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**The 'Peace Mission 2007'
Exercises:
The Shanghai Cooperation
Organisation Advances**

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Key Points

* 'Peace Mission 2007' conducted from 9-17th August 2007 in China and Russia, was the first large-scale SCO exercise to include troops of all member states and in which defence forces were combined with internal security troops.

* The increase in the number of participating armies as well as the introduction of non-defence troops shows that command and control of SCO drills have been seriously improved since 'Peace Mission 2005'.

* Events and agreements in 2006 and 2007 indicate a cautious development of the SCO towards a full-grown security organisation:

- The 2006 Shanghai Summit and the 2007 Bishkek Summit mentioned the development of a mechanism in response to threats to regional peace, as well as a regional conflict prevention mechanism;
- The agreement on a structural arrangement for joint exercises by the SCO ministers of Defence in June 2007;
- The intensifying relationship between the SCO and the CSTO, which is to be consolidated in a Memorandum of Understanding;
- The first combination of a political summit (Bishkek 2007) with war games ('Peace Mission 2007');
- The de facto application of a 'military assistance' concept in the 2007 exercises.

* The SCO still lacks a considerable number of essential elements which a mature military security organisation should have, such as an integrated military-political structure, permanent operational headquarters, a rapid reaction force, as well as continuous political deliberations. Therefore, it would take much more consultation and effort and thus many years before the SCO could truly be described as the 'NATO of the East'.

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The 'Peace Mission 2007' Exercises: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Advances

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Introduction

In August 2007 the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) conducted military exercises in China and Russia, under the title 'Peace Mission 2007'. The SCO is a regional international organisation comprising states in Europe, the Near East, Central Asia and South East Asia.¹ The SCO encompasses cooperation in political, military, economic, energy and cultural fields. SCO member states have a population of nearly 1.5 billion people, which is about a quarter of the total world population. If the four observers are included, the SCO covers nearly half of the world's population. Furthermore, in addition to the member states Russia and China, the observers India and Pakistan bring together four nuclear powers, and observer Iran might well be on its way to reach that status. The armed forces of China and Russia are two of the world's three largest.² The total area occupied by SCO member states is 3/5 of the territory of Eurasia.³ Concerning energy cooperation, Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Iran are big exporters – and China and India are significant importers. Russia and even more China are the leading actors of the SCO. Comprising a considerable territory in and around Central Asia, a large part of the world's population, energy sources, nuclear arms and significant armed forces, the SCO in theory has a formidable economic, political and military potential. This paper provides an overview and assessment of the recent SCO war games and will put the 'Peace Mission 2007' manoeuvres in perspective with its predecessor 'Peace Mission 2005' as well as with other previous exercises. Whilst emphasizing the military component, an outlook will be made on the development of the SCO into what possibly in due course might become a full-grown security organisation.

Peace Mission 2007

Background and starting point

'Peace Mission 2007', the joint SCO military exercise for 2007, was initially scheduled for July 18-25, to be conducted in Russia. Colonel General Moltenskoy, Deputy Commander of the Russian Ground Forces, overall commander of 'Peace Mission 2007' and chief of the Russian contributing troops, flew to China in January 2007 for the second round of consultations in preparation for the exercise. At first, 'Peace Mission 2007' was supposed to involve only battalions from Russia and China (400-450 troops each) companies from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan (100 troops each), and a Kyrgyz platoon. Beijing, however, asked to increase the number of troops involved to 2,000 and Moscow agreed.⁴ Further negotiations in spring 2007 changed a number of details of the exercises. The

amount of troops was further enlarged; the total personnel strength of troops involved was raised to 4,000. Apparently, later consultations further raised the number of troops to some 7,000, which was the actual number during the manoeuvres. Furthermore, in the fourth round of consultations between SCO members, in May 2007, it was decided to broaden the scope of the exercises, geographically and in its international significance. Now, the war games were to be conducted not only in Russia – in the vicinity of the town of Chebarkul, in the Chelyabinsk region of the Ural Mountains – but to start (the first two days) in China, in the north west city of Urumqi, capital of China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. Moreover, the manoeuvres were rescheduled to 9-17 August. Another interesting phenomenon – related to the postponement of the exercises from July to August – was the combination with the annual political summit of the SCO, this time in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, on 16 August. After the Bishkek Summit, the Heads of State of the SCO: Russian President Vladimir Putin, Tajik President Emomali Rakhmonov, Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, Chinese President Hu Jintao, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev and Uzbek President Islam Karimov as well as their guests, flew to Russia to attend the final stage and day of the exercises.⁵

