

Eurasia's SCO Takes Action for Stability

by Mary Burdman

Eurasian nations, led by Russia and China, are taking unprecedented measures to build effective collective security against the forces of terrorism, separatism, and extremism—the asymmetric warfare operations now destroying Iraq and Afghanistan, and creating dangerous instability in Eurasia. If the Dick Cheney-led warmongers go ahead with any attack on Iran, the threat to Russia, China, and other Eurasian nations will get a lot worse.

This is why the nations of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) carried out their first-ever joint military maneuvers involving troops from all six nations from Aug. 9-17 at Chelyabinsk, in the southern Urals in Russia, and Urumqi, China. The maneuvers were proposed by Russia on June 1, to coincide with the annual SCO Heads of State Council, which was held Aug. 16 in Bishkek, capital of Kyrgyzstan. On Aug. 17, the SCO Presidents—Russia's Vladimir Putin, China's Hu Jintao, Kazakhstan's Nursultan Nazarbayev, Kyrgyzstan's Kurmanbek Bakiyev, Tajikistan's Emomali Rakhmonov, and Uzbekistan's Islam Karimov—went to Chelyabinsk to review the maneuvers.

This is a new level in Eurasian cooperation, but Putin and other SCO member-country spokesmen made a special point of saying that there is no “new Warsaw Pact” or “anti-NATO” alliance here. The SCO was founded in 2001, as an outgrowth of measures undertaken in Central Asia to resolve border and other issues after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Security was the first issue; now, economic and other cooperation are coming to the fore.

While Putin is at pains to emphasize his own country's desire to collaborate with the United States, rather than set up a competing military force, nonetheless there is no question but that the SCO military maneuvers send a signal that Russia would be ready to defend itself, and its neighborhood, militarily, if necessary. If the Bush Administration does not give a positive answer to Russia's offer to collaborate on missile defense, for example, or takes military action against Iran, the Russian response would be not only political, but military as well.

The SCO countries, especially China and Russia, already have created bilateral agreements and “Good Neighbor” treaties. At Bishkek, for the first time, these bilateral agreements were given the support of a full-scale “Treaty among the member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on Good-Neighborly Relations, Friendship and Cooperation,” a measure which had been proposed at the 2006 SCO summit.

The SCO is not limited to its six members. Iran, India, Pakistan, and Mongolia are all official observers, and were—except India—represented at the highest level at the summit. For the first time, Turkmenistan was represented, by its new President, Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov; Afghan President Khamid Karzai was also there; and there was another notable attendee: UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Lynn Pascoe, a former U.S. State Department official. About Pascoe's presence in Bishkek, commentator Dmitri Kosyrev of RIA Novosti wrote on Aug. 18: “the United States has made the first contact with the SCO” via Pascoe. “Although he no longer serves at the U.S. State Department but is a UN official, he is still an American diplomat, and a good one at that.”

Challenge to the U.S.

The SCO Declarations challenge the United States by making clear that if the U.S.A. chooses not to *participate* in dealing with the world's most serious security challenges—Iraq, Afghanistan, and North Korea—all of which lie on the SCO nations' doorsteps, the SCO nations will act in concert nonetheless. The Bishkek Declaration states that the SCO “heads of state believe that stability and security in Central Asia can be ensured primarily by the forces of the region's states themselves, on the basis of international organizations already established in the region. The member states stress the need for collective efforts on counteracting new challenges and threats.”

Russian President Vladimir Putin made the same point at Bishkek Aug. 16: “In this new century the world is changing rapidly. The old way of thinking in Cold War blocs is out of date. New centers of power and economic growth have appeared. Like other countries of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Russia supports the strengthening of a multi-polar international system that provides equal security and development possibilities for all countries. We believe that security in a globalizing world is indivisible. Any attempts to deal with global and regional problems in isolation have no future.”

At Bishkek Aug. 15, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad met Chinese President Hu Jintao to discuss peaceful resolution of the Iran nuclear issue. Other important bilateral meetings took place, including between Putin and Hu.

