

S. Kondapalli^{1*} , L.F. Delovarova² , A.B. Yermekov² 

¹Jawaharlal Nehru University, India, New Delhi

²Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Kazakhstan, Almaty

*e-mail: srikondapalli@gmail.com

SCO ENLARGEMENT: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS IN THE CONTEXT OF IRAN'S ACCESSION

This article examines the problems and prospects of the SCO enlargement. The admission of India, Pakistan and Iran to the SCO gives impetus to the development of the organization within the geopolitical perspectives. Although the format of strategic, including military-political, cooperation within the organization is a priority in bilateral relations, the SCO has the potential for institutionalization. At the moment, within the SCO, from the standpoint of geopolitics, the balance of power is shifting, and the parties are actively promoting the priorities of economic cooperation. The SCO still faces a dilemma, whether to go through the process of institutionalization or to maintain the current regime of cooperation based on a regional platform. In the spectrum of the development of military-political relations, an important role is played by the shift in the balance of power in relations between Russia, India, on the one hand, and China and Pakistan, on the other. India's diplomatic activity in the framework of the QUAD cooperation, as well as the strengthening of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership, all lead to a change in the existing status quo. Another important aspect is the side of economic cooperation, when Russia and China express ideas about the conjugation of the EAEU and the Belt and Road Initiative, where a number of SCO experts are considered as a platform for strengthening this strategic dialogue.

Key words: SCO, Asia, expansion, regimes, geopolitics.

Ш. Кондапалли^{1*} А.Ф. Деловарова², А.Б. Ермаков²

¹Джавахарлал Неру университеті, Үндістан, Нью-Дели қ.

²Әл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ ұлттық университеті, Қазақстан, Алматы қ.

*e-mail: srikondapalli@gmail.com

ШЫҰ-НЫҢ КЕҢЕЮІ: ИРАНЫҢ ҚОСЫЛУ КОНТЕКСТІНДЕГІ МӘСЕЛЕР МЕН ПЕРСПЕКТИВАЛАР

Бұл мақала ШЫҰ-ның проблемалары мен кеңейту перспективаларын қарастырады. Үндістан, Пәкістан және Иранның ШЫҰ құрамына қабылдануы аталған ұйымның геосаяси перспективада дамуына әсерін береді. Ұйым ішіндегі стратегиялық, әскери-саяси ынтымақтастықтың форматы екі жақты қатынастардың басымдығы болып табылатынына қарамастан, ШЫҰ институционалдандыру перспективаларына ие болып табылады. Қазіргі уақытта ШЫҰ ішінде геосаясат тұрғысынан күштер теңгерімінің ығысуы жүруде, сондай-ақ тараптар экономикалық ынтымақтастықтың басымдықтарын белсенді түрде алға жылжытуда. ШЫҰ алдында өңірлік алаң негізінде институционалдандыру үрдісінен өтуіне ынтымақтастықтың қолданыстағы режимін сақтау дилеммасы сақталып отыр. Әскери-саяси қатынастардың даму спектрінде бір жағынан Ресей Үндістан, екінші жағынан Қытай мен Пәкістан арасындағы қатынастардағы күштер тепе-теңдігін ауыстыру маңызды рөл атқарады. Ромбтың ынтымақтастығы шеңберіндегі Үндістанның дипломатиялық қарым-қатынастың белсенділігі, сондай-ақ Қытай-Ресей стратегиялық серіктестігінің күшеюі осының бәрі қазіргі Кво мәртебесінің өзгеруіне әкеледі. Тағы бір маңызды аспект Экономикалық ынтымақтастық болып табылады, онда Ресей мен Қытай ЕАЭО-ны және ШЫҰ сарапшыларының бірқатары осы стратегиялық диалогты күшейту алаңы ретінде Белдеу мен жолды түйінdestіру туралы идеяларды қарастырады.

Түйін сөздер: ШЫҰ, геосаясат, аймақтық ынтымақтастық, қауіпсіздік.

