

NATO and the SCO: Their Conceptual Foundations and Implementation in the Work of Organizations¹

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Abstract

On 24 February 2022, Russian president Vladimir Putin, during his address to the citizens of Russia, announced a special military operation in Ukraine. Since then, the international environment on the Eurasian continent, and the world order that has existed for 30 years after the Cold War, has changed. The armed conflict in Ukraine, which occurred as a result of North Atlantic Alliance (NATO) policy, has revealed once again the differences between the approaches of Russia, China, and western countries to world order and multilateral cooperation. This article analyzes the principles of activity, goals, and decision-making mechanisms of two key international security organizations—the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and NATO. Thus, this article defines the characteristic features of NATO and SCO approaches to ensuring regional security.

In addition, in view of the suspension of Russia's membership in many international organizations and the adoption of a new NATO Strategic Concept, it seems especially relevant to intensify cooperation within the organizations in which the Russian Federation retains enduring influence. In this regard, the issues and the prospects for developing and strengthening the SCO's role on the world stage in the context of the current geopolitical situation were also considered.

Keywords: SCO, NATO, international organization, regional security, military alliance, multilateralism

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Regarding the current situation in the international arena, Zhang Hongzhi, former editor and member of the Council of the Institute of Party History and Literature of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, wrote: “The conflict erupted at the stage of intertwining the age-old changes and the epidemic of the century. The world is already undergoing profound changes” [2022]. When western countries actively supported, according to the leaders and officials of the Russian Federation, “anti-Russian hysteria” [RIA Novosti, 2022b], in another part of the world, the causes of the conflict in Ukraine were viewed differently. As early as 23 February 2022, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said: “When the

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United States violated an agreement with Russia five times to expand the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) eastward to the borders of the Russian Federation and deployed advanced offensive strategic weapons, did they think about the consequences of putting a major power in a stalemate?” According to her, in order to find a rational and peaceful solution, it is necessary to understand all the subtleties of the Ukrainian issue and, on the basis of equality and mutual respect, properly resolve reasonable security concerns [Xinhua News, 2022].

The current conflict in Ukraine has highlighted the fundamental differences in the approaches of the three leading powers—Russia, China, and the United States—to the world order and the work of international organizations. In the context of a changing international situation, in order to optimize the mechanisms of activity of international security organizations and search for the best models of multilateral cooperation, this article compares two different models of regional international organizations on security issues on the territory of the Eurasian continent. To determine the prospects for development and assess the role on the world stage, the authors consider the ideological foundations, goals, and results of the work of NATO and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in the rhetoric of leaders and conceptual documents of organizations.

NATO: Goals and Objectives of the Organization in Conceptual Documents and the Rhetoric of Leaders

To determine the principles of activity, goals, and decision-making mechanisms of organizations, the rhetoric and behaviour of their leading countries on the world stage should be considered. As noted by A.V. Lukin, head of the Department of International Relations, Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs at the National Research University Higher School of Economics, geopolitical thinking in the United States has long been focused on the danger of the emergence and strengthening of an anti-American alliance, a coalition of powers, or an anti-American-minded power on the Eurasian continent. This idea is rooted in the works of the founders of geopolitical thought, such as H. Mackinder and N. Spykman [Lukin, 2020, p. 47]. At the same time, it is worth noting that in 1997 the famous Polish-American political scientist, Zbigniew Kazimierz Brzezinski, wrote in *The Grand Chessboard* about the dangers of the development of such an international situation for the United States: Potentially, the most dangerous scenario would be a grand coalition of China, Russia, and perhaps Iran, an anti-hegemonic coalition united not by ideology but by complementary grievances [1999, p. 256]. At the same time, he also stressed that, “Eurasia, however, retains its geopolitical importance. Not only is its western periphery—Europe—still the location of much of the world’s political and economic power, but its eastern region—Asia—has lately become a vital center of economic growth and rising political influence” [Ibid., pp. 11–2].

NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, also referred to as the North Atlantic Alliance, was founded in 1949. The initial purpose of creating the alliance was to confront an “armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America” from the East. However, even after the collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War, NATO did not cease to exist. Moreover, commitments not to expand NATO to the East, which were made during the German reunification talks in 1990, were repeatedly violated.

Thus, until today, NATO has been a collective military bloc with the clear goal of suppressing a few specific external adversaries [Yakovlev, 2017]. It is important to note that, in accordance with Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, “the most important and enduring purpose of NATO is to guarantee the freedom and security of all its member states by political and military means” [NATO, 2008]. At the same time, according to the official website of NATO, “by

applying Article 5, NATO countries can provide assistance in any form that they deem necessary to respond to the situation that has arisen [authors' note: armed attack against one or more of the Contracting Parties in Europe or North America]" [NATO, 2022d].

