internet; cooperation in the field of international information security; on countering drug threats. The SCO countries, despite growing tensions in various parts of the world, have been able to achieve relative stability, largely due to effective security cooperation within the Organization. Especially successful, the researcher emphasizes, should be recognized the experience of the SCO in the field of countering terrorism, Islamist extremism and drug trafficking. SCO participants proceed from the fact that terrorism, as an international phenomenon, is difficult to resist alone. This is a common threat to the economic, political and social security of all members of the international community, including members states of the Organization.

Almost all the states of post-Soviet Central Asia suffered from the destructive activities of religious extremist groups, among which the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan gained the greatest fame, which was eventually forced out into Afghanistan, as well as the Islamic Liberation Party (Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami). Islamist and terrorist associations (Al-Qaida, etc.) established in Afghanistan since the Taliban rule have been destabilizing the socio-political situation not only in Afghanistan itself, but also in

China, Central Asia, and other Asian states. In recent years, the Islamist terrorist “international” has been replenished in the Asian region at the expense of immigrants from the Middle East – participants of the Islamic State (IS) terrorist structure partially defeated in Syria and Iraq. It is trying to extend its influence not only to Central and South Asia, but also to South-East Asia, where Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and a number of other ASEAN countries have become victims of terrorist activity of Islamist groups.

The SCO, acting as the leading multilateral structure to combat terrorism, religious extremism and drug trafficking, used a specially created Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) to counter them. Within the framework of this SCO unit, military exercises are being conducted, and information is being exchanged regarding terrorist groups penetrating the region. Extradition of criminals suspected of committing terrorist acts is also provided. In addition to the anti-terrorist struggle, RATS SCO is involved in activities to counter unconventional security threats – human and drug trafficking, cyber threats, etc. In 2019–2020, RATS played a coordinating role in the organization of a number of specific measures to ensure regional security. Anti-terrorist command and staff exercises “Peace Mission” are regularly conducted, and the border operation “Solidarity – 2019–2021” was carried out. In December 2019, representatives of the competent authorities of India, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan took part in a joint anti-terrorist exercise of the SCO member countries to identify and suppress the use of the Internet for terrorist, separatist and extremist purposes – Xiamen – 2019.” RATS SCO has intensified its cooperation with international organizations. In 2018, a “Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation and Coordination” was signed between the RATS, the Anti-Terrorism Center of the States Members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (RATS CIS) and the Secretariat of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). According to the

document, the parties inform each other about challenges and threats of a terrorist and extremist nature, ongoing and planned anti-terrorist and anti-extremist activities. Russia assumes a huge share of responsibility for maintaining security within the RATS. So, the Russian Federation, together with Saudi Arabia, will finance a UN project to prevent illegal trafficking in small arms by terrorists in Central Asian countries. Especially in this region in 2020–2021 the RATS expects to implement the first stage of the UN project to prevent and suppress the illicit circulation of small arms and light weapons and their illegal supply to terrorists.

A special place in the activities of the SCO is occupied by the fight against illicit drug trafficking. In order to create an effective system for joint fight against the drug threat, the SCO is currently working on the prospects for the realization of the project to create the SCO Anti-Drug Center in Dushanbe. Using a flexible institutional framework of cooperation, the SCO covers a wide range of anti-drug policies, conducting joint operational-search actions and implementing a set of preventive, medical and rehabilitation measures. In this regard, the international anti-terrorist operations “Web,” organized by the SCO (2019–2020), gained particular significance. In the field of combating the drug threat, the SCO works closely with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the UN unit dealing with the problems of drug trafficking, weapons, and international terrorism. In 2019, with the support of the Russian chairmanship of the SCO in New York, an event was held on the problem of narcoterrorism. It was stated that the funds received from the sale of drugs were used to feed the destructive activities of terrorist organizations. This is especially relevant for Asian countries. Given the emergence of in addition to land routes for the sea transportation of drugs from the countries of the “opium golden triangle” (Thailand, Myanmar, Laos), which undermines the security of India and China, the SCO considers it long-range to increase cooperation with ASEAN in the fight against the drug threat.

