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POST-GLOBALIZATION: THE US RETREAT, SCO, SINO-RUSSIAN ACCORD AND MULTIPOLARITY

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Summary

This paper examines the conditions for peaceful transition from unipolar to multipolar world, taking recent Chinese endeavors, known as “Belt and Road” initiative, and Sino-Russian rapprochement, as an example. The initiative adopted a unique approach encompassing cultural relativism and multilayered interconnections mixing various forms of multilateral and bilateral cooperation. To assess the viability of the project, author scrutinized past records of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the first regional structure in which China played major roles together with Russia, and makes point of advantages of its functionalist approach. The paper shows how functionalist approach has nourished mutual trust of SCO members and enhanced the in-group cohesion. The effect has promoted the Sino-Russian rapprochement to a level of certain kind of accord, and helped create a common identity. As a conclusion, the paper supports an optimistic view on the “Belt and Road” initiative so long as it upholds the same functionalist approaches as SCO.

Key words: Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Multipolarity, Russia, China, Central Asia.

Introduction

Since the end of the WWII, the United States has led the construction of international order, making use of interstate political (UN), military (NATO, and other bilateral or multilateral alliances) and financial and economic (IMF, World Bank, WTO/ GATT et al.) organizations. When the Cold War ended, the US further consolidated its grip over the global affairs by expanding its geopolitical

and ideological hegemonies, and created the unipolar system under its aegis, the *Pax Americana*. The US hegemony, however, hardly survived a decade. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq seriously depleted its politico-financial resources, and inaugurated the shift to an international system characterized by multilayered and culturally diversified polarity (Geeraerts, 2011: 57). Although the US is still the most important global player, its political capital has so depleted that it can no longer in the position to impose its rules over the rest of the world.

The withering of US economic clout has long since predicted, and the “Great Recession of 2008” came as a final sign of the shift of global wealth at the cost of Americans. (Layne, 2012:1). China is about to grow into the world largest economy based on purchasing-power-parity (PPP), and the total share in the world GDP of emerging economies (EE) is constantly eroding the dominance of the West.^[1] Albeit we should not automatically translate the economic scale into the political one, a hegemonic shift is well underway in view of the recent meetings in G20, APEC, and ASEM, where the Western leadership has been frustrated by the stiff opposition of EEs.

The hegemonic decline always has its consequences. In the past, it accompanied a huge scale of destruction, as the doomed hegemon tries to obstruct the new comers’ claims by way of coercive measures. Sensationalist journalism mentions of the repetition of same catastrophes as WWI and WWII. Will the world ahead of us be a more turbulent place than it was during the era of the *Pax Americana*? Or, are there the other ways that will guarantee more peaceful transition? If the answer of latter question is YES, what is their precondition?

Did the China’s rise cause the US decline?

Since the announcement of “Reform and Opening-up” at the end of 1978, China has recorded constant and cumulatively rapid growth. Its gross domestic product (USD currency base) increased by 50 times from 1980 to 2013. While its growth was 1.9 times in 1980-1990, it reached at 3.8 in 1990-2000, and 4.5 in 2000-2010 (See table 1). The rapid growth, together the synergy effect with its huge population, accounts for the rise of its share in the world GDP and, as a logical consequence, the shrink of the US share.

Table 1: China’s GDP and Population 1980-2013

Main indicators	1980	1990	2000*	2010*	2013*
GDP (US\$, billions)	189.40	356.93	1,370.14	6,159.14	9,514.28
GDP per capita (US\$)	205.1	341.3	945.5	4,433.3	6,807.4
Population, millions	987.05	1143.33	1267.43	1,337.70	1,357.38

Source: World Bank national accounts data (2015): * with Hong Kong.

The constant fall of the US share in the global economy is not the one that China intentionally brought about. It was a reciprocal process of American lagging behind of the world average growth rate and much ahead of it that China and the EEs recorded (See: Table 2). Notwithstanding, there are growing concern and/or overt complain about the Chinese preponderance among the US elite. Nothing better illustrates it than the recent dismay caused by the inauguration of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The plan was first announce in October 2013 by PRC President Xi Jinping. Since then, the US policy makers did everything to thwart it (Jianxun, 2015).

They refuse to join the bank, and put pressure on countries around the world to stay away from the AIIB. The US was especially ardent to prevent its key allies from becoming founder members. To their surprise, however, on 12 March 2015, Britain applied to be a founding member of AIIB, followed by five European countries (Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and Switzerland) as well as the two of the Washington’s most important allies in the Asia-Pacific region – South Korea and Australia. The Wall Street Journal described the event as “a telling indicator of how much diplomatic influence the U.S. has lost, not least with its European allies.”^[2] Edwin M. Truman, a former Obama Treasury official said, “We are withdrawing from the central place we held on the international stage.”^[3]

Table 2: Share of the Largest Economies in the World’s GDP, 2000-2013 (USD Billion)

Country	2000	2005	2010	2013
USA	10,284 (31.3%)	13,093 (28.1%)	14,964 (23.1%)	16,768 (22.4%)
Japan	4,731(14.4%)	4,571 (9.8%)	5,495 (8.5%)	4,919 (6.6%)
Germany	1,947(5.9%)	2,857 (6.1%)	3,412 (5.3%)	3,730 (5.0%)
BRICS	2,887 (8.8%)	5,176 (11.1%)	11,910 (18.4%)	16,097 (21.5%)
China	1,370 (4.2%)	2,438 (5.2%)	6,159 (9.5%)	9,514 (12.7%)
Brazil	644 (2.0%)	882 (1.9%)	2,143 (3.3%)	2,245 (3.0%)
Russia	259 (0.8%)	764 (1.6%)	1,524 (2.4%)	2,096 (2.8%)
India	476 (1.5%)	834 (1.8%)	1,708 (2.6%)	1,875 (2.5%)
S. Africa	136 (0.4%)	257 (0.6%)	375 (0.6%)	366 (0.5%)

Source: World Bank national accounts data (2015)

The reason of the extraordinary dismay was not that the allies’ infidelity, but because Washington knew well that “sustaining our leadership depends on shaping an emerging global economic order.”^[4] The United States has been enjoying the privilege of lucrative spending more than they earned since the early 1970s. It was enabled by the dollar’s role as the international system’s reserve currency. Therefore, “if the dollar loses that status, US hegemony will literally be unaffordable”(Layne, 2012: 6). As the world largest borrower, the spiraling accumulation of US national debt will cause serious doubts about the confidence of dollar as the international reserve currency. In order to avoid its fall, the US has to do all “with confidence that the international system whose creation we led in the aftermath of World War II will continue to serve America.”^[5] According to the Obama administration, the goal is to put “the United States at the center of a free trade zone” by removing “barriers to U.S. exports” and making “America the production platform of choice and the premier investment destination.” For this end, “American leadership” must be “central to strengthening global finance rules.” Their chief concern is extending China’s economic influence in Asia and elsewhere. As Barak Obama put it: “If we do not help to shape the rules so that our businesses and our workers can compete in those markets, then China will set up the rules that advantage Chinese workers and Chinese businesses.”^[6] His determination to “the use of our economic strength to set new rules of the road,”^[7] however, turned out to be empty bluster in the face of the rushing applicants to the AIIB.

The initiative of AIIB was a logical response to a huge lack of investment for the

infrastructure in the Asia-Pacific region. According to an estimate of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) a total of \$8 trillion will be necessary between 2010 and 2020, while being the loans provided by the ADB amount to only 10 billion per year. Such dereliction of international financial system led the Indonesian President, Joko Widodo, to call for a “new global economic order, that is open to new emerging economic powers”^[8] at the Asian-African summit in April 2015. As an economic power with nearly \$4 trillion in foreign exchange reserves, it was natural that China took on the role to fill the vacuum. Moreover, China’s initiative to multilateralize the flow of funds is a desirable for the investors, as it ameliorates the core problem of the existing financial system that has failed in recycling over accumulated capital to places where investment is needed (Stiglitz, 2015). It was the neglect of the US and its ally, Japan, in addressing the system’s malfunctioning that necessitated China to take action.