Objectives

According to Vice-Chairman of the Chinese Central Military Commission, State Councillor and Defence Minister Cao Gangchuan, the purpose of the joint anti-terrorist manoeuvres was to demonstrate the determination of the SCO member states in the fight against the three evil forces, as well as the common desire to ensure security and stability in the region and stimulate common development and prosperity. General Xu Qiliang, deputy chief of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), deputy overall commander of 'Peace Mission 2007' and chief of the Chinese troops for the joint exercise, added to this that the joint drill was significant in reinforcing the anti-terror capabilities of the SCO member states and meanwhile intensifying partnership among them in defence affairs.⁶ Moreover, SCO member states hoped that the exercises, involving military forces from all the SCO member countries, would help intensify their exchanges and cooperation in defence and security, enhance the capabilities of their armed forces in collectively countering terrorism and promote regional peace, security and stability.⁷ In addition to the common SCO exercise targets, the Chinese political and military authorities also had their own national objectives for the manoeuvres. They considered them a practical way to improve the Chinese army's capability to tackle terrorist threats. Furthermore, the joint military exercises could help foreign armies to learn more about the PLA and understand that the talk of a Chinese threat is baseless. Also, the PLA could learn about advanced military theories, weapons and equipment from its foreign counterparts, which could help the PLA speed up reforms.⁸

Scenario

The set-up of 'Peace Mission 2007' was as follows. Under support of an international terrorist organization based in the north border of country 'N', a terrorist organization of SCO member state 'A' launched an anti-government action in the south eastern part of the country. They seized a city and took hostages. By creating chaos and disorder and forcing the government to take measures against the will of the population, and supported by domestic political opposition and ethnic groups, the terrorists intended to create a popular revolt with which they would takeover control of country 'A'. As part of the setting, country 'A' was not capable of resolving

this terrorist attack itself. Therefore, at the first stage of the exercise, 9 and 10 August, in the Chinese city of Urumqi, political-military consultations were held at the level of Chiefs of the General (Main) Staff to discuss counter measures. During the consultations the terrorist attack was reported to these authorities. Under the scenario, country 'A' requested from the SCO's Council of Heads of State military assistance to solve the crisis. Subsequently, the SCO asked and received a mandate from the United Nations Security Council to take military action against the terrorists. At the headquarters of the joint drill, commanders from the six SCO members decide to annihilate the terrorists by forming six operational battle groups. To conduct the counterterrorist operation, a joint SCO operational staff was formed, with a personnel strength of 60.⁹ During the second stage of the manoeuvres – close by the Russian city of Cherbarkul – from 11-17 August, first, the military units of state 'A' localized activity of militant and terror groups, isolated the area of their activity, ruled out the possibility of new militants penetrating into the territory or supplying weapons to them. After that, the joint SCO armed forces found and eliminated bases of the militants and their arms depots. The collective group of forces divided key forces of the militants and blocked certain groups of terrorists. Finally, on the last day of the exercises, the joint forces retook the town from the terrorists, bringing an end to the SCO rescue operation.¹⁰