NATO repeatedly used military force around the world, taking "collective defence measures" during the Gulf War in 1991, the crisis in Iraq in 2003, and in Syria in 2012 [Ibid.]. It is also impossible to omit the tragic bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 under the pretext of fighting for human rights, which was committed in violation of international law. NATO conducted military operations in Libya in 2011 and in other countries as well. The 20-year NATO occupation of Afghanistan ended in August 2021 [Bennett, 2022].

Meanwhile, since 2014, the bloc's military activity near Russia's borders has also increased. Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation V.V. Gerasimov, in a 2015 speech noted: "Compared to 2013, the number of arrivals of ships from non-Black Sea NATO states in the Black Sea has quadrupled, the intensity of flights along the Russian borders of tactical and reconnaissance aircraft has doubled, and airborne early warning aircraft—has increased nine times" [Ministry of Defence of the RF, n.d.]. In 2021, NATO countries sent more than 30 warships to the Black Sea, thus breaking the record for the number of North Atlantic Alliance ships in this sea since 2014 [Naumenko, Perelet, Gubskaya, 2022].

Also since 2014, in the conceptual documents of the United States, the leader of the bloc, Russia and China have gradually been included among the main strategic rivals and threats. In the U.S.'s 2015 national security strategy, Russia was identified as one of the main challenges [The White House, 2015]. The 2017 strategy highlighted interstate competition and stated that "China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests" [Ibid., 2017]. The 2021 U.S. interim national security strategy guidance also highlighted the dangers of "increasing competition with China, Russia, and other authoritarian states." In addition, in the United States, at the official level, in the national security strategy of October 2022, China was identified as "the most serious geopolitical challenge." Competition with Russia and China is also spelled out in the new U.S. Arctic strategy [The White House, 2022].

Russia and China are also designated as the main threats in NATO's conceptual documents. As for the NATO budget, despite the imbalance in contributions, defence spending is growing. Member countries contribute according to an agreed cost-sharing formula based on a share of gross domestic product (GDP), but of all countries, the United States accounts for the largest share. At the 2014 Wales summit, NATO leaders agreed to meet the defence target of 2% of GDP. In 2014, three Allies spent 2% of GDP or more on defence; this went up to nine Allies in the first half of 2022. Moreover, 2022 is the eighth consecutive year of rising defence spending across European Allies and Canada, amounting to a rise of 1.2% in real terms compared to 2021. [NATO, 2022b]. However, the United States remains the permanent leader in defence spending: as of 2021, it was in first place in terms of funding (more than \$800 million, or 3.57% of GDP [NATO, 2022a]).

When setting the priorities for the 2021 defence budget, special attention was also paid to the Russian Federation and China, "in the face of strategic challenges from an increasingly assertive China and destabilizing Russia..." [The White House, 2021]. In December 2020, Jens Stoltenberg presented the NATO 2030: United for a New Era programme, according to which the main threats to the alliance are "Russia, terrorism, cyberattacks, technology, the rise of China and climate change" [TASS, 2022a]. At the Brussels summit in 2021, it was decided to adopt, in 2022, in addition to the NATO strategic concept, specific requirements for additional funding until 2030 and to determine the impact on the funds of the military budget, the NATO security investment programme, and the civil budget, as well as possible measures to improve efficiency. In addition, in the statement following this meeting, Russia's actions were

proclaimed a “threat to Euro-Atlantic security” and the number of references to Russia in the text is more than 60 [NATO, 2021].

At the NATO summit in Madrid in June 2022, a new strategic concept was adopted. Julianne Smith, U.S. permanent representative to NATO, said: “Even before February 24, there was a deep appreciation across the alliance that the language on Russia from 2010 was sorely outdated and needed a significant upgrade and needed to reflect the current environment... There was also an appreciation that China, for the first time, needed to be part of the strategic concept” [Garamone, 2022]. According to the 2022 concept, “the Russian Federation is the most significant and direct threat to Allies’ security” [NATO, 2022c]. China is included in this document for the first time “The People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) stated ambitions and coercive policies challenge our [NATO] interests, security and values” [NATO, 2022c]. In addition, “the deepening strategic partnership between the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation and their mutually reinforcing attempts to undercut the rules-based international order run counter to our [NATO] values and interests.”