In the same vein, the BRICS’ plan to establish their own parallel structure was push forward by the US refusal of reform of the Breton Woods Twin. On 15 July 2014, the BRICS leaders agreed to establish the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA). The former is aimed at easing the “financing constraints” for developing countries to address “infrastructure gaps and sustainable development,”^[9] and the latter is to take care of the “financial stability.”^[10] Thus, their functions are identical with those of WB and IMF respectively. NDB and CRA are, however, not designed to counteract WWB/IMF tandem, at least in their original plan, as they were born in the following context. To better address the global financial crisis, the IMF started the discussion of the quota reform to double total financial commitments from all member states in 2008. The reform intended to raise capitals from the BRICS in exchange for larger voting shares, as the BRICS, comprising over one-fifth of the global economy, wielded about 11 percent of the votes at the time. The EU agreed to the concession, but the US showed reluctance. Washington tried to contain Beijing’s new quota much smaller than it deserved, and forced to strike a deal at 6 % - very moderate in comparison with the US share of 16.5, in 2010. For all the concession on Chinese side, the US Congress voted against the adjustment.^[11] Although China had since long pursued careful appeasement policy to USA (Glosny, 2010: 129), the Washington’s uncompromising attitude crucially pushed Beijing to turn toward its BRICS friends and to search for alternative measures.

The two recent episodes suggest us that it was not the Chinese expansionism, but the US failure to remedy the deficiency of international financial institutions, that has precipitated the transformation of the world from unipolarity to more multipolar oriented one.

US Dichotomy vs. China’s Multilayer Approaches

The *Pax Americana* has asserted the United States’ “liberal ideology” as the only universal model for political, economic, and social development (Layne, 2012: 9). The AIIB and NDB/CRA, two major failures of recent US diplomacy, symbolize the degradation of the American model of free market-liberal democracy nexus, known as the “Washington consensus.” A part of the reason is the depletion of American economic resources. The USA can no longer present itself as the sole standard for the affluent future prosperity due to its relative decline. To compensate the deficit, Barak Obama’s government has opted for a “soft power” approach as opposed to the Bush administration’s hard lines.

“Soft Power” is “the ability to get what you want through attraction.” According to Joseph Nye, the values like democracy and human rights are “deeply seductive,” thus, the best way to enhance a country’s attractiveness is to support such values (Nye, 2004). Obama’s “soft power” approach upholds the same doctrine, as his *National Security Strategy* (2015) put it: “To lead

effectively in a world experiencing significant political change, the United States must live our values at home while promoting universal values abroad... Defending democracy and human rights is related to every enduring national interest. It aligns us with the aspirations of ordinary people throughout the world.”^[12] One may question, however: Is the defense of “democracy and human rights” indeed every nation’s first priority? In 2013, over 500 million people are living in the countries of instability and conflict (Institute of Economics and Peace, 2014: 2). 2.2 billion people were living on less than US \$2 a day in 2011.^[13] The world has a lot of problems to address and each country has its own agenda. For those who are struggling with social unrest and/or poverty, such slogan may sound cumbersome: “We are upholding our enduring commitment to the advancement of democracy and human rights... In doing so, we are working to support democratic transitions.”^[14]

Moreover, the US espousal of “democracy” often accompanies another message – fight against “authoritarianism.” The following passage of the same document is a good example. “[The] demands [for greater freedoms and accountable institutions] have often produced an equal and opposite reaction from backers of discredited authoritarian orders... Many of the threats to our security in recent years arose from efforts by authoritarian states to oppose democratic forces.”^[15] Here, one can notice a clear dichotomy between “democracy” and “authoritarianism” and a presupposition that the obstacle to democracy is “authoritarianism.” It also envisages inverse formula - elimination of “authoritarian” regime brings about democratic government.

The recent turbulence in North Africa and Middle East is one of the most critical counter-evidences of Obama’s formula. The US invasion and ensuing de-Baathization threw Iraqi into civil wars. In 2011, the US helped Libyan rebels destroy the regime and drove the country into chaos. The same year, the USA started backing rebels in Syria that turned the country into a center of world Jihadism. In 2013, Washington denounced the democratically elected Mursi government as human rights abuser, and helped no more democratic General Sisi topple it down. All attest to that the US support to the Arab “democratic change” resulted in rampant violence and humanitarian catastrophe. The Obama administration’s execute for the outcomes is as follows: “The popular uprisings that began in the Arab world took place in a region with weaker democratic traditions, powerful authoritarian elites, sectarian tensions, and active violent extremist elements, so it is not surprising setbacks have thus far outnumbered triumphs.” It amounts to the confession that the USA intentionally supported “authoritarian elites, sects, and violent extremists” during the “Arab spring,” as Washington had known well the region’s “weaker democratic traditions.” According to Nye, the legitimacy of a country’s behavior enhances its attractiveness (Nye, 2004). One may doubt any legitimacy in the US policy in Middle East.

The democracy/authoritarianism dichotomy reveals a special nature of identification of the US diplomacy. Identifying of Self is not a priori given. An actor constructs its identity by identifying differences between other actors and itself, and also by constructing its relationships with these Others within its perceived context. However, the Self/Other dynamic is not always formed around an antagonistic relationship between the Self and the Other. The nature and identity of Other is not fixed. These include an oppositional and antagonistic Other; an Other that is seen as different but not antagonistic to the Self; or an Other with which the Self sees similarity and with which it can construct a common in-group identity (Aris & Snetkov, 2013: 206). Against this background, the peculiarity of the US diplomatic discourses is evident. In their vocabulary, there are little room for the Others that are not friend but not enemy either. For them, Self/Other dichotomy is almost automatically interpreted into friend/foe dimension. The US foreign policy hardly admits the existence of third party positions. As William Blum put it, the essential US foreign policy goals has been preventing the rise of any alternative model (Blum, 2013:6). During the cold war, it was very

hostile to the non-aligned movement. It refused the proposal for friendship by the Cuban and Iranian revolutionary governments out of hand, and labeled them as “anti-American.” The mind-set became even stricter after the cold war. It deprived Yugoslavia of the privileged position of “friend of America,” then let it fall apart. In the same vein, Washington eliminated Arab countries of allegedly pro-socialist regimes. As the “Arab spring” discourses revealed, the Obama’s “soft power” policy has fully inherited the tradition.

The US friend/foe dichotomy makes a sharp contrast to the recent Chinese diplomacy. Chinese President Xi Jinping disclosed an ambitious plan of huge infrastructure investment during his visits to Central Asia and Southeast Asia in 2013. Its general outline was unveiled on 28 March 2015, when China issued a document, “Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road.”^[16] The plan presumes two big project of infrastructure construction as its pillars. One is the “Silk Road Economic Belt” that will connect the Eurasian landmass by high ways and rapid train network. The other is the “21st-Century Maritime Silk Road” foreseeing a sea lane network running from China through the Indian Ocean to East African coasts.

According to the “Vision,” the project embraces wider area of international cooperation, including trade, finance, policy coordination, and cultural exchange. In the field of trade, it emphasizes the centrality of WTO rather than bilateral or multilateral rules. It makes stark contrast with the US led Trans-Pacific Partnership (TTP) and Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) that propagate the advantage of “higher standard” of the West. The proposed financial structure is more impressive. The “Vision” envisages financial integration within the region, by deepening financial cooperation, building currency stability, investment, financing and credit information system. More concretely, it proposes to expand the bilateral currency swap, open the bond market in Asia, and create the system of currency reserve mechanism based on Renminbi (RMB).

