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*A New Balance of Power for the Twenty-First Century:
The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, 2001-2007**

Abstract: *In September 1997, President Jiang Zemin stated that the multi-polarity trend contributed towards worldwide peace, stability and prosperity, while both hegemonism and the policy of Power were still a major threat to peace and international stability. A few years later, the new Russia of Vladimir Putin promoted a multi-polar system of international relations, claiming that the global order of the XXI century had to be based on mechanisms for the collective resolution of key problems. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, founded in 2001, pursued the so-called struggle against the “three evils”, that is terrorism, separatism and extremism. Besides, the organisation managed to combine China, a massive world energy consumer, with high profile energy producers like Kazakhstan and an unmatched hydropower producer such as Tajikistan. On the other hand, Russia at the end of the second Putin mandate needed to make common cause with other Powers in order to exercise a serious influence in international affairs. Within such a scenario, the United States National Security Strategy of 2006 claimed that it was necessary to work closely with Russia on strategic issues of common interest. The Bush Administration also encouraged Beijing to continue down the road of reform and openness towards liberty, stability, and prosperity. Despite this, Chinese leaders were being accused of acting as if they could somehow “lock up” energy supplies around the world or seek to direct markets rather than opening them up.*

Keywords: Eurasia; Multilateralism; Balance of Power; Asia-Pacific; New Cold War.

Introduction

In his work, “*The Grand Chessboard*”, former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski highlighted the importance of Eurasia, writing at the end of the twentieth century that a power dominating that area would control two of the world’s three most advanced and economically productive regions, almost automatically entailing Africa’s subordination, rendering the Western Hemisphere and Oceania geopolitically peripheral.¹ Brzezinski was writing a few years after the end of the Cold War, when it seemed the United States would lead the world along a path of market democracy. Such a supremacy, according to Samuel P. Huntington, had determined a situation in which a quick end to the status quo would produce massive international instability: «The sustained

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¹ See Z. BRZEZINSKI, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives*, New York, NY, Basic Books, 1997, p. 31.

international primacy of the United States is central to the welfare and security of Americans and to the future of freedom, democracy, open economies, and international order in the world».² In the same years, the Pentagon's draft Defense Planning Guidance for the Fiscal Years 1994-99 affirmed: «Our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival, either on the territory of the former Soviet Union or elsewhere [...]».³

To be honest, there were many factors why Central Asia was of paramount importance, such as the availability of rich energy resources, its geopolitical location among regional powers like India, China, Russia, and Iran, as well as the proximity to Afghanistan.⁴ Moreover, China's conception of Eurasia was based on a series of interconnected lines of thought, aiming at: a) resolving territorial problems; b) preventing any threat to the control over the province of Xinjiang; c) gaining the best possible economic benefit in the post-Soviet space.⁵ As a matter of fact, the Chinese preference for multi-polarity was due to the neo-realistic thought that the power of a State could only be positively checked and balanced by that of other nations, thus better serving the interests of weaker and less privileged countries. Such a stance had already been adopted in the 1980s, both as a consequence of changing great-power relations, and because of China's path to modernisation. However, while in the early 1990s a lot of Chinese scholars thought that the US-led unipolar moment would be of short duration, at the end of the decade they tended to believe it would take quite a long time for a multi-polar structure to emerge.⁶ To back this concept, in his report to the 15th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in September 1997, President Jiang Zemin reaffirmed the idea of a changing world. According to the Chinese President, the multi-polarity trend contributed towards

² S.P. HUNTINGTON, *Why International Primacy Matters*, in «International Security», XVII, 4, Spring 1993, p. 83.

³ See *Excerpts from Pentagon's Plan: Prevent the Re-Emergence of a New Rival*, in «New York Times», March 8, 1992, p. 14.

⁴ See M. RAKHIMOV, *The Institutional and Political Transformation of the SCO in the Context of Geopolitical Changes in Central Asia*, in M. FREDHOLM, ed., *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Eurasian Geopolitics: New Directions, Perspectives, and Challenges*, Copenhagen, Nias Press, 2013, p. 63.

⁵ See P. STODBAN, *Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and Asian Multilateralism in the Twenty-first Century: A Critical Assessment*, in N.S. SISODIA - V. KRISHNAPPA, eds., *Global Power Shifts and Strategic Transition in Asia*, New Delhi, Academic Foundation, 2009, p. 220.

⁶ See X. XIN, *The Chinese Concept of "Twenty Years' Strategic Opportunities" and its Implications for Asian Security Order*, *ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

worldwide peace, stability and prosperity. Despite these positive signs, the statesman pointed out that both hegemonism and the policy of Power were still a major threat to peace and international stability. In order to claim the legitimacy of China's social system, Jiang Zemin added that all countries were entitled to choose the social system, development strategies and lifestyle suiting their own conditions.⁷

As regarded the American stance on Central Asia, the Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott, in a major 1997 speech had stated that «The consolidation of free societies [...] from the Black Sea to the Pamir Mountains, will open up a valuable trade and transport corridor [...] between Europe and Asia. [...] If economic and political reform [...] does not succeed, [...] the region could become a breeding ground for terrorism [...] Our support has four dimensions: the promotion of democracy, the creation of free market economies, the sponsorship of peace and cooperation within and among the countries of the region, and their integration with the larger international community».⁸ In particular, in the Caspian region the United States had five objectives, that is: a) energy security and diversification; b) rapid development of the region's energy resources and trade linkages as pivotal to the independence, the prosperity, the democracy and stability of all the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus; c) U.S. energy companies' investments; d) concern about proposals forcing more oil to the Strait of Hormuz; e) viable and reliable alternatives for export of the region's resources along an East-West corridor.⁹

Meanwhile, the Chinese government was pursuing a new geopolitical approach, called "New Security Concept" ("Xin anquan guandian"), according to which security was no longer restricted to only military aspects. In a nutshell, China's perception of its security environment included six strands: 1) no major war; 2) globalisation; 3) the U.S. as a partner and competitor; 4) non-traditional security challenges; 5) energy insecurity; 6)

⁷ See J. ZEMIN, *Report Delivered at the 15th National Congress of the Communist Party of China on September 12, 1997: Hold High the Great Banner of Deng Xiaoping Theory for an All-Round Advancement of the Cause of Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics into the 21st Century*, September 12, 1997, in http://www.bjreview.com/document/txt/2011-03/25/content_363499.htm [accessed on May 1, 2019].

⁸ S. TALBOTT, *Address at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, Baltimore, Maryland: A Farewell to Flashman: American Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, July 21, 1997, in <https://1997-2001.state.gov/regions/nis/970721talbott.html> [accessed on May 9, 2019].

⁹ See F. PENA, *The U.S. Role in the Caucasus and Central Asia: Hearing before the House Committee on International Relations*, 105th Congress, April 30, 1998, in http://commdocs.house.gov/committees/intlrel/hfa50308.000/hfa50308_of.htm [accessed on May 9, 2019].

China's rise.¹⁰ The expression "New Security Concept" appeared in the Chinese Defence White Paper, *China's Defence*, published in 1998. According to such a document, security should be based on mutual trust and common interests, cooperation, respect for each other's sovereignty. In international relations, the role of economic factors was becoming more outstanding. Hence, the Chinese definition of economic security included steady economic growth based on free and fair access to overseas market and uninterrupted supply of natural resources. The Defence paper also incorporated into military security non-traditional issues like terrorism and drug trafficking, as well as extremism and separatism.¹¹ On grounds of that, the rise of China pushed Moscow to reorient its foreign policy. Engagement with Beijing became necessary to reach a settlement to any possible disputes. After Boris Yeltsin had said in April 1997 that Russia wanted the world to be multi-polar, three years later Putin put an end to pro-West orientations, thus marking a shift towards Russia as a Eurasian power.¹² In the same period, in December 1997, the Russians had issued the so called National Security Blueprint, which stressed the expansion of Russian interests in problems of international security, specifying that the only prospect of NATO expansion to the East was unacceptable to Russia; therefore, Yeltsin claimed the implementation of an active foreign policy course aimed at consolidating Russia's position as one of the most influential centres of the developing multi-polar world through equal partnership with the other great Powers.¹³ By virtue of this, the new Russia of Vladimir Putin stressed the topmost foreign policy priority in the protection of the interests of the individual, society, and the State. Within this framework, the Foreign Policy Conception of the Russian federation, approved by the President on June 28, 2000, directed the main efforts towards the following aims: a) ensuring the reliable security of the country, preserve and

¹⁰ See A. KUMAR, *New Security Concept of China: An Analysis*, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, IPCS Special Report 125, May 2012, New Delhi, in <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/2584/8436de67b462ee2a8074cd0ab696c555bd04.pdf> [accessed on May 2, 2019].

