



RUSSIA, CHINA, INDIA AND CENTRAL ASIA

Rusia, China, India y Asia Central

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India's forthcoming entry into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization may be of importance to Delhi but it cannot undo the critical fact that China is increasingly becoming the most consequential foreign actor in Central Asia and that Russia is slipping into dependence on China even to the point where its Ministry of Defense has formally sought an alliance with China against terrorism, "color revolutions", and the US. China is winning the rivalry for influence in Central Asia, India is barely competitive there and Russia is steadily losing ground there, mainly due to its own failures to enhance its economic-political capacity, even before it invaded Ukraine. The consequences of that move have only accelerated the processes of its growing dependence on China.



Abstract

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Fechas

La próxima entrada de India en la Organización de Cooperación de Shanghái puede ser importante para Delhi pero no puede deshacer el factor crítico de que China se está convirtiendo cada vez más en el actor extranjero más relevante en Asia Central y que Rusia está dependiendo de China hasta el punto de que su Ministerio de Defensa ha buscado formalmente una alianza con China en contra del terrorismo, «las revoluciones de colores» y los Estados Unidos. China está ganando en la competición por la influencia sobre Asia Central, India apenas es competitiva allí y Rusia está perdiendo terreno paulatinamente, principalmente debido a sus propios fracasos para acrecentar su capacidad económica-política, incluso antes de invadir Ucrania. Las consecuencias de esa jugada tan solo han acelerado el proceso de su creciente dependencia de China.



Resumen

Russia and China continue to profess a growing amity and identity of interests, not least in Central Asia. And they also have tried to accommodate India's rising influence, e.g. by supporting its membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and Asia Pacific Economic Community (APEC).¹ Moreover, at their recent foreign ministers meeting all three states nominally agreed to support a multipolar world and essentially passed over Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2015). Nevertheless the abiding Russian idea of a strategic triangle comprising all three states is not likely to materialize anytime soon. The differences between India and China even before the Modi government came to power last year were serious and they may have hardened despite Chinese efforts to accommodate India (see Blank, 2008). So despite these professions of amity and mutual agreement on the need for a more polycentric or multipolar world order, it increasingly appears that Moscow cannot compete with Beijing in Central Asia while Indian objectives are only to a limited degree congruent with those of China.

Indeed, Prime Minister Modi has castigated Chinese expansionism in Tokyo and increased Indo-Japanese and Indo-Australian military ties. Still more recently, he and President Obama signed a joint statement openly criticizing Chinese foreign policy.² And the tensions between India and China across Asia, for all their efforts at accommodation, are deeply rooted.³ At the same time, the signs of Russia's retreat from competition with China are everywhere. Already in 2013, the late Alexandros Petersen stated publicly that China was and would be the most consequential foreign player in Central Asia.⁴ Scholars have also long known that this trend evoked Russian suspicion but Moscow could not, even then, compete economically with China. Since then things have gotten even worse. Recognizing Russian suspicions, Chinese President Xi Jinping magnanimously offered to link the Trans-Siberian railroad to China's Silk Road. President Putin welcomed that offer ("Beijing", 2014). Sergei Ivanov, Putin's Chief of Staff, may claim that the silk road will link to Russia's Baikal-Amur and Trans-Siberian railroads and have a great potential if they do so by connecting East and Southeast Asia with Europe ("Moscow", 2014, July 9). Yet thanks to its reckless invasion of Ukraine and the ensuing Western sanctions and collapsing energy prices, Russia has now had to withdraw altogether from this project.⁵

This sequence displays China's victory over Russia and Russia's inability to compete with China. Russia now is merely a "junior brother" in such endeavors. Typically, China graciously but decisively punctured Russia's grandiloquent Eurasian and great power pretensions. And Russia's recklessness and failure to reform greatly assisted in this process. Given the expansive geostrategic benefits that China will obtain as it realizes its silk road vision, the evolving bilateral relationship on this issue portends a massive and decisive Russian strategic defeat in Eurasia rendering it here, as in energy, China's raw materials appendage (Calder, 2012).