After the start of the Ukrainian crisis, NATO, led by the United States, has continued the policy of expanding the anti-Russian military bloc. In June 2022, NATO officially invited Sweden and Finland to join the alliance; 30 NATO allies signed an accession protocol for the two countries, which will allow them to join NATO [Emmott, Siebold, 2022]. The accession of Sweden and Finland to the North Atlantic Alliance will result in a significant expansion of NATO’s land and sea borders with Russia, leading to further destabilization of the situation in the region and increased tension.

The U.S. is also expanding military alliances toward China’s borders, which is accompanied by the development of the QUAD, which unites the United States, Japan, Australia, and India, as well as the AUKUS partnership between Australia, the UK and the U.S., which is supposed to bring nuclear submarines to the Pacific Ocean [Bennett, 2022]. The then British foreign secretary, Liz Truss, described such actions as a NATO expansion into the Indo-Pacific region: “We should keep strengthening our NATO alliance with bonds around the world, like the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force, the 5 Eyes, and the AUKUS partnership... The G7 should act as an economic NATO, collectively defending our prosperity” [GOV.UK, 2022].

Thus, both in NATO’s conceptual documents and in the rhetoric of the bloc’s leaders, a clear anti-Russian and anti-Chinese orientation of the alliance’s policy can be traced, and the danger of deepening cooperation between Moscow and Beijing is emphasized. NATO’s offensive policy, as well as numerous precedents for the use of military force beyond the borders of Europe and North America, appeal to the reasonable concern of countries that the alliance refers to as challenges and threats. As a result, international tension grew, NATO policy did not contribute to its reduction, and the expansion of the bloc and provocative maneuvers near the borders of Russia ultimately led to the crisis of 2022.

SCO: Goals and Objectives of the Organization in the Conceptual Documents of the Leaders’ Rhetoric

The predecessor of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation was the Shanghai Five mechanism, which was originally a negotiating mechanism between “two sides and five countries” (China and Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan) in the early to mid-1990s. According to Liu Zhenmin, vice foreign minister of the People’s Republic of China in 2016, thanks to the creation of the Shanghai Five, the more than 7,000 km long border connecting China with four neighbouring states has become a link and a bridge of friendly communication between the five countries [People’s Daily, 2016].

The SCO was established in 2001 for cooperation in the field of regional security. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization was founded on the basis of the 1996 military confidence-building agreement in the border area [Legislation of the CIS Countries, 1996] and the 1997 agreement on the mutual reduction of armed forces in the border area [GARANT, 1997], accordingly, the issues of strengthening military mutual trust and reducing armaments in the Chinese-post-Soviet border regions were a priority for its activities. In a short period of time, the SCO has evolved from a consultative mechanism for resolving border issues and strengthening confidence-building measures in the military field to a diversified international organization with significant military and economic potential [Rakhimov, Kurylev, 2018, p. 11].

Starting with cooperation in the fight against international terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism, the SCO expanded its activities to other areas: the SCO, unlike NATO, in addition to cooperation in the field of security, also actively develops contacts in the economic, scientific, technical, humanitarian, and environmental protection spheres (Fig. 1). Thus, the SCO serves not only to contain destructive forces, but is also an organization of complex regional cooperation with the largest territory and the largest population in the world.

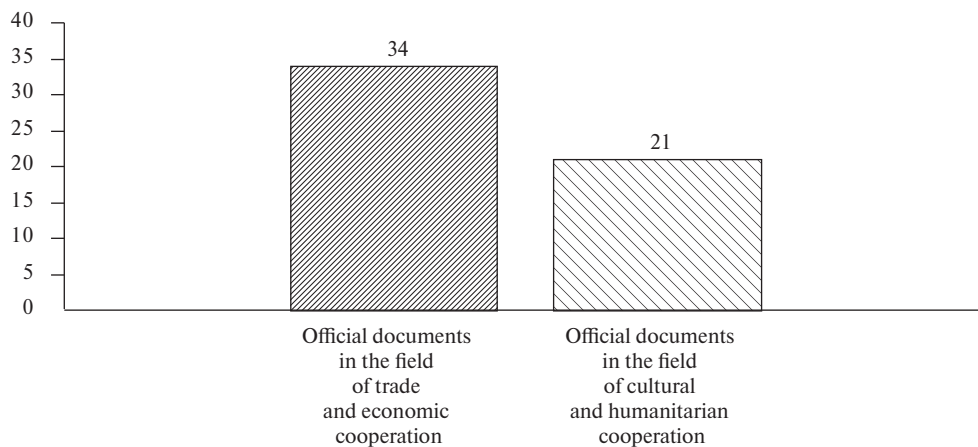


Fig. 1. Statements, Agreements and Other Official Documents of the SCO, 2022

Source: Compiled by the authors based on data from the official website of the SCO.