¹¹ See *China's National Defense 1998*, in <https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/China%E2%80%99s-National-Defense-in-1998.pdf?x87069> [accessed on May 2, 2019].

¹² See STODBAN, *Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and Asian Multilateralism*, cit., p. 222.

¹³ See *Russian National Security Blueprint*, in *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, December 26, 1997, pp. 4-5\FBIS-SOV-97-364, December 30, 1997, in <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/blueprint.html> [accessed on April 30, 2019].

strengthen its sovereignty, its territorial integrity, and its strong and respected position in the world community; b) influencing global processes with the objective of forming a stable, just, and democratic world order based on the generally recognised norms of international law; c) creating the external conditions favourable to the steady development of Russia; d) forming a belt of good-neighbourliness along the perimeter of Russia's borders.¹⁴

As concerned the relations with NATO, the document acknowledged the importance of cooperation in the interests of maintaining security and stability in Europe, provided the Atlantic Alliance followed the principles stated in the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act.¹⁵ However, on a certain number of parameters, NATO's political and military guidelines did not coincide with security interests of Moscow, since the provisions of NATO's new strategic concept did not rule out operations employing force beyond the zone of the application of the Washington Treaty and without the sanction of the UN Security Council. As an evidence of that, in the second paragraph there is a clear reference to new threats to the national interests of Russia, such as a growing trend towards the establishment of a unipolar world order, with domination by the United States. On the contrary, Russia promoted a multi-polar system of international relations, claiming that the global order of the XXI century had to be based on mechanisms for the collective resolution of key problems, such as military-political rivalry among regional powers, the growth of separatism, ethnic-national and religious extremism, as well international terrorism, transnational organised crime, and illegal trafficking in drugs and weapons. Therefore, emphasis was to be placed on invigoration of Russia's participation in the main integrative structures of the Asia-Pacific Region.¹⁶ The question of sovereignty had already been dealt with in the National Security Concept. It was certainly not by chance that NATO's practice of using military force without UN Security Council authorisation

¹⁴ See *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, June 28, 2000 in <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.htm> [accessed on April 28, 2019].

¹⁵ This treaty stated that NATO and Russia did not consider each other as adversaries, sharing the goal of overcoming the vestiges of earlier confrontation and competition and of strengthening mutual trust and cooperation within a stable, peaceful and undivided Europe. See *Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation*, May 27, 1997, in https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm [accessed on April 29, 2019].

¹⁶ See *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, cit.

was blamed of destabilising the entire strategic situation in the world. Moreover, a sort of warning to Washington was included in the passage affirming that one of the main threats to the international community was the possible emergence of foreign military bases in direct proximity to Russian borders. As concerned national interests, the Kremlin made a difference among individual, society and the State. In light on this, the interests of the individual consisted in the exercise of constitutional rights and liberties, in the assurance of personal security, in improved quality of life and standard of living, while the interests of society lay in strengthening democracy and the rule of law. On the other hand, the interests of the State consisted in the inviolability of the constitutional order, and Russia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as in political, economic and social stability.¹⁷

According to Yeltsin's successor, traditional Russian values had to be safeguarded in order to consolidate society and the State. In a few words, this project could be summed up in: a) patriotism, referring to the striving to make the country more prosperous, stronger and happier; b) the State as a strong great world Power, whose content was embodied not so much in its military might, as in its ability to be at the forefront to ensure the highest level of its people's wellbeing, guarantee its stable security, and defend its interests in the international arena. Moreover, in order to integrate the economy into world economic structures, Russia had to be incorporated into the international system of regulation of foreign economic activity, above all into the World Trade Organisation.¹⁸ This vision was strengthened by the Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, who marked that an important lesson had been missed from the end of the Cold War and the collapse of communism to promote a new world order based on a concord of great Powers, increased authority and efficiency of the United Nations. This new order was also supposed to involve multilateral security regimes in the Far East, Central and Southern Asia and other regions. Therefore, Moscow was expected to try to persuade NATO partners that the policy

¹⁷ See *National Security Concept of the Russian Federation*, approved by Presidential Decree No. 24 of 10 January 2000, in http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICk6BZ29/content/id/589768 [accessed on April 29, 2019].

¹⁸ See V. PUTIN, *Russia at the Turn of the Millennium*, December 30, 1999, in A. MELVILLE - T. SHAKLEINA, eds., *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition: Concepts and Realities*, Budapest-New York, NY, CEU Press, 2005, pp. 221-234.

of further expanding the alliance was counterproductive and would lead to the formation of new dividing lines on the continents.¹⁹

1. The Foundation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

The disintegration of the Soviet Union had created a new security situation in Central Asia, with a network of ethnic and religious tensions, territorial disputes and socio-economic problems. The power vacuum due to the collapse of the communist State had facilitated the rise of Islamic fundamentalism requiring a common forum to collectively address the challenge. In consequence of that, the agenda for security consultation went beyond the traditional border issue, thus involving other questions of common concern, such as a more comprehensive military cooperation, as well as the collaboration to fight crime and drug trafficking.²⁰ The two former superpowers of the Cold War in early June 2000 signed a Joint Statement on Principles of Strategic Stability, through which they agreed that the international community was facing a dangerous and growing threat of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. In consequence of that, such a threat had to be addressed through mutual cooperation and respect of each other's security interests.²¹ As concerned Russia-U.S. relations, the new Head of the Kremlin stressed that the Anglo-Saxon nation was always one of Russia's main partners, while at the same time the American President claimed the necessity to always have a good, stable relationship with a strong, prosperous and free Russia.²² Nonetheless, we also have to say that neither Russia nor China had ever hidden their will to become centres of power able to match the United States' international stance. Both capitals were making

¹⁹ See I. IVANOV, *Russian Foreign Policy on the Eve of the 21st Century: Problems of Formation, Development and Continuity*, 2000, *ibid.*, pp. 235-267.

²⁰ See J. WANG, *China and SCO: Toward a New Type of Interstate Relations*, in G. WU - H. LANSLOWNE, eds., *China Turns to Multilateralism: Foreign Policy and Regional Security*, London-New York, NY, Routledge, 2008, p. 80.

²¹ See *Russia-United States Joint Statement on Principles of Strategic Stability*, in *Public Papers of Presidents of the United States* (thereafter PPUS), William J. Clinton, 2000, Book I, June 4, 2000, pp. 1076-1077, in <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-2000-book1/html/PPP-2000-book1-doc-pg1076.htm> [accessed on May 4, 2019].