Moreover, China has announced two "silk roads", one through Central Asia and a maritime one through South and Southeast Asia and launched enormous railroad, infrastructure, tele-

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1 For more information see Valdyntan (2015) and "Russia, India and China Stand United To Bring Perpetrators of Terror Acts To Justice" (2015).

2 For more information see Baker & Harris (2015); Einhorn (2014).

3 See Smith (2014); Malik (2011); Tellis & Mirski (2013).

4 As stated by Alexandros Petersen at a conference at the Central Asia Caucasus Institute of the Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Washington, D.C., November, 2013

5 See Goble (2015); Terekhova (2015).

communications and pipeline projects to realize this vision. This vision contradicts and would eclipse Russia's rival vision of a transcontinental "iron silk road" from Europe to Asia through the Trans-Siberian Railroad and a North-South corridor to India, Iran, and Central Asia. And by inviting India into the maritime if not overland silk road, China also destroys the essentially rhetorical US silk road project while also trying to coopt India into its grand design. The US' Silk Road Project, announced by Secretary of State Hilary Clinton in 2011 outlined a grand vision of projects linking together Central Asia and India. Unfortunately this was merely a bureaucratic smokescreen to deflect criticism about the absence of any coherent US policy for Central Asia beyond the war in Afghanistan. Only one major project, the CASA-1000 program to bring Central Asian electricity to Afghanistan and Pakistan, appears to be moving forward and bureaucratic funding, the true test of the project's genuineness, was always minimal (Blank, 2013). China already is and will remain the most consequential and preeminent foreign actor in Central Asia.⁶ And this was true even before President Xi Jinping outlined his Silk Road project in late 2013. Thus these silk roads are increasingly morphing into building blocks of China's hegemonic project in continental Asia.

Neither does Russia's decline end with this issue. As part of the mounting and increasingly hysterical (no other word is appropriate) threat assessments now prevailing in Russia, Moscow evidently believes that the US has also launched a global conspiracy to threaten it in Asia as well as Europe by launching color revolutions while Islamic radicals threaten terrorist attacks along its frontiers. Thus In November 2014, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said in Beijing that Russia and China confront not only US threats in the Asia-Pacific but also US-orchestrated "color revolutions" and Islamic terrorism. Therefore, "The issue of stepping up this cooperation [between Russia and China] has never been as relevant as it is today" ("Moscow", 2014, November 18). Specifically this means his advocacy of enhanced Sino-Russian security cooperation (through unspecified means) both bilaterally and within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Ibid). Shoigu included not only Central Asia but also East Asia, as did his Deputy Minister Anatoly Antonov. Both men decried US policies that allegedly were bringing about color revolutions and support for Islamic terrorism in Southeast and Central Asia. Meanwhile official threat assessments betray mounting anxiety about the other threat of terrorism breaking out of what Moscow sees as a failing Afghanistan into Central Asia where it would threaten Russia's vital interests. Specifically Chief of the General Staff, General Valery Gerasimov, reported to foreign defense attachés that,

In the light of the political decision adopted by the US leadership to withdraw the contingent of American troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2014, we predict with a high degree of probability a significant deterioration in the situation in that country with the transfer of real control of particular regions to terrorist groupings. In the context of the severe deterioration in the situation in Iraq and Syria as well as the stepping up of the activities of the terrorist grouping ISIL, the possible removal of Afghanistan from the focus of attention by Western and other interested countries is capable of putting the security of the Central Asian region in jeopardy. ("Moscow", 2014, December 10)

Russia has attempted to shore up its gradually eroding position in Central Asia by the use of all available means of power at its disposal including searching for multilateral and bilateral part-

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⁶ As stated by Petersen at a conference at the Central Asia Caucasus Institute of the Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Washington, D.C., November, 2013.

nerships even as it acts unilaterally to strengthen its forces (Nixey, 2012). An examination of its military policy which has probably ruled out the return of Russian combat troops to Afghanistan, reveals an ongoing pattern to leverage partnerships and alliances with all the interested parties in Afghanistan except for NATO since that is now obviously out of the question. Yet it will insist, as observed above that NATO defends Afghanistan. Nevertheless this policy means heightened military-political and military-economic engagement and deals with India, China, and Pakistan, and in the Chinese case an approach for what appears to be an open military alliance.