The SCO discussions and agreements are complementary to the progress being made in the Six Party Talks on Korea, which have resulted in an agreement on the second-ever summit meeting between North and South Korea, with the ultimate goal of a peace agreement. While the summit has to be postponed until October due to the destructive flooding in the North, it is another demonstration of real progress being made towards war-avoidance on the Korean Peninsula.

Afghanistan

The unending war in Afghanistan is high on the SCO agenda. Summit host Kyrgyz President Bakiyev, said that the



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A new level of Eurasian cooperation was established at the SCO summit in Bishkek Aug. 16. Here, President Hu Jintao of China (left) and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

“SCO pays much importance to the earliest and complete stabilization of the situation in Afghanistan, [which is] continuing to render, as before, a negative influence on security in our region.” A special SCO-Afghanistan contact group was set up in November 2005, but much more must be done. In his speech on Aug. 16 President Putin called for forming “anti-drug security belts around Afghanistan, which could be complemented with financial security belts supervised by SCO financial monitors.” He called on the SCO foreign ministers to do what is needed to initiate an international conference to help Afghanistan.

On July 31, Nikolai Bordyuzha, general secretary of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) called on the CSTO and SCO to join forces on the Afghanistan crisis. The CSTO is the military branch of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the association formed by the former republics of the Soviet Union. Bordyuzha, speaking on a video conference between Novosti and the Russian information center in Beijing, said: “We together, including China, which makes up part of the SCO, should assist in preventing the Taliban from coming to power; otherwise we will get serious problems in Afghanistan, problems for many years. Work should be conducted in all spheres, political and economic, and assistance in the formation of armed forces, law enforcement and the fight against illegal drug trafficking.” A CSTO-SCO “cooperation protocol will be signed in a few days or weeks, and cooperation trends between the two organizations will be clearly defined in it,” Bordyuzha said.

Peace Mission 2007

The Russian General Staff designed the SCO joint maneuvers to deal with the kind of asymmetric warfare going on in Afghanistan. As they began Aug. 9, Gen. Yuri Baluyevsky, Chief of the Russian General Staff, said that such military co-

operation is needed to exchange experience “in combating new challenges and threats. No one country is able to independently deal with these threats, as the Sept. 11 terror acts in the United States showed,” Itar Tass reported. He also said that successful economic development is “impossible without building up security in the region, particularly involving the SCO military agencies in this process.” Baluyevsky was speaking from Urumqi, the command headquarters for the program.

The actual “combat” was rehearsed and carried out at the Chebarkul military range. Russian commander Gen. Col. Vladimir Moltensky described the scenario as a response to a “deteriorating domestic political situation” in a regional state, threatened by a coup by “separatists and opposition with a view to toppling the legitimate president and the government of the country and escalating the internal armed conflict,” in a report to Itar Tass published Aug. 13. The “state” requested support from the Urumqi SCO command, which initiated a joint military response—with a United Nations mandate—after political and economic efforts failed. Chinese deputy commander Major-General Qian Lihua called the training “a complete success.” Overall some 7,500 troops participated, the largest numbers from Russia and China, with 500 pieces of military and special hardware and about 70 Russian and Chinese aircraft.

General Baluyevsky said that Russia is drafting a policy for “conceptual foundations of military cooperation within the SCO framework.” The SCO is preparing to deal not only with terrorism, extremism, and drug trafficking, he said, but also ensuring information security—in conditions of the growing pressure on part of media outlets in some Western countries. These countries keep making attempts to persuade our peoples that so-called “truly democratic” public institutions “on the Western pattern” must be set up, and this “contributes to the destabilization of the situation in the countries of the region,” Baluyevsky said—a clear reference to the various recent “color revolutions.” A permanent SCO training base is to be set up near Chelyabinsk, and President Putin has proposed that such exercises be carried out on a regular basis, in the various SCO nations.