The SCO's priority is to deter drug trafficking from Afghanistan. In general, the Afghan problem remains in the focus of attention of the SCO. The interaction of the Organization's participants was carried out for a long time mainly within the framework of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group (CG). However, it has not achieved effective results during its existence.

The researcher notes in this regard the important role that Uzbekistan plays in the Afghan problem. This is due, firstly, to the fact that in the north of Afghanistan there are many ethnic Uzbeks, and Uzbek speakers are the third largest (about 11 per cent) after the Pashtun and Dari language group of Afghanistan. Secondly, it was the representatives of Uzbekistan who led the SCO leadership for many years, and therefore had the opportunity to determine the Organization's agenda on resolving the Afghan crisis, including through the one established by Uzbekistan in 2018 SCO People's Diplomacy Center.

The Uzbek side was not limited to the SCO formats solving the Afghan problem, supporting the Contact Group "6 + 2" functioning within the UN to resolve the situation in Afghanistan (with the participation of Iran, China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan + Russia and the USA). Since the early 1990s, Uzbekistan has consistently expressed political initiatives to achieve peace in this country, and has provided its territory for organizing inter-Afghan negotiations between the official leadership of Afghanistan and the Taliban. Uzbekistan also sets itself the task of more active involvement of Afghanistan into regional trade and economic processes, contribution to the socio-economic recovery of this republic within the framework of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group. Such an approach supported the main principle of the foreign policy strategy of the republic – the preservation of the maximum "centrality" from all world centers of power.

The diplomatic efforts undertaken by the SCO to withdraw Afghanistan from the prolonged military-political and economic crisis have not yet yielded tangible results. The situation in

Afghanistan continues to be alarming, as it poses potential risks in the form of exports of instability and the transfer of terrorist activity to neighbouring states in Central and South Asia. The growing presence of the Islamic State in the Afghan conflict zone gives rise to concern for Afghanistan's neighbors. In addition to the Afghan problem, the SCO is faced with the task of developing a strategy to solve other knots of contradictions in Asia – Sino-Indian and Indo-Pakistani, given that the parties of these political confrontations are full members of the Organization.

The SCO, the researcher notes, judging by its official documents (the SCO Charter, the SCO Development Strategy until 2025, etc.), avoids being considered a military-political organization. There is also opposition (mainly from China) to the transformation of the SCO into an association that takes on an integration function and creates supranational governing bodies. As a result, the SCO reacts mainly at the declarative level to many of the problems created by the tasks of ensuring regional security. Preference is given to solving these problems at the level of bilateral interstate contacts, rather than within the framework of the SCO or its structures. In practice, in solving many problems, SCO participants are guided by national interests and development strategies. At the same time, the expansion of the Organization at the expense of new Members did not provide determination in the immediate and constructive solution of emerging problems.

There is a reason to hope, the author believes, that the coronavirus pandemic that affected the SCO countries, which set the Organization's participants the task of adapting to new realities, will force them to develop actively a collective response to the challenges of biological security. One of the options for such an answer may be combination, within the framework of the new international center, of the Russian experience, which has managed to organize effective work to combat COVID-19, with the epidemiological and pharmaceutical achievements of China and India.

A.Sh. Azemkulova, PhD(Political Science), BSU, [2] notes that the leaders of the Central Asian states are making efforts to promote in their policies the ideas of integration of the Central Asian states in order to achieve security and stable development. The development of the modern world is determined by two trends - globalization and regionalization, which lead to the development of regional integration. In this sense, regional integration appears to be the form and way in which the world community responds to global challenges and threats. The current threats, such as religious extremism, international terrorism, international drug trafficking, illicit arms trafficking, environmental threats, cannot be overcome by any country in the world. Therefore, the desire for regional integration is peculiar to all regions and states of the world, integration processes around the world have a significant definitive influence on foreign policy. The interaction of economies, languages, political actions, cultures directs states not to clash with each other, but to cooperation as a dialogue of civilizations. States are trying to solve the problem of international security through integration processes.