²² See *The President's News Conference with President Vladimir Putin of Russia in Moscow*, *ibid.*, June 4, 2000, pp. 1081-1085, in <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-2000-book1/html/PPP-2000-book1-doc-pg1081-2.htm> [accessed on May 4, 2019].

no secret that they wanted to acquire again a status of superpower; hence, the normalisation of their mutual relations was also a way to assist each other to achieve such a task.²³ As a matter of fact, cooperation with the United States was something necessary for everyone, but while the Americans were persistent on the universality of human rights and democratic values, the Chinese President said that dialogue and cooperation in the field of human rights were supposed to be conducted on the basis of respect for State sovereignty: «The world is diverse and colourful», stated Jiang Zemin; on grounds of that, «Just as there should not be only one colour in the universe, so there should not be only one civilisation, one social system, one development model or one set of values in the world».²⁴

In the same weeks, the so-called “Shanghai Five” decided to establish an international organisation for regional security and cooperation, whose basic idea was the preservation of the integrity of its member States, as well as the need to combat “separatist” movements and preventing outside interference.²⁵ Just to give an example of the strategic importance of Central Asia, suffice is to say that Moscow feared that instability in the region would be exploited by Islamist fundamentalism,²⁶ which was spreading in those years as a process of Islamisation of the society. Putin had decided to adopt a more active policy of

²³ See A.J.K. BAILES - J.M. THÓRDISARDÓTTIR, *The SCO and NATO*, in FREDHOLM, ed., *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Eurasian Geopolitics*, cit., pp. 92-93.

²⁴ See *Statement by President Jiang Zemin of the People’s Republic of China at the Millennium Summit of the United Nations*, September 6, 2000, in https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t24962.shtml [accessed on May 5, 2019].

²⁵ On April 26, 1996, Russia, China, and the three former Soviet Central Asian Republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan had signed a treaty in Shanghai on demilitarising the more than seven-thousand-km-long border between China and the former Soviet Union. The Regional Security Pact stated that strengthening security and maintaining peace and stability in the area was an important contribution to the maintenance of peace in the Asia-Pacific region. See *Agreement between the Russian Federation, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan and the People’s Republic of China on Confidence-Building in the Military Field in the Border Area* (“Shanghai Declaration”), 1996, in MELVILLE - SHAKLEINA, eds., *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition*, cit., pp. 65-73.

²⁶ Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the first Russian Foreign Minister, Kozyrev, had stated that Moscow had to be ready to play its part in the containment of “Islamic extremism” on behalf of the civilised world. See M. MESBAHI, *Russian Foreign Policy towards Central Asia: The Emerging Doctrine*, in I. OLDBERG, ed., *Priorities in Russian Foreign Policy: West, South, East? Proceedings of a Conference in Stockholm, 3 June 1996*, FOA Rapport, R-97-00391-180, Swedish National Defence Research Establishment (FOA), Stockholm, 1997.

reversing the trend and thus strengthening Russian influence in the area.²⁷ On the other hand, consistent with the Chinese New Security Concept, the Dushanbe Statement of July 5, 2000, called for the transformation of the Five into a regional structure for multilateral cooperation. Pivotal to the statement was the reference to the United Nations Charter confirming the right of each country to choose its own way of political, economic and social development.²⁸ Soon afterwards, Vladimir Putin attended a Russo-Chinese summit in Beijing on July 18. The consequent Declaration stressed the inadmissibility of the use of armed force in contravention of the U.N. Security Council, and denounced international terrorism, ethnic separatism and religious extremism as a serious threat to peace, but also contained an unequivocal message that Beijing and Moscow did not accept American dominance in the world.²⁹

In light of all this, on July 16, 2001, Russia and China signed the Treaty of Good Neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation, stating that both sides supported each other in defending national unity and territorial integrity, as well as conducting cooperation in world financial institutions and economic organisations. Moreover, the contracting parties committed themselves not to join any alliance or be a party to any bloc with a third country compromising the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of both nations.³⁰ The previous month, the members of the Shanghai Five, with the addition of Uzbekistan, had founded the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, whose goals were the strengthening of mutual trust, friendship and good-neighbourliness, efficient cooperation in political, trade, economic, scientific and technological spheres, with the mutual commitment to maintain peace, security and stability in the region. The leading principle was the so called Shanghai Spirit, characterised by respect for the variety of cultures, and aspiration for

²⁷ See L. JONSON, *Russian and Central Asia*, in R. ALLISON - L. JONSON, eds., *Central Asian Security: The New International Context*, Washington, D.C., London, Brookings Institution - Royal Institute of International Affairs 2001, pp. 100-101.

²⁸ See *Dushanbe Declaration by the Heads of State of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation, and the Republic of Tajikistan*, July 5, 2000, in MELVILLE - SHAKLEINA, eds., *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition*, cit., pp. 147-152.

²⁹ See *Vladimir Putin Met with Jiang Zemin, President of the People's Republic of China*, July 18, 2000, in <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/38413> [accessed on May 6, 2019].

³⁰ See *Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation Between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation*, July 16, 2001, in https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/t15771.shtml [accessed on May 8, 2019].

joint development.³¹ On the same day, another important convention was signed, that is the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism, which were the “three evils” to struggle against. As a matter of fact, terrorism was interpreted as any deed aimed at causing death of anyone not taking active part in hostilities in the situation of an armed conflict.³² On the other hand, separatism was regarded as any act aimed at breaching the territorial integrity of a State. Finally, extremism was defined as any deed aimed at a violent seizure of power, or change of the constitutional order.³³

As concerned the Russians, they understood that China’s influence in Central Asia was growing. Hence, the most reasonable thing to do was coordinating regional cooperation with Beijing. Second, the SCO came to be seen as something like a counterbalance to Western economic and political structures. Apart from that, Russia wanted to utilise SCO mechanisms to harness China’s economic power for the development of its own economy.³⁴ Following the events of September 2001, the Kremlin effectively supported US operations in Afghanistan and pursued a corresponding policy in the SCO. In an interview with «Vremya Novostey» newspaper on July 24, 2003, Alexander Losyukov, deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, spoke about the fight against the terrorist threat in Central Asia: «Neither we nor China are glad that the American military presence appeared in Central Asia [...] We could [...] not cope with that [terrorist] threat either alone or with China’s help [...] An American presence emerged as a result of the struggle against that threat [...] We see the USA not as an adversary, but as a partner in this struggle[...]».³⁵

³¹ See *Declaration on the Creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, June 15, 2001, in MELVILLE - SHAKLEINA, eds., *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition*, cit., pp. 181-184.

³² China has applied the Three Evils approach in particular to the ethnic Uyghur population concentrated in Xinjiang. Uyghurs and international human rights monitoring groups have voiced strong concerns regarding policies and practices of the Chinese government, including Han settlement in the province, and the resulting impact on Uyghurs’ distinct culture, language, and religion. See *Human Rights in China and Human Rights Watch, Devastating Blows: Religious Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang*, in <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2005/china0405/> [accessed on May 9, 2019].

³³ See *The Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism*, June 15, 2001, in *Counter-Terrorism and Human Rights: The Impact of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: A Human Rights in China Whitepaper*, March 2011, New York, NY-Hong Kong, in https://www.hrichina.org/sites/default/files/publication_pdfs/2011-hric-sco-whitepaper-full.pdf [accessed on May 8, 2019].

³⁴ See A. LUKIN, *China and Russia: The New Rapprochement*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2018, pp. 84-85.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

A few months afterwards, in his first meeting with Jiang Zemin, President Bush said that, in the long run, the advance of Chinese prosperity depended on China's full integration into the rules and norms of international institutions.³⁶ The Chinese leader also stated that China and the United States shared common responsibility and interest in maintaining peace and security in the Asia Pacific and the world at large. Hence, they were bound to work together to combat terrorism through the development a constructive and cooperative relationship.³⁷ On November 14, 2001, the Heads of State of Russia and the United States issued a joint statement, announcing the common determination to meet the threats to peace in the new century, that is terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, militant nationalism, ethnic and religious intolerance, and regional instability. The two leaders claimed they recognised some common values such as market economy, freedom of economic choice and an open democratic society.³⁸ Despite such declarations of intent, Moscow and Beijing claimed the right to develop these questions according to their own doctrine. Such an approach was confirmed once again by the President of China during an interview to the New York Times. Jiang resolutely affirmed that a direct democratic election would not work in the Asian country. Should China apply parliamentary democracy, the only result would be lack of food and great chaos.³⁹ What worried Moscow and Beijing most in those years were the military operations the Americans had conducted in the Persian Gulf and especially in the Balkans. This suggested that neither prospective adversaries nor international organisations seemed to pose much of a constraint on Washington's decisions about where and when to act abroad. Since both Russia and China had territories over which they were seeking to secure

³⁶ See *The President's News Conference with President Jiang Zemin of China in Shanghai*, October 19, 2001, in PPPUS, George W. Bush, 2001, Book II, pp. 1262-1265, in <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-2001-book2/pdf/PPP-2001-book2-doc-pg1262.pdf> [accessed on May 10, 2019].