Seen in this way, the “Vision” sounds like an open challenge to the Breton Woods system. The recent discourses appeared in official Chinese media implies the existence of such intention. “These initiatives challenge the dominance of the international political and economic order centered on oil and the U.S. dollar.”^[17] “The unipolar system dominated by the USA will evolve toward a bipolar one” (Xuetong, 2015). “The countries along the “One Belt One Road” are likely to become a renminbi currency area.”^[18] “Russia and China are working together to create an alternative to the Western financial and economic system” (Ivanov, 2015). Careful reading of these discourses, however, highlights that the Chinese plan is rather conservative, being based either on the existing institutions and mechanisms or on already taken-root commercial practices. The Chinese leadership has repeatedly underscored that they have no intention of replacing the US, as they know how detrimental for their economic interests the open confrontation with Washington will be. China has no intention to “rewrite any rules” (Gang, 2015). Indeed, the “Belt and Road” initiative is far from the attempts to inaugurate the “Beijing consensus.” Its blue print of international investment system is nothing but a coordination of either existent or planned institutions, such as AIIB, NDB, CRA, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) financing institutions, and the Silk Road Fund as the main pillars. All of them are built or conceived in different context only partly overlapping the “Sino-centric” economic initiatives. The same is true for the financial system. It is nothing but a “strengthen[ing] practical cooperation of China-ASEAN Interbank Association and SCO Interbank Association, and carry out multilateral financial cooperation in the form of syndicated loans and bank credit.”

The “Vision’s” proposal for the new regional governance has the same kind of nature, as it envisages to “take full advantage of the existing bilateral and multilateral cooperation mechanisms...

such as the SCO, ASEAN Plus China, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF), China-Gulf Cooperation Council Strategic Dialogue, Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) Economic Cooperation, and Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC).” All of them have inaugurated in a different context and intentions, and majority of them are not under the Chinese initiative, let alone control.

In this way, contrary to the innovative impression that Beijing tries to create, the “Belt and Road” initiative is not a cutting-edge project, but essentially an amalgamation of a series of conservative and defensive measures. What is seen as China’s challenge in the eyes of Washington is a kind of total defense of status quo based on the existing multilateral and bilateral institutions, agreements and practices. Its main objective is to fence off the US imposition of new rules by means of TTP and TTIP into the core interest of the growing Chinese economy.

The Chinese strategy has another strong point - a multilayered approach based on profitability and effectiveness of various partners. In contrast to the Washington’s insistence on the centrality and universality of shared value of “free market” connected with “democracy and human rights,” the China’s call for cooperation upholds “diversified, independent, balanced and sustainable development” based on the “mutual trust and respect.” Its core concept, so-called “win-win” cooperation, presupposes the complementary coordination of in-group countries’ resource to the advantage of mutually benefit. Its functionalist approach makes stark contrast to the institutionalism espoused by the USA.

The underlying philosophy is quite different from that of the USA, too. The “Vision” highlights the importance of “tolerance among civilizations, respects the paths and modes of development chosen by different countries, and supports dialogues among different civilizations on the principles.” So it recognizes of Otherness of its partners, accepting the difference as a priori, and trying to find agreement through dialogues for the pursuit of mutual benefit. The “Silk Road Spirits,” as it called by the document, is essentially based on the utilitarian and/or pragmatic thinking, rather than idealism. In other wards, Chinese approach presupposes cultural relativism as opposed to universalism. It may sounds much softer than the friend/foe dichotomy of the US diplomacy, especially for those countries that is exposed to the unilateral imposition of the US “higher standard.”

The SCO as a testing ground for the “Belt and Road” initiative

The Chinese project of “Belt and Road” is still an idea on a paper, and its feasibility is widely open to question. Instead of assessing its future possibilities, the author proposes to infer them by the past Chinese endeavors in regional cooperation, taking SCO as an example. The SCO is the first regional structure in which China played major roles, as well as one of the most important spring boards from which China embarked on the greater adventure of “Belt and Road.”

Five Eurasian states (China, Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan) agreed on a cooperation to fight against terrorism in June 2001. The group proceeded to further institutionalize themselves by the adaptation of its charter at a meeting in St. Petersburg in June 2002. Since then, the SCO continues to function as a viable regional structure and cumulatively enlarges its field of cooperation.

Since its inauguration, many US and European analysts have given negative, if not hostile, assessment to the SCO. They have described it as an anti-Western camp created to counterbalance

the US/EU influence in Eurasia (Cats, 2007; Niazi, 2007; Frost, 2009; Carroll, 2011). More serious scholars, however, give more nuanced evaluations. Some underscore the non-military nature of the organization and rule out the possibility that it will grow into any meaningful threats to the West (Iwashita, 2004; Germanovich, 2008; Matveeva & Giustozzi, 2008; Aris, 2009, 2011; Barski, 2011). The latter's assessment is more relevant if one recalls the following process of SCO making. The origin of SCO is the security concern among the former USSR countries and their largest neighbor – China. The abrupt end of USSR posed imminent threats over the border control among the newly independent states and their neighbors. This issue was particularly crucial in the Central and Eastern Asia, as the region had a number of unsettled territorial disputes with China. While the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was created as an attempt to foster cooperation, its historical role was nothing but facilitation of an orderly dissolution of USSR (Dadabev, 2013: 105-6). In the face of potential instability, a framework was pursued for the enduring settlement of border issues among China, Russia and the Central Asian Republics (Aris, 2009; 457). The first step was an agreement on a “strategic partnership” between Russia and China (1996) that provided mutual security guarantee but did not presuppose collective defense against the third party (Iwashita, 2004: 275). The principle subsequently reached at a multilateral level, embracing three CA countries. On 26 April 1996, Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan agreed on the necessity to address their common issues, and established a new framework known as “Shanghai Five.” In June 2001, with the admission of Uzbekistan, the “Shanghai Five” transformed itself into the SCO and the “Shanghai Convention Against Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism” was signed. The SCO was further consolidated as a collective body by the adaptation of the St. Petersburg charter in June 2002 (Chung, 2006: 3).

As the process attests to it, the SCO started as a regulatory formation, whose main agenda was to preclude the potential frictions among the member states. As defined in its charter, the main SCO's goals are “to strengthen mutual trust, friendship and good neighborliness between the member States,” under the principles of “mutual respect of sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity of States and inviolability of State borders, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs.”^[19] The member states consider those principles, known as “Shanghai spirit,” are not restricted to the regional framework, but should be applied to the international level. Thus, the SCO has acted collectively to check the external intervention, albeit such actions are always carried out through non-military ways, such as common declaration, communiqué and memorandum. The nonintervention principles were strongly observed in such critical events as the South Ossetia crisis 2008 and the Osh riots in Kyrgyzstan in 2010. In the former case, the SCO did not even issue a statement of support for Russia. In the latter case, the SCO did not respond to the request for assistance from the Kyrgyz president (Aris 2011, 471). To sum up, “Shanghai spirit” is the contemporary version of Westphalian principles that place state sovereignty and territorial integrity as the cornerstones of the international system (Aris & Snetkov, 2013: 2). The SCO is neither military nor collective security body, but essentially a defensive cooperation addressing common concern that would endanger the stability of its member states.

The Westphalian nature of the SCO often gave rise to accusation on the side of scholars that espouse the regional institutionalism theories. For them, the SCO appears to be an authoritarian club working together to reject Western democratic norms (Bailes et al, 2007; Haas, 2007; Ambrosio, 2008; Naarajärvi, 2012). They like to see the SCO's noninterventionism as the sign of collective blockage to “global democratic trends,” and even consider it a deviation from the principles of human rights. According to them, this is the SCO's “Achilles heel,” because the reliance on repressive methods coupled with blockage of outside influence, will make Central Asian societies

and regimes more fragile (Bailes et al, 2007: 7-8, 25). Their assertion, however, does not fit into the ongoing achievements of SCO. Moreover, their theoretical premise is not perfectly elaborated.

Many scholars of regional institutionalism assume that liberal democracy is the primary facilitator of regional cooperation. Their basic argument is that, due to its open nature, liberal-democratic systems enable states to monitor internal affairs of other states and, it helps foresee the others' intentions and appease their concerns. It enhances, in turn, the mutual trust, cumulatively urges states to be more liberal-democratic, and fortifies the ground of accord. For instance, Edward Mansfield and Jon Pevehouse argue that “entering an IO [international organization] can help leaders in transitional states credibly commit to carry out reforms since these institutions convey information, help ameliorate time-inconsistency problems, and improve the reputation of new member states. Membership can also discourage regime opponents from threatening emerging regimes by imposing potentially high costs on countries that renege on IO commitments. Each of these mechanisms can assist in the process of deepening democracy, giving leaders in nascent democracies strong incentives to join IOs” (Mansfield & Pevehouse, 2006: 163). Their reasoning, however, presupposes exceptionally optimistic conditions, and disregards the growing scale of “non-conventional” threats.