Ш. Кондапалли^{1*} Л.Ф. Деловарова², А.Б. Ермаков²

¹Университет Джавахарлала Неру, Индия, г. Нью-Дели

²Казахский национальный университет имени аль-Фараби, Казахстан, г. Алматы

*e-mail: srikondapalli@gmail.com

Расширение ШОС: проблемы и перспективы в контексте вступления Ирана

Данная статья рассматривает проблемы и перспективы расширения ШОС. Принятие Индии, Пакистана и Ирана в состав ШОС, дает импульс для развития данной организации в геополитической перспективе. Хотя формат стратегического, в том числе и военно-политического, сотрудничества внутри организации является приоритетом двухсторонних отношений, ШОС обладает перспективами институционализации. На данный момент, с точки зрения геополитики, внутри ШОС происходит смещение баланса сил, кроме того, члены организации активно выдвигают приоритеты экономического сотрудничества. Перед ШОС сохраняется дилемма – пройти процесс институционализации либо сохранить действующий режим сотрудничества на основе региональной площадки. В спектре развития военно-политических отношений стран-членов ШОС, немаловажную роль играет смещение баланса сил в отношениях между Россией и Индией с одной стороны, а также Китая и Пакистана с другой стороны. Дипломатическая активность Индии в рамках сотрудничества «Ромба», а также усиление китайско-российского стратегического партнерства, в совокупности ведет к смене сложившегося статуса-кво. Другой немаловажный аспект – это сторона экономического сотрудничества, когда Россия и Китай говорят о сопряжении ЕАЭС с инициативой «Пояс и Путь», что рассматривается рядом экспертов ШОС как площадка для усиления данного стратегического диалога.

Ключевые слова: ШОС, геополитика, региональное сотрудничество, безопасность.

Introduction

The enlargement of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has recently attracted huge attention of the expert community. The admission of Iran to the SCO at the Summit in Dushanbe on September 17 this year has become a significant event in the world diplomacy. Prior to that, India and Pakistan became full members of the SCO. Although the world political literature pays considerable attention to such issues as the enlargement of the EU and NATO, the SCO as an political entity does not receive sufficient attention, despite the fact that its expansion reflects new geopolitical trends in the system of world politics. The SCO has recently experienced a number of functional crises, when the organization's agenda was somewhat vague. At the same time, the entry into the SCO of countries such as India, Pakistan and Iran gives impetus to the development of the organization.

Within the framework of the contemporary SCO expansion, it is very important to understand such aspects as the formation of a multipolar system. Although a number of experts point out that the confrontation between the United States and such states as Russia, Iran and the DPRK has episodic features (Timofeyev, 2021), and the contest in Sino-US relations occupies a central place, and recently augmenting the military-political confrontational events within the US-China-Russia triangle. These

tendencies cannot but affect the SCO and its functionality, therefore the organization experiences the influence of international processes on its degree of functionality.

The SCO expansion unambiguously extended the diplomatic agenda of the organization, but, nevertheless, the format of strategic relations between its main participants remains at the stage of bilateral relations. The SCO, as a system of regional security architecture, has the prospect of institutionalization of the collective security system; however, given the nature of international relations in Asia, this seems unlikely in the short and medium term.

The inclusion of new members into the organization also reflects which trends will dominate within its institutional structure – military-political or economic. At this stage, the SCO member states have not specifically decided which parameters of cooperation will dominate in the functioning of the organization, and clarification of this process requires the definition of a specific approach. Despite the active and dynamic processes within the SCO, the organization is likely to preserve the cooperation regime, which will be limited by the regional framework and aspects of the local interactions.

The main purpose of this article is the problem of studying the functionality of the SCO, namely, what functions this organization will perform in contemporary conditions. The SCO was originally

created as a platform for strengthening regional cooperation, in the spirit of "Shanghai cooperation". The organization was formed due to the regional problems deriving from border issues and Beijing's strategic need to institutionalize its presence in Central Asia. A number of experts criticize the SCO for the lack of a clear platform and agenda, for example, unlike NATO or the CSTO (Gabuev, 2017). At the same time, it should be noted that such criticism is unfounded. The SCO is unique in its structure, as it allows considering a number of issues and solving them jointly at the political and diplomatic level.

For example, the diplomatic agenda within the SCO was determined by various factors and aspects of the development of the member-states of the organization and the region as a whole. In the period of 1990s, mainly issues related to cross-border cooperation, border demilitarization and the promotion of economic cooperation. Then, in the 2000s, the main topic of the SCO cooperation was an anti-terrorism direction. Now the main priorities of the SCO cooperation are being built within the framework of a shifting balance of power and the development of prospects for strengthening economic cooperation.

Research methodology

The scientific-methodological approach that was used in this article is based on Keohane's regime theories. According to Keohane's theory, for the development of cooperation there must be a precedent in the form of a conflict between its main participants. The absence of conflicts leads to a harmony, but the presence of conflicts and their constructive overcoming leads to increased cooperation (Keohane, 1984). Therefore, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has the potential to resolve controversies and even conflicting issues between its main participants.

The SCO as an organization acts as a regional platform for solving actual regional problems. There are a number of disagreements between the parties, but, nevertheless, these disagreements are resolvable, and therefore, from the point of view of the scientific and methodological approach, the proposed theory of regimes is more suitable for the topic of the article.

