
Shanghai Cooperation Organization

SCO Summit Takes Up Security Challenge, But Needs Economic Vision

by Mary Burdman

The July 4-5 summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) nations—Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan—took place in the Kazakhstan capital of Astana, amid a highly charged situation in Eurasia. Although the world financial meltdown crisis was not publicly addressed at the summit, the big security strains in Eurasia were. Terrorism, extremism, and separatism have been key concerns of the SCO since it was founded in June 2001, and were previously addressed in broad terms; this time, the SCO leaders were direct. In a declaration on July 5, the five Presidents said that the United States and other NATO troops fighting in Afghanistan, should set a deadline to leave their military bases in SCO member states. These are the U.S. bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, set up after Sept. 11, 2001.

“We support the efforts of the international coalition conducting the anti-terrorist operation in Afghanistan, and we have taken note of the progress made in the effort to stabilize the situation,” the declaration said. “As the active military phase in the anti-terror operation in Afghanistan is nearing completion, the SCO would like the coalition’s members to decide on the deadline for the use of the temporary infrastructure and for their military contingents’ presence in those countries.”

This is no naive statement about the situation in Afghanistan, which has long been a concern of its Eurasian neighbors. The SCO leaders know full well that fighting there has intensified and that militant-linked drug-trafficking has increased many times since the Taliban was driven from Kabul. Rather, the SCO Presidents were pointing to other problems: the unending U.S.-led war in Iraq and the past months’ political upheavals in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, after the “soft revolutions” in Georgia and Ukraine. The new government of Kyrgyzstan was welcomed at the summit, but so was President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan, who had visited Moscow June 28-29. There, Karimov said, “The script-writers and stage managers [of the events in Andizhan, scene of the upheavals] used the same religious, extremist, and radical forces . . . which they had battled so ‘successfully’ in Afghanistan and are now fighting in Iraq.”

A member of the Russian delegation in Astana, Novosti news service reported July 5, said that the SCO wants a clear

time frame for the withdrawal. “This is not an ultimatum. We just need to know how long the countries within the coalition will use the relevant infrastructure in SCO countries to conduct the anti-terrorist campaign in Afghanistan. This is an issue of practical importance to Russia, as well as the countries where the contingents are deployed. We need a clear answer to the question.”

The SCO was founded to reduce tensions along former Soviet borders, but its members have rapidly expanded its scope, to meet the fast-moving challenges in the region. This time, South Asia was also represented, as India, Pakistan, and Iran all attended as official observers, joining Mongolia, which became an observer last year. Afghanistan had been invited to the summit last year, but no one from Kabul attended.

The language of the summit was more pointed than at previous meetings. In the final declaration issued July 5, the Presidents affirmed that “a rational and just world order should be based on strengthening mutual trust and good-neighborliness, on establishing genuine partnership relations without claims to supremacy and domination in international affairs,” and this should be based on the UN Charter. Chinese President Hu Jintao stressed in his speech on July 5, that “without stability, there can be no talk of any development.”

The Chinese *People’s Daily* noted on July 6 that the SCO was already committed to ending terrorism, as a “serious threat to social stability,” before George Bush had launched his crusade. The editorial explicitly accused the United States and other Western powers of going from their direct military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq, to starting “‘color revolutions’ one after another,” which have “posed great challenges” to SCO nations. Having “tided over” the first transfer of power from the former Soviet Union, now “Central Asian countries need a steady and harmonious regional environment,” *People’s Daily* wrote. The Bush-Cheney-Blair agenda in Eurasia will not allow that.

Moscow is also putting a lot of weight on the SCO discussions. Prior to the summit, on July 4, President Vladimir Putin’s aide Sergei Prikhodho told Novosti in Moscow that the Kremlin considers the SCO as one of the most effective regional organizations, because SCO leaders elaborate posi-

tions themselves, without mediators. All countries in the region faced “similar challenges—terrorism and drug trafficking,” Prikhodko said: “Every country is in favor of increasing economic cooperation, and real interaction rather than single protective measures, subsidies, and bonuses.”

Prikhodko said that the United States was interested in getting observer status, but that will not be considered. “This is a regional forum. . . . SCO members are not bound by obligations to take into account the interests of other, non-regional, powers.”