Moscow has thus brokered an arrangement by which India would buy Russian arms and equipment, e.g. light artillery and mortars that will then go to the Afghan army. Since neither side can or will inject its own forces into Afghanistan and India does not have the necessary spares and equipment this arrangement works well as a way of satisfying the enormous needs of the Afghan army (Miglani, 2014). This arrangement also builds on the upsurge of Russian direct investment in Afghanistan (Weitz, 2014). This process thus enhances Moscow's standing in Kabul and continues to build on its long-term partnership with India that now embraces Central Asia as well as South Asia. It may also be the case though we cannot be certain that Moscow will look benevolently upon the efforts of India and Central Asian governments to strengthen military ties with each other. The expansion of such ties clearly ranks among major recent Indian policy initiatives. It meets the needs of Central Asian states as well, especially if they are continuing to balance their major power relationships.⁷

However, the most striking and consequential example of this is the new approach to China growing out of the close Sino-Russian relationship. Shoigu and Antonov's remarks above demonstrate the Ministry of Defense and presumably the government's advocacy of what amounts to a military alliance with China based on the principle of collective security against both terrorism, and supposedly US-sponsored "color revolutions".

This overture to China apparently marks a fundamental reversal of past Russian policy to keep the Chinese military out of Central Asia and retain the option of military intervention there as an exclusively Russian one and could signify Russia's growing dependence on China in Central Asia and elsewhere under mounting Western and economic pressure. But the details remain to be seen. Such an alliance would also mark a reversal of Chinese policy that has heretofore shunned military involvement in Central Asia but there are some straws in the wind suggesting that Beijing is rethinking this position. On the one hand, China's Ministry of Defense spokesman, at an international press conference on November 27, 2014, went out of his way to deny that an alliance with Russia existed and said that,

I need to emphasize here, though, China and Russia adhere to the principle of no alliance, no confrontation, and not targeting a third party in military cooperation, and therefore it (the Sino-Russian partnership) will not constitute threats to any country. It is inappropriate to place normal military cooperation between China and Russia in the same category as the US-Japan military alliance. ("Beijing", 2014, November 27)

On the other hand, however, on December 16, 2014, right after Shoigu's visit, Prime Minister Li Keqiang, speaking in Astana, proposed that the SCO become the "guardian of Eurasia". Obviously, this is linked to concern over Beijing's showcase policy project of a new silk road through Afghanistan and Central Asia to Europe that would come under severe pressure if

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7 See Gokhale (2014); "Kazakhstan and India Develop Cooperation in Defense Sector" (2014).

Afghanistan collapsed. And in August, 2014, Russia and China held their largest SCO exercises to date where China contributed J-10 and J-11 fighters JH-7 early warning assets and control aircrafts, and WZ-10 and WZ-19 attack helicopters (Aneja, 2014). In this vein there are also signs that China might actively contribute to the struggle against ISIS (The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) with support for coalition air strikes against them even if it does so independently and apart from the US coalition (Borgozmer & Hornby, 2014). This too would mark a revision of past Chinese policies if these were genuine indicators of an impending major policy change and could betoken movement towards a genuine Sino-Russian military-political alliance in Central Asia against terrorism and Islamism in all its forms. Obviously, that trend if it materializes would have profound implications for world affairs, going far beyond Central Asia.