The geopolitical structure of the SCO, in any case, is a complex basis, where, on the one hand, there is a balance of power, and on the other hand, the participants are ready for cooperation and enhanced

interactions in the international environment. The geopolitical conditions in Asia are different from the transatlantic, but, nevertheless, the functioning and activities of the SCO have created a basis for cooperation and mutual trust in Central Asia. For example, the principle of the balance of power operates between Russia and China; it is limited and regulated by the established institutions within the SCO.

Results and discussion

SCO expansion dynamics

The SCO is one of the leading regional structures that cover various areas of cooperation. Along with such regional organizations as the CSTO and the EEU, the SCO is one of the key structures of the architecture of regional security which promotes cooperation. This design is represented by several components. Firstly, this is the presence of the main participants in the system of region: Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, as well as the recently joined Pakistan, India and Iran. Secondly, it is a multilateral coverage of complex regional problems, from border management issues to ensuring a regional balance of power.

We will not dwell in detail at each stage of the SCO evolution, but we will briefly note the main points of the transformation of priorities and vision of important goals and objectives of the organization. In general, 3-4 stages of the SCO evolution can be identified.

The first stage is the second half of the 1990s to the early 2000s. The main agenda of the future SCO member-states in the format of multilateral interaction was the resolution of territorial disputes, demilitarization, border delimitation and the building of constructive good-neighborly relations between the countries of the region and Beijing (Zhumaly, 2006). In particular, the formation and development of the SCO is characterized by the fact that China has made considerable diplomatic efforts to legitimize its presence in the Central Asian region, although many experts note that Beijing has always given priority to the format of bilateral relations (Zhumaly, 2006), (Lanteigne, 2014).

In general, it can be noted that the creation of the SCO helped China to institutionalize its presence in Central Asia. The institutional approach within the framework of China's regional policy made it possible to build diplomatically trusting and constructive relations between the participants in the "Shanghai process". Experts also note that the

creation of the SCO allowed China, in its overall security strategy, to create a strategic rear in Eurasia, and to reorient its main security issues towards the Asia-Pacific (Tellis, 2012) (Dapeng, 2020).

The second stage covers the period from the late 1990s to the mid-2000s. At this stage, the geopolitical component in determining the main organization's agenda has significantly increased. Here, two factors played an important role; the first is the coming to power in Afghanistan of the Taliban, in the context of strengthening the socio-political positions of various transnational Islamist movements in Central Asia. The threat of armed transnational Islamist movements had a complex basis, since it covered various aspects of regional security: on the one hand, it was a direct challenge to the existing regimes in Central Asian countries, especially those countries located in the Fergana Valley (Zhumaly, 2006). On the other hand, Russia and China faced the threat of separatism within their own countries: the war in Chechnya and the activities of separatist groups in Xinjiang. The very systematic nature of the problem was clearly stated by the Chinese side: «separatism, extremism and terrorism. » Instability in Afghanistan and the civil war in Tajikistan posed a strategic challenge to maintaining the geopolitical status quo in Central Asia.

During this period, American strategists designated the Central Asian region as an integral part of the Greater Middle East, and this meant that the security problems of the Greater Middle East were projected onto Central Asia, therefore, the military-political activity of armed transnational groups led to the strengthening of the geopolitical component of the SCO. Another important aspect of strengthening the general political and diplomatic component of the SCO was the strengthening of the US activity in the region. Within the framework of the doctrine of global domination, the United States openly recognized Central Asia as a zone of its «vital interests. » Therefore, within the SCO, the military-political component has intensified, the long-term goal of which is to ensure a strategic balance within the Central Asian region. In this case, the SCO played the role of an appropriate balancer against the potential increase in American influence in the region.

The third stage of the SCO's activities begins in the second half of the 2010s, namely, the period of accession of India, Pakistan, and then Iran as full members of the organization. The expansion of the SCO reflected the intensification of the process

of multipolarization of the system of international relations, which took place against the background of the aggravation of the strategic Sino-American rivalry. The third stage of the SCO can be noted with an increase in its political and diplomatic component at the global level and the willingness of the parties to act to resolve new, more expanded regional problems. The polarization of the system of international relations has increased the importance of the SCO in the eyes of the participating countries and introduces new priorities and agenda for the organization's activities.

The ongoing transformations have had a direct impact on the dynamics of the organization's development. The geopolitical vector of the SCO's functioning is largely unlimited exclusively by the region of Central Asia; it also includes South Asia. The accession of Pakistan and India means a radical transformation of the SCO, in which the organization's foreign policy agenda is no longer determined solely by issues of regional security in Central Asia, but also encompasses the security problems of South Asia.