Although India is an observer, represented on the Foreign Ministry-level, it pledged to contribute “significantly” to the SCO effort against terrorism and for increased economic cooperation. The SCO will “help revive the intense interflow of ideas and commerce that marked the heyday of the famous Silk Route era,” External Affairs Minister K. Natwar Singh said July 4. “Political, economic, social, and cultural linkages that Asian countries are vigorously developing today, both individually and through organizations like the SCO, will play a significant role in reiterating our common Asian identity, and in making this century the Asian Century.”

The Necessary Vision

The Astana summit followed directly on Chinese President Hu Jintao’s state visit to Russia, where he and President Putin signed a joint statement on the new world order for the 21st Century. This calls for a “new security framework” and efforts to end the “development gap” between rich and poor nations. Security should be based on mutual trust and benefit, equality, and cooperation, and be founded on “the universally recognized norms of international relations.” All nations should have equal security rights, and conflicts should be solved through equal dialogue, consultation, and negotiation.

Yet, something profound was lacking in the Chinese-Russian summit: a concept for really expanding economic cooperation. On one level, this was demonstrated by Russia’s continued stonewalling on the oil pipeline it has been proposing to build from Siberia to the Pacific for at least a decade. The Hu-Putin joint communiqué said only that the two sides will “facilitate Russian-Chinese hydrocarbon projects, including the construction of an oil pipeline from Russia to China,” but this is nothing more than has been said for years. Late last year, Moscow said it would build the main pipeline to the Russian Pacific coast, rather than directly to China, which will facilitate exports to Japan. A branch of the pipeline is to go to China, but the timetable was not made clear. China is proposing next year to increase its oil imports from Russia by half, to some 100 million barrels, but everything has to be shipped by rail.

Meanwhile, Kazakhstan is already building an oil pipeline to China, scheduled to be completed by the end of the year. When Hu Jintao arrived in Astana July 3, he and Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev also discussed building a

gas pipeline, and, according to the Pakistani agency Jang, Nazarbayev said that the two leaders “have signed a feasibility study memorandum to start work on a trans-Kazakhstan narrow-gauge railway to connect western China and the Caspian Sea.”

On a more comprehensive level, the Chinese and Russian Presidents did discuss the potential for mutual benefit in regional economic cooperation. China is committed to developing its huge western region, and reviving the “old” industrial base in the northeast, which borders Siberia and the Far East region of Russia. But there are severe problems. Khabarovsk Territory Governor Viktor Ishayev warned during a visit to Moscow July 4, of potential conflicts between Russia and China because of Moscow’s failure to do anything about the abysmal conditions in Far Eastern Russia. Moscow has allocated only what Ishayev called a “meager” \$1,400,000 to develop the area during the next 10 years.

The region has suffered massive disinvestment and population loss since 1990. The population of Russia’s Pacific Primorsky Krai is barely 2.3 million people, and that is half the population of the entire Far East—with a territory of some 6 million square kilometers. Eastern Siberia has some 9 million people in 4 million square kilometers. In contrast, China’s Heilongjiang has about 37 million people. Ishayev called for the whole development strategy for the Far East to be revised. “The idea is to make the most of China’s proximity and its human resources.”

After leaving Moscow, Hu Jintao went to Novosibirsk, the most important city in Siberia, where he addressed a seminar on regional cooperation with the governors of the Siberian Federal District and Novosibirskaya Region. Hu said that regional cooperation between China and Russia has “historic opportunities,” and that China’s decisions to develop its western regions and rebuild its industrial northeast are important opportunities for eastern Russia.

But these discussions lacked the vision of the speech made by former Chinese President Jiang Zemin in Novosibirsk’s Science City, Akademgorodok, during his November 1998 visit. There, speaking Russian, Jiang Zemin told the scientists that the progress of human civilization has proven the importance of science and technology as a “driving force for economic development and social progress. . . . Human wisdom is inexhaustible. Science and technology are a shining beacon of this wisdom.” Jiang stressed Russia’s role as a world scientific and technological power: “Even today,” he said, “Russia leads the world in many key scientific and technological areas.”

It is exactly this unique Russian scientific tradition, particularly that of Vladimir Vernadsky, which Lyndon LaRouche has emphasized as the central, most important factor for the development of the great Eurasian landmass. It has to be on such a level—economic cooperation using the most advanced technologies—that the SCO nations find their real stability.