The main principle and ideological basis for the unification of the SCO members is the “Shanghai spirit,” which implies mutual trust and benefit, equality, consultations, respect for the diversity of cultures and civilizations, and the desire for joint development [President of Russia, 2001]. The SCO charter enshrines the most important principle of the organization’s work—non-direction of the SCO against other states or international organizations [Ibid., 2002]. According to the Declaration of the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on Building a Region of Long-term Peace and Shared Prosperity, member states are “convinced that it is impossible to ensure one’s own security at the expense of the security of others” [Embassy of China in Russia, 2012]. As former SCO secretary-general Rashid Alimov said, “Shanghai spirit” makes the organization particularly attractive, “this unique principle is considered to be the core one in establishing cooperation between the six states as a new model of regional cooperation. Being the main integral concept and the most important principle of the SCO, the ‘Shanghai spirit’ has enriched the theory and practice of modern international cooperation, implementing the universal desire of the world community for the democratization of international relations” [TASS, 2016].

The SCO for a long time acted only within the framework of China, Russia, and the Central Asian republics. For some western political scientists, the SCO looked like some kind of “new Warsaw Pact Organization” [Kaleji, 2021] or even a “Moscow-Beijing axis” [AsiaNews, 2009] or an eastern bloc in a new cold war. However, the historic SCO summit in Astana on 8–9 June 2017 opened a new stage in the development of the organization. One of its most important results was the granting of India and Pakistan the status of full members of the association [Alimov, 2017]. Thus, two South Asian powers joined the SCO, which did not have an “anti-western,” “dictatorial” stigma, but, on the contrary, were the largest democracy in the world [Ziabari, Chellaney, 2018] and a non-NATO ally of the United States [U.S. Department of State, 2021], respectively. This indicated that the SCO is not a closed military alliance led by China and Russia but rather an open regional cooperation organization, and its activities are characterized by tangible results in ensuring security and strengthening the multifaceted political, economic, and humanitarian cooperation of the participating countries [Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 2014].

It is important to emphasize that partnership within the SCO is different from a traditional union. Military-political alliances imply a very high degree of political interdependence, as well as some isolation since such alliances usually imply a willingness to mobilize in opposition. According to the current SCO secretary-general, Zhang Ming, the SCO is not a military alliance, and there are no confrontational components in its genotype [SCO, 2022a]. SCO member states share intelligence to a certain extent through the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) and conduct annual peace mission military exercises aimed at improving coordination in response to terrorist attacks. However, apart from these activities, the development of any hard security for the SCO has been limited [Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2015].

The SCO is also not a classic example of economic integration, in which maximum unification is achieved by delegating a significant part of sovereign rights to supranational bodies. As for the budget of the organization, it is formed for a period of one calendar year and consists of annual equity contributions from the SCO member states (Fig. 2) [Kodeks, 2017]. At the same time, there is no unified military budget or corresponding items in the general budget of the organization [SCO, 2021b].

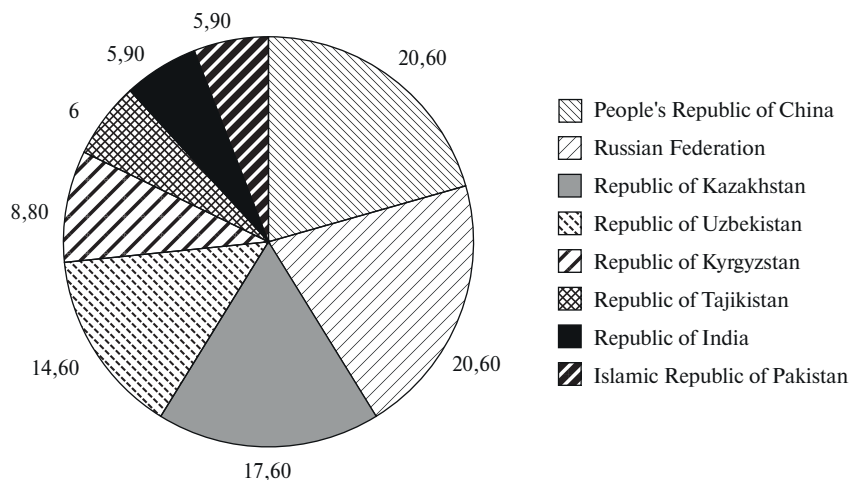


Fig. 2. Equity Contributions of the SCO Member States

Source: Compiled by the authors on the basis of the agreement on the procedure for the formation and execution of the budget of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

The principles of the SCO are reflected in the policy of the organization in crisis situations. In June 2010, during the height of the riots on the territory of Kyrgyzstan, Roza Otunbayeva, who at that time held the position of chair of the interim government of Kyrgyzstan, turned to Russia with a request to send peacekeepers to the south of the country, but the Russian government and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) refused to directly interfere in the internal politics of Kyrgyzstan. The SCO also adhered to the principle of non-intervention; only during the period of recovery after the riots did the SCO RATS council decide to assist the Kyrgyz side by the competent authorities of the SCO member states in ensuring security in the southern regions of Kyrgyzstan, including by establishing a timely exchange of information on possible attempts by international terrorist, separatist, and extremist organizations to destabilize the situation in the region [RIA Novosti, 2010].