Thus, the factor of emerging multipolarity has had a broad impact on the dynamics of the SCO's development. In understanding the modern nature of the development of the SCO, it is necessary to rely on the two leading member states of the organization – Russia and China. For Russia, the key moment was the Crimean events, which undermined the European security system. For China, the turning point was the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States and his subsequent designation of China as the strategic rivalry of the United States. For these reasons, the SCO could not stay away from these processes. Although the SCO does not position itself as a military-political bloc, the above geopolitical changes have an indirect impact on the functioning of this organization and the vectors of its development.

In general, the structure and organization of the SCO consists of the following important components:

- Russian-Chinese strategic balance in the CA region. In this case, the organization acts as a security architecture in the CA region, where the institutionalization of Sino-Russian relations is necessary to maintain a balance (Laumulin, 2020);
- SCO as a regional platform for resolving common problems. In this case, the relevance of the SCO lies in its multilateral format, where member-states can cooperate on a wide range of issues;
- The SCO acts as a kind of regime, where

cooperation issues are ranged from military-political to trade-economic issues;

- From the perspective, the admission of India and Pakistan to the SCO gives a new impetus to the development of the organization. Now, the main trends in the field of world security are being shaped in the Indo-Pacific region, therefore, the admission of the leading states of South Asia to the organization should contribute to updating the diplomatic agenda, and, consequently change its structural transformation.

Russian prospects in the SCO are primarily associated with the idea of transforming the vast Eurasian geopolitical space. After the Crimean events, the crisis of the European security system came, when Russia did not agree with the principles of European integration of Ukraine, and the West did not accept with Russia's actions in Crimea and Donbass. Therefore, the concept of Greater Eurasia marked the movement of Russia to the East. It should be noted that although in geopolitical terms, Russia designated its identity as Eurasian, nevertheless, since the end of the Cold War, Moscow has developed systemic relations with the West, which is expressed in the strategic dialogue between Russia and NATO, building a common security system with The West, the implementation and maintenance of the strategic arms control regime, and the institutionalization of the European security system. The development and implementation of the concept of "Greater Eurasia" should have strengthened the Eurasian vector of Russia's development, and strengthened its Asian component in multilateral aspects. Therefore, these events had an important impact on the perception of the SCO as a strategic platform for interaction with other Asian countries. Although a number of experts indicate that the Russian initiatives of the SCO are not directly related to the crisis in the European security system that arose after the annexation of Crimea to Russia. Russia's actions on cooperation in the SCO area, and within the framework of the foreign policy conceptualization of «Greater Eurasia» are natural, due to the growing importance of the Asia-Pacific region in world politics. Therefore, this requires a specific approach to an extensive regional strategy (Kulintsev, 2020).

In 2016, the idea of the Greater Eurasian Partnership was announced within the framework of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum. The Russian president – Putin proposed to include in it a number of leading states of Eurasia, such as China, India, Pakistan, Iran, as well as the member states of the SCO and the EAEU. In this case, the SCO

acted as a platform for connecting two geopolitical projects, the Belt and Road and the EAEU. Russian priorities within the SCO are determined not only by the ideological struggle with the West, but also by the support of the economic balance in Central Asia, by preserving the Central Asian region as Russia's sphere of influence, without prejudice to Eurasian integration (Kulintsev, 2020).

At the moment, Asia develops new trends in the field of global security trends, so the Asian security issues, in the SCO can play a key role in its subsequent transformation and evolution. As noted above, the Chinese leader Xi Jinping stressed the importance and necessity of creating and developing a collective security system in Asia, which will operate in a new strategic environment. Therefore, the inclusion of India and Pakistan in the SCO, on the contrary, will only strengthen the institutional potential of the organization. The security system in Asia, unlike Europe, is not institutionalized, and therefore, taking into account the growth of the conflict potential in Asia, the SCO has the prospect of becoming an appropriate platform for resolving these issues.

Another strategic importance of the SCO for China lies in the security structure it provides. During the Cold War, the main threats to China's security lay on the Soviet side, when the nuclear and conventional capabilities of the Soviet Union posed a threat to China. By developing trusting relationships, Beijing has created a strategic rear in Eurasia that allows it to focus on security issues in the vast Indo-Pacific region (Dapeng, 2020). As the Chinese experts emphasize, it will be difficult to resolve territorial disputes on a multilateral platform. And therefore, issues of foreign policy and tough security will remain in the sphere of priorities of bilateral relations (Dapeng, 2020).