Moreover, Russia's new defense doctrine proposes to "coordinate efforts to deal with military risks in the common space of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)" ("Voyennaya Doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii", 2014). It also provides for creation of joint missile defense systems. While Moscow has pursued this with the West in the past, this could also be a warning or offer to go with China in the creation of such systems. Although analysts like Dmitri Trenin deny that Moscow is seeking an alliance with China, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said in Beijing in his aforementioned statements that Russia and China confront not only US threats in the Asia-Pacific but also US-orchestrated "color revolutions" and Islamic terrorism. Therefore, "The issue of stepping up this cooperation [between Russia and China] has never been as relevant as it is today".⁸

Shoigu further stated that, "In the context of an unstable international situation the strengthening of good-neighborly relations between our countries acquires particular significance. This is not only a significant factor in the states' security but also a contribution to ensuring peace throughout the Eurasian continent and beyond" ("Moscow", 2014, November 20; "Moscow", 2014, November 10). Thus Shoigu stated that, "During talks with Comrade Chang Wanquan, we discussed the state and prospects of the Russian-Chinese relations in the military field, exchanged opinions on the military-political situation in general and the APR (Asia-Pacific Region) in particular". And "We also expressed concern over US attempts to strengthen its military and political clout in the APR", he said. "We believe that the main goal of pooling our effort is to shape a collective regional security system". If this is not an offer for an alliance then we need to redefine the term.

China has been no less active but infinitely more rational. During 2014, China has launched a major new initiative regarding Central and South Asia that fundamentally departs from its previous policies and points in new and hitherto unforeseen directions. China has reversed its traditional opposition to Indian participation as a full member in major Asian security institutions and invited India to join or participate in the following agencies, many of which are Chinese-sponsored institutions: the Chinese-sponsored Asian infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), ambitious Chinese-initiated maritime silk road projects through Southeast Asia, the Asia-Pacific Economic Community (APEC) whose annual meeting China hosted in November 2014, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Iran, Pakistan and Mongolia will also receive invitations to the SCO.⁹ And, China and India are both founding members of the

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⁸ See "Moscow" (2014, November 18); Trenin (2014).

⁹ See Raina (2014); Aneja (2014); "China Invites India to Join Maritime Silk Road" (2014); "China Invites India to Join Its Ambitious Silk Road Projects" (2014); "Modi Leads India to the Silk Road" (2014); Tiezzi (2014).

forthcoming BRICS bank (Panda, 2014). This is an amazing turnabout for Beijing since most analysts perceive the Indo-Chinese relationship to be fundamentally rivalrous.¹⁰

India has long sought membership in the SCO and the Modi government's newly enhanced engagement with China and India's pre-existing "Connect Central Asia policy" suggest it will actively participate in the SCO (Raina, 2014). Analysts have already discerned two potential benefits for China by expanding the SCO in this fashion. On the one hand, an expanded SCO works to curtail US influence in both South and Central Asia that could block expanded Chinese influence in both regions (Raina, 2014). Since considerable Sino-Russian cooperation against America already exists in Central Asia, one might visualize the SCO as a joint effort to restrict Washington's presence there and prevent Central Asia's alignment with either Moscow or Beijing against the other (Lindley-French, 2014, p. 37). But from Moscow's standpoint the SCO is also undoubtedly a way to moderate or channel China's rising Central Asian profile within an institution where Russia has an equal voice and can assert itself. Given the close ties between Delhi and Moscow, Moscow may think it is gaining a partner and the increased membership might dilute China's presence there and more broadly in Central Asia. In this context, expanding the membership is arguably a calculated Chinese risk to dilute Russia's voice, obstruct India's gravitation to either Moscow or Washington, and enhance its own influence through Pakistan's adhesion.

Yet on the other hand, India has made clear its opposition, in tandem with the US and Japan, to China's expansionist tendencies and for all the effort to bring both India and China together in expanded mutual cooperation, the security tensions between these two powers spill over into Central Asia.¹¹ Equally, if not more importantly, India will be nobody's instrument, though it might align itself with one or another of the major powers to pursue its interests. So calculations based on having India available to support Russia, China or the US against one or more of the other powers are built on flimsy premises.

