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SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION: THE EVOLUTION OF COUNTER-TERRORISM AT A REGIONAL LEVEL

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Abstract

The article analyses the emergence and evolution of cooperation between member states of SCO and the joint actions and instruments involved in the struggle against international terrorism. The complex political and economic environment in the region and the revitalization of terrorist activities both in and out of the territory of SCO have served as an accelerator for the development and strengthening of cooperation between members of the organization. Counter-terrorism was one of the SCO's priorities even before the September 11 attacks in the USA. The SCO Counter-Terrorism Convention determined the forms of interaction among parties and provided the basis for the activities of SCO against terrorism. The September 11 attacks and an increase in terrorist activities in the territory of SCO have intensified counter-terrorism cooperation inside the organization. Throughout the whole period of existence, SCO has applied consistent and unique measures aimed at providing the legal and institutional support of activities. The communication and cooperation within the organization at the level of Heads of States, Governments, relevant ministers and agencies created the legal framework. The struggle against terrorism is one of the main SCO spheres of activities. It includes not only the cooperation by making and implementing joint decisions but also the practice of regular counter-terrorism training since 2004. The analysis of the evolution in the cooperation of SCO member states against international terrorism leads to the conclusion about significant achievements in the creation and development of a system used against the threat to regional security.

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1. Introduction

International terrorism is very common. Stepping over the international law and state borders it became an instrument of struggle for nationalist organizations and extremists to achieve their political and ideological targets. Confronting the humankind, terrorism undermines the integrity of states, public order, creates an atmosphere of fear, causes political and economic damage to society and states, provokes conflicts between population groups and destabilize the situation in countries and regions.

An increase in the number of terrorist organizations and acts performed by them, the use of the latest technologies in science and engineering oblige the international society to develop efficient measures to campaign against the phenomenon. The experience of SCO that was created in 2001 is particularly interesting in this case. This organization has developed an effective counter-terrorism mechanism while searching for a measure to provide security in the region.

2. Problem Statement

The article analyses the emergence and evolution of cooperation between member states of SCO and the joint actions and instruments involved in the struggle against international terrorism. This is a particularly interesting problem as almost all decisions adopted within SCO against terrorism are aimed at an even broader task which is to provide international safety in the region.

3. Research Questions

The article analyses the counter-terrorism activities of SCO in the context of safety in the region.

4. Purpose of the Study

The work is aimed at analysing the main SCO events and mechanisms against international terrorism.

5. Research Methods

The research is based on the historical and genetic method as well as system analysis.

6. Findings

Both Russian and foreign researchers pay increased attention to SCO, its appearance, evolution, and activities, as well as the issues of security in Central and Southern Asia.

For example, the emergence and development of SCO, as well as the perspectives for cooperation in the organization were described in the work by Alimov (2017), who was the organization's General Secretary in 2015–2018.

Vasiliev (2017) analyses the geopolitical situation in Central and Southern Asia, causes and conditions for threats to the safety of the SCO region, assesses the SOC experience in fighting against the international terrorism, evaluates its efficiency and perspectives for future development. Khalanskiy (2017)

notes the significant role of the USA in taking the advantage of the region's insecurity to destabilize it using the scenarios previously tested in the states of Middle East and Maghreb, as well as the insufficient cooperation of SCO member states in critical situations and the lack of a single defence structure that would allow quick responses to domestic political conflicts.

Barskiy (2015) pays attention to the possible participation of SCO in the management of local conflicts in the region by developing the corresponding peacekeeping structure. On the contrary, Konarovskiy (2016) believes that the idea of a defence structure is unrealistic as it contradicts the basis of the organization. At the same time, he points out the necessity to develop the interaction inside SCO in the form of regular meetings at the level of defence ministries, aimed at the development of already existing forms of cooperation in counter-terrorism activities. Nikitina (2011) takes the same position. She thinks that the most perspective way is the unification of CSTO mechanisms with international and political credibility of SCO (Nikitina, 2011). Eris (2013) also indicates the SCO's peace component aimed at enhancing the trust between the region's states and their potential cooperation with the West in the global struggle against terrorism.