Watching the final day of the maneuvers Aug. 17, Putin stressed again that the SCO is not a reaction to NATO: “The comparison of the SCO to NATO does not correspond to reality, and is improper either in content or form,” Putin said. “The SCO has begun broadening its boundaries; it attends to political and economic matters. As for the military component, it is not properly a military, but an anti-terrorist component. Regrettably, many countries of the world, including Russia, are confronted with a terrorist threat, and the latest event at the Moscow-St. Petersburg railway proves once more that we have not done everything we could to abolish this threat.” (The Nevsky Express train had derailed the evening of Aug. 13, after an apparent bomb explosion.)

Now, Putin said, the economic component “is coming into

the foreground, and we attend to the development of the infrastructure and finances, we encourage the business activity of all member countries.”

Toward a New Silk Road

The Bishkek Declaration says that, “The international security agenda must not exclude such tasks as ensuring the stability of the world economy, reduction of poverty, evening up the social and economic development level, maintaining economic, environmental, energy and information security, as well as protecting the population and territories of the SCO states from emergency situations, natural or man-made.” The

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nations also signed documents on transport and financial cooperation, such as the Organization of the Business Council and Interbank Association.

At the summit Aug. 16, Kazak President Nursultan Nazarbayev made large-scale proposals for transport and energy cooperation. He presented a draft proposal for an SCO energy agency to develop a uniform and coordinated oil and gas market among the nations, which already have an extensive international pipeline system. More pipelines are being planned, including from Turkmenistan to Russia, and between China and Kazakhstan.

Nazarbayev told the summit: The SCO “should actively work in the direction of creation of a single transit-transport system between Europe and Asia. It is necessary to attract international financial institutes for establishment of a transcontinental transport corridor between Europe and Asia, representing traditions of the Silk Road,” Kazinform reported. The SCO nations are in the key position between the two continents, and should actively support creation of a single transit-transport system. This will “attract additional volumes of

freight, where total value is now already worth US\$50 billion,” Nazarbayev said.

China, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan discussed a specific, very challenging part of this transport corridor. Presidents Bakiyev and Karimov hailed Chinese investment into the Xinjiang-Uzbekistan rail project, which will eventually connect Kashgar to Central Asia and Europe. Hu Jintao had discussed this project with Kyrgyz Prime Minister Almazbek Atambayev when Hu arrived in Bishkek Aug. 15, for his first visit. “A political decision on building the railway from Uzbekistan to China through Kyrgyzstan has practically already been taken,” Atambayev was quoted by Agence France Press.

Russian First Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Denisov told *Vremya Novosti* that the SCO is focussing on economic issues, and is looking for concrete economic projects to work on. In an interview published Aug. 15, Denisov said that “As the SCO is a young organization, it does not institutionalize economic cooperation, but sums up economic interests and looks for concrete economic projects, for instance in energy and transport. The SCO was set up to resolve issues of security and stability and sustain peace in the region. But it is natural that nobody can escape from economy and nobody has the intention to do this. . . . Mutual interest and objective prerequisites for the development of equal and mutually advantageous economic cooperation in the region are evident.”

Denisov said that Putin’s initiative to create international nuclear fuel cycle centers “will be promoted at the bilateral or trilateral basis at this stage,” based on SCO cooperation. “Of course, we see an objective interest in such projects. There are uranium producers in the region that are interested in international cooperation. This area as well as nanotechnologies is very promising.”

The Youth Generation

In his speech to the SCO summit, Putin stressed cultural, and especially youth cooperation among the nations. He proposed “multilateral projects in culture, science, and education and youth cooperation with the operating structures. . . . In this context, an important subject involves establishing the Shanghai Cooperation Organization University. It could be a network of educational institutions from member states offering coordinated educational programs. This can markedly increase the opportunities our young people have to receive a first-rate modern education, and for teachers and researchers to develop academic contacts. I think that this issue could be worked out by ministries of education, and then presented to the SCO Council of Heads of State.”

Even more promising for the future, is the clause in the Bishkek Declaration: “The heads of state are confident that the younger generation will take over the cause of promoting friendship among the peoples of the SCO member states. In this connection they hailed the intention of youth organizations to develop contacts in the SCO framework.”