Composition of troops, arms and equipment

Between 6,500 and 7,500 troops, some 1,270 pieces of arms and equipment and around 85 aircraft participated in this largest collective SCO exercise so far. The bulk of troops and arms were contributed by Russia and China. As to personnel strength, some 2,000 combat and 2,700 support troops were from Russia, 1,700 from China, whereas Tajikistan and Kazakhstan joined with paratrooper companies (of about 100 men each), Kyrgyzstan with an airborne platoon of 30 soldiers and Uzbekistan with some 15 officers for the staff of the manoeuvres.¹¹ 'Peace Mission 2007' comprised the following number of units, arms and equipment. Russia contributed an infantry battalion, a reinforced airborne company, some 500 pieces of arms and equipment, including 18 122-mm and 100-mm artillery systems and 40 aircraft, comprising six Ilyushin Il-76 Candid transport planes, eight to nine Sukhoi Su-25 Frogfoot ground-attack jets, 12-14 Mil Mi-24 Hind helicopter gunships and 12-18 Mi-8 Hip helicopters. China provided, among others, an airborne company of 120 soldiers, 40 BMP and 14 BTR armoured infantry vehicles, 18 pieces of 122-mm and 100-mm artillery systems, 340 air force personnel and some 46 aircraft, i.e. six Il-76 aircraft, eight JH-7-A fighter-bombers, 13 to 16 JG-9W combat and 16 Mi-17 Hip helicopters.¹² The Russian infantry combat support and logistic units belonged to the 34th Motor Rifle Division of the Volga-Ural Military District, at which unit's training ground the manoeuvres took place. The reinforced airborne company was subordinated to the airborne brigade in Ulyanovsk. The Il-76 aircraft were from the 61st Air Army, the helicopters from the 5th Air Forces and Air Defence Army in Yekaterinenburg and the Su-25 fighters from the 4th Air Forces and Air Defence Army in Rostov-na-Donu. Russia participated not only with Defence forces but also with Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), Border Guard Troops, Special Police Units (OMON) of the Ministry of Justice and other special security units (SBOR).¹³ On the whole this composition of troops and arms was the equivalent of an armoured infantry brigade, reinforced with artillery and airpower.

Attendance

The leaders of the four SCO observer countries, i.e. Iran, Pakistan, India and Mongolia, were not invited to participate with forces. However, they were represented by their respective military attachés accredited in Moscow. They, as well as other military attachés, observers from the CSTO and 400 journalists represented the wider international community. General Moltensky stated that no US observers were invited to the manoeuvres because they were internal and concerned only six states. Moltensky added that "we invited [officials] from these [SCO member] states, as well as the military attachés accredited in Moscow from other countries. The total exceeded 80 people." According to Moltensky the Chebarkul military testing ground was not large enough to accommodate many guests.¹⁴

Preparations and course of the war games

The 2007 SCO exercises were planned for a dual location, from 9-10 August in Urumqi, the capital of China's Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Area, and continuing from 11-17 August at the 255th all arms shooting and training range of the Russian Ground Forces' 34th Motor Rifle Division near Chebarkul, about 80 km west of Chelyabinsk, in the Volga-Urals Military District. In preparation for the drills, Russian troops had trained near Chebarkul since early June. The first Chinese military trains were scheduled to arrive on 27 July. The preparations by the railway authorities in Chelyabinsk for receiving trains with Chinese troops had already started in February 2007.¹⁵

The Chinese organisers of the manoeuvres faced the considerable logistical challenge of deploying 1,700 Chinese troops and their equipment, by rail and air, from Xinjiang to central Russia. In addition to a small portion of 300 military who were transported by air, the 1,400 remaining PLA soldiers went by train, a trip which took two weeks. They had to travel a distance of 10,300 km, 5,333 km of which was over Chinese territory. From Xinjiang they travelled to the east of China, through Inner Mongolia province, to cross the border with Russia in the Zabaykal-Chita region, where railway platforms had to be changed due to the difference in railway size. From Chita the trip continued through Russia via Irkutsk, Novosibirsk and Omsk to Chelyabinsk. Qui Yanhan, deputy commander of the Chinese contingent, told the official Chinese Xinhua news agency that this was the first time that the PLA had sent so many soldiers and armaments to such a faraway place.¹⁶ As such this logistic operation considerably contributed to the capabilities and experience of the PLA.