³⁷ See *U.S., China Stand against Terrorism: Remarks by President Bush and President Jiang Zemin in Press Availability, Western Suburb Guest House, Shanghai*, October 19, 2001, in <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/10/20011019-4.html> [accessed on May 10, 2019].

³⁸ See *Joint Statement by President George W. Bush and President Vladimir V. Putin on a New Relationship between the United States and Russia*, November 14, 2001, in PPPUS, George W. Bush, 2001, Book II, pp. 1399-1400, in <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011114-3.html> [accessed on May 10, 2019].

³⁹ See *In Jiang's Words: "I Hope the Western World Can Understand China Better"*, August 10, 2001, in <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/08/10/world/china-s-leaders-jiang-s-words-hope-western-world-can-understand-china-better.html> [accessed on May 10, 2019].

sovereign control, that is Chechnya and Taiwan, they felt increasingly embarrassed of the role that a more fearless United States might decide to play.⁴⁰ From this point of view, strategic partnership with the United States was supposed to better enable China to cope with the potentially dangerous constraints of American hegemony during the Asian country's rise to great power status. In a few words, the reason leading the United States to build a partnership with China was the threat that its collapse might lead Beijing to: a) give other partners preferential economic treatment; b) complicate US diplomacy by exercising China's veto in the UN Security Council; c) be less circumspect in its export controls on sensitive military technologies to countries about which the United States had strong concerns; d) be less helpful in containing regional tension in Korea or South Asia.⁴¹

Despite the common struggle against terrorism and Sino-Russian support for the American position, and the collaboration offered by the four Central Asian members of the SCO, the national interests of each one were clearly different. On one hand, in fact, Putin did not miss the chance to improve Russo-US relations by accepting the US military presence in Central Asia and expressed his desire that the US understand Russian battles against "terrorist" action in Chechnya. In contrast, China faced a more serious situation, as Washington had not changed its position of expressing concern over Beijing's policy towards the Uyghurs. The US presence in Central Asia and the possible eastward enlargement of NATO, therefore, directly pressed west China and the Xinjiang Autonomous region. Besides, Uzbekistan immediately accepted the proposal to deploy American armed forces on its territory. Even Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan agreed with the American presence in their own territories. Such a pro-American policy, conducted by supposedly Russian-dominated States in Central Asia, illustrated how deeply the national interests of countries within the SCO collided with one another.⁴²

At the same time, according to many Chinese scholars the SCO and the Shanghai Spirit representing the organisation underlined a sort of "new regionalism", in contrast with the

⁴⁰ See A. GOLDSTEIN, *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2005, p. 138.

⁴¹ See *ibid.*, pp. 147-148.

⁴² See I. AKIHIRO, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and its Implications for Eurasian Security: A New Dimension of "Partnership" after the Post-Cold War Period*, in http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no2_ses/4-1_Iwashita.pdf [accessed on May 10, 2019].

old one, embodied by the European Union as a group of countries sharing similar ideology, history, culture, and economic system. On the other hand, new regionalism was based on the expansion of trade and the tackling of mutual problems, focusing much less on similarities among members. Besides, while old regionalism seemed to surrender sovereignty in favour of greater integration, SCO ideology maintained the primacy of sovereignty. Just to confirm that, suffice it to quote the Chinese security concept of 2002, whose core stated that all countries should transcend differences in ideology and social system. Within this context, the SCO was regarded as a successful case, through which its members had properly resolved their border issues, taking also the lead in making an unequivocal stand and proposition of combating terrorism, separatism and extremism.⁴³ Apart from that, there was also the wish to tie China to the region in a way to lessen the Sino-Soviet conflict over Central Asia. The SCO might have become the best way for Moscow to manage the growing power of the Chinese and its attraction for the countries of the afore mentioned area. In this way, Russia was allowed to go back to the region, with the further advantage to reduce its role enough to make the SCO appear more attractive than regional structures dominated by the former communist superpower.⁴⁴ Actually, Monika Pawar says that for Russia the main task of the SCO has always been security and standing up to the West, while for the Chinese equally important is economic cooperation. This implies that Central Asia members could enjoy diversification of their economies, thus linking away from excessive dependence on Russia.⁴⁵

In the meantime, facing the common threat of Islamism, Washington, Beijing and Moscow recognised international terrorism as the primary menace to global security. Such convergence was made further manifest when Bush and Putin jointly announced that Russia and the United States were committed to economic cooperation, having launched a major new energy partnership to allow private firms to develop and transform

⁴³ See *China's Position Paper on the New Security Concept*, July 31, 2002, in https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/gjs_665170/gjzzyhy_665174/2612_665212/2614_665216/t15319.shtml [accessed on May 12, 2019].

⁴⁴ See B. GONZALES, *Charting a New Silk Road? The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Russian Foreign Policy*, Saarbrücken, VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2011, pp. 74-75.

⁴⁵ See M. PAWAR, *Russia's Security Relations with China and India under Putin*, Saarbrücken, VDM Verlag, 2010, pp. 47-48.

the vast energy reserves of Russia and the Caspian area through multiple pipelines.⁴⁶ George W. Bush in the same days announced that his government would support WTO membership for Russia.⁴⁷ The US Department of Commerce granted Russia market economy status in June 2002, and announced that the USA and the former communist country would start bilateral negotiations on WTO accession. Nonetheless, such a first class relationship between the two rivals of the Cold War was rather questionable. In fact, the Americans aimed at using their position of strength and influence to create a balance of power favouring freedom. This involved Russia as an important partner in the war on terror, but also with the outlook to reach a future of greater democracy and economic freedom. As concerned China, the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, Condoleezza Rice, said that Washington was collaborating with Beijing on issues ranging from the fight against terror to maintaining stability on the Korean peninsula.⁴⁸ On the other hand, Kremlin leaders were becoming increasingly apprehensive about US unilateralism and felt they were losing ground in the area of the former Soviet Republics.⁴⁹ To add confirmation to this, we always have to remember that the White House National Security Strategy, issued in September 2002, criticised Moscow's uneven commitment to the basic values of free-market democracy. In particular, the United States policy sought to refocus the relationship with Russia to broaden the cooperation in the global war on terrorism, while at the same time bolstering the independence and stability of the States of the former Soviet Union in the belief that a prosperous and stable neighbourhood would reinforce Russia's growing commitment to integration into the Euro-Atlantic community. Despite these nice words, the document stated that Russia's attitude towards human rights issues remained matter of great concern. Washington

⁴⁶ See *The President's News Conference with President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia in Moscow*, May 24, 2002, in PPPUS, George W. Bush, 2002, Book I, pp. 861-867, in <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-2002-book1/html/PPP-2002-book1-doc-pg861.htm> [accessed on May 11, 2019].

⁴⁷ See *President Bush, President Putin Discuss Free Market Economy: Remarks by President Bush and President Putin to Students at St. Petersburg University*, May 25, 2002, in <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/05/20020525-2.html> [accessed on May 11, 2019].

⁴⁸ See C. RICE, *A Balance of Power that Favors Freedom*, October 1, 2002, New York City, NY, in <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=3462> [accessed on May 11, 2019].