Cooperation within the SCO raises certain paradoxes. Thus, Russia and Kazakhstan in the 2000s reacted very coolly to the idea of strengthening the economic component in the SCO, which was put forward by the Chinese party. But by the second half of the 2010s, a tendency was formed in the organization, in which the parties began to show interest in strengthening economic cooperation. In particular, China and Russia have shown interest in enhancing the economic component, namely, the conjugation of the Belt and Road Initiative and the EAEU, as two connecting elements of the Greater Eurasia doctrine. Both projects have the prospect of interfaces and points of cooperation, in particular, increasing the efficiency of transport

and logistics routes in Eurasia. The strengthening of cooperation is explained by the fact that the parties, in particular Russia and China, have already clearly and specifically formulated their priorities, which have passed the stage of institutionalization in the form of two organizations.

Asia faces the problem of institutionalizing the macro-regional security system. Institutions, as international structures, are necessary to contain the growing conflict potential of geopolitical rivalry between great and regional powers. Taking into account the shift of the main trends in the formation of global military-political security to the Indo-Pacific region, the relevance of ensuring and creating additional institutional mechanisms for resolving tension seems to be especially important.

For instances, the OSCE was originally created as a platform for detente between the United States and the USSR, which resulted in the settlement of a number of issues within Europe. Then, after the end of the Cold War, the OSCE laid the foundation for the development of the institutional framework of the European security system – control over conventional arms became one of the achievements of the institutionalization of European security. It is thanks to the OSCE that the European security system has become institutionalized and which supports peace and stability.

Also, Asian continent needs to create a number of mechanisms that will be able to contain the growing confrontation between its major powers, if the UN cannot create the appropriate conditions. For example, it is possible to indicate the evolution of the system of strategic stability, which is influenced by the fact that most of the unofficial members of the nuclear club are located in Asia; therefore, the creation of a base for collective security is a very relevant topic within the framework of the hypothetical evolution of the SCO.

Thus, the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan – Leader of the Nation N.A. Nazarbayev, back in 2018, within the framework of the Astana Club, proposed to create an analogue of the «Asian OSCE». At the same time, it is necessary to understand that the creation of collective security institutions does not mean automatic subordination or elimination of issues of national security and foreign policy, which will be subordinate to national sovereignty. The creation of collective security mechanisms is necessary to contain the growth of military threats. Taking into account these arguments, the words of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan – Leader of the Nation

N.A. Nazarbayev, in this case are relevant, since the CICA or SCO can be used as a platform for creating a system of collective security in Asia.

SCO and Afghanistan's security problems

After the withdrawal of NATO from Afghanistan and the return of the Taliban movement, the issue of regional security in the context of Afghanistan was again actualized. A strategic balance is being formed around Afghanistan, where the main participants are the leading states, significant in their political potential. Within the framework of regional diplomacy, each side has its own priorities and vision of the situation. China, as a rule, implements an extensive strategy of the Belt and Road Initiative, where it sees Afghanistan as part of its geopolitical project. At least part of the Belt and Road, in the form of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (Velichkin, 2021). In addition to the transport and logistics factor, the mineral resources of the country are also important for China. Therefore, given the strategic potential of Afghanistan, China cannot but stand aside. In any case, it cannot be ruled out that his geo-economic measures in foreign policy may lead to political transformations (Kondapali, 2021a).

Also in Afghanistan, taking into account the political interests of Pakistan, the format of a strategic triangle is taking shape. The rise to power of the Taliban strengthens the positions of both Pakistan and China. For example, an Indian expert – professor S. Kondapalli notes a huge similarities between CCP and Taliban as a political entities (Kondapali, 2020 b), which can naturally provide a basis for cooperation between them. This psychological factor is also important in shaping of the further Afghanistan-China cooperation. It cannot be ruled out that, according to Chinese plans, Afghanistan may become part of an extensive Belt and Road initiative, in particular, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The Taliban give reasons for this. As Interfax reported, Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid said: “China <...> represents a fundamental and exceptional opportunity for us, because it is ready to invest in our country” (Chigasov, 2021). According to him, the PRC will also assist the militants in the reconstruction of Afghanistan after the war. At the same time, the Mujahid spoke positively about China's economic project “Belt and Road”, noting that in this way Beijing is reviving the “ancient Silk Road”. He said that the Taliban are counting on Beijing's help in rebuilding the Afghan mining industry and has singled out the copper mines of Afghanistan (the Ainak deposit is considered by experts as the

largest in the world), which “thanks to the Chinese, can be returned to production and modernized.” In conclusion, Mujahid called the People’s Republic of China “a pass for the country to all markets in the world” (Chigasov, 2021).