Contemporary security threats mainly come from non-state actors. Capitalizing on the “double erosion” of nation-state, the “new wars” are proliferating (Kaldor, 2012). This “post-Westphalian” type of conflicts is extremely hazardous, as the fighting parties hardly have the will to comply international norms, and often challenge the universally accepted values. The so-called “Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL)” is a typical embodiment of this trend (Sahara, 2015). Higher accessibility to information makes it easier for the extremists either to recruit their followers or to instigate like-minded people to commit violent actions. In the same vein, the regime opponents of ISIL type scarcely care for the “high costs” imposed by the other states, because their objectives are to create the Caliphate that never recognizes the existence of equal political entity and they are decisive to realize their goals against all odds. In other words, regional institutionalism through liberal-democracy only makes sense in particular circumstances in which a certain set of shared values has already existed. It is no accident that the proponents of the theory like to take EU as the primary example for their “empirical” reasoning.

Table 3: Basic data of SCO member states and observers (2014)

	Area (1000km ²)	Population	GDP (PPP USD bn)	GDP (current USD bn)
China	9,326	1,355,692,576	17,630	10,360
Russia	16,378	142,470,272	3,568	2,057
Kazakhstan	2,700	17,948,816	421	226
Uzbekistan	425	28,929,716	170	63
Kyrgyzstan	192	5,604,212	19	8
Tajikistan	142	8,051,512	22	9
SCO total	29,163	1,558,697,104	21,830	12,723
World share%	19.6	21.7	20.3	16.3
India	2,973	1,236,344,631	7,277	2,048
Pakistan	770	196,174,380	884	238
Mongolia	1,554	2,953,190	30	12

SCO+3 total	32,906	2,991,216,115	29,991	15,009
World share%	22.1	41.7	27.9	19.2

Source: CIA, The World Factbook (2015)

The SCO member states live in quite different conditions from their former Socialist comrades in the Eastern Europe that have so far relatively well conformed to the EU regulations of liberal-democracy and market economy. The SCO zone has been the contested ground among different civilizations, and is one of the most poverty-stricken parts of the globe. There is no tangible clue with which some common values can be established. In other words, diversity is commonality in this region. To make matters worse, the state borders artificially drawn by Joseph Stalin are running through the vast, culturally fragmented, ethnically intermixed, and deeply affected by warriors' tradition territories. Newly independent countries from USSR were all devoid of self-sustained administrative, police, and military structure, let alone economic viability. For the people in the region, the immediate and essential needs are security of life and sustainable economy, how moderate may it be.

The most pressing threat to the life of people in the region is the Islamic extremism. With ties across a wider region, including Afghanistan and Pakistan, the extremists posed formidable threats that no country could defend effectively by oneself. In Uzbekistan, a number of Islamic radical organizations appeared mainly in the Ferghana Valley seeking to establish a Caliphate during the 1990s. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were facing the same danger of Islamic extremist parties. Kazakhstan was trying to control the activity of Uyghur separatists (Rashid, 2003, 2009). China has its own concern over the separatist forces in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Its fear centers on a transnational network supporting the Uyghur separatists in general, and Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) in particular (Zhao, 2011; Odgaard & Nielsen, 2014). Russia has its own concern over the Islamic extremism, especially in the Northern Caucasus, but not exclusively there. Moscow appreciates the destructive effects of extremists' threat emanating from CA over the various parts of its territory with Muslim plurality (Chuikov, 2015). It was the conversion of those concerns that brought the SCO member states together.

The CIS had its own Anti-Terrorist Center in Bishkek. The mechanism, however, was not effectively used even at the times of severe threats emanating from Afghanistan since 1996. To fill the vacancy, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan formed a coordination center to conduct joint operations against terrorists in the wake of the 1999-2000 attacks. It was further strengthened by the Treaty "On Joint Actions in Fighting Terrorism, Political and Religious Extremism, and Transnational Organized Crime," signed on April 21, 2000 among Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (Tolipov, 2006). It eventually merged with Sino-Russian "strategic partnership" and incarnated in the SCO in 2001. As defined in its charter, the SCO's main purpose is "working together to maintain regional peace, security and stability" in general, and the containment of Islamist rebel groups in particular (Fredholm, 2013: 4).

Since its onset, the SCO has displayed successful records in its battle against the Islamic extremism. According to its official sources, the law enforcement structures of the SCO have prevented several hundreds of terrorist attacks (Barski, 2011). So far, all SCO countries have contained the threat to the extent they can control it by their own jurisdiction without outside help. Thanks to the deterrent of SCO, there is a marked reduction in the tensions with regard to Chechnya and Xinjiang, respectively. It is impressive if one recalls the recent anarchies in Middle East and North Africa.

The SCO's success in the battle against terrorism was achieved mainly by three measures.

First, it settled the territorial disputes. Since its start, the SCO brought about rapid consensus among the member states on the mutual recognition of international border. It enabled effective control of the borders, and facilitated the viable tackling over cross-border terrorism and organized crime. It worked as an effective barrier to prevent the Afghanistan war from spreading into the region (Iwashita, 2004; Lukin, 2007; Aris, 2009; Guang, 2009, 2013).

Second, the SCO members reached at a consensus on the definition of terrorism. The Shanghai Convention defines the notion of the so-called “three evils” - “terrorism, extremism and separatism” clearly (Article 1). Its Article 6 delineates the member states’ duties as to cooperate and assist each other through exchange of information, execution of requests concerning operational search actions, development and implementation of agreed measures to prevent, identify and suppress the acts of “three evils,” any attempts of financing or arms supplies and trainings. Moreover, it envisaged concerted legislation and normative regulations against the phenomena among the member states.

The agreement enabled the member states to introduce well-coordinated measures against the phenomena within the jurisdiction of each country. The SCO states piled up the common list of terrorists, extremists, and separatists, and cracked them down in a coordinated way. A great attention was paid to the cooperation of law-enforcement systems of the SCO member states, and a mechanism coordinated in a legal and organizational manner was created (Zakharov, 2015). It made difficult for the terrorist groups to make use of other country’s territory as their safe heaven, and narrowed the niche for the trans-border collaboration among the different terrorist groups (Lukin 2007: 142; Aris, 2009: 466; Song, 2014:94).

The SCO has an interstate security structure, known as the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS). It is a rather moderate institution composed of several dozens of intelligent officers, with its main tasks being exchange of intelligence information (Matveeva & Giustozzi, 2008: 13-4). Regardless of low-level collaboration, the past records of RATS are highly appreciated by member states as it has played important roles in harmonization of security laws, contact between national and local police forces, and regular exchange of information among the key security officers. The merit of RATS lies in its ability to develop a single approach for SCO states in the fight against terrorism and other problems. Each state is expected to coordinate its national legislative and internal security procedures with other SCO member states based on the recommendation of RATS, regardless the latter has no jurisdiction to enforce its policy recommendations (Aris, 2009: 469-70). The principle of nonintervention is persistent in this field.

The SCO’s record in the fight against terrorism merits special attention, when one compares it with the US endeavors. Although the US led “war on terror” have so far expended several trillion dollars and deployed hundreds of thousands of soldiers, it has proliferated, rather than eliminated, militant Islamic extremists. In contrast, for all its slack and low-level cooperation, the SCO has prevented the Jihadists to create their “Caliphate” enclaves within its territory. The difference came from their treatment to the phenomena. The US approach is more inclined to conventional state security strategy, thus its campaigns put emphasis on military actions against “terror centers” and “sponsor states of terrorism.” In contrast, the SCO is addressing more directly the terrorism itself, and prefers judicial and police measures. In the light of “post-Westphalian” nature of international Jihadism, the phenomena oriented approach of SCO, rather than the state oriented US model, is more likely to reduce its danger, as the former help recover the law enforcement functions of member states by its sovereignty oriented non-interference principles (Chung, 2006; Lukin, 2007; Yuan, 2010; Hongxi, 2013; Sahara, 2104).