Given that the development of international terrorism is enhanced by the conflict situation in different regions of the Middle East it is important to take measures to decrease it. Guan (2009) highlights the so-called arc of terrorism in the region of Malacca strait and offers to use the experience of SCO to contain the proliferation of conflicts in Central Asia and Afghanistan with regards to conflicts in other regions.

The issues of countering Islamic radicalism in Central Asia are highlighted in the work of Azizian (2006) who studies Islamic movements in the territory, counter-terrorism strategy of Central Asia states and the issues of the USA collaborating with the region's states. SCO and the problem of radical Islamic terrorism are the subjects in the works of Jackson and Lopez (2017).

Wishnick (2009) emphasizes a particular intention of the USA to cooperate with SCO states and offers to pay attention to the "SCO+" format that might include the USA, European Union and Japan for joint discussion of issues including those connected to the counter-terrorism sphere (Wishnick, 2009). Another point of view is expressed by Plater-Zyberk and Monaghan (2014) that think SCO serves as an instrument for China and Russia to keep the USA away from the region. However, they believe that two-way relations between the USA and Central Asia states as well as a mutual interest in the fight against terrorism and other issues can give an opportunity to overcome the resistance of China and Russia. The researchers treat SCO as an instrument to promote Russian interests in the region as well as to counter the external policy of the USA (Plater-Zyberk, Monaghan, 2014). Allison (2013) criticizes SCO and says that it couldn't solve the problem of security in the territory of Central Asia while its protective functions are solidarity in the resistance to external influence. Developing this idea Allison (2013) makes a conclusion that if the political situation in the majority of states in Central Asia changes as a result of "successful" Islamic outrages the loyalty of member states to SCO will be destroyed. Moreover, the author has no doubts about the success of such outrages.

The Italian researcher Di Placido (2007) makes the conclusion that presence of the USA in Central Asia will have a favourable impact on the following development of relations between Russia and China and will strengthen their ties with the region's states and the balance of forces in the Asia Pacific region.

This will influence the economic growth in Asia and will decrease the level of terrorist threat (Di Placido, 2007).

We believe that it is the complex political and economic environment in the region as well as the revitalization of terrorist activities both in and out of the territory of SCO that have served as an accelerator for the development and strengthening of cooperation between members of the organization, including the fight against international terrorism. At the same time, the SCO contribution to counter-terrorism is undeniable.

Even before the September 11 attacks, the Declaration on the Establishment of SCO has named the regional security as one of the main spheres of activities and counter-terrorism as one of the main tasks. This was supposed to be facilitated by the close cooperation of SCO member states at different levels, the creation of anti-terrorism structure and the formation of the corresponding regulatory and legal framework. Moreover, the Counter-Terrorism Convention formulated such notions as terrorism, separatism, and extremism to prevent the contradictions that can appear in the course of cooperation. The SCO Convention also determined the forms of interaction among parties and provided the basis for the activities of SCO against terrorism.

The September 11 attacks and the following Enduring Freedom operation and an increase in terrorist activities in the territory of SCO have intensified counter-terrorism cooperation inside the organization. In particular, this resulted in the creation of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS). It collects and analyses information to fight against terrorism and forms the bank of data about international terrorists and the entities or persons supporting them etc. This increased the efficiency of counter-terrorism activities.

Practically each SCO summit touches the counter-terrorism issues. For example, the 2002 summit in St.-Petersburg has been marked by the declaration of one of the essential means to fight terrorism – destroying its social basis. The great attention of the 2003 summit in Moscow was given to cutting the financial channels of international terrorism. The 2004 Tashkent summit stated the need for joint counter-terrorism training.

The Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan and events in Andijan in 2005 caused great concern in SCO and contributed to accepting the Framework Document on cooperation in combating terrorism which became the basis for joint strategy and system of measures in the area of counter-terrorism.

The institutional and legal formation of SCO was finished by 2006. The 2006 summit in Shanghai paid attention to the new danger, in particular, the use of IT for terrorist and other purposes. Thus, SCO responded to new threats in due time. Further on, the issues connected with international information security and counter-terrorism received priority in the activities of SCO (this is clear from the decisions made during summits in Dushanbe and Ekaterinburg).

Over time, the changes in the situation with regional security as well as the changes in terrorism itself, its forms, types and the scale of terrorist attacks caused the necessity to develop already existing conceptual apparatus and the forms of cooperation. For example, Chinese authorities stated that riots in Urumchi on 5th of July 2009 during which 150 people died were provoked by terrorists from abroad using the Internet. And SCO reacted again. In 2009 the summit in Ekaterinburg accepted the SCO Counter-Terrorism Convention for an indefinite duration. This document, unlike the 2001 Shanghai Convention, has declared terrorism as the ideology of violence and practical actions aimed at forcing authorities to make

different decisions by committing or threatening to commit offences connected with causing fear in the population and aimed at making damage to people, society and state. Besides, the 2009 Convention determined the jurisdiction of Parties, the format of interaction and communication channels as well as the obligations of Parties in taking corresponding measures at the domestic level to fight the financing of terrorism. The convention also listed deliberate acts that should be treated by Parties as criminal at the domestic level. It also regulates the cooperation of competent authorities and the surrender of persons for criminal prosecution.

Thus, since a decade from its establishment, SCO became an effective instrument for the development of serious solutions aimed at stability and security at the regional level. Regular joint discussions and meetings at the level of the Heads of States, Governments, ministers of foreign affairs and other ministers have helped to address important issues connected with counter-terrorism fight.

The Arabic Spring in Northern Africa and the Middle East has stimulated SCO to make new decisions. The Astana Decade Declaration signed during the 2011 summit highlighted the importance of creating political, social and other conditions to combat the terrorist propaganda. Next SCO declaration gave the primal importance to fighting the terrorist propaganda on the Internet.

The 2015 SCO summit in Ufa showed that organization entered a new level of development which was marked by signing several documents. The first thing worth noting is the Programme of Cooperation in Combating Terrorism for 2016–2018 and the Strategy of SCO development until 2025 that determined the aims and tasks in the sphere of political cooperation, the cooperation in the area of security with a view towards development of the situation in the world and region. Also, there was a special paragraph singled out that encouraged the preventive work aimed at preventing the appearance and proliferation of religious extremism, racial discrimination, and fascism. In the 2017 Counter-Terrorism Convention SCO will name these ideas a breeding ground for terrorism and will indicate the importance of educational, religious and cultural institutions, as well as mass media and other organizations to combat the proliferation of terrorism.

In addition to this, the 2015 Ufa summit was marked with signing an agreement about interaction on the issues of borders that indicated authorities, responsible for the execution of this agreement and the forms of interaction. New vectors of cooperation were declared including those connected with campaigning against terrorist acts that use chemical and biological weapons and the developing measures of impacting the causes and conditions for appearing problems. The issues of fighting against transnational crimes, criminal acts in IT, illegal migration and terrorism financing are still important.

In 2015 SCO paid great attention to preventing terrorist acts by working with people, especially youngsters. SCO highlights the necessity of joint actions to fight the proliferation of terrorist and extremist ideologies among young people including the countering of propaganda, incitement and recruiting, especially on the Internet. The organization also carries out activities aimed at education and moral formation of the younger generation.

In 2017 the Heads of States participating in the Astana summit signed the Declaration on the joint counteraction against international terrorism and the declaration stating the intention to prevent financing and provision of logistic services to terrorist activities.