The joint anti-terrorism military exercise began on 9 August in Urumqi with military-political consultations at the headquarters of the Uighur Military District. The initial phase of the manoeuvres involved the heads of SCO general staffs. Under the exercise scenario, they received information about a terrorist attack on a small town in the Urals, 2,000 km away. The participants then briefed their respective national leaders on the situation, compiled plans to contain the conflict and prepared for a military operation against terrorist units. However, in addition to the scenario of the drills, the chiefs of staffs also discussed reality, i.e. current topics of international and regional security, as well as of military cooperation. For example, the Chief of the Russian General Staff, Army General Yuri Baluyevsky, made a plea for stronger regional security involving the members' respective military structures.¹⁷ From 11 August on the drills were continued in Russia. The final stage

of the manoeuvres was conducted on 17 August, when at 13:00 local time after the firing of three red signals, the live fire exercise with ground and air forces started. Along with other military action, Russian and Chinese forces carried out an airborne landing by 240 paratroopers and 24 infantry vehicles from 16 Il-76 transport aircraft. In the space of two hours, the SCO coalition troops carried out a joint operation to ferret out, block, pursue, disarm, and destroy a large terrorist organization.¹⁸

Difficulties and differences

According to Chinese commanders, the exercises – as expected – demonstrated some military-operational difficulties, especially because of language differences (Chinese as opposed to Russian for the remaining SCO forces) and also for disparities in tactics. Another operational problem was that the Chinese air force pilots were used to deserts and good visibility and not this terrain of mountains and lakes with often limited visibility conditions.¹⁹ However, certainly with the experience of 'Peace Mission 2005' these problems were expected, taken into account and were helpful to learn from. Interoperability was also a matter of concern, with Chinese and Russian opinions diverting. According to General Xu Qiliang, commander of the Chinese military contingent, the participating SCO troops coordinated excellently in commanding, planning and combat operations. He stated it was difficult to distinguish whether it was a multinational force or that of an individual country in action. Nevertheless, the Russian commanders of the exercises pointed out that there were a number of difficulties to overcome. For instance that at the rather limited space of the training range at Cherbarkul a number of activities – such as airborne landings from aircraft and air assault landings from helicopters, close air support, action by combat helicopters, artillery barrages and attacks by mechanised infantry and Special Forces – had to be conducted at the same time and at the same location. This demanded intensive planning and coordination.²⁰

The real problems, however, were found in contrasting views of participating states on a number of aspects of the drills, of Russia, China and Kazakhstan in particular. It took SCO military experts six rounds of talks to coordinate all aspects of the war games. Russia and China had different opinions on the size of the military contingents, involvement of the Collective Treaty Organisation (CSTO), logistics and openness. As to the size of the force contributions, during the consultation rounds China more than once pressured Russia to accept a bigger Chinese contingent. Although Russia agreed with this, they did not accept the Chinese request to participate with tanks and other heavy equipment, in order to keep the operation along the lines of the intended anti-terrorist scenario.²¹

Another conflicting aspect between Russia and China was the possible involvement of the CSTO in the war games. The CSTO is a Russian-led military alliance of seven states within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The other member states are Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Just as NATO, the CSTO has a military assistance article, which states that an aggression against one signatory would be perceived as an aggression against all. The main responsibilities of the CSTO are cooperation in defence, the manufacturing of weapons, preparation of military personnel, and peacekeeping activities. Other areas of cooperation are a common integrated air defence system, the fight against terrorism and against narcotics, which particularly concerns Central Asia. In the near future the CSTO is planning to create a contingent of

peacekeeping troops.²² The Russian Chief of the General Staff, Army General Yuri Baluyevsky, intended to make these exercises a joint SCO-CSTO effort, but the Chinese counterparts turned this down. The Chinese were anxious about the connection with CSTO, a military alliance, which would possibly present the SCO more as a military-orientated organisation than a political-economic one, as desired by China. Furthermore, participation by the CSTO might have strengthened Russia's position in the SCO, which would go against the interests of China. As a result of the Chinese rejection, the CSTO input in the manoeuvres remained limited to representatives of its secretariat, staff and member states as observers.²³