The networking effect to fend off external intervention

The third advantage of SCO is the leverage of their network position to collectively push off the pressure imposed from outside. One of the serious deficiencies of the US “war on terror” is its inconsistency addressing the question. Its coalition against ISIL is a typical example. While waging airstrikes against the ISIL positions, the US pays little attention to impair Jihadists’ fighting potentials by coordinating joint actions among the interested parties. Its exclusion of Syria, Iran and Russia from the coalition, due to its insistence on “democracy” agenda, fatefully reduces the combat efficiency on the ground. Moreover, the US inconsistency on the definition of terrorism has empowered extremist groups such as al-Nusra front and Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK). As William Blum put it, “The United States is not actually against terrorism per se, only those terrorists who are not allies of the empire... The United States has also provided close support to terrorists, or fought on the same side as Islamic Jihadists... [For Washington] to further foreign policy goals [are] more important than fighting terrorism” (Blum, 2013: 17). Such US position paradoxically explains the successful records of the SCO’s struggle against terrorism.

The SCO countries, especially Russia and China, have introduced rigorous monitoring and cracking-down mechanisms against terrorists. For instance, China adopted an early warning and prevention system. The objective of this system is to monitor the activities of terrorist groups, forestall their attacks, and cut their financing. To buttress it up, the authorities have a quick response mechanism to take speedy and determined measures to neutralize perpetrators (Guang, 2006: 21). This implies, at the same time, the law enforcing authorities can have arbitrary powers to watch out citizens’ activities, interfere in business exchanges, and preemptive policing. It gives rooms for human rights activists and their external supporters to criticize the authorities of violation of democratic principles. Indeed, it often happens that the Western media, NGOs, EU, Japan and USA voiced concerted accusation after major cracking-down operations are carried out in China and Russia. If it were the case for smaller state, it would bring about political crisis and end up in providing wider niche for terrorist activities. On the contrary, the SCO’s networking leverage has skillfully prevented the negative effect of the external “moral” interventions. Let us see the mechanism taking the Andijan incident and ensuing development as an example.

After the September 11 attack, the US interest in CA significantly increased. The SCO countries welcomed the US initiative of war against the Taliban, believing that they could share the same interest with Washington. Accordingly, they took an active part in the coalitions operation, providing facilities and military bases (Guang, 2005: 503). The attitudes corroborates that the SCO is not an anti-Western club but ready for cooperation in the field of common interests. The intentions of US and SCO, however, were not perfectly overlapped. While the SCO states expected the Americans as an ally in their war on terrorism, the US made use of their goodwill to enhance its “democracy” agenda, pushing them to political and market reforms in exchange of various economic aids controlled by its semiofficial “NGOs” (Tolipov, 2006: 156).

So long as the push remained at parole level, cooperation could work. For instance, Uzbekistan security services placed hundreds of alleged terrorists in custody in 2002. While the UN issued a report on constant abuse and torture of the detainees, Washington remained unconcerned with such “undemocratic” tendencies (Yastrebova, 2010). So, Tashkent was ready to sign a Declaration “On Strategic Partnership” with the US in March 2002. The change of tide came in March 2005, when an uprising overthrew the regime of Askar Akayev in Kyrgyzstan. After the parliamentary elections of February, protestors stormed several government buildings and forced Akayev to flee the country. The Western media described the events as “the Tulip Revolution” in

which democratic forces successfully pulled down a dictator. Soon afterward, on 13 May 2005, Hizb-ut-Tahrir, an extremist group closely tied with Taliban, stormed a jail in Uzbek town of Andijan, setting free a total of 23 suspects of terrorism. The rebel subsequently attacked a police station, military garrison and local government building (Rashid, 2009: 344). The raids triggered off an uprising that merged with wider socioeconomic discontent, and several thousands of people gathered in the central square to express their opposition to the regime of President Islam Karimov. Karimov swiftly sent security forces. The units opened fire at the crowd and a total of 187 people were killed according to the official announcement (Matveeva & Giustozzi, 2008: 2).

The US response to the event was extraordinary harsh. White House press secretary Scot McClellan condemned “the indiscriminate use of force against unarmed civilians” and called for an international investigation. Senator John McCain described the Andijon events as “not unexpected in a country that does not allow the exercise of human rights and democracy.” The assistant secretary of State Dan Fried asserted that promotion of human rights and democratization are of the US primary importance. President Bush, in his part, made an official speech calling for an international investigation (Yastrebova, 2010; Heathershaw, 2007: 130).

The government of Uzbekistan was deeply offended by the US response, as they believed the unrest was the act of terrorism. The US upholding of the rioters’ cause led them to the confidence that Washington’s commitment to human rights was a cover to its real objectives - to overthrow the government. Karimov claimed that the events in Andijan were linked to the “Tulip Revolution,” and implied the US involvement with following words: “The scenario was identical, they wanted to repeat the coup in Kyrgyzstan” (Ambrosio, 2008: 1331). He refused to even consider the call for an international investigation, and expressed deep mistrust for its intention: “I can even say in advance what [the international investigators’] conclusions would be. The conclusions would be no different from those in Chechnya and other countries” (Heathershaw, 2007: 131). Such categorical rejection cost much. Washington withheld \$8 million of aid to Uzbekistan in protest at the incident, and warned that it would withhold \$22 million of aid, unless it allowed a full inquiry.^[20]

The plight of Karimov was greatly alleviated by sympathetic attitudes of his SCO colleagues. The SCO Secretary-General Zhang shared the same view on the “Tulip revolution” and described the protesters as “religious extremist forces” (Ambrosio, 2008: 1332). The Chinese and Russian presidents issued a joint statement castigating unnamed states that “pursue the right to monopolize or dominate world affairs” by seeking to “impose models of social development” (Bailes et al, 2007: 7). The climax came on 5 July when the heads of the SCO states made a joint declaration denouncing the “pretense to monopoly and domination in international affairs.” It precluded the unilateral intervention on the pretext of “human rights,” and upheld different approaches by saying: “In the area of human rights it is necessary to respect strictly and consecutively historical traditions and national features of every people.” It even requested the eviction of US bases.^[21] Emboldened by the strong backings, Uzbekistan delivered a memorandum to the US embassy in Tashkent demanding the removal of the US airbase at Kharshi-Khanabad (K2) within 6 months on 29 July. On 21 November 2005 the US evacuated the base, which it had occupied since 2001, something that would have been unrealistic, if it had had been an isolated effort of Tashkent alone.

The Astana declaration caused serious concern among the US policy makers. On 19 July 2005, the House of Representatives adopted a resolution expressing concern over the SCO declaration. US State Department spokesman Sean McCormack told a press briefing that it is up to individual states, not the SCO, to determine their relationship with foreign troops. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld hurriedly visited Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in late July, and tried to convince the two governments that it was in their best interest to give in (Tolipov, 2006: 161). Secretary of State

Condoleezza Rice made an official visit to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in October 2005 with the same purpose (Lukin, 2007: 149-51). The US concern was not over the damage that the loss of air base would cause on its operations in Afghanistan. Rumsfeld admitted that he did not believe US operations in Afghanistan would be hurt if Tashkent denied continued use of K2, because there are other options in the region.^[22] As one US expert noted that “having bases in Central Asia also sends a message to China and to Russia that this is now a significant U.S. sphere of influence” in December 2005, the Washington’s real concern was the recession of US presence in the region (Bailes et al, 2007: 12).