⁴⁹ See J. WILHELMSSEN - G. FLIKKE, *Chinese-Russian Convergence and Central Asia*, in «Geopolitics», XVI, 4, 2011, p. 868.

accused also Beijing of being committed to national one-party rule and still hoped that only by fully respect people's rights could China reach its full potential.⁵⁰

To tell the truth, such an approach was not shared by the Chinese, for Jiang Zemin repeated that Beijing stood for democracy in international relations respecting different development models, being ready to work with the international community to boost world multi-polarisation. The Chinese leadership claimed that politically all countries should respect and consult one another and should not seek to impose their will. Economically they should pursue common development and should not create a polarisation of wealth.⁵¹ Beside this, the Chinese scholar Lu-Zhong-Wei thinks that the "Shanghai Spirit" was characterised by the so-called "five Cs", that is confidence, communication, cooperation, co-existence, and common interest. According to this interpretation, the SCO showed to the world that a system of regional security could be founded on the basis of cooperation, rather than military competition, thus ending up in a situation of win-win. Concerning this, the Indian scholar Devendra Kaushik said that for the first time a new mechanism for ensuring security had been formed through peaceful means, rather than reliance on exclusively military alliances.⁵² From this point of view, he then said, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation was based on security through cooperation, meeting the challenges of a non-conventional nature, such as drug and arms traffic, refugee problems, questions of energy. To conclude, Kaushik did not portray the SCO as a NATO of the East. Rather, it was an altogether different type of regional cooperation, which he thought could play a very constructive role in finding a solution by undertaking development.⁵³

Russia and China had entered the new century with an array of agreements on political, military, and border issues that helped turn their border into a zone of good

⁵⁰ See *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, September 2002, in <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf> [accessed on May 11, 2019].

⁵¹ See *Full Text of Jiang Zemin's Report at 16th Party Congress: Build a Well-off Society in an All-round Way and Create a New Situation in Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics*, November 8, 2002, in http://en.people.cn/200211/18/eng20021118_106983.shtml [accessed on May 12, 2019].

⁵² See L.C. KUMAR, *Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Eurasian Security through Cooperation*, Shipra Publications, New Delhi, 2010, p. 41.

⁵³ See D. KAUSHIK, *Strategic Cooperation: U.S.-Russia-China-India*, February 2009, in https://archive.schillerinstitute.com/conf-iclc/2009/ruesselsheim_conf/kaushik.html [accessed on May 12, 2019].

neighbourliness, stability, and cooperation. As an evidence of this, on June 7, 2002, the Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation was signed in St. Petersburg, whose main tasks were set to be: a) mutual trust, friendship and good neighbourliness; b) promotion of a new democratic, fair and rational political and economic international order; c) joint struggle against terrorism, separatism and extremism in all their manifestations; d) balanced economic growth, social and cultural development in the region. Furthermore, the document highlighted the following principles: 1) mutual respect of sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and inviolability of State borders; b) equality of all members, and search of common positions on the basis of mutual understanding; c) gradual implementation of joint activities in the areas of mutual interest; d) prevention of any illegitimate acts directed against SCO interests.⁵⁴ The SCO members wanted to build their relations in the framework of an emerging multi-polar system of international relations and believed that the world order of the XXI century should be based on the mechanisms of collective resolution of key issues, in strict accordance with the UN Charter. On grounds of this, the effective functioning of the Organisation was said to be facilitated by the expeditious implementation of procedures for the ratification of the SCO Charter and the Agreement on the Regional Antiterrorist Structure (RATS) of the SCO.⁵⁵ Among the key aims of the RATS there were: 1) developing proposals and recommendations on strengthening cooperation in combating terrorism, separatism, and extremism; 2) assisting the competent agencies of the Parties in combating terrorism, separatism, and extremism; 3) collecting and analysing information provided to RATS by the Parties on issues of combating terrorism, separatism, and extremism.⁵⁶ Moreover, the members of the organisation managed to combine China, a massive world energy consumer, with high profile energy producers like Kazakhstan and an unmatched

⁵⁴ See *Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, June 7, 2002, in eng.sectsc.org/load/203013/ [accessed on May 13, 2019].

⁵⁵ See *Declaration by the Heads of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, June 7, 2002, in eng.sectsc.org/load/193445/ [accessed on May 15, 2019].

⁵⁶ See *Agreement on Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure between the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, June 7, 2002, in <http://eng.sectsc.org/documents/> [accessed on May 15, 2019].

hydropower producer such as Tajikistan.⁵⁷ In a few words, the SCO enjoyed the outlook of becoming a huge labour supply and consuming market, attracting foreign investments towards the Eurasian and Asia-Pacific region. Besides, stability in the area was thought to provide the sufficient amount of supplies to turn the SCO into a cartel of energy.⁵⁸

President Putin visited China in early December 2002. The consequent Joint Declaration of Russia and China said that the two governments were resolved to continue applying persistent efforts to raise the standards of friendly and mutually beneficially cooperation of the two countries. An important passage of the Declaration was the one taking into account the great significance of cooperation in the energy sphere, aiming at ensuring the prompt implementation of the existing agreements concerning Russian-Chinese oil and gas pipelines, as well as coordinating the implementation of promising energy projects to ensure the long-term and stable nature of oil and gas supplies.⁵⁹ Such a policy matched Russia's interests in Central Asia, which were mainly two-fold: a) integrating the Central Asian States in the CIS sphere and making them close allies; b) denying external Powers strategic access to Central Asia. At the same time, however, there was the intention to counterbalance the increasing ties being made by Central Asian States with Western Powers.⁶⁰ On the other hand, another Power pushing to promote closer economic and trade ties with Central Asia, especially in the energy sector, was China, which was about to become the world's second largest consumer of petroleum products.⁶¹ By virtue of this, China aimed at successfully accomplishing two of its main goals, dealing respectively with stability of Western borders, first of all in the Xinjiang province, and positioning itself as a major player in the race to exploit and develop Central

⁵⁷ See *Significance of Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Pakistan's Perspective*, 2014, p. 68, in https://www.ndu.edu.pk/issra/issra_pub/articles/margalla-paper/Margalla-Papers-2014/04-Significance of-SCO.pdf [accessed on May 15, 2019].

⁵⁸ See HU FENG-YUNG, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO): Prospects and Problems in Russia-China Relations*, in «Journalism and Mass Communication», III, 2, February 2013, p. 110.

⁵⁹ See *Joint Declaration of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China*, December 2, 2002, in http://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/russia_2002_jointstatementprc.pdf [accessed on May 16, 2019].

⁶⁰ See *Russia and Central Asia*, in The NATO-Russia Archive, in <http://www.bits.de/NRANEU/CentralAsia.html> [accessed on May 16, 2019].

⁶¹ See *Department of Energy China Country Analysis Brief Page*, August 2005, in <https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis.php?iso=CHN> [accessed on May 16, 2019].

Asia's energy sources, also flooding the area with Chinese goods.⁶² To sum up, China sought to promote peace and cooperation and rejected the notions of the “new great game” and sphere of influence. Beijing promoted the development of the SCO as a regional organisation for political and economic cooperation, not as a military alliance. Then, China's Central Asia policy focused on six specific areas: border security; combating the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM); energy security; economic interests; geo-political stability; and the SCO.⁶³

2. *The Energy Link*

As it is easy to realise, the American Administration had been monitoring the energy market in the Caspian area for already a few years, as several CIA Intelligence reports show. What worried Washington was above all the need for China to boost its energy sector and find new sources of supply in the Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea regions, thus increasing competition with American firms.⁶⁴ As regarded trade relations with the Russians, Washington analysts believed that in the following three years such a relationship would be developed in an uneven way, since on one hand Russian arms delivery to Beijing was supposed to grow; on the other hand, the CIA predicted that commercial relations would remain stagnant. At the same time, the closeness of their collaboration was expected to be limited by their mutual distrust.⁶⁵ What the Intelligence focused the attention on, moreover, was the fact that China's growing energy demand would soon be turned into a chance for Russia to supply more oil and gas to the Dragon.