The passive role of the SCO in the face of a real security challenge—the riots in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2010—drew heavy criticism regarding the organization's ability to maintain peace and security in the region. However, this position was a clear reflection of the organization's principles. A significant number of Chinese researchers positively assessed this decision of the SCO on the situation in Kyrgyzstan. In particular, according to the director of the Shanghai Center of International Studies, Pan Guang, in the context of such crises as in Kyrgyzstan in 2010, the “suitable” way to intervene is to influence the security and economic spheres without the use of military force, because the SCO is not a military alliance [2010, p. 44]. While the SCO did not provide military assistance to Kyrgyzstan during the turmoil, it provided political support. Thus, for the participating countries in the Central Asian region, the SCO, which, in the event of an emergency in a participating country, can provide collective diplomatic support, is of particular value. In addition, while the military intervention of the major powers will help to quickly quell the unrest, it will exacerbate the fears of other members of the organization regarding the dominance of the major powers and the preservation of their own sovereignty, especially when the military presence of Russia and China, due to complex historical and modern factors, is a sensitive issue for representatives of society and political elites of the countries of Central Asia. For example, as Kazakh political scientist A. Kaukenov wrote, “taking into account the high level of anti-Chinese sentiment in the region, inviting Chinese soldiers to their territory to solve security problems is unacceptable for the Central Asian elites” and “will instantly nullify the legitimacy of a ruler who decides to take such a step” [Kaukenov, 2013].

We should also consider the reaction of the SCO to the situation in Afghanistan after the U.S.'s withdrawal in 2021. Vladimir Putin emphasized the importance of using the full potential of the SCO in order to “provide all possible assistance to the start of an inclusive inter-Afghan peace process and at the same time do everything to block the threats of terrorism, drug trafficking, and religious extremism emanating from this country” [SCO, 2021a]. According to him, what is happening after the “flight” of the U.S. and its allies from Afghanistan directly affects the interests of the SCO members. In this case, as in the 2010 unrest in Kyrgyzstan, the SCO has traditionally not used military force to resolve the issue. In 2021, the situation in Afghanistan became the central topic at the SCO summit; a joint meeting of the leaders of SCO and CSTO countries was held within the framework of the summit in the “outreach” format. The countries of the organization provided humanitarian assistance, expanded cooperation with regional partners to curb the spread of threats to regional security, and expressed their readiness to assist in the formation of an “open and inclusive” political structure in Afghanistan [Ibid.]. The President of the Russian Federation proposed to resume the work of the SCO-Afghanistan contact group to encourage the new authorities of the country to fulfil their own promises to establish peace and security [RIA Novosti, 2021]. The meeting of foreign ministers in the format of the SCO-Afghanistan contact group was held in July 2021. Speaking at the SCO

summit, Chinese president Xi Jinping focused on the importance of respect for the sovereignty of Afghanistan, stressing that all parties should promote the implementation of the principle “under Afghan leadership and control” [Li, 2021].

In January 2022, during the riots in Kazakhstan, at the request of the president of the country, K.-J. Tokayev, the CSTO, as a military alliance, for the first time used the collective flow of force in Kazakhstan. At the same time, the SCO, as a new type of international cooperation organization that is not a military bloc, repeated its “Kyrgyzstan model” of non-interference in domestic politics. The SCO RATS also declared its readiness to provide the necessary assistance in the prescribed manner upon the appropriate request of the competent authority of the Republic of Kazakhstan [RIA Novosti, 2022a].