The US response to the Kyrgyz and Uzbek affairs, coupled with its insistence on military presence even after the end of major battle in Afghanistan, led the SCO members to the common confidence that the US intention was regime changes (Wilson, 2009: 386; Aris & Snetkov, 2013: 214; Dadabaev, 2014: 113). The belief united them tightly, and induced them to take collective actions. They now realized the necessity of concerted stance to uphold the non-interference principle and to prevent intrusion in their internal affairs by the West (Aris, 2009: 468). As the SCO communiqué of 2006 states that the Astana Summit created “favorable conditions for the Organization to conduct more robust multilateral cooperation in various areas,”^[23] the SCO was cumulatively becoming more coherent and functioning organization after 2005. In 2006, the role of the SCO Secretariat was strengthened and the SCO’s anti-terror cooperation was enhanced and systemized by the introduction of a new mechanism that keep member states’ permanent representatives at the anti-terror structure (Guang, 2005: 502). The next year, the SCO announced its plans to fight against international drug mafia as the financial backbone of terrorism. In 2008, the SCO declared to actively participate in resolving Afghanistan’s problem.^[24]

Parallel to the development, the collective will to fend off the US intrusion was pronounced repeatedly. The sixth SCO summit underscored “the Shanghai spirit” as the base for a new and non-confrontational model of international relations, and called for discarding the “Cold War mentality” (Lukin, 2007: 141). In February 2007, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Hu Jintao signed the *Declaration on the World Order in the 21st Century*. It upheld that “international human rights protections should be based on the principles of firmly safeguarding the sovereign equality of all countries and not interfering in each other's internal affairs.” It also called for that “no social and political systems and models should be imposed from the outside” (Niazi, 2007).

The growing solidarity of the SCO affected the behavior of its most pro-Western member, Kyrgyzstan. President Kurmanbek Bakiev, who was elected with US support, prohibited the use of USA Manas base for combat operations, and restricted its function as a hub for humanitarian aids. In 2007, at the Bishkek summit of SCO, Bakiev called for the further reduction of US military presence (Niazi, 2007). In 2009, the Kyrgyzstan government announced that it would close down the base, only to reverse its decision after the US upped the annual rent from \$17 million to \$60 million. In November 2011, however, newly elected President Almazbek Atambayev announced that he would close the base when its lease ran out in 2014. The Manas air base was formally closed in June 2014 (Kucera, 2014).

The eviction of two US bases illustrates the network leverage of SCO. While a single state is no match for the influence of “sole world super power,” the collective action with other SCO member states fortifies the bargaining position of each member to the extent it could preclude the unilateral imposition of the Leviathan’s arbitrary will. It, in turn, reinforces the mutual confidence among the members, further enhances their cooperation, and bolsters each member’s bargaining power. The advantage of SCO as a model of inter-state cooperation exactly lies here. Contrary to the

assumption of liberal-democracy regional institutionalism theories, the development of the SCO is in large part a result of growing confidence in its capability to address particular issues apart from ideology and political creed (Aris, 2009: 473-4; Dadabev, 2014: 104). Its cooperation first focused on security area, settlement of border issues and coordination of law enforcement mechanism for the better fighting against terrorism. When successes are achieved, cooperation moved on to the next area, a collective diplomacy to counteract the US infiltration into their region. At this stage, the level of cooperation went up from a technical teamwork to a common creed – upholding sovereign equality and non-interference, as opposed to external imposition of liberal democracy model.

The US role in the Sino-Russian rapprochement

The SCO's functionalist approach to common agenda has so far recorded tangible successes. Its counter-terror cooperation has entered into a geopolitical dimension, fermenting a mutual trust among the member states into a common political creed. One of the most important achievements is the Sino-Russian unison. The SCO has allowed two big brothers to coexist and to manage their relations with the Central Asian states without any open confrontation. It may prepare the preconditions for further cooperation in economic areas. The past assessment of researchers, however, holds skeptical views in this direction. Some see potential sources of discord in the different relationship among the members that constitutes three dimensional matrix, between China and Russia, China's and Russia's relationships with the CA states, and relationships among the CA states (Yuan, 2010; Carroll, 2011; Dadabev, 2014; Song, 2014). Out of those three dimensions, the first one is of primary importance, as it dictates the other two dimensions, albeit the latter have connotations in the first dimension in reciprocal way. Many presuppose essential incompatibility of interests between China and Russia. The view is especially strongly pronounced by analysts with "neo-realist" approaches. As they start from the assumption that a state acts to maximize its interests, they predict big states with their own interests can not live together harmoniously for a long time. According to them, the Sino-Russian unison is temporary, and will come to a breaking point sooner or later (Kerr, 2010; Carroll, 2011). More empirical assessments share the similar views. They claim the SCO has followed a difficult path even in security areas due to inherent dissonance between China and Russia. Some argue Russians see the SCO useful only to the extent that it helps check the Western expansion into its sphere of influence, such as NATO's eastern shift and the US military presence in CA (Song, 2014:95). Others underscore incompatibility of security strategies of Beijing and Moscow. For instance, Russia's priority on CSTO is considered as the crucial obstacle for SCO to develop into a meaningful security framework (Frost, 2009).

Much larger frictions were pointed out in the field of economic cooperation. From the onset, Beijing saw the SCO as a vehicle to facilitate greater regional economic integration, as it provides a forum for China to expand its influence in the region (Yuan, 2010: 856). China sought to transform the SCO into a financial cooperation and customs union. On the other hand, Russia's goals were to reassert its economic influence over the former USSR territories including CA, as its priority was the Moscow-led Customs Union and Eurasian integration. The rivalry was the main hindrance to the SCO's economic cooperation (Carroll, 2011:7; Dadabev, 2014: 116-7). A Chinese researcher complained, for instance: "The trade and investment facilitation was far from being reached and a free trade area is still considered taboo...Russia is proving to be an ever-increasing obstacle to any coordination or cooperation initiatives that would include China in a comprehensive energy framework within the region" (Song, 2014: 96, 101). Recent development unfolding between Beijing and Moscow, however, has made such negative estimations somewhat obsolete.

In March 2014, the West launched a series of economic sanctions against Russia with the pretext of Ukrainian conflicts. The US-led sanctions came as a serious blow to the Russian economy that had deeply integrated into the Western systems. The West singled out the Russia's oil and gas sectors as its main target, believing that they were the major source of power for President Vladimir Putin. It introduced a series of restrictions on trade and investment transactions, disregarding their purportedly espoused "liberal economy" codes and conduct (Shadrina, 2014: 67-8). The externally imposed restrictions pushed Russia for a pivotal change to the East. Russian Gazprom signed, after ten years of negotiations, a US\$ 400 billion contract envisaging a 30-year gas supply with China on 21 May 2014. The deal involves the construction of the Power of Siberia gas pipeline with an annual capacity of 38 bcm. In October 2014, Gazprom disclosed its negotiations with China on another pipeline project – the Altai - of annual capacity 30 bcm. The gas deals were just a prelude of a comprehensive economic cooperation between the two countries. Chinese financial institutions and companies rescued Russian capital shortage by providing loans and upfront prepayments (Shadrina, 2014: 74-5). The financial cooperation further consolidated by the Ruble-RMB currency swap.^[25] Chinese companies swiftly filled the business vacuum created by withholding of the Western capital. Chinese investment enabled many interrupted construction projects to resume, and Chinese commodities complemented the supply shortage from the West.^[26]

The Chinese inflow of credit and goods much alleviated Russian economic plight that had reached at almost desperate level during the second half of 2014. The ruble slump stopped by the middle of January 2015, and the currency rallied again, recovering almost half of its loss vis-à-vis USD by early May. Other indexes are improving steadily. As a result, the US-led sanctions failed to produce any discernible effect in a middle term, and President Vladimir Putin's regime and the country it runs have successfully avoided collapse. Moreover, the sanctions accompanied several side effects that do not please the West very much. First, the sanctions precipitated the Sino-Russian economic integration. In May 2015, China and Russia signed 32 contracts of various construction projects and investment, including the one that connects Beijing and Moscow by rapid trains. The deals are expected to increase the share of Chinese capital in Russia from 18% to 25% in 2015, and up to 40% in the future.^[27] Due to the development, the perennial question of SCO – sluggish economic cooperation – has more than solved, and the organization set about to deeper integration. China and Russia have already agreed, in general line, on the merger of the Moscow-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEC) with the Chinese project of "Silk Road" in the way that Russia supports the construction of the "Silk Road" economic zone and the PRC supports all efforts of the Russian Federation to promote the integration processes in the EAEC.^[28] The SCO is expected to provide the basic framework for the integration, and a 10-year strategy drafted by the Russian side is to be adopted during the SCO summit in Ufa.^[29] Second, the two countries have undertaken the steps for "de-dollarization" of international trade. The Russia reduced its US treasury holdings from 131.8 billion in January 2014 to 82.2 billion in March 2015.^[30] Beijing has already moved away from dollar-denominated assets and is expanding the scope of its investment targets including infrastructure and property projects abroad.^[31] As noted above, the tandem has also started a strong push for an alternative international finance through AIIB, NDB, CRA, and other multilateral banking systems.