For its part, Beijing has consistently envisioned the SCO as a template of multilateral cooperation for a new, essentially anti-American, and alternative system of Asian and international relations generally (Blank, 2013). The SCO thus represents the embryonic form of a future anti-American system in Asia where China plays a major role and leverages its membership as a means of influencing these organizations in its direction. It has always emphasized that the SCO embodies China's vision of a future world or at least Asiatic order from which American military power and calls for democratization would either be excluded or at least restricted to a minimum. Thus, Beijing simultaneously pursues multilateral initiatives like the East Asian Summit that it has tried to guide in order to engender the exclusion of America throughout Asia as a whole. Many commonalities exist between China's efforts to guide the SCO and its promotion of multilateralism in Southeast Asia. Reiss states:

One of the results of China's diplomatic efforts has been to marginalize the United States. Washington is not a party to any of the regional institutions that China promotes and which are now setting the future Asian agenda. To be sure, the United States does not have to belong to every institutional organization, but China is defining multilateralism for the region in ways that specifically exclude the United States. (2005, p. 342)

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10 See Raina (2014); Smith (2014); Tellis & Mirski (2013); Malik (2011).

11 See Smith (2014); Tellis & Mirski (2013); Malik (2011).

In this respect, the SCO is the opposite of America's Asian alliance system. China's policies toward Central Asia, particularly the development of the SCO, exemplify the process by which China intends first to build a prosperous neighborhood under its auspices and then shelter its economic development from both internal and foreign threats. Beijing also hopes to reshape Asian security agendas to attenuate US alliances and replace them with relationships that are ideologically and politically more congenial to China's insistence on its unfettered sovereignty and freedom to maneuver in world affairs.

Step one for the SCO was to build the group, the first multilateral group China had started on its own. Step two: expand it to discussions of trade, economics and energy. Step three: begin discussions on more substantive security partnerships. The SCO has gone so far as to conduct its own joint military maneuvers, in China's Xinjiang Autonomous Region. This approach of deepening regional multi-level ties will likely be repeated in other forums, such as ASEAN+ 3 grouping (ASEAN plus Japan, Korea, and China). (Cooper Ramo, 2004, p. 53)

In light of the hegemonic aspirations lurking behind the Silk Road projects we can see that the SCO – which serves as the venue where China makes many of the bilateral deals that futher the silk road through Central Asia – is equally a part of this grand design.

Ultimately this fact also makes the SCO the arena for Russo-Chinese competition in Central Asia. While both governments support suppressing Central Asian reform and repressing any threats to the status quo; they clearly compete against each other in the SCO and Central Asia. Thus those governments have previously differed on membership issues in the SCO (Blank, 2013). A 2008 Senate Foreign Relations Committee study observed that,

Some observers have viewed the creation of the SCO as reflecting the common goal of Russia and China to encourage the Central Asian states to combat regime opponents (in their own countries-author) of the two major powers. While cooperating on this broad goal, Russia and China have appeared to differ on other goals of the SCO and to vie for dominance within the organization. Russia has viewed the SCO mainly as a means to further military cooperation and to limit China's influence in Central Asia, while China in recent years has viewed the SCO not only as enhancing regional security but also as an instrument to increase trade and access to oil and gas. ("Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 2008, p. 68)

Since 2008 we have seen numerous examples of Sino-Russian competition in Central Asia and Russia's mounting but ultimately unsuccessful efforts to hedge against China's growing influence there. China frustrated Russia's attempts to dominate the region's energy industry and force it into a single Russian channel (Feigenbaum, 2011, p. 31). China has also become the primary money and foreign capital market for Central Asia (Feigenbaum, 2011, pp. 29-31). Similarly China's commercial penetration of Central Asia compared with the visible signs of Russia's inability to compete commercially or as an investor in Central Asia has triggered increasing Russian anxiety and moves to restrict Central Asian trade with China like the new Eurasian Union and accompanying Customs Union (Feigenbaum, 2011, pp. 29-31). These trade diverting organizations are already diverting Central Asian trade from China to Russia (Wisniewska, 2013, p. 15; Mankoff, 2013, p. 2). A study of the impact of that Customs Union on Kyrgyzstan concluded that,