Thus, transparency and the absence of a specific opponent are integral features of the SCO partnership model. The SCO, although focused on security issues, is not a military-political structure or an economic integration bloc. Within the framework of the work of the SCO, three main areas are presented on the website of the organization: cooperation in the fields of politics and security, trade and economy, and culture and humanitarian cooperation [SCO, 2019]. The consensus decision-making model emphasizes the equality of all participants, regardless of their potential or capabilities [Alimov, 2018]. Only when the views, opinions, and approaches of the member states are unified does the SCO take a decision. It is fair to regard the SCO as an example of a partner organization based on consensus. Ideologically, the principle of non-intervention and the use of non-military support of the SCO fully reflect the ideas and principles of the SCO as an organization of a new model. Pragmatically, it is best for participants to receive support and assistance without fear about the true intentions of the organization and its major participants. As Putin said in a 2012 article in the People's Daily, “the SCO has brought many new and useful things to world politics. First, it proposed a partnership model based on the true equality of all participants, on their mutual trust, on respect for the sovereign, independent choice of each people, for its culture, values, traditions, and on the desire for joint development. Such a philosophy, in fact, best embodies the basic, and in my opinion, the only viable principles of international relations in a multipolar world” [Vesti, 2012].

Prospects for the Development of the SCO

When discussing the activities of organizations, we cannot ignore some of the problematic issues of the work of the SCO, which has been repeatedly criticized for its consensus decision-making model [Aris, 2008], its non-intervention in crisis situations in the region [Saksena, 2014], and the lack of a specific goal or common vision due to differences in political systems and economic situation [Imanaliyev, 2017]. The organization has serious institutional competitors, such as the BRICS states (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) and the CSTO, whose functionality overlaps with that of the SCO.

In addition, since 2010, Beijing has been promoting two important initiatives—the creation of the SCO Development Bank and the SCO Development Fund (Special Account), as well as the idea of forming a free trade area (FTA). These initiatives remain unlaunched because the member states cannot reach a consensus [Nurimbetov, 2021] due to fears about the dominance of the Chinese economy and also because some SCO members already have a higher-level integration mechanism within the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Therefore, according to Zhao Huasheng, professor at the Institute of International Studies of Fudan University, China is now focused on promoting liberalization and facilitation of trade and investment procedures within the SCO, strengthening interconnectedness, and harmonizing and parallel developing

the Belt and Road project with the development strategies of member states and the EAEU, as well as strengthening new areas outside the traditional areas of cooperation [2022].

There are also a number of problems associated with the interaction between members of the organization. First, Chinese researchers highlight disputes between India and Pakistan. Although the two countries have stated that they will not use third party platforms to carry on their conflict, in reality, the India-Pakistan conflict may affect the work of the SCO, contributing to the growth of contradictions in decision-making [Zhang, Dai, 2019, p. 28]. Second, geopolitical conflicts between China and India may affect the cooperation of the two countries within the framework of the organization. The contradictions between China and India are mainly manifested in border issues and national foreign policy. The Doklam crisis that erupted in June 2017, as well as the conflict in Aksai Chin in 2020 due to border tensions, show that tensions and mutual distrust remain between China and India. The promotion of China's Belt and Road Initiative and the establishment of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor will gradually heighten the fears of India. In turn, conflicts between China and India may affect the strategic balance between Russia, China, and India within the SCO [Zhang, Dai, 2019, p. 28]. Third, there are differences in the definition of the role of the SCO by China and Russia. In particular, China's economic and trade cooperation with the countries of Central Asia has steadily increased China's influence within the organization, as well as in the countries of Central Asia, while Russia strives to maintain close ties with the countries of Central Asia and its position in the region. In order to create a system of checks and balances, the SCO has actually formed the mode of operation of the Chinese-Russian condominium (joint management) [Li, Zeng, 2018, pp. 105–6].

However, regarding disagreements within the organization, SCO secretary-general Zhang Ming commented that, as in all international organizations, the interests of SCO member states cannot be 100% aligned. According to him, the experience of the past 20 years has proven that the principles and values of the SCO are strong enough to overcome differences and defend common interests, which is “difficult to understand for traditional western political sciences” [SCO, 2022b]. Thus, the SCO secretary-general states that the concept of international order of Russia and China is completely different from the western one, and that the SCO, as the embodiment of this concept, is also fundamentally different from NATO.

However, one cannot fail to note some achievements in the work of the organization, as well as promising areas of development. One of these is the activities of the SCO RATS and the practice of regular anti-terrorist exercises through the law enforcement agencies and armed forces of the member states—for example, the “peace mission” exercises. As for the development of cooperation, in 2022 the need to coordinate actions with the CSTO as part of the SCO was announced by Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi during a meeting with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov [Dukhanova, Medvedeva, 2022]. As a result, on 16 February 2022, the CSTO, the Anti-Terrorism Center of the CIS Member States (CIS ATC), and the SCO RATS signed the Joint Position of the SCO RATS, the CIS ATC and the CSTO Secretariat on Countering Terrorism and Extremism [CSTO, 2022]. In addition, a joint statement on international relations entering a new era and global sustainable development, signed by Russian president Vladimir Putin and Chinese president Xi Jinping, stated that the SCO should play an important role in shaping a polycentric world order [REGNUM, 2022].