A further problem or difference in attitude, in this case between China and the other participating forces, was the apparent solo military action by the former. For instance, all contributors to the war games – except for China – made use of ammunition, arms and equipment provided by Russia. China, however, had brought its own stocks of ammo and material. Why the Chinese were unwilling to make use of Russian supplies has remained unclear. More striking was the high level of secrecy with which the Chinese troops surrounded themselves. Journalists were not allowed to take pictures in the Chinese quarters, nor were they allowed any interviews. Furthermore, all Chinese arms and equipment when not in action were covered, whereas those of the other SCO forces were visible for spectators. Again, the reasons for the contrasting attitude in openness of the Chinese were not disclosed.²⁴ Kazakhstan also caused a conflicting issue. Kazakhstan, though a member of the SCO and a participant in the exercise, failed – either because of reluctance or lack of time – to pass legislation allowing foreign troops to cross its territory. The most direct route for the Chinese troops from Xinjiang to Chelyabinsk in central Russia would have been through Kazakhstan. Because Kazakhstan did not allow the Chinese to cross its territory, the PLA troops were forced to make a detour of more than 10,000 km.²⁵ Perhaps as an 'appeasing' move and to demonstrate that the matter of allowing foreign troops to go across its territory should be solved in the near future, Kazakhstan offered to host the next SCO war games in 2008 or later.²⁶

Operational assessment – Comparison with 'Peace Mission 2005'

From 18 to 25 August 2005, for the first time in 40 years, Russian and Chinese armed forces carried out joint exercises under the heading 'Peace Mission 2005'. These drills comprised 10,000 military personnel, navy vessels and aircraft, which carried out a wide range of military action, such as flights of strategic long range bombers; neutralisation of anti-aircraft defence, command posts and airbases; gaining air superiority; enforcing a maritime blockade, control of maritime territory, as well as amphibious and airborne landings. Although originally bilaterally organised, China and Russia brought 'Peace Mission 2005' under the umbrella of the SCO. These war games were mainly held on Chinese territory and saw large-scale amphibious landings on its Yellow Sea coast. The exercise caused some controversy, and was seen by some as preparation for a Chinese invasion of Taiwan.²⁷

Background and starting point

In 'Peace Mission 2005' China took the lead in proposing the size, participating type of forces and content of the manoeuvres. And in the process of drafting the exercise plan the number of Chinese troops increased. The consultation rounds of 'Peace Mission 2007' showed a similar pattern of China demanding permission to

participate with a larger contingent, although its request to involve heavy weapons was denied by the Russians. Remarkable was that at a very late stage the date of the war games (from July to August) and the location (not only in Russia but starting in China) were changed. Both adjustments were probably the result of changes in views, respectively to make the combination with the Bishkek Summit of 16 August, and to stress the Russian-Chinese military relationship.

Objectives

The formal objectives – reinforcing the anti-terror capabilities of the SCO member states, intensifying partnership and cooperation among them in defence affairs and ensuring security and stability in the region – corresponded to those of 'Peace Mission 2005'. With the exclusion of heavy weapons – which did participate in 'Peace Mission 2005' – 'Peace Mission 2007' was much more than its predecessor of 2005 a genuine anti-terrorist exercise. Consequently, these war games did not cause any concerns with other countries, although they must have given such a signal to separatist movements within the SCO states. Nevertheless, with the presence of some 80 defence attachés and 400 journalists, as well as all six Heads of State, the large scale exercise 'Peace Mission 2007', just as the one of 2005, was clearly also meant to display the military power of the SCO. Thus, as was mentioned in the final declaration of the Bishkek Summit, the war games were also likely to emphasize that these countries would manage the security of their region themselves, without outside (Western) interference.²⁸

Scenario

The scenario of the 2007 war games was similar to that of 2005, but, as regards to locations, turned around: now starting in China and continuing in Russia. In both cases the exercises began with two days of military-political consultations in one country but conducting the actual drills in the other country. Although this time the bilateral approach was uplifted to an all-SCO level of participation, with China and Russia as lead nations, the geographical scope remained the same. Otherwise, the setting of the two 'Peace Missions' was also alike. The scenarios included an attempt by terrorists to takeover the government of a country, which was counteracted by a joint military operation, after receiving a mandate from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to do so. Mentioning the United Nations in the scenario is an example of the value that Russia and China attach to international law, when this is in line with their security policies. Russia and China, but also the other SCO states, are always very sensitive to outside interference in their internal affairs, including unrest – as was the case with Andijan, Uzbekistan in May 2005 – and therefore are keen on obtaining a UNSC resolution for any action. As permanent members of the UNSC, Russia and China can always veto requests from other countries.