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The main conclusion of this section of the study is the need to modify Kyrgyz trade policy, which has been based on trade flows going from China to the CU countries through Kyrgyzstan. All stages of the supply chain from importation to exportation must be changed. According to the opinions of local experts, changes in the trade flows from China to CIS countries could be expected as a result of the CU formation. Such changes would likely increase trade flows via Central Asia rather than the Far East region of the Russian Federation, due to lesser costs. At the same time, “shadow” re-export flows could be replaced by products produced in Chinese factories newly located in Kyrgyzstan. (Beshimov, Abdykamov & Sultanalieva, 2010, p. 12)

Kazakh analyses also highlight Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan’s inability to compete with Chinese goods and conclude that the Customs Union will reduce China’s penetration of their domestic markets (Yilmaz & Moldashev, 2009; Moldashev, 2011).

This bilateral rivalry over energy, economics and each government’s political influence in Central Asia is visible, robust, and growing despite both sides’ understandable efforts to conceal it. Russian analysts already claim that “the interaction with China within SCO only weakens Russia’s position in the long run” (Teploukhova, 2010, p. 83). Maria Teploukhova writes that,

Beijing is one of the major foreign policy partners of Moscow, bilateral dialogue is well set, and the SCO cannot be regarded as a priority for further development or interaction. Even for military exercises both parties do not need the SCO – they can simply continue them in the bilateral format, as they do now. Meanwhile attempts to compete with China within the SCO are also doomed to failure, since for China the SCO is a matter of foreign strategy and for Russia it is a matter of prestige. Therefore, Moscow either has to agree to the position of second player (as it does now), or to spend much of its resources on real rivalry. Cooperation between the SCO and the Collective Security Treaty Organization helps to improve the position of Russia, but again the overall context implies that the structure is more oriented towards Central Asia than the Russian Far East. (2010, p. 83)

Indeed, China’s economic power grew so much by 2009 that Russia had to accept China’s investments in Central Asia as a positive phenomena. Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov actually praised Chinese investment in Central Asia for its “transparency”. Ryabkov further claimed that,

We believe that our friends and partners in Central Asia are appropriately meeting the situation and solving the task facing them in the sphere of economic and social development using the opportunities that present themselves as a result of cooperation with China. Hence this can only be welcomed. (“Russian Officials Laud Ties With China; Observers Express Concerns”, 2009)

Given Moscow’s consistent paranoia regarding any gain by China or America in Central Asia, this represented a profound change in rhetoric if not policy and a major concession to China. As a 2007 report of the Russian-Chinese Business Council observed,

Being a member of the SCO, China views other members of the organization as promising markets. It is China that wishes to be the engine behind the trade and economic cooperation within the framework of the SCO --- China’s intentions to form [a] so-called economic space within the SCO are well known. Owing to that fact, experts have

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been speaking about greater Chinese economic expansion in various parts of the world, including Central Asia. --- Beijing has activated ties with all Central Asian countries and strives to comprehensively strengthen economic relations and the dependency of these countries on its market. ("Moscow", 2007, November 15)

By 2007 China was already Russia's commercial rival there, bypassing Russian efforts to monopolize Central Asian energy trade against China (Graham, 2010, p. 65). And now China has become the leading outlet for Central Asian and especially Turkmen gas. It will soon get up to 65BCM annually from Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, more than they send to Russia (Blank & Kim, 2013). Nevertheless, Russia will not admit that China is its rival and only acts indirectly or covertly against China there. As Dmitri Trenin and Alexei Malashenko wrote,

The rise of China has challenged Russia's position in Central Asia even more massively, fundamentally, and permanently than America's insertion into the region. However, Moscow while traditionally allergic to military expansionism, is relatively tolerant toward the projection of economic influence, which distinguishes the Chinese practice in Central Asia from the American. Russia still regards the United States – not China – as its principal competitor. (2010, p. 21)

Shoigu's remarks, cited above, clearly confirm their concluding assertion.