⁶² See T.G. CRAIG, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Origins and Implications*, Monterey, CA, Naval Postgraduate School, September 2003, p. 23, Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in National Security Affairs, in https://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/860/03sep_Craig.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y [accessed on May 16, 2019].

⁶³ See J.D. YUAN, *China's Role in Establishing and Building the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)*, in «Journal of Contemporary China», XIX, 67, November 2010, p. 860.

⁶⁴ See *Intelligence Report: China - Scenario of Long-Term Oil Consumption*, June 22, 1998, Secret, in <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/> [accessed on May 17, 2019].

⁶⁵ See *National Intelligence Estimate: Russian-Chinese Relations – Prospects and Implications: Update NIE 98-08 Russian-Chinese Relations – Prospects and Implications, August 1998*, NIE 2000-10C, September 2000, in <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/> [accessed on May 17, 2019].

In a few words, oil and gas trade between these two countries would also end up affecting American policy efforts in the region.⁶⁶

Less than two years after these reports, the Russian Foreign Minister practically confirmed such a trend by stating that the volume of trade with China, especially in the energy sector, had by then reached a record level of almost 12 billion dollars. In a few words, the two States were beginning to regard each other as strategically important markets, thus strengthening the material base of the entire range of bilateral relations.⁶⁷ Soon afterwards, the new Chinese President, Hu Jintao, visited Russia on May 26-30, 2003.⁶⁸ On such occasion, he and Putin on May 27 signed a joint declaration on implementing the strategic partnership concept, which, as concerned economic questions, included the following points: a) China, after becoming a member in 2001, supported Russia's accession to the World Trade Organisation; b) both sides were willing to develop bilateral and regional cooperation in the fields of economy, trade, military technology, energy, finance, information technology. The two leaders also confirmed their mutual understanding that «[...] no matter what changes the world may go through, the strengthening of friendly and good neighbourly relations [...] between Russia and China will always remain a strategic priority...».⁶⁹

As regards the newly-elected Chinese leader, one of the first analyses was the one produced by Willy Wo-Lap Man, who reminds how the Leading Group on Foreign Affairs was particularly sensitive about an “anti-China containment policy” supposedly being spearheaded by Washington. Despite relatively stable relations with the United

⁶⁶ See Central Intelligence Agency – Directorate of Intelligence: *China-Russia – Energy Linkages slowly Developing*, December 14, 2001, Secret, in <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/> [accessed on May 18, 2019].

⁶⁷ See *Replies by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Igor Ivanov to Readers' Questions during an Online Conference on the Renmin Ribao Website*, Beijing, February 27, 2003, in http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/530662 [accessed on May 18, 2019].

⁶⁸ While his predecessor showed quite a moderate stance towards the United States, Hu Jintao appeared more pro-Russian, as a way to get political and diplomatic support to challenge the West's policy of containment of China. See J.P. PANDA, *Beijing's Perspective on Expansion of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: India, South Asia, and the Spectrum of Opportunities in China's Open Approach*, in «Asian Perspective», XXXVI, 3, July-September 2012, p. 503.

⁶⁹ See *Joint Declaration of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, the Kremlin, Moscow, May 27, 2003*, in https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/russia_2003_jointdeclarationprc.pdf [accessed on May 18, 2019].

States, Beijing felt increasingly alarmed by the ongoing close military alliance between the United States and Japan. Also pivotal was the leadership's attention on guaranteeing sufficient and reliable supplies of oil and gas and policy makers started waging "petroleum diplomacy". The team led by President Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao elaborated a strategy to ensure energy imports not only from neighbouring and Asian countries, but also suppliers as far away as Africa and South America.⁷⁰ In the past, Jiang Zemin had basically divided the world into power blocs made of the United States, the European Union, Japan, China, and Russia, thus creating the situation that Chinese experts had characterised as *yichao duoqiang* ("one superpower, several powers"). In this context, the Chinese Communist Party's leadership was convinced that Beijing could gradually play the role of a big Power.⁷¹ For Jiang Zemin, the key to whether China could live up to the reality and obligations of a "great power" in world affairs depended very much on ties with the United States. Therefore, he had pursued a "pro-US" policy, thus recognising American supremacy in the world, provided that Washington respected Chinese suzerainty over Taiwan and continued to trade with and invest in China. Jiang and former president Bill Clinton got along to the extent that the Chinese President had raised the possibility of cementing a bilateral "constructive strategic partnership".⁷² Instead, Hu pointed out that, in order to keep a cooperative partnership, the United States was expected to acquiesce on China's harsh policies in Xinjiang and Tibet in return for Beijing's support of the global war on terrorism.⁷³ As an evidence of this, during Jiang Zemin's last summit with Bush in late 2002, the latter told that «[...] no nation's efforts to counter terrorism should be used to justify suppressing minorities or silencing peaceful dissent». ⁷⁴ Despite this, the White House had toned down its criticism of Chinese

⁷⁰ See W. WO - LAP LAM, *Chinese Politics in the Hu Jintao Era: New Leaders, New Challenges*, Armonk, NY-London, M.E. Sharpe, 2006, p. 158.

⁷¹ See W. WO - LAP LAM, *Jiang Rolls Last Diplomatic Dice*, September 24, 2002, in <http://edition.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/asiapcf/east/09/24/willy.column/index.html> [accessed on May 19, 2019].

⁷² See H. HARDING, *The Clinton-Jiang Summits: An American Perspective*, Speech Given at the Asia Society Hong Kong Center, May 28, 1998, in www.asiasociety.org/speeches/harding.html [accessed on May 19, 2019].

⁷³ See E.S. MEDEIROS-M. T. FRAVEL, *China's New Diplomacy*, in «Foreign Affairs», LXXXII, 6, November-December 2002, pp. 22-35.

⁷⁴ See *Remarks by the President and Chinese President Jiang Zemin in Press Conference, Crawford, Texas: President Bush, Chinese President Jiang Zemin Discuss Iraq, N. Korea*,

behaviour in Xinjiang and Tibet. In fact, for the first time since Tiananmen, Washington had decided in 2002 not to sponsor an “anti-China” motion at the UN Commission on Human Rights at Geneva. During his tour of Asia and Australia in 2003, Bush pronounced himself encouraged by China’s cooperation in the war on terror, and President Hu reciprocated when he said they were going to develop healthy and stable Sino-US relations.⁷⁵

As concerned energy issues, in January 2003 the Japanese Prime Minister, Junichiro Koizumi, had signed in Moscow a six-point plan of cooperation in economics, energy and international diplomacy. By reading the document, we can find out that Japan-Russia energy consultations had been convened and feasibility studies had been implemented to find areas for joint implementation projects. Moreover, both sides shared the recognition that the realisation of a project in the Russian Far East and the Siberian region to develop energy resources and construct a pipeline would be of mutual benefit and would contribute to the improvement of the stability and the energy security of the Asia-Pacific region.⁷⁶ Another strategic reason spurring China’s entry into the Central Asian energy market was the need to reduce dependency on sea lines of communications for oil transport. In particular, in case of international crisis or terrorist attack, the crude flow through the vulnerable Strait of Malacca could have been easily disrupted. As regards this question, a serious contribution to research is the one given by Thrassy N. Marketos, who says that there were five factors driving Chinese engagement in Central Asia, that is: a) economic development in Xinjiang; b) domestic political stability; c) regional stability; d) energy security; e) implementation of an alternative transport corridor to Europe.⁷⁷

As regarded Russia, Putin wanted to turn his country into a sort of economic tiger integrated into world economic systems, being at the same time the dominant regional

October 25, 2002, in <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021025.html> [accessed on May 20, 2019].

⁷⁵ See W. WO - LAP LAM, *China Seeks Payback for N. Korea Efforts*, September 16, 2003, in <http://edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/asiapcf/east/09/15/willy.column/index.html> [accessed on May 20, 2019].

⁷⁶ See *Japan-Russia Action Plan*, January 10, 2003, in <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/russia/pmv0301/plan.html> [accessed on May 20, 2019].