Following the enthusiastic welcome of the capture of Kabul (“broke the shackles of slavery!”) by Prime Minister Imran Khan himself, Pakistani Interior Minister Rashid Ahmad bluntly stated that Islamabad supports the Taliban’s desire to make Afghanistan a member of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (Velichkin, 2021). Therefore, Afghanistan, as a subject of international and regional relations, cannot stay away from the formed network of transport and logistics corridors in Eurasia.

Another significant factor is India. In the context of the situation in Afghanistan, there are a number of priority issues for India that can be identified as follows: counterterrorism, energy and trade. In terms of counterterrorism and its relationship to the Kashmir issue, India is concerned that Afghanistan may become a haven for anti-Indian terrorist groups. The situation for India, in the context of Afghanistan, is aggravated by the fact that, in addition to the Chinese factor, it also has the fact that Islamabad supports these terrorist groups (Velichkin, 2021).

Strategic preconditions

The admission of Iran to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has become a significant geopolitical event within the framework of this organization, which undoubtedly reflects the dynamics and processes in which it develops. At the same time, Iran’s entry into the SCO indicates an intensification of confrontational tendencies between the United States on the one hand and China and Russia on the other, within the framework of the international system.

Earlier, in the 2000s, discussions were held within the SCO about Iran’s membership in the organization, but Russia and China, as leading members of the organization, did not express much enthusiasm for accepting Iran as a full member. A number of explanations can be found for this.

The international system at that time was largely unipolar, where the United States was the undisputed hegemon, and conflicting or confrontational tendencies were local and did not have a significant impact on relations between the great powers. In Central Asia, Moscow understood that the US policy would be limited, since on an unofficial level, Washington recognized Central Asia as Russia’s sphere of influence.

At the same time, China did not put forward any grandiose geopolitical projects, such as the Belt and Road Initiative. Beijing, under the presidency of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, was quite pleased with the country’s growing economy and the Chinese leadership strove to create a natural ideological base in the new strategic environment (Tellis, 2019). The Chinese army did not have its current potential to change the strategic balance within the region. Therefore, during this period, Sino-US relations were limited to issues of local cooperation, i.e. predominantly economics and trade. The creation and promotion of the later «Belt and Road», was a reflection of China’s intentions to create its own sphere of influence in developing countries (Atlantic Council, 2021).

Despite the fact that Iran had previously shown interest in membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, however, the previous decisions of the SCO to refuse Iran were due to the absence of confrontational tendencies with the United States, where in the period of 2000s and 2010s, China remained one from the key economic partners of the United States and did not want the SCO to become as an anti-American platform (Smagin, 2021).

Prospects for the SCO after the admission of Iran as a full-fledged participant

Iran’s admission to the SCO is due to several factors, the key of which are the growth of confrontational tendencies within the international system, as well as the increase in the geopolitical weight of Iran itself. Earlier, within the SCO, there was an informal balance of power between Russia and China, where Russia invited India to join the organization, and China – Pakistan. However, due to the change in the strategic landscape, a special approach has been adopted with respect to Iran. The starting point for its change can be considered the period of Trump’s presidency in 2017, when China was designated as a strategic rival, even surpassing Russia in its geopolitical potential (Elbridge, Wess 2020). This was also facilitated by the change in the US regional strategy in the Asia-Pacific region from the amorphous Obama’s «Rebalancing» doctrine to the clearer and explicit of the Indo-Pacific doctrine, with the creation of systems of regional alliances in the form of “QUAD” and the recently created “AUKUS” (Istomin, 2019).

At the same time, as some experts note, Iran has already come close to creating nuclear weapons. Accordingly, his admission to the SCO may mean that China and Russia are ready to take a serious anti-American position. At the same time, there

is an opinion that the West, in its confrontation with China, can attract Russia to its side (Tellis, 2020). However, under Putin, given his "Eurasian" thinking, this is unlikely; in addition, China is pursuing a well-balanced policy in Central Asia, without violating the status quo, which is quite in Russia's interests. Therefore, even despite some existing disagreements (China's delay in sponsoring the construction of the Russian transport and logistics route «China-Mongolia-Russia-Europe»), Moscow is quite satisfied with Beijing's balanced policy in its traditional sphere of influence. For China, in turn, Eurasia is needed as a strategic rear in the fight against the United States in East and South Asia. Accordingly, the existing relationship of strategic balance with Moscow, for the current period, fully satisfies Beijing.

Locally, within the framework of the prospects of Iran itself, the admission of Tehran to the organization reflects the current political trends of the growing multipolar confrontation. There are two levels of perspective for Iran here. The first is political, which is expressed in the political rapprochement of states, and the possible coordination of security issues. And second, the possible strengthening of economic cooperation within the SCO (Smagin, 2021).