The Sino-Russian rapprochement is not restricted to the economic areas. A significant improvement has been underway in their bilateral military cooperation since the summer of 2014. In September, Rosoboronexport signed a contract with China for the Almaz S-400 Triumph air defense missile system. S-400 system is the Russia's latest surface-to-air missile, and Moscow had long withheld to sell them to Beijing for fear of reverse engineering. China and Russia held frequent

high-level exchanges to discuss bilateral military cooperation with the purpose of comprehensive strategic partnership.^[32] In November, vice chairman of China's Central Military Commission Xu Qiliang mentioned: "Advancing China-Russia military cooperation is a priority for China's armed forces' foreign relations."^[33] The next day, Sergei Lavrov replied: "The tie between Moscow and Beijing is one of the key factors to enhance stability and security on the planet."^[34] Those remarks illustrate that the Sino-Russian military cooperation has been well beyond the level of "strategic partnership." An Russian analyst describes it as "entente" (Trenin, 2015: 19), but it seems much better to call as a practical alliance, as the recent Sino-Russian joint naval drills imply. In May 2015, for the first time in history, Chinese navy entered into the Black Sea and Mediterranean for military exercise. According to the Chinese Defense Ministry spokesman: "The aim is to increase our navies' ability to *jointly deal with maritime security threats* [Italic is added]."^[35] It can be translated into that China has now a shared military interest with Russia even in the remote areas that it has so far had no direct security threat.

The deepening military cooperation implies underlying motivations that can not be fully explained by the economic necessity imposed by the Western sanctions. There are many signs that imply deep mistrust on the side of Russia and China toward the West and its espousing values. The irrationality of Washington's insistence on sanctions has led the Russian leadership to a strong suspicion of their underlying intentions. For instance, the first Minsk ceasefire was agreed by the initiative of Russia on 5 September. The next week, Washington imposed a new set of sanctions targeting Russian banks, energy companies and military industries. Putin interpreted the action as "not to humiliate us, but to subjugate us. They want to solve their own problems at the cost of ours."^[36] Foreign Minister Lavrov corroborated: "It is not because the Ukrainian crisis will take some time, but because the overall reassessment of America's place in the world."^[37] On 25 October, Putin remarked: "The probability of a series of acute conflicts with indirect and even direct involvement of major powers has sharply increased... Ukraine is an example of such conflicts that influence a global balance of power."^[38] On 7 February 2015, Putin mentioned on the US attempts to maintain a unipolar world by holding back Russian development.^[39] These discourses succinctly show that the Kremlin considers the US sanctions as a tool to curb Russia for the sake of US hegemony over the world.

There are other tangible signs that Moscow's fear is so deep that they believe the US is trying to destroy the Russian Federation from within. In his speech at the ceremony of Unity Day on 4 November 2014, President Putin called for the national solidarity by quoting the events of early 17th century: "The pain for the motherland, for the internecine feuds, and for treason, united people of different nationalities and faiths into one... Dear friends, this year we had to face difficult challenges. As it happened many times in our history, our people respond them with solidarity, moral and spiritual ascendancy."^[40] On 4 December 2014, Putin mentioned, as a part of his speech to the Federal Assembly, of "Yugoslav scenario." "They [the Americans] always estrange us from our neighbors either directly or behind the scenes... This [sanctions] is not a nervous reaction of the United States over the Ukraine coup nor so-called 'Crimean spring'...The external supports for separatism in Russia is absolutely obvious and there is no doubt. We are happy to have let the Yugoslav scenario of disintegration and dismemberment to fail. We will never allow it."^[41] As one of such preventive measures, Putin signed a decree "On the Federal Agency for the Affairs of Nationalities" on 31 March 2015. Its main task is to strengthen the unity of the multinational people of Russia.

In the same month, Russian Security Council announced that the "color revolutions technology" would be applied to Russia by the United States with high probability.^[42] Putin

instructed the Council to draw up a new strategy for countering extremism until 2025 by following words: “We see the tragic consequences brought about by a wave of so-called ‘color revolutions,’ the crowbars with which external powers interfere into other countries’ affairs... The authorities are obliged to do everything necessary so that this will never happen in Russia.”^[43] According to the Kremlin, the “color revolutions technology” is composed of hostile media propaganda in conjunction with external sources, popular unrest orchestrated by pro-Western NGOs, and instigation of extremists.^[44] Upon this belief, Moscow has tightened its grip over media and NGOs, and taken high alert to extremist activities. Since previous year, the government has put various pressures on media through legislation and informal interventions. For instance, the Federal Assembly adopted a new law that restricted the share of foreign capital in Russian mass media up to 20% on October 2014. The government announced it had cracked down the activities of 350 foreign agents and scouts in 2014.^[45] As Putin has openly announced his conviction that a number of opposition organizations in Russia working in the interests of other states, more strict monitoring has been introduced on the NGO’s with alleged foreign ties. The government amended the legislation of NGOs and granted the Ministry of Justice the authority to impose the foreign agent label on NGOs in May 2015.^[46] Five organizations: Carnegie Foundation, Transparency International, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, and “Memorial” are the firsts to be put on the black list.^[47]

The discourses and measures, mentioned above, illustrate that the Russian leaders has reached at the strong confidence that the US has a concrete plan to destroy Russia from within by creating popular unrest to safeguard its world hegemony. The belief, how ungrounded it may be, led them to take various preventive measures that are seen as “anti-democratic” by the West. Their intention, however, is not to reject democracy per se, but to prevent disastrous outcomes that the imposition of Western version of “democracy” will cause. They realized how biased the Western espousal of human rights and the “double standard” in their implementations. For them such denouncement of “anti-NGO law” by a State Department spokeswoman sounds nothing but hypocrisy, as they know well that it was Washington that has isolated the Russian people from the world: “We are concerned this new power... is a further example of the Russian government’s... intentional steps to isolate the Russian people from the world.”^[48] In the mind of Kremlin policy makers, quite different identity has already taken root.

The same type of mindset has been widespread among the Beijing leaders. China has since long expressed anxiety over “external” instigation in Tibet and Xinjiang using “democratic” rhetoric (Kerr, 2010; Odgaard & Nielsen, 2014). They have used almost identical vocabulary as the Russians. In 2011, for instance, a Chinese scholar wrote: “The threat from the West can cause instability. External forces are preparing intervention capitalizing on adoption of western democracy. Violent riots have a particularly serious effect on regional stability, as they easily cause interference from outside” (Hayyung, 2011). The mindset was the most clearly displayed during the political crisis in Hong Kong of 2014.

In late September, a number of students started occupation of central areas in Hong Kong, requesting election reforms and dismissal of the mayor whom they regarded as Beijing’s henchman. As the movement gathered momentum by joining of thousands of residents, the CPC was thrown into a difficult position. They were exposed to harsh criticism orchestrated by the Western media, governments, and international organizations. The mainstream Western media depicted the event as a “pro-democracy” movement, and the Hong Kong version of “Color Revolution,” branding it as “Umbrella Revolution.” British Prime Minister David Cameron expressed his “deep concern” and upheld “the importance of giving the Hong Kong people a democratic future.” In Washington, U.S. State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said that her government was concerned by reports of the

police actions and urged a swift, transparent and complete investigation. The EU expressed “concern” and warned Beijing that it was “closely monitoring developments.”