⁷⁷ See T.N. MARKETOS, *China’s Energy Geopolitics: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Central Asia*, London-New York, NY, Routledge, 2009, pp. 19-20.

Power within the former Soviet Union area, especially by playing the card of energy supplies. Just to give an example, Fiona Hill mentions that Russia transformed itself from a defunct military superpower into a new energy superpower, making the energy sector represent Russian State interests globally.⁷⁸ In late May 2002, at a summit in Moscow, the US and Russia had announced a strategic energy dialogue that would focus on bringing more Russian oil to world markets.⁷⁹ In short, energy issues had opened the door to bilateral cooperation with the United States. Actually, Washington wanted to diversify energy supplies and avoid dependence on oil coming from the turbulent and unstable Persian Gulf, while Russia was looking for new potential markets, at the same time needing investment in high-risk exploration or a technologically challenging development.⁸⁰ A second point of convergence was that Russia was becoming a premier energy producer, while the United States was the largest oil and gas consumer in the world. As such, the US oil majors had both the means and the interest to pursue expansion in Russia. So important had become diversification of supplies, that the US Energy Information Administration assumed that the developing countries in Asia would account for 37 per cent of the total world energy demand growth by 2020, with the risk of getting extremely dependent on unstable Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries for their economic survival.⁸¹ The fact that the SCO included both major energy exporters and significant importers, ended up making energy one of the main topics of this organisation. However, several factors seemed to be limiting Sino-Russian collaboration, as Moscow feared that Chinese investments in Eurasian corridors could hurt the Russian Far East's development, and possibly damage its territorial integrity. As a matter of fact, the SCO

⁷⁸ See F. HILL, *Energy Empire: Oil, Gas and Russia's Revival*, London, The Foreign Policy Centre, 2004, pp. 27-28.

⁷⁹ See *Joint Statement on the New U.S.-Russian Energy Dialogue Adopted by President Vladimir Putin of Russia and President George W. Bush of the United States of America in Moscow*, May 24, 2002, in <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/3480> [accessed on May 21, 2019].

⁸⁰ See E. CHOW, *US-Russia Energy Dialogue: Policy, Projects or Photo op?* in «Foreign Service Journal», LXXX, 12, December 2003, p. 34.

⁸¹ See D. BOCHKAREV, *Russian Energy Policy during President Putin's Tenure: Trends and Strategies*, London, GMB Publishing Ltd., 2006, p. 7.

allowed Russia to monitor China's activities and contain them, but at the same time provided China with a *forum* to assert its security and economic interests.⁸²

Within a scenario like this, Russia's Energy Strategy of 2003 explicitly mentioned energy resources as a political instrument and as a key way to dominate that particular sector.⁸³ To be honest, the Russian Energy Strategy to 2020 may be considered as the main "ideological foundation" for the national development policy, also defining energy exports as a major instrument of Russian foreign policy. Just to give an idea, we can summarise the main goals of the Strategy like this: a) exporting energy resources; b) transporting energy mostly from Central Asia to Europe; c) attracting foreign investments to the national energy sector; d) promoting the exploration and production activities of the Russian fuel-energy sector abroad; e) increasing the presence of Russian companies in foreign markets.⁸⁴ The main external challenge of the energy sector dealt with the necessity to overcome the threats associated with the instability of world energy markets and volatility of prices, as well as to ensure the contribution of the energy factor into improvement of foreign economic activities and to reinforcement of Russia's position in the world economic system.⁸⁵

According to Leonid Grigoriev, Russia's approach to regional energy issues may be better understood if we keep in mind all the objectives of outside actors, particularly their attempts to return to a buyer's market and build transit routes to bypass Russia.⁸⁶ In order to avoid such a stranglehold, Moscow decided to use the Siberian region as a "strategic

⁸² See B. CARLSON, *The Limits of Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership in Central Asia*, pp. 174-175, in <https://jpia.princeton.edu/sites/jpia/files/2007-8.pdf> [accessed on May 21, 2019].

⁸³ See I. OLDBERG, *Aims and Means in Russian Foreign Policy*, in R.E. KANET, ed., *Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2011, p. 50.

⁸⁴ According to Stephen Blank, Russia was expected to collide with the American insistence on preserving Central Asian countries' independence as a key political goal. See S. BLANK, *The United States and Central Asia*, in ALLISON-JONSON, eds., *Central Asian Security*, cit., p. 130.

⁸⁵ See *Energy Strategy of Russia for the Period up to 2030, Approved by Decree N° 1715-r of the Government of the Russian Federation Dated 13 November 2009, Amending the Energy Strategy of Russia for the Period up to 2020, Approved by Decree N° 1234-r of the Government of the Russian Federation Dated 28 August 2003*, Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, Moscow 2010, in https://espas.secure.europarl.europa.eu/orbis/sites/default/files/generated/document/en/ES-2030_%28Eng%29.pdf [accessed on May 22, 2019].

⁸⁶ See L. GRIGORIEV, *Russia, Gazprom and the CAC: Interests and Relations*, in A. DELLECKER - T. GOMART, *Russian Energy Security and Foreign Policy*, Abingdon-New York, NY, Routledge, 2011, p. 165.

gateway” in pursuing Asia-Pacific energy diplomacy.⁸⁷ According to the Russian Energy Strategy, the volume of oil export, which was 145 million tons in 2000, was estimated to increase to more than 300 million tons in 2020. However, exports to Europe were to increase in the period 2000-2020 only from 127.5 million to 160 million tons, or 1.1 percent per annum. An increase of the same scope was expected for the exports to the CIS countries, whereas oil exports to other countries, like the USA and China, were going to rise to about 100 million tons in 2010. Thus, the increase of oil exports was clearly expected to shift from West to East.⁸⁸

As a matter of fact, the relationship between China and Russia was a typical one between two great Powers, tilting between pragmatic considerations urging both sides to co-operate, and deep-rooted suspicion due to disputes in history. For example, Russia’s Eastern regions are sparsely populated and bordering with a heavily populated Chinese territory. Moreover, Russia was concerned about China’s rise, which could threaten its position as a regional superpower. From such a point of view, fuelling Chinese modernisation by supplying energy could be seen as jeopardising Russia’s own interest. In a word, the key dimension of the SCO was always the Sino-Russian relationship, as there was a lot of common ground for both Moscow and Beijing to co-operate. Dependency was reciprocal, since Russia needed China to access Asian market and to promote the economy development of its Eastern regions. On the other hand, Central Asian/Caspian countries offered the best available option for China to reduce its dependence on the Gulf (as well as Russia) and help avoid the “Malacca dilemma”. Therefore, it was no surprise that China had made this region a cornerstone of its energy

⁸⁷ Perhaps, the most important concern in Sino-Russian economic relations was the issue of natural gas, as Beijing was more interested in purchasing it from Central Asia, while Moscow aimed at being the main source of Chinese gas industry. See K. SALUM, *Russian-Chinese Relations and their Leadership Cooperation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, p. 223, in «ENDC Proceedings», XVII, 2013, in <https://www.ksk.edu.ee/en/research/endc-proceedings-nr-17/> [accessed on May 23, 2019].

