

Development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Through the Development of the Common Approach of the Organization to the Conflict in South Ossetia in 2008

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Abstract: Experts support the thesis that at the summit in Dushanbe in 2008 members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization could not develop a consolidated position on the conflict in the Caucasus in August 2008 which only proved the fact that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is unable to become a competitor of Western associations and in particular of the North Atlantic alliance, therefore is not a sufficiently successful union. The researchers refute this position, considering the influence of the talks in Dushanbe as further development of cooperation between the members of the organization. In their study, they come to the conclusion that the SCO has never been and is not a competitor to NATO, being essentially different. The SCO, first of all is a political association aimed at realizing the ideology of building a multipolar regional (Eurasia) and global world order. Commitment to the ideals of polycentrism was demonstrated by the states in the Dushanbe Declaration which in turn was reflected in the intensification of interaction between the states both in the sphere of political negotiations and economic cooperation and in enhancing joint security activities (in the fight against transnational crime and joint military exercises). Thus, it can be stated that the SCO is successfully evolving within the framework of a predetermined strategy and the acceptance of new major players to the organization (India and Pakistan) is the evidence of this process. The 2008 summit in Dushanbe, therefore, can be seen as a catalyst for the accelerated development of the organization in the face of increasing risks of intra-regional conflicts.

Key words: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a multi-polar world, regional security, international security, the united nations charter, international law

INTRODUCTION

As part of our research, we were able to come to the following conclusions. Despite, the position that the organization worked out and approved in the f the Dushanbe Declaration though it seemed very “smooth”, the mechanism for interaction of the participating countries to develop a unified Foreign policy in the context of such complex and controversial international problems and above all, regional conflicts, gave a significant impetus to the development. It is important to understand that the adoption of a consolidated position by the SCO on such a controversial issue in itself was a turning point in the history of the international organization. In 2008, few experts believed that countries such as Russia, Uzbekistan, China, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan

and Kyrgyzstan having different national interests, would be able to reach a consensus on matters directly affecting the vital position of one of the leaders on the international arena and at the same time could cause serious tensions among member countries. However, the final declaration, not only reflected the common position of the participating countries on the conflict in South Ossetia but also laid the foundation for the adoption of any subsequent decision on the Foreign policy issues and has served as an incentive to intensify cooperation among the SCO member states in the sphere of international security and counteraction against international terrorist threats.

Undoubtedly, the most vivid illustration is the gradual incorporation of a growing number of members in the joint military and anti-terrorist exercises and immediate operations. So, the traditionally held counterterrorism

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exercises “Peace Mission” 2016 were attended by Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. It is important to note that these exercises developed from bilateral exercises between China and Russia into the exercises of the SCO in just a few years (2005-2007) and became regular just as a result of the intensification of cooperation between the member countries of the organization which started to develop after the signing of the Dushanbe Declaration (2008). Particularly noteworthy is the fact that China, according to most experts, perceived the SCO primarily as an economic union for a long time but has recently taken the Russian side on the idea of expanding cooperation in the field of international security. The key decision in this regard was the decision of the Chinese government to strengthen the support for B. Assad government in Syria by sending military advisers to train government soldiers. Also at the conference of the prime ministers of the SCO, held at the beginning of November 2016, the Chairman of the State Council in China Li Keqiang “urged to take measures to strengthen security in the SCO states. In particular he noted that “in a situation with Afghanistan, China is ready to work with all members of the organization in order to achieve peace in the country and the formation of the economy, aimed at the development of the state”, according to the central internet portal of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization “InfoSCO”.

Another, indication that the decision of the SCO on the analysis of the war in South Ossetia in 2008 and the development of a consolidated position of the participating countries had an extremely positive impact on the development of the organization is the SCO course taken to increase its diplomatic weight on the international arena in order to form a powerful center force. The most important event in this regard is the admission of India and Pakistan to the number of full members of the organization which is in spite of the relatively high risks of causing conflicts and contradictions to the work of the SCO with proper approach would strengthen the organization’s role in international relations as a continental and even, perhaps, a world center force. Thus, we suppose that the issue of conflict in the Caucasus in August 2008, served as a catalyst for an intensification of development of the SCO and had a positive impact on the development of cooperation between member states in the area of consolidated policy on international security issues and key aspects of international relations and geopolitics.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Main part:

Historical factors of the issue: The SCO, being formed at the turn of 20 and 21th century as the regional

organization (at the time of the formation the SCO included primarily the central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and the countries with the greatest regional political weight-China and Russia, naturally subsequently became the union leaders) as an international organization has a very wide range of development goals for the association of the participating countries; “strengthening mutual trust, friendship and good neighborhood between the member states; encouraging effective cooperation between them in the political, trade-economic, scientific-technical, cultural, educational, energy, transport, environment and other fields; joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region, the construction of a new, democratic, just and rational, political and economic international order” (Declaration on the establishment of the SCO from 15.06.2001).