The region of Central Asia is also in desperate need of development of integration processes, where after the collapse of the Soviet Union, new independent states appeared on the world map: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan. Despite the community of history, traditions and customs that have developed over the centuries, there are both internal contradictions and threats to the world order among the states of the region. First of all, these are conflict potentials of nearby Afghanistan and the Ferghana Valley, the socio-economic problems of the countries of the region, and the political interests of the leading states of the world. Due to the fact that Central Asia is in the center of Eurasia, these threats pose danger to national security not only for every country in the region, but also for other parts of the world. The ideas of regional integration in the Central Asian region are therefore

relevant. The political elite of the Central Asian States realizes these problems. Central Asian leadership elites began the integration process as early as the 1990s. An example of this is the creation of structures such as the Central Asian Economic Community (CAEC) and the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO).

Presidents I. Karimov and N. Nazarbayev concluded an "Agreement on a common economic space," in 1994 in Tashkent, later supported by the leaders of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. In 1997, the Declaration of Alma-Ata was signed to create a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia, which was then implemented in the form of a treaty (Semipalatinsk, 2006). More than 160 multilateral cooperation documents were signed within the framework of CAES and more than 50 projects in the field of economics were adopted. At the initiative of political leaders, an agreement was concluded among the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan on joint actions to combat terrorism, political and religious extremism, transnational organized crime and other threats to the stability and security of the parties. Attempts have also been made to promote the military and political integration of the Central Asian states. In 1994, the leaders of three states: the Republic of Kazakhstan N. Nazarbayev, the Kyrgyz Republic A. Akaev, the Republic of Uzbekistan I. Karimov signed an agreement on military-technical cooperation. In 1995, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan signed an agreement on the organization and formation of a collective peacekeeping Central Asian battalion under the auspices of the UN.

But at that time, the author notes, not all Central Asian states took part in integration processes. So, there was a civil war in Tajikistan, and it was busy solving its internal problems. The leader of Turkmenistan chose the policy of "permanent neutrality", without wishing to integrate, pursuing his national interests. Thus, the first attempts at integration in the region did

not lead to the creation of a single integrated space. There were a number of reasons for this, including different levels of economic and social development of the countries of the region, political reforms, the claims of countries to expand their zones of influence beyond their own borders, the struggle for regional leadership, and ethnocultural conflicts. However, integration has been a constant focus of the political activities of the Central Asian leadership elite. Great attention was paid to regional security issues at the summit of the heads of state of Central Asia in Tashkent in 2000, where a wide range of issues were considered to ensure peace and stability in the region. As a result, at this summit, the Presidents of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan signed a treaty on joint actions to combat terrorism, political and religious extremism, transnational organized crime and other threats, which was a "Defense Union" that defended the sovereignty and security of Central Asian states.

Closer political integration to ensure regional security has become possible with the participation of Russia, China and Western countries in the framework of major international regional organizations CSTO and SCO. The most important tasks of the CSTO are: military-political integration of the participating countries, strengthening their military-technical cooperation, improving interaction between them, joint training of military personnel and specialists. The SCO currently unites 8 states of the planet and 4 observer countries. An important area in the SCO's activities, along with economic, political, scientific and cultural interaction, is the solution of security problems on the Eurasian continent. Today, all the presidents of the Central Asian States speak about the importance of regional security integration.

In the Concept of Kazakhstan's foreign policy for 2014–2020, the main priority is the development of political stability, economically stable and safe Central Asia, the reduction of conflict potential, the settlement of all differences among the

states of the region. The National Development Strategy of Kyrgyzstan for 2018–2040 plans to participate in global projects within the framework of the SCO, the EAEU, in bilateral cooperation with neighboring states. The Concept of Foreign Policy of Tajikistan gives priority to the further expansion of friendly coexistence of the peoples of Central Asia. In the strategy of Uzbekistan's policy until 2021, it is planned to create a belt of security, stability and neighborliness around it, and to resolve border disputes. The leader of Turkmenistan, in order to achieve regional security, also considers the countries of Central Asia a priority of its foreign policy. According to the researcher, in view of the events caused by globalization, major socio-economic and geopolitical changes in the world, the countries of Central Asia need to intensify their efforts in integration processes in order to strengthen regional stability and security, since only integration gives an opportunity to provide a collective response to modern threats and challenges.