China did everything to fend off such Western intervention, while carefully refraining from preemptive use of coercive measures. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei argued that Hong Kong’s affairs were China’s domestic matters and no country or individual had a right to interfere. He rightly pointed out that the support for illegal act such as occupation amounted to an abetment of crimes.^[49] Beijing knew well the Western “concern” was not about possible unrest but about the removal of occupiers, no matter how orderly and lawful it may be. It was solid proof, they believe, of the Western instigation of the occupation. The following lines of CPC’s central organ, People’s Daily, conveyed the straightforward sentiment of Beijing’s political elite. “It is inevitable that these new moves on the part of the US government, non-governmental organizations and media will be associated with the US involvement in the ‘Color Revolutions’ in the CIS, Middle East, North Africa and elsewhere. The US purports to be promoting the ‘universal values’ of ‘democracy, freedom and human rights,’ but in reality the US is simply defending its own strategic interests and undermining governments it considers to be ‘insubordinate.’”^[50] We can see here almost same rhetoric as the Kremlin’s concern over the “color revolutions technology.”

The oratorical coincidence is by no means an accident as China has long felt the same fear of US intention to destroy their country from within. The following article appeared in People’s Daily in March 2015 displayed exactly the same assessment as the Russians. “The East Turkestan Islamic Movement is a clear and present threat to China’s security... However, due to the prejudice originating from different ideologies and political systems, China’s efforts have sometimes been misinterpreted. Some foreign countries were reluctant to define the incident as a terrorist one. Instead, they characterized it as a symptom of ‘ethnic conflict.’ Those countries use double standards on terrorism, linking the campaign against terrorism in China to ethnic issues.”^[51] At the moment, Beijing felt real anxiety over the possible spillover of the Hong Kong upheaval in Xinjiang. In January 2015, for instance, the Political Bureau of the CC CPC issued an unusual communiqué that warned China was facing “unprecedented security risks.”^[52]

The Sino-Russian concern over the US intrigue is not completely ungrounded. Washington has singled the two countries as its main security risks in the new version of *National Security Strategy*. It relates: “China [should] uphold international rules and norms on issues ranging from maritime security to trade and human rights. We will closely monitor China’s... expanding presence in Asia... We will deter Russian aggression.”^[53] The bellicose language, no doubt, has aggravated the Sino-Russian concern over the “color revolution technology.”^[54] The common belief of the US conspiracy has led China and Russia to a new stage of shared identity. Nothing more clearly articulated this than the joint speech of Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin addressed at the 70th anniversary of victory of WWII on 8 May in Moscow. In the ceremony which most the Western leaders boycotted, the two heads of state chanted their countries’ centrality as the “two major battlefields” of the war, and asserted the joint efforts based on a “profound friendship” of two nations had been basic forces that destroyed Nazism and Japanese militarism, the two main aggressors of global peace. Both leaders highlighted that it was China and Russia that had created the basis of the contemporary world. This view constitutes a stark contrast with that of the US that insists on the primal roles of American “democracy” during the war and its aftermath. “We stand,” Xi said, upholding shared historical experience, “ready to deepen the traditional friendship with the Russian people.” Putin, for his part, made point that the two countries would oppose any attempt to deny and distort history. Based on this identical understandings of history, the two heads of state pledged to promote each other’s development, expand the Eurasian common economic space,

strengthen military interaction and help the whole Eurasian continent maintain development and stability.^[55]

The recent development in the Sino-Russian relation illustrates the degree of maturity of their bilateral relations. It has already gone beyond the stage of “strategic partnership” i.e. limited cooperation in certain fields where the both parties had common interests. It has reached at such high level that they are ready to carry out comprehensive cooperation in various fields. The basic factor that brought them together so tightly is their shared concern over the US threats. No matter how fantastic it may sound, the threats are real for them, and both of them have developed identical theory of “color revolutions technology” i.e. the US tactics of regime change. As they consider the US championing “democracy” the main tools of plot, they are watchful at those who uphold it in their countries. It is wrong, however, to assume that the two countries opted for oppressive regime. Both of them have no idea to renegade the modern values. Rather, their argument centers on the gradual applicability of democracy and human rights in accordance with socio-economic development. In other words, they adhere cultural relativism vis-à-vis the Western egocentrism. It is due to this asymmetry that the Western pressure for unconditional acceptance of their set of principles has produced nothing but counter effects. The stronger the pressure grew, the tighter the ties of two countries has become. The shared sense of estrangement from the West has helped China and Russia upgrade their common creed into a common identity. They now look at each other more as in terms of Self, rather than friendly Other. Their Selfness was first defined by the shared Otherness in relation with the West, then, it developed into more solid form based on a sense of identical historical experience. The Sino-Russian rapprochement has already reached at the level one can say as an accord. As the two big brothers have created strong solidarity, the SCO will become more effective and functioning organization.

Conclusion

As unipolar globalization has already gone and the arrival of new bipolar system is not plausible, the multipolarity is reality in our near future. Albeit what exact shape the new multipolar world will take is unforeseeable, a great powers’ accord such as we saw in the nineteenth century is impossible, as the interdependency of nation states has so deeply progressed. The new system will be built on several regional structures on which a number of states, both large and small, reside harmoniously. The effectiveness of sovereignty oriented and utilitarian cooperation the SCO has displayed will be the key for a peaceful transition and the sustainability of the new system.

The success of SCO put the Chinese initiative of “Belt and Road” into an optimistic perspective. As the dismay expressed by the Washington policymakers over the AIIB suggests, the Chinese success will increase the counter pressure from the West in general, and from the USA in particular. It may bring about serious military confrontations, such as the recent US intimidation with show of force over the Nansha Islands dispute. The US cognizance of Others is so narrow that it hardly allows any room between “friends” and “foes.” The network leverage of regional cooperation will provide the solution to possible disastrous collisions, as it empowers the smaller players in the international relations vis-à-vis great powers, and produces pushing back effect of latters’ unilateralism. The US unilateralism, disguised as universality, has led the rest of the world, i.e. the countries that dare not fully embrace it, like Russia and China, to construct counter-identities and consolidate their solidarity. As Daniel Flemes infers, the rising powers will not grant the USA the legitimacy and sole authority to define the rules of the game (Flemes, 2013: 1032). It no doubt further precipitates the multipolarization of the global systems, so does it the decline of self-claimed

“leader” of unipolar world.

The Chinese approach has additional advantages for the effective consolidation of the networked world. The “Silk Road Spirits” presupposing Otherness of its partners will enable more horizontal and reciprocal ties with the less competitive countries. Its multilayered approach prevents the world division into hostile blocks, reduces the risk of open confrontations between military alliances, and promotes transparency of interstate exchange.

There are, at the same time, some rooms for skepticism. First, it is totally open to question whether the so-called “win-win” cooperation will produce the presupposed effects of mutual prosperity. As the rapid growth of the EEs was largely the product of neoliberal globalization, it will be necessary for the exponents of new order to substantiate alternative model of development. More elaborate assessment is necessary to ascertain the advantage of regional economic cooperation. Second, one can predict several security risks if the US retreat is inevitable. Accidental outbreaks of hostilities will be more difficult to preclude in the regions where no viable interstate structure has been established, such as North Eastern Asia. How to fill the growing vacuum the US retreat creates is a question to be addressed. Third, the promotion of mutual trust among different civilizations through dialogue seems too optimistic, if not naïve. As identifying Self is a historical process, Self/Other dimensions will change in accordance with the alteration of perceived context. For instance, it is more than likely that the Sino-Russian accord will be fragile if the perceived US threats eventually disappear as a result of marginalization of the world hegemon. To nourish enduring mutual trust is a fresh challenge for peaceful transition of the world. Fourth, qualitative changes in existing political, social, economic and cultural systems are necessary to be accompanied by the transformation. As Boris Kagarlitski pointed out, if the changes will not put an end to capitalism, they merely substitute the current neoliberal model with a new welfare state (Kagarlitski, 2015: 11). How effectively address those questions is prerequisite for an enduring multipolar world in the future.

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