Troops and material

'Peace Mission 2005' involved 10,000 military personnel, of which Russia contributed 1,800 and China more than 8,000. Furthermore, the 2005 war games comprised a great number of heavy weapons, ranging from some 70 naval ships and submarines to long range strategic bombers. In comparison, the total number of troops of 'Peace Mission 2007' was raised from originally some 1,000 military to an actual personnel strength of some 7,000, of which Russia, as host, provided the greater part. However, in contrast with the heavy weapons-loaded and more

offensive nature of 'Peace Mission 2005', apparently as a 'lesson learned', Colonel General Vladimir Moltenskoy stated that the 2007 drills would not involve any heavy military equipment. Instead, troops of Russia's security departments – other than those of Defence – earmarked for internal security, such as Border Guard Troops, the Interior Ministry's Internal Troops and special police (OMON) units would take part. As to the material used, mechanized-infantry combat vehicles, armoured personnel carriers and helicopter operations – instead of the tanks and strategic bombers of 'Peace Mission 2005' – dominated the 2007 exercises.²⁹

Operational cooperation

With contrasting views on the size of the military contingents, involvement of the CSTO, logistics and openness of Russia, China and Kazakhstan, 'Peace Mission 2007' provided inside information on a number of aspects of military cooperation. First, it showed that Russia, China and to a lesser extent Kazakhstan are the lead countries of the SCO, which of course has to do with the size of these states and their defence forces, as compared to the remaining SCO states. Secondly, it also proves that these three states are not always on the same line and have their own military and security agendas. However, considering that the SCO has only been conducting military exercises for some five years, it naturally takes time to solve conflicting interests. More importantly, 'Peace-Mission 2007' demonstrated advancement in the level of military drills. This time Russia and China were joined by all other SCO member states. This was not the first time that all six SCO members participated in SCO war games, as was previously the case with the anti-terrorist exercises 'East-Antiterror 2006' of March 2006 in Uzbekistan and also with 'Issyk-Kul Antiterror 2007' of May 2007 in Kyrgyzstan.³⁰ However, these two exercises were in size and scenario not comparable with 'Peace Mission 2007'. In these aspects the large-scaled 'Peace Mission 2007' can only be weighed against 'Peace Mission 2005'.

In doing so, a number of improvements in conducting joint exercises are evident. 'Peace Mission 2007' brought not two but six national armed forces together, which made higher demands on command and control of the drills. Furthermore, in addition to defence forces, units of Russia's other power ministries also participated. Thus, for the first time these SCO exercises showed a combination of defence and security forces, which made the war games even more complicated. So, the increase in the number of participating armies as well as the introduction of non-defence troops gives evidence to the fact that command and control of SCO drills have been seriously improved since 'Peace Mission 2005', although this remains to a large extent the result of Chinese and Russian efforts.

Political assessment – Drills as exponent of security policy

Supporting Russia's security agenda

In a number of ways Russia has used 'Peace Mission 2007' as an instrument to advance its national security policy. For instance, at the military-political consultations in Urumqi, Chief of the Russian General Staff Army General Yuri Baluyevsky made public that Russia had sent a proposal on SCO military cooperation to the member states in April but had not received a reply. Baluyevsky furthermore argued that the member states' economic development required stronger regional security, involving the members' respective military structures.³¹ President Vladimir Putin did likewise, when he proposed conducting counterterrorism exercises on a regular basis at the Bishkek SCO Summit of 16

August. Furthermore, on 17 August at the Chebarkul range Putin used the audience at 'Peace Mission 2007' of some 500 journalists and military observers to announce that Russia would resume long-distance patrol flights of strategic bombers, which were – according to the Russian president – suspended in 1992 after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The president said that although the country stopped strategic flights to remote regions in 1992, unfortunately, not everyone followed Russia's example. Putin asserted that other states' long-distance strategic patrol flights have created certain problems for Russia's national security.³² Moreover, the USA was not allowed to send observers to the exercises, allegedly because the drills were internal SCO orientated and because the military testing ground was not large enough to accommodate many guests.³³ With hundreds of military and media observers, also from the West, both grounds seemed invalid. The real reason is likely to be found in Russia's current anti-American policy, for instance related to the US' 'missile shield' initiative in Europe. Thus, the 2007 SCO war games were an excellent chance for Putin to have global media coverage for his continued anti-Western stance. Another long-standing Russian interest has been closer ties and cooperation between SCO and CSTO. Although China prevented 'Peace Mission 2007' becoming a joint SCO-CSTO exercise, Russia was allowed to invite representatives of the CSTO, Belarus and Armenia to observe the war games, which advanced this spearhead of Russian security policy.