The SCO can also act as a link in the project of conjugation of the large-scale economic projects of China and Russia—the Belt and Road and the EAEU. As early as 8 May 2015, during the visit of Xi Jinping to Moscow, the two countries issued the Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on Cooperation in Aligning Efforts to Build the Eurasian Economic Union and the Silk Road Economic Belt, and the first article of this docu-

ment stated that both countries “will establish a joint work in bilateral and multilateral formats, primarily at the site of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation” [President of Russia, 2015].

Although the prospects and goals of these two projects of economic cooperation in the region differ, the territory of their implementation largely overlaps (especially in Central Asia and the Transcaucasus). The docking of the EAEU and the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) prevents competition between Russia and China in Eurasia, especially in the Central Asian region. As the Russian political scientist F.A. Lukyanov observed “the interest of continental powers (primarily Russia and Kazakhstan) in their own development coincides with the desire of the PRC to build a corridor to the west—in the direction of European markets and beyond. In this configuration, the question of the inevitable, as it was believed, competition between Moscow and Beijing in Central Asia is at least mitigated—the region becomes not an end in itself, but a means of solving specific problems that are relevant for all participants” [Lukyanov, 2015]. At the same time, all priority areas for linking the SREB and the EAEU are fully consistent with the areas of regional economic cooperation of the SCO [Li, 2016].

We should also mention the expansion of the organization in 2022 and the increased interest in the organization from third countries in the new geopolitical conditions. Already, at the present stage, four countries have the status of an observer state at the SCO (the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Republic of Belarus, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Mongolia), six countries are dialogue partners of the SCO (the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Armenia, the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, the Republic of Turkey, and the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka) [SCO, n.d.]. On 15–16 September 2022, the SCO summit was held in Samarkand, as a result of which the procedure for Iran to join the organization was completed and the procedure for Belarus to join began.

The increased interest in the SCO indicates an active search for alternative partners. Senior Fellow of the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences B.D. Dolgov pointed to the blocking of Russia’s assets by western countries as one of the reasons for the movement of the Arab states toward the SCO [Bainazarov, Portyakova, 2022]. In addition, the inclusiveness of the approach and the principle of consensus decision-making attracts other countries to join a more open and fair organization. For the SCO, the expansion of membership, on the one hand, will entail both more complex decision-making and dispute settlement procedures, and on the other hand, it will expand the influence of the organization in the political, trade, and economic spheres.

We can predict the strengthening of cooperation in the economic sphere. In 2021, the development banks of the SCO, at a meeting of the council of the Interbank Association, signed a strategy for further development in the medium term, according to which areas of cooperation were identified, including overcoming the consequences of the pandemic, minimizing the negative consequences of various kinds of cataclysms, assisting banks in increasing the share of settlements in the national currencies of the SCO member states, and using alternative interbank communication systems to increase the security and flexibility of settlements, as well as joint financing of healthcare projects, cooperation in the digital economy, and electronic commerce [Prime, 2021]. On 16 June 2022, deputy secretary-general of the organization, G.S. Logvinov, noted that the “pandemic of a sanctions nature” had a devastating effect on world economic relations, in connection with which the member countries of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation will work to expand settlements in national currencies [TASS, 2022b]. In this area, Russia and China have already achieved some success: in 2019, the two countries entered into an intergovernmental agreement on settlements in national currencies; in the first quarter of 2020, the dollar’s share of trade between Russia and China fell below 50% for the first

time on record and the greenback was used for only 46% of settlements between the two countries, compared to 90% in 2015 [Simes, 2020].

Thus, it can be assumed that the role of the SCO will be strengthened in the context of a changing geopolitical situation. Within the framework of the SCO, as an alternative multilateral organization, there may be an intensification of cooperation in the field of security and the economy. At the same time, the philosophy of the SCO is largely aimed at equal and mutually beneficial cooperation, which makes this organization attractive in the eyes of the participants and allows them to pursue an independent course.

Conclusion

Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, which began 24 February 2022, "became the most significant international event since the end of the Cold War, which will open a new stage in world history" [Zhang, 2022]. Western models of multilateral organizations and regional cooperation in the field of security, of which NATO is a prime example, not only failed to bring peace and security, but also led to disaster—the events that have taken place over the past 30 years and continue today are proof of the inconsistency of the western model with modern realities of international relations.