For Russia China remains the "threat that dare not speak its name" in Central Asia as elsewhere (Kipp, 2011, pp. 459-503). And this inability to acknowledge the Chinese threat has only grown as Moscow's dependence on China has grown in the wake of its invasion of Ukraine. Now it will be virtually impossible for Russia to deal candidly with Chinese power as it showed at the recent Shangri-La conference on Asian security (Gabuev, 2015). And there are still more examples of this rivalry. China joined other SCO members in 2008 to block support for Abkhazia and South Ossetia's independence from Georgia. China then collaborated with Uzbekistan to thwart Russian efforts to intervene in Kyrgyzstan's domestic crises in 2010 (Blank & Kim, 2013). China prevented Russia from obtaining a precedent using Article 51 of the UN charter and the right to protect ethnic kinsmen abroad from being applied to Central Asia. That precedent could be used to devastating effect against both Central Asian and the Chinese governments and could have been used in Ukraine but this precedent apparently blocked that gambit. While principles defending states' territorial integrity are enshrined in the SCO charter, Russia clearly does not take them seriously. This alone drives other members to look to China. Should future crises erupt within one or more member states or between any two of them, it will be an important test for the SCO. Ukraine suggests it could fail that test and that the gap between the SCO's formal by-laws and its effective functioning will probably grow over time.

Zhao Huasheng, the Director of the Center for Russia and Central Asia Studies, Center for Shanghai Cooperation Organization Studies, at Shanghai's Fudan University, wrote in 2004 that issues like terrorism, drugs, and the links between drug running and the Taliban were problems beyond Russia's effective unilateral ability to cope with, either in the short or long-term perspective. Moreover, other regional organizations could not fight these challenges either. Only the SCO could combat terrorists, extremists, separatists, and drug trafficking. Zhao embellished upon the idea of China's free riding, explaining that China concedes to Russia a leadership position in Central Asia, as long as Russia recognizes that it needs China's influence to exercise legitimate authority here.

For Russia China remains the "threat that dare not speak its name" in Central Asia as elsewhere

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has continued to influence this area but its ability to control Central Asia is waning. To varying extents, the countries of Central Asia wish to be independent from Russia. In the long run, Russia's control over Central Asia is worrisome. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization links the Central Asian countries and remains attractive for this reason. Therefore, the SCO may be conducive to the exertion of Russian influence and domination. In particular, Russia may cement its broad and general existence in this region with the help of China's influence and the Central Asia's confidence in China. The newly-born SCO has the potential to develop into the most influential regional organization of this part of the world. Joining the SCO is an important way for Russia to take part in Asian affairs, otherwise Russia's potential is greatly diminished. (Husheng, 2004, p. 286)

If he accurately captured China's thinking and Russia's reality, then the SCO could well resemble Asian security organizations who have been singularly unable to prevent major powers from launching unopposed security threats, e.g. China in the South China Sea, even more than it presently does. And that would benefit none of the members whether they be old or new, except for China who could then bring its power over other members to bear bilaterally, given Russia's growing economic dependence on China. That is not a positive outcome for Russia or India. For example, in the Asian Regional Forum (ARF) and ASEAN, open rivalries and strong differences may be publicly voiced but little practical result ensues. Unless Russia learns to compete economically with China, it may ultimately function merely as the gendarme of Eurasian autocracy and of China's investments.