At the same time, the acceptance of Iran as a full-fledged member of the SCO may affect the quality of the organization. In the beginning of 2010s, SCO faced with the identity crisis, when diplomatic agenda was determined more by local tasks that could be resolved at a bilateral level (Gabuev, 2017). Now, the SCO most likely resembles the «European concert» system of the 19th century, when the balance of power on the continent was determined and supported by the European powers. Having already adopted a nuclear Iran, and the possession of nuclear weapons will certainly change the strategic balance, the leading SCO member states agree that they can be directly or indirectly involved in the system of conflicts in the Greater Middle East, within the framework of general anti-American solidarity.

In this context, it is necessary to note the apparent trend of expanding the sphere of China's strategic ambitions. Under Hu Jintao, China adopted a more flexible diplomatic strategy with the main goal of preserving its national interests. For example, in the context of aggravated Indo-Pakistani rivalry, China did not provide direct and unconditional support to Islamabad. Now the policy of Beijing, in the implementation of the Sino-Pakistani economic corridor, has become more principled and China

intends to act more decisively and tougher against India in the event of confrontational tendencies (Small, 2015).

In addition, the short-term regional crisis that arose as a result of the assassination of an Iranian general in early 2020 contributed to the formation of a quasi-alliance between China and Russia, in connection with which the admission of nuclear Iran to the SCO may also indicate the desire of both countries to expand the geography of containment of the United States.

The adoption of Iran indicates that an internal balance of power is being formed between the main SCO states, where the previous format of the strategic balance is no longer valid. Previously, Russia and China were softly balancing against each other, and the invitation to India and Pakistan should have kept this balance. But India's active movement towards the United States, and the strengthening of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership, led to a shift in the balance of power within the SCO itself. Therefore, members of the organization will give preference to a bilateral format of relations in the formation of a strategic partnership, rather than a cumbersome alliance. Thus, in the short and medium term, one should not expect the SCO to face dynamic transformations.

The SCO's prospect of becoming a collective security organization in Asia, a kind of analogue of the OSCE, is hampered by the existing security dilemma in Asia, clearly structured along the line of the Sino-American strategic rivalry in the Indo-Pacific region. Given the existing contradictions between the SCO members, it is highly unlikely that the organization will assume such a role. This would be possible only if the US role in the world is reduced, which is also extremely unlikely. The prospect of becoming a pro-Chinese institution in the context of collective security in Asia is hindered by the reluctance of countries such as Japan, South Korea, the Philippines and Vietnam to become part of the Asian security system.

Moreover, unlike the OSCE, the SCO has no direct sources of threat and from the point of view of China, India and Pakistan, conventional and nuclear weapons cannot be under the jurisdiction of international institutions or regimes. Another dimension of the SCO is geoeconomics. The organization has the prospect of becoming a pro-Chinese EAEU, with a system of institutions and regulatory mechanisms within it, but even these prospects are unlikely in the medium term.

Therefore, most likely, for the near future the SCO will retain its status of a diplomatic platform. This is influenced by the priority of its members' choice of bilateral formats in resolving problematic issues. At the same time, due to the existing disagreements between the members of the organization, the expectation from the SCO of actions leading to an exacerbation of confrontation with other global players and alliances, including the US, EU, QUAD and AUKUS, seems unlikely.

Conclusion

As part of the dynamics of the development of the SCO, it can be noted that the organization has emerged from the period of hibernation. If we talk about the format of bilateral relations within the SCO, then the organization is experiencing a significant revival, and the factor of China's geopolitical rise, as well as the emerging multipolar system, has played an important role in the development of the current stage of the SCO.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization has significant potential for the formation of an Asian security system. The inclusion of India, Pakistan, and Iran, among the full-fledged member states, can significantly affect the further transformation of the macro-regional order in Eurasia. The SCO, taking into account its two leading states – Russia and China, maintained a strategic balance in Central Asia, and its functionality was largely limited, but as mentioned above, the admission of new states to the organization creates a political and diplomatic platform for its further evolution, already as a system of collective security in Asia. With the admission of India and Pakistan, the SCO

already covers the region of South Asia, which is an important component of the security system in the macro-region of the Indo-Pacific region. According to its political, diplomatic and institutional platform, the SCO acts as a regional institutional entity, but, nevertheless, in the future it can become an initiative for the institutionalization of security problems. At this stage, the role of the nuclear factor in the security of the main Asian states is increasing, therefore, the institutionalization of security can; in this case, soften the confrontation between the parties.

Moreover, the security mechanisms of the Indo-Pacific region are of an American-centric nature, where politics, in any case, will be determined by the logic of a zero-sum game. The SCO, on the other hand, can work out collective security mechanisms, where, naturally, this will take time.