However, this agreement was as versatile as it is “vague” that during the first years of its existence, the organization gave many political experts reason to predict the collapse of the SCO because of the large number of contradictions between the participating countries as well as the existence of issues and problems more relevant than the development of some form of integration and cooperation in the Shanghai cooperation organization line. The milestone of the development of cooperation in the framework of an international organization was probably the collision of two positions of the two union leaders on the strategy and the ideology of the organization. Russia almost immediately began to pursue a policy of cooperation in the field of international security and counterterrorism in the SCO. While China as a priority, outlined a model of economic and trade cooperation. The idea of the SCO as a major international political center of power, seemed utopian then as in fact the union was just a major debates club.

However, with the development of the organization, despite the skeptical expert community, the SCO began to attract more and more attention from the major international centers of power and above all attention from the hegemon of the unipolar world-the United States. The most illustrative episode was the Astana Declaration (5 July, 2005) which obliged the US to determine the deadline for the withdrawal of American bases from Central Asia, stationed in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The response of the American side (“United States Congress expresses its concern about the provisions of the Declaration of Heads of the SCO member states which require to determine the deadline for the temporary use of the infrastructure of the SCO member states as well as their military presence in these countries” (Pravda.ru) was extremely negative and in fact served as a formal declaration of the beginning of the conflict between the United States and the SCO in Central Asia which later

spread to other regions, particularly the Middle East (conflict over the issue of cooperation of the SCO and Iran) (SCO, 2017a-f).

Consequently, in August 2008 the SCO was already a well-known international organization, however, the question about the prospects of unification was still open, due to the fact that at that time the practical activities of the SCO were not big-scale and in addition the organization had not yet faced the tasks that could cause obvious contradictions between its members, therefore the stability and the opportunity to intensify the development of cooperation could be questioned.

As we know, on August 8th, 2008, the same day as the opening of the Olympic Games in Beijing, Georgian troops treacherously attacked Ossetian Tskhinvali and attacked the peacekeeping forces of the Russian Federation in South Ossetia. Thus, the post-Soviet Georgian-Ossetian conflict, frozen, in many ways, again turned into a regional war. However, this time Russia was forced to become a direct participant in the conflict from the first days of the war. After 5 days of the Russian operations to compel Georgia to peace, the aggressor troops were driven back and the process of peaceful settlement of the conflict began which ended with the signing of the peace plan on August 16th by the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev (the previous document was signed by the leaders of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as well as the President of Georgia). It was worked out by the conflicting parties with the active mediation of the leader of the French Republic Nicolas Sarkozy. On August 26th the Russian President also signed decrees on the recognition of South Ossetia's and Abkhazia's independence by the Russian Federation (RIA-novosti).

Russia's actions caused extremely resonant response of the international community. Thus, the United States, strongly criticized Russia's actions and taking full advantage of the sole superpower, tried to create in the world (and implement) the image of Russia as an outcast state because of its "aggression" against a sovereign Georgian state. At the same time, the attitude of the individual European states ranged from neutral to frankly Russophobic. In this respect, Russian diplomacy decided to rely on its closest neighbors and allies in the former Soviet Union and on strategic partners who share the vision of a multipolar world. And it is not surprising in the fact that the SCO summit on August 28, 2008 in Dushanbe where Russia had to regain the status of the President of the organization, in this regard, had acquired a strategic importance for Russia. Accordingly, the Russian Federation had to put on the agenda of the Shanghai organization of cooperation the question that could either cause controversy among the member