Finally China's recent invitation to India, Iran, Pakistan, and Mongolia to join the SCO opens a new chapter in its history. This may be partly a gesture to Russia which has long supported Indian entry into the SCO in return for the visible warming of Russo-Pakistani relations or it may be part of an altogether new page in Sino-Russian rivalry of the SCO in South and Central Asia. Only time will tell. But this move certainly comports with the Russo-Chinese desire to create new international organizations that exclude the US and transform the Asian and international economic-political order. But it is unlikely that this move will improve amity within the SCO, formal rhetoric to the contrary notwithstanding. Despite the professed Russo-Chinese identity of outlooks, at the 2012 Beijing summit of the SCO, Russian diplomats openly took the credit for successfully torpedoing China's major initiatives (Kaukenov, 2013, p. 11). Thus the Kazakh analyst Adil Kaukenov writes,

It is difficult to understand how an efficient and reliable organization can be established if the second largest participant is set on doing all it can to prevent major projects from working. And there I an explanation for this; it is obvious that one of the reasons for Russia's accession to the SCO was to prevent China's uncontrolled penetration into Central Asia. At the beginning of the 2000s, it became clear that China's entry into the region was inevitable, so Moscow gave the green light, as long as it was involved too. This was also advantageous to Beijing, since Moscow's participation in the organization gave the SCO, which also meant China's entry into the region, a significant reserve of legitimacy. So Moscow occupied the position of an active pessimist in the SCO, making generous offers, allotting funding, but in the end doing everything to ensure that the SCO does not go beyond the framework of a dialog platform. Russia's attempts to make the SCO more global by means of an enlargement or active efforts on the global scale are being opposed both by Beijing, for which the SCO is an entirely specific mechanism,

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so it is worried about its erosion, and by the Central Asian countries, which are worried they will be drawn into a new standoff between Russia and the West. (Kaukenov, 2013, pp. 11-12)

While he thinks Xi Jinping's new policies towards Russia and emphasis on finding larger areas of agreement with Russia might change this situation; this rivalry remains the primary impediment to the SCO's effectiveness (Kaukenov, 2013, p. 12). Furthermore, China is consolidating its advantage by building a gas pipeline from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to China even though Gazprom took over Kyrgyzstan's energy company and China could buy cheaper gas using the existing Kazakhsan-Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan pipeline. As Kyrgyz expert Adjar Kurtov argues, China aims to create,

A system for the region's dependence on interests of China. Its aim is to create conditions so that in the future China might become a moderator of [the] majority of key processes in the west of its borders. And China consistently will implement this aim step by step which will be facilitated by China's financial mightiness and international reserves which are the biggest in the world in terms of volumes.¹²

So while it is quite clear that there is substantial cooperation among any dyad of this triangle, it is equally true that at the regional level in Central Asia and even all the way to Korea and Japan that there are considerable tensions among them, i.e. between Russia and China and between India and China (Blank, 2014, September). While efforts to keep these relationships in equilibrium are to be welcomed, no dispassionate and objective analyst can overlook them and pretend to a full understanding of these dynamics among them. In a situation where Russia is steadily declining relative to both India and China who are both rising and competitive with each other and where Russia constantly tries to assert itself even as it seeks ever closer unity with China, their relationships in Asia in general and Central Asia in particular are likely to be much more stressful than they want others to believe. So while both China and Russia have welcomed India into the SCO and more broadly into Asian multilateral organizations; India may join the SCO but it might yet recoil from what it finds there and in Sino-Russian relations.

Even as Russia seeks to hedge against China on issues of Asian security it is clearly losing ground to China in Central Asia and must depend on it globally for support against Washington. Under the circumstances it is hardly surprising that not only US allies in Asia but also states like India and Vietnam increasingly gravitate towards Washington despite excellent ties with Russia.¹³ If India hoped, as in the past, that Russian support would be critical in helping it deal with China, increasingly that is a vain hope. Russia clearly aims to be thought of as a great independent Asian power, but its own failure to reform, aggression in Ukraine, and inability to address itself to Asia's security concerns and agenda have greatly undermined that pretense (Gavueb, 2015). Insofar as Russia claims great power standing in Asia it increasingly appears to be a case of what the Chinese proverb calls the name without the reality rather than the reality without the name.

It is hardly surprising that not only US allies in Asia but also states like India and Vietnam increasingly gravitate towards Washington despite excellent ties with Russia

12 See "Chinese Puzzle: Beijing Goes the Other Way, Why?" (2014).

13 See Singh (2015); Vuving (2015).

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