Thus, throughout the whole period of existence SCO has applied consistent and unique measures aimed at providing the legal and institutional support of activities. The communication and cooperation

within the organization at the level of Heads of States, Governments, relevant ministers and agencies created the legal framework that is a basis for the efficient practical implementation of the objectives.

The partnership of SCO with other international and regional organizations seems important in the fight against international terrorism. For example, SCO received the observer status from the UN General Assembly in 2004 already. In 2005 the SCO Secretariat signed the Memorandums of understanding with the Secretariat of ASEAN and the Executive Committee of CIS that indicated the main directions for joint activities including those against terrorism. A similar memorandum was signed by the SCO Secretariat and the CSTO Secretariat in 2007.

The exchange of information, regular consultations, and meetings including the interaction at sites of different organizations facilitate the solution of important issues in the sphere of security at the international and regional levels.

This fact has stimulated the UN interest in SCO and in 2010 the Secretariats of both organizations signed the declaration of cooperation aimed at addressing emerging threats facing the international community. The declaration stressed the importance of joint actions on aspects of international peace and security.

In 2018 in Moscow the Executive Committee of SCO RATS, the Anti-Terrorist Centre of CIS member states (ATC CIS) and CSTO signed a memorandum where they affirmed the intentions to strengthen the interaction in the counter-terrorism and counter-extremism spheres, exchange of information about threats in joint responsibility zones, the results of action in the direction.

The struggle against terrorism is one of the main SCO spheres of activities. It includes not only the cooperation by making and implementing joint decisions but also the practice of regular counter-terrorism training since 2004, e.g. East-Antiterror-2006, Norac-Antiterror-2009 and the Gathering of senior staff of security agencies and special forces of SCO member states. The representatives of ATC CIS, CSTO, UN, OSCE, the embassies of the USA, France, Iran, Pakistan, India, and Tajikistan were invited to training as observers. The most extensive anti-terrorism training is called Peaceful Mission. They lasted from 24 to 28 of August 2014 and involved the army, aviation and airborne forces with a total of more 7000 people from Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, China and Kyrgyzstan.

The demonstration of cooperation in reacting on possible critical situations, resulting from terrorist attacks, implemented in practice supports the fact that SCO takes significant measures to improve the already existing mechanism of fighting terrorist threats.

The data bank on counter-terrorism, the creation of which was declared by the FSB director N.P. Patrushev in 2007 is one of the directions in counter-terrorist activities (InterFax, 2017). Some researchers raise the issue of excessive restrictiveness of data constituting the bank. However, modern terrorism develops faster than mechanisms aimed to counter it. The excessive disclosure of information that is of interest for researchers will bring negative consequences, the least of which is a decrease in the efficiency of counter-terrorism system.

On 10 May 2017, the head of the RATS Executive Committee E.S. Sysoev stated that more than 3 300 people are included in the list of persons wanted for committing terrorist crimes and more than 2 000 people are included in the list of active international terrorists. In 2017 the list of organizations prohibited in the territory of SCO was expanded with 34 new organizations with a total number reaching 105.

The efficiency of SCO counter-terrorism activities is supported by statistics. In 2013-2017 the authorized bodies of SCO member states stopped more than 600 terrorist crimes in the preparation stage as well as the activities of more than 2 000 members of international terrorist organizations, destroyed more than 500 boot camps, seized more than 50 tonnes of explosives and 10 thousand firearms units with more than a million of munitions. In 2016 more than 2 thousand accounts of people suspected to be involved in terrorism were blocked. Two hundred citizens of SCO member states were prohibited from leaving abroad to participate in international terrorist organizations. In 2017 150 people wanted for terrorism were identified, arrested and extradited. More than 100 thousand internet-resources, containing 900 thousand materials of terrorist and extremist nature were blocked. By 2017 the number of such materials reached 4 million (InterFax, 2017).

7. Conclusion

Thus, analysing the evolution in the cooperation of SCO member states against international terrorism we can see significant achievements in the creation and development of a system used against the threat to regional security.

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