countries and as a result stop the development of associations or to initiate a new phase of the SCO on the formation of the continental political power center (SCO, 2008).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Adoption of the consolidated position of the international organization: The main difficulty in discussing the August conflict in the framework of the SCO was the fact that the official position of the Russian side on a number of aspects caused fears of other countries participating in the association. Thus, despite the actual sympathy and to some extent the approval of Russia's actions on the part of China, China was still not ready to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia because the precedent of recognition of these states could force China to change the approach to the formation of an official position on Xinjiang-Uygursk Autonomous region, Tibet and Taiwan that would contradict its national interests. The attitude of the former Soviet republics among the SCO member states, though implied taking Russian side in this conflict was aggravated by the fear of increasing Russian influence in the former Soviet Union that potentially could, in the opinion of these countries lead to Russian intervention in matters relating to their immediate national sovereignty. It should be noted that the recognition of independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia took place just two days before the start of a summit in Dushanbe and therefore, Russia could hardly expect and probably only just hoped for the recognition of independence of these states by the SCO members. Much more realistic was the goal of consolidation and securing the general principles of the SCO in solving this precedent and demonstrating that Russia was once again an active and important player in the international arena which considered the SCO as an alternative to the leading Western international organizations that have a direct impact on international politics and safety. From the other members Russia primarily expected to achieve at least the proclamation of "non-pro-western" (not anti-Russian) position on the conflict in South Ossetia.

Despite the fact that from the very beginning of the conflict, Russia had successfully developed cooperation with the other SCO member states (in particular succeeded in providing humanitarian aid to South Ossetia from China and Kazakhstan), in fact up to the summit Russian partners had avoided dramatic statements. However, during the discussion of the Caucasus conflict, the representatives of the member countries unanimously expressed support for the Russian position. For example, "Chinese President Hu Jintao said that Georgia's actions

were a reflection of the provocative policy of the West for NATO expansion and Russia's actions in response to this were quite adequate" and the president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, in turn, noted that "the events in South Ossetia started with the bloody shelling of Tskhinvali by the Georgian armed forces. Russia had to either ignore it or stop the bloody development and the international community should take the path of solving international problems and not to speak constantly of the "cold war" (Vremya, 2008). And yet, due to the above-mentioned legal issues the final Dushanbe declaration of the SCO did not directly provide full support of the Russian actions on the part of other members of the organization. Only the statement "The SCO member states approve of the six principles for resolving the conflict in South Ossetia on 12th August 2008 in Moscow and support the active role of Russia in promoting peace and cooperation in the region" could be regarded as the success of the Russian side. Moreover, a number of analysts today suggest that "The decision of the SCO leaders to avoid public statements on the critically important issue for one of its members showed that the SCO in the near future would not be able to become a powerful military-political alliance and compete with NATO. The SCO resembled the North-Atlantic Alliance, only by the number of hidden and latent conflicts which have not yet manifested themselves" [Jablonskih E.V. Reakcija]. In our view such position is fundamentally wrong, since it replaced the strategic interests of the Shanghai cooperation organization with the tactical interests of the Russian Federation. So strategically, it is more important to emphasize other theses of the declaration: "attempts to strengthen its own security at the expense of the security of others do not contribute to the preservation of global security and stability" and "The search for effective responses to common challenges and global threats, should be based on strict adherence to the UN Charter and universally recognized norms of international law, through the joint efforts of all countries, overcoming the confrontation mentality, blocking politics and unipolarity with the use of multilateral diplomacy capabilities." In fact these provisions of the declaration of the SCO member states were in favor of the intensification of the organization activities to promote cooperation for the formation of a multipolar world which in our opinion, may also indicate the desire of the SCO to be one of the new centers of power.

CONCLUSION

Influence of the Dushanbe summit of 2008 on the development of the SCO: South Ossetian conflict gave the

SCO major geopolitical lines on the Eurasian continent in the 21st century, by launching through the Dushanbe summit of a long negotiation process (S.G Luzianin notes that one of the most important points of the summit in Dushanbe is: "prospects of stopping the moratorium on the expansion of the organization" in the article "The SCO's role in resolving the conflict in the Caucasus" (Vlasov and Luzyanin, 2008) which was eventually implemented in the Declaration of Ufa 2015. Among other things, the discussion of the war in the Caucasus as well as the development of a consolidated position of the SCO obviously became a model for decision-making by the organization on the most significant, controversial issues that cause arguments and confrontation among the members of the organization. It also showed the willingness of the SCO to resolve internal contradictions which undoubtedly contributed to the further decision to admit India and Pakistan into the membership, though they have extremely tense relations. Another process initiated by the five-day war and the summit in Dushanbe, of course was the promotion of the international security mechanism supported by the Shanghai organization of international cooperation which we wrote about in the introduction. In general, the events of August 2008 were a test of the SCO strength. They forced the organization to reconsider some of their priorities and decide on the further strategic development. In our opinion this period was a turning point for the organization which showed that it had to play a role far more important than the "anti-NATO" option and proved the common desire of the member states to conduct sustained, common strategy, further combining Russian (with the emphasis on safety) and Chinese (with the priority of the economy) ideologies of the SCO development.

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