China's ambiguous attitude towards the SCO's military component

The Chinese expressed ambiguity in their attitude towards the contents of the war games. On the one hand China attempted to increase the scope of the exercises, by pleading for larger contingents and more heavy equipment. On the other hand it refused participation of the Russian-led CSTO military alliance, which actually would have strengthened the global impact of the drills. It appears that China – although, just as Russia, usually stressing the political and economic cooperation and diminishing the military element of the SCO – is interested in strengthening its military component, there are limits to this interest. This is probably also the reason for the ongoing negotiations within the SCO on a Memorandum of Understanding with the CSTO, propagated by Russia, but carefully and hesitantly considered by China. This is more evidence that the SCO has two lead nations, which publicly intensively cooperate but behind the scenes often are involved in a struggle for power.³⁴

Warning to internal separatist movements

The scenario of 'Peace Mission 2007', of terrorists supported by domestic political opposition and ethnic groups, intending to create a popular revolt with which they would take control of country 'A', has similarities with real events, such as the Andijan uprising in Uzbekistan (May 2005), the incursions by Chechen terrorists to take over rule in Dagestan (August/September 1999) and also with terrorist problems the Chinese face from Muslim separatists in Xinjiang province. Considering the latter, the choice of the location of the start of the war games, in Urumqi, capital of China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, was probably meant as a warning to the separatist movement in that province and consequently also towards terrorist/separatist movements in any SCO state.

Military and political activities combined

For the first time 'Peace Mission 2007' saw a combination of military drills with a political summit. Moreover, until then defence ministers were the highest ranking officials to watch SCO military exercises. The political leaders' presence at the war games was probably to demonstrate the growing significance of the military component within the SCO but also signalled their determination to be in 'command' of the security situation in this region.

Military assistance as a concept

Perhaps the most significant development with regard to the security policy aspects of 'Peace Mission 2007' was its scenario in which military assistance played a central role. Repeatedly SCO Heads of State, for instance Putin at the 2007 Bishkek Summit, have denied that the SCO would develop into a full-grown security organisation such as NATO.³⁵ One of the vital ingredients of such a security organisation, which also applies to the CSTO, is military assistance as one of its vital instruments. Although a development towards inclusion of such an article in the policy documents of the SCO can not yet be discerned, the scenario of 'Peace Mission 2007' unmistakably revealed a de facto application of military assistance. Although the SCO is still far from becoming a genuine military security organisation, the use of the military assistance concept in war games could be regarded as one step further in that direction.

Assessment of the SCO as a security organisation

Considering the recent security activities, above all 'Peace Mission 2007' and the Bishkek Summit, is the SCO developing into a "NATO of the east" as it was regularly described after the anti-Western flavour of the 2005 Astana Summit? In the last couple of years the SCO has indisputably made huge steps in intensified security cooperation, operational as well as political.

Military security cooperation – exercises

The first joint military exercises were initially small in numbers and earmarked against terrorism in particular.³⁶ They have become increasingly ambitious, developing from a bilateral or multilateral level to a joint all-SCO level. Furthermore, gradually, the emphasis of the exercises on counterterrorism has been expanded with international power play aspects. 2005 seemed to be the year of a breaking point, when Russia and China conducted large scale manoeuvres under the patronage of the SCO. Although these exercises were formally described as peace-keeping and counterterrorism operations, the massive use of ground, air and naval arms and equipment clearly demonstrated their capabilities in conducting modern conventional warfare and thus exhibited the SCO's military power. 'Peace Mission 2007' was a step further in that direction, by combining the war games with the SCO Summit in Bishkek. The presence of representatives of CSTO observers at the 'Issyk-Kul Antiterror 2007' as well as at the 'Peace Mission 2007' exercises further displayed the growing importance of the military dimension as part of the SCO security framework in the international arena.