The goal of the SCO and NATO is to maintain regional security, but the principles of activity, tasks, and results of the work of these two organizations are fundamentally different. Despite the significant military potential of the participating states, it cannot be argued that the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is a counterbalance to such an entity as NATO. While NATO is a military alliance with a clear focus on Russia and China, transparency and the absence of a specific opponent are integral features of the SCO's partnership model. The principles of the organizations are reflected in their international activities: NATO has numerous precedents for the use of military force, while the SCO respects the sovereignty of its member states and does not interfere in internal conflicts (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparative Characteristics of NATO and SCO.

Characteristic	NATO	SCO
Character	Military-political alliance with a specific ideological orientation, which has specific enemy countries	An open regional international organization with different fields of activity, not ideologized, not a military bloc against a third party
Goals	"Absolute security" of the members of the organization, strengthening the world order, and spreading the values of the western model	Building a multipolar, democratic, just, and rational world order
Fields of activity	Military* and political	Security*, economics, and cultural and humanitarian ties
	* Cooperation in the field of protection against traditional security threats, the ability to confront specific enemy countries	* Cooperation in the field of defence against non-traditional security threats, notional adversaries are not specific countries
Interest aggregation methods	The presence of a clear real threat or an external adversary is a necessary condition for the development of the organization, therefore NATO has never stopped the process of searching for enemies and strengthening the confrontation between the enemy and its own	The pragmatic demand of the participants for peace, good-neighbourliness, and joint development; common actual interests in the face of non-traditional security threats ("three forces of evil") and common pragmatic needs in the region for cooperation in the economy, cultural, and humanitarian sectors

Characteristic	NATO	SCO
Military integration	Collective defence from Art. 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, mechanisms for the standardization of weapons and armed forces of the participants and military integration, has its own Rapid Reaction Forces	Absent
Sanctions for breaking the rules	At the legal level, NATO does not have a mechanism for exclusion of member states. NATO member states can voluntarily apply to withdraw from the organization (North Atlantic Treaty, Art. 13), but they cannot be forced to leave	Membership in the SCO of a member state that violates the provisions of the charter of the organization and/or systematically fails to fulfil its obligations under international treaties and documents concluded within the framework of the SCO may be suspended upon the recommendation of the Council of Foreign Ministers by decision of the Council of Heads of State. If this state continues to violate its obligations, then the Council of Heads of State may decide to expel it from the SCO from a date determined by the Council itself (SCO Charter, art. 13)
Decision-making	The participants make decisions on major issues by consensus, the mandate of the United Nations Security Council is a guarantee of the legitimacy of operations outside the territory of its participants. At the same time, there is "coalition of the willing" (Iraq, 2003) and operations without a UN mandate	Decisions are considered adopted if none of the member states in the negotiation process is against (consensus), with the exception of decisions to suspend membership or expel from the organization. In case of disinterest of one or several member states in the implementation of individual cooperation projects, they can be implemented only by interested countries (SCO Charter, art. 16)
Cultural background of participants	Western democratic values	Varied
Political requirements for candidates	Promoting the democratization and westernization of the political regime in the country	Has no claims for course change
Polarity and democracy	The United States acts as a guarantor of security in Europe, European participants provide for the strategic needs of the United States	Multipolarity without a specific leading country or determining the foreign policy course, equal status of participants

Source: Compiled by the authors.

Thus, in the context of a changing international environment, in order to optimize the mechanisms of activities of organizations in the field of security, as well as to search for the most suitable models of multilateral cooperation, it is especially important to maintain and develop alternative forms of multilateral cooperation, different from western models. At the same time, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, whose activities are actively supported by Russia, China, and a number of Eurasian countries, can serve as a vivid example of alternative non-western models of multilateral cooperation.

The SCO, in comparison with NATO, began to develop relatively not very long ago, so it is too early to say that the organization is a model of multilateral cooperation. The SCO still faces a number of tasks that need to be addressed, among them, ensuring a comfortable integration of India and Pakistan into the institutions of joint work of the SCO, resolving internal disagreements, and establishing mechanisms for more active trade and economic cooperation. However, the SCO is attractive and, unlike NATO, does not impose strict obligations on member states and is not directed against third countries and organizations; as such, it can serve as a

dialogue platform both for joining projects and for resolving international issues and searching for new partners. As E. Yu. Vinokurov, the director of the Centre for Integration Studies of the Eurasian Development Bank, observed “it is quite possible that in the coming years, a decade, a situation will arise when the presence of such an organization that brings together the three largest players—China, India, Russia and several regional balancers—Pakistan, Kazakhstan, will play a decisive role in preventing military conflicts” [SPIEF, 2022]. In the context of a changing international environment and the formation of a more just system of international relations of a new type, the SCO and other multilateral cooperation organizations, in which Russia, China, and other non-western centres of power actively participate, will play an important role and gain more weight in the international arena.

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