Another significant factor within the SCO is the confusion of the internal balance of power. Earlier, within the SCO, there was a balance between Russia and India on the one hand, and China and Pakistan, on the other. But since the confrontation intensified, first between Russia and the United States, and then between China and the United States, this balance began to shift towards the strategic triangle Russia-Pakistan-China. Strengthening Russian-Pakistani military cooperation, in any case, underlines this factor. Therefore, the format of bilateral relations within the SCO remains a priority.

Thus, it seems that the SCO mechanisms will function as an institutional platform and the organization in the medium term will not focus on any clear and specific points of cooperation of a military-political or geo-economic nature. Due to this, the admission of Iran to the SCO most likely reflects the market trends in strategic interaction between the leading powers.

References

- Keohane R. (1984), *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*, Princeton University Press P.53
- ZHumaly R. (2006), *Geopolitika Central'noj Azii [Geopolitics of Central Asia]*. – Almaty: 2006. S. 340
- Lanteigne M. (2013) *Chinese Foreign Policy. An introduction*. Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, P. 61
- Tellis A. (2012) *Strategic Asia 2012-2013 (2012) China's Military Challenge* // Edited by Tellis A. and Tanner T. with contribution from Blumenthal D. – Washington: The National Bureau of Asian Research. P. 36
- Gabuev A. (2017) *Bol'she, da huzhe. Kak Rossiya prevratila SHOS v klub bez interesov [More is worse. How Russia turned the SCO into a club without interests]* // <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/71212>
- Laumulin M. (2020) *Central'naya Aziya v epohu transformacii. [Central Asia in the era of transformation.]* – Nur-Sultan: KISI pri Prezidente RK, 2020. S. 388
- Kulincev YU. (2020) *SHOS vo vneshnepoliticheskoj strategii Rossii [SCO in Russia's foreign policy strategy]* // <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/shos-vo-vneshnepoliticheskoy-strategii-rossii/>
- Dapen P. (2020) *Rol' SHOS vo vneshnepoliticheskoj strategii Kitaya [The role of the SCO in China's foreign policy strategy]* // <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/rol-shos-vo-vneshnepoliticheskoy-strategii-kitaya/>

Velichkin S. (2021) Ekho kabul'skogo obrusheniya: razmyshleniya v Deli [Echoes of the Kabul collapse: Reflections in Delhi] // https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/ekho-kabul'skogo-obrusheniya-razmyshleniya-v-deli/?sphrase_id=84866737

Kondapalli S. (2021) After two decades, the SCO appears to be at a cross-roads with the US withdrawal from Afghanistan // <https://m.rediff.com/news/column/srikanth-kondapalli-all-eyes-on-sco-meet-after-taliban-takeover/20210916.htm>

CHigasov N. (2021) «Taliban» nazval svoego glavnogo partnera [Taliban names its main partner] // <https://lenta.ru/news/2021/09/03/chinatalib/>

Balachandran V. (2021) US seeks intelligence outreach to check China // <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/comment/us-seeks-intelligence-outreach-to-check-china-323767>

Istomin I. (2019) Politika SSHA v Indo-Tihookeanskom regione: posledstviya dlya Rossii. Rabochaya tetrad' [US policy in the Indo-Pacific region: implications for Russia. Workbook] RSMD № 49, s.19

Tellis A. (2019) Strategic Asia (2019). China's Expanding Strategic Ambitions. Edited by

Ashley J. Tellis, Alison Szalwinski, and Michael Wills – Washington: The National Bureau of Asian Research. P.360

Anonymous (2021), The Longer Telegram: Toward A New American China Strategy. Atlantic Council, P.8

Smagin N. (2021) Iran v SHOS: vynuzhdennyj povorot na Vostok i al'ternativnyj miroporyadok [forced turn to the East and an alternative world order] // <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/iran-v-shos-vynuzhdennyj-povorot-na-vostok-i-al'ternativnyj-miroporyadok/>

Elbridge C. and Wess M. (January/February 2020), The Age of Great-Power Competition. How the Trump Administration Refashioned American Strategy, Council on Foreign Relations, Foreign Affairs P.121

Tellis A. (2020) Strategic Asia (2020), U.S.-China Competition For Global Influence. Edited by Ashley J. Tellis, Alison Szalwinski, and Michael Wills – Washington: The National Bureau of Asian Research. P. 53

Small A. (2015) The China Pakistan Axis. Asia's New Geopolitics, C Hurst & Co. p. 61

Tokaev K. Preodolenie [Negotiation]. Almaty, 2003 S. 210