Political security cooperation – policy concepts

The combination of the political summit with military drills, the use of a 'military assistance' concept during 'Peace Mission 2007', as well as the intensifying relationship between the SCO and the CSTO, are indications of a maturing security policy. Two other developments can be mentioned which may indicate that the SCO is making further steps towards becoming a full-grown military security organisation. First of all, on a common security policy the 2006 Shanghai Summit concluded that in case of threats to regional peace, stability and security, SCO members will have immediate consultations on effectively responding to the emergency. Furthermore, this summit expressed the intention of formulating a mechanism for measures in response to threats to regional peace, as well as a study on establishing a regional conflict prevention mechanism within the SCO framework. The projected drafting of such security mechanisms, which are also found with NATO, were repeated at the 2007 Bishkek Summit.³⁷ Secondly, prior to the 2007 Summit the SCO ministers of Defence in Bishkek on 27 June 2007 reached agreement on a structural arrangement for joint exercises. According to the Kyrgyz Defence minister, Ismail Isakov, this agreement would lay the long-term organisational and legal foundations for such activities in the future.³⁸

Outlook

The SCO has developed itself from, originally, a border, arms control oriented organisation via a regional counterterrorism body to a truly international entity. Until recently the nature of the organisation was mainly political and economic. However the developments described indicate a closer cooperation in the field of security. The SCO still lacks a considerable number of essential elements which NATO, as a mature security organisation, has: an integrated military-political structure with permanent operational headquarters, a rapid reaction force, and continuous political deliberations. Moreover, SCO member states and observers cooperate in many areas but also illustrate large differences, such as conflicting political and economic interests. However, in spite of these shortcomings, the intensification of the SCO security policy has now reached the point that a cautious development towards a genuine security organisation can no longer be excluded. If this is the desire of the SCO member states, such a development will still take a considerable number of years before the SCO can truly be described as the 'NATO of the East'. Although the West at present does not have anything to fear from the SCO, its current endeavours in the security dimension might encourage the West at least to closely observe further activities of the SCO but possibly also to seek cooperation with this organisation.

Annex: SCO military exercises 2002-2007

| Dates | Participants | Locations | Topics |
|---------------------------|--|--|---|
| October 2002 | China, Kyrgyzstan | Kyrgyzstan | Anti-terrorist exercise |
| August 2003 ³⁹ | Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan | Kazakh Almaty oblast and Chinese Xinjiang province | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Cooperation 2003’ • Cross-border anti-terrorist exercises • 1,000 troops |
| August 2005 ⁴⁰ | Russia, China | Russia’s city of Vladivostok; China’s Shandong Peninsula and the adjacent Yellow Sea | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Peace Mission 2005’ • Formal objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Anti-terrorist exercise ○ Enhance combat readiness against new threats • De facto objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Practice of modern conventional warfare ○ Show-of-force against the West • 10,000 troops |
| March 2006 ⁴¹ | Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan | Uzbekistan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘East-Antiterror 2006’ • Special services and law-enforcement agencies defending critical infrastructure |
| May 2007 ⁴² | Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan | northeastern Kyrgyzstan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Issyk-Kul Antiterror 2007’ • Monitored by representatives of the four SCO observers and the CSTO • Intelligence services, special forces and law-enforcement bodies |
| August 2007 | Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan | Urumqi in northwestern China (two starting days) and six days in Chebarkul, Chelyabinsk region, Urals, Russia. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Peace Mission 2007’ • Anti-terrorist exercise • Some 7,000 troops, mainly Russian (4,700) and Chinese (1,700) • Mostly Special Forces but also Russian Internal, Border and Justice Troops • Monitored by the SCO observers, the CSTO and some 80 defence-attachés • For the first time war games combined with the annual political summit • The scenario included a de facto ‘military assistance’ concept |

Endnotes

¹ The SCO has China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as member states and Mongolia, Iran, Pakistan and India as observers. For further details on background and development of the SCO, see: H. Plater-Zyberk, *Who's Afraid of the SCO?*, Central Asian Series 07/09, Conflict Studies Research Centre, March 2007 and A.J.K. Bailes, P. Dunay, P. Guang & M. Troitskiy, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, SIPRI Policy Paper, No. 17, Stockholm International Peace Institute, May 2007.

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