⁸⁸ See R. GÖTZ, *Russia and the Energy Supply of Europe: The Russian Energy Strategy to 2020 (Updated Version)*, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Working Paper Research Unit Russia/CIS FG 5 2005/06, October 2005, pp. 1-2, in https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227075056_Russia's_Energy_Strategy_and_the_Energy_Supply_of_Europe/download [accessed on May 24, 2019].

security policy.⁸⁹ What made not only the United States, but also Russia's neighbours rather suspicious were also some comments made in Moscow about the Kremlin's strategic leverage. For example, Anatoliy Chubais, chief executive officer of UES, Russia's electric-power company, argued in 2003 that Russia should lead the former Soviet republics through an "economic occupation" of neighbouring economies. In his view, Russian investors were thought to purchase foreign debts and acquire strategic economic assets in CIS countries.⁹⁰

The establishment of the SCO demonstrated that procurement of oil was deemed a national security issue in China. As concerned Beijing's strategy to pursue national energy interests, it was based on the following steps; a) establishing strong commercial ties around oil and energy supplies; b) considering military interests and acting upon; c) should China ever decide that its commercial interests were not sufficiently protected, activating the SCO to use the Chinese military to secure those interests.⁹¹ With this in mind, it was obvious for China to become interested in acquiring oil and gas reserves from foreign sources, including those countries hit by American sanctions, such as Iran, Iraq, Libya, and the Sudan.⁹² Actually, the policy of seeking sources abroad was the ratification by the government of national oil companies' early efforts to invest in other countries. When the China National Petroleum Corporation first sought to invest overseas, in 1992 in Peru and in 1996 in Sudan and Venezuela, it had not obtained government approval. However, after China had joined the World Trade Organisation, the idea of creating national enterprises that could be competitive internationally gained ground.⁹³ To be more precise, in 2003 the Chinese government launched a programme

⁸⁹ See M. ÖĞÜTÇÜ - X. MA, *Growing Links in Energy and Geopolitics: China, Russia, and Central Asia*, pp. 11-13, in <http://www.eisourcebook.org/cms/Links%20between%20energy%20&%20geopolitics,%20China,%20Russia,%20&%20Central%20Asia.pdf> [accessed on May 24, 2019].

⁹⁰ See O. OLIKER - K. CRANE - L.H. SCHWARTZ - C. YUSUPOV, *Russian Foreign Policy Sources and Implications*, Santa Monica, CA, The RAND Corporation, 2009, p. 95.

⁹¹ See B. BOEKESTEIN - J. HENDERSON, *Thirsty Dragon, Hungry Eagle: Oil Security in Sino-US Relations*, IPEG Papers in Global Political Economy, No. 21, November 2005, pp. 35-36, in https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280739402_Thirsty_Dragon_Hungry_Eagle_Oil_Security_in_Sino-US_Relations/download [accessed on May 24, 2019].

⁹² See R. SPENCER, *Tension Rises as China Scours the Globe for Energy*, in «The Telegraph», November 19, 2004, in <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/1477009/Tension-rises-as-China-scours-the-globe-for-energy.html> [accessed on May 24, 2019].

⁹³ See J. JIANG - J. SINTON, *Overseas Investments by Chinese National Oil Companies: Assessing the Drivers and Impacts*, International Energy Agency Information Paper, February 2011, p. 13, in

called the “Twenty-First-Century Oil Strategy”, allocating 100 billion dollars for a “futuristic strategic oil system”, covering a ten-point-scheme, which claimed: 1) diversifying oil import sources; 2) co-developing oil and gas wells in other countries; 3) setting up the national oil reserve and security guarantee mechanism; 4) initiating the national oil foundation to construct a platform for oil finances and futures; 5) re-starting the National Energy Commission to deal with oil security affairs; 6) cutting out some reliable marine oil transport lines; 7) preparing strategic oil reserves in northwest China; 8) encouraging a frugal and efficient oil consumption; 9) organising a couple of titanic oil corporations; 10) restructuring the energy consumption regime to reduce dependence on oil.⁹⁴ In 2005 the State Council established a State Energy Leadership Group headed by Premier Wen Jiabao. Energy security was prioritised in the 11th Five-year Plan of 2005, emphasising energy conservation, the environment, climate change and green energy.⁹⁵

This spurt in China’s energy usage required a corresponding increase in the consumption of all major sources of energy: coal, oil, natural gas, nuclear energy, and hydropower. According to the US Department of Energy, between 2005 and 2030 Beijing’s net energy use was estimated to increase by 131 percent, a far bigger gain than that expected for any other country. Over the course of this period, China’s share of world energy usage was estimated to jump from 14.5 to 22.3 per cent. Even more significant, China was expected to overtake the United States to be the world’s leading consumer of energy.⁹⁶ The fact that China established close ties to countries considered unfriendly to the United States was of course seen in Washington as a provocation. Furthermore, in the effort to cement its relations with these suppliers, the Chinese also provided them with military and diplomatic aid. The seriousness with which top US officials viewed these

<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/5kgglrwdrvvd-en.pdf?expires=1552759869&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=C8A79F2B81ED281551B3F08D3CACD4B1> [accessed on May 28, 2019].

⁹⁴ See *China’s 21st Century Oil Strategy Outlined*, November 14, 2002, in http://en.people.cn/200211/14/eng20021114_106819.shtml, accessed on May 29, 2019.

⁹⁵ See *Special Report: The 11th Five-Year Plan*, in http://www.gov.cn/english/special/115y_index.htm [accessed on May 29, 2019].

⁹⁶ See M.T. KLARE, *Fueling the Dragon: China’s Strategic Energy Dilemma*, in E. PAUS- P.B. PRIME-J. WESTERN, eds., *Global Giant: Is China Changing the Rules of the Game?*, New York, NY, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 184.

activities was noticeably evident in the Pentagon 2005 report on Chinese strategy and capabilities, *The Military Power of the People's Republic of China*, which for the first time highlighted energy competition as a significant factor in US-Chinese security affairs: «Beijing's belief that it requires such special relationships in order to secure its energy access could shape its defense strategy and force planning [...]», thus, presumably, posing a potential threat to US national security through a more activist military presence abroad. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, we can read in the report, had stated that the shortage of oil and gas resources had become a restricting factor in the country's economic and social development, thus calling upon China to implement a strategy for sustainable development of domestic oil and natural gas resources. For the foreseeable future, however, China was reported to rely on overseas sources. Hence, this dependence was playing a role in shaping the Dragon's strategy and policy, especially when dealing with long-term supply agreements with producers, as well as with countries located along key geostrategic chokepoints.⁹⁷ In 2005, the Bush Administration responded to what it saw as a continued Chinese challenge to American efforts to contain Iran by supporting India's pursuit of nuclear energy, while maintaining its sanctions against Chinese acquisition of the same technologies.⁹⁸ It was also true that the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation granted Iran, together with Pakistan and India, observer status in 2005, but this did not necessarily mean a deliberate challenge to U.S. interests and dominance in the Persian Gulf and the wider Middle Eastern region. After all, having Iran in the SCO framework was meaningful for the organisation to be effective in combating terrorism in Central Asia.⁹⁹ As a matter of fact, China viewed that area as a vital source of energy, posing fewer security risks than maritime imports. Moreover, the region was much more stable than the Persian Gulf or the Middle East. What is more, President Hu Jintao used the

⁹⁷ See *A Report to Congress Pursuant to the National Defense Authorization Act Fiscal Year 2000: The Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2005*, Office of the Secretary of Defense, in <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/china/dod-2005.pdf> [accessed on May 30, 2019].

⁹⁸ See S.R. WEISMAN, *U.S. to Broaden India's Access to Nuclear-Power Technology*, in «The New York Times», July 19, 2005, in <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/19/washington/us-to-broaden-indias-access-to-nuclearpower-technology.html> [accessed on May 30, 2019].

⁹⁹ See Z. DAOJIONG, *China's Energy Security and its International Relations*, in «The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly», *Energy and Security*, III, 3, November 2005, p. 50.

expression “Malacca Dilemma” to describe China’s increasing risks of importing by sea, due to pirate or terrorist attacks, or potential trade disruptions by another hostile Power.¹⁰⁰

With the passing of time, China’s expectations of the SCO escalated. First of all, Beijing attached more importance to cooperation in fighting against terrorism in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Then, it made greater efforts to promote trade and investment among SCO members. Finally, as the international profile of the organisation increased, China began to use the SCO as a platform for advocating a Chinese version of multilateral cooperation. In his speech at the 2005 summit, President Hu Jintao stated that China hoped that the SCO could better deal with new challenges, advance regional development, maintain regional stability, and fulfil common prosperity through deepening and expanding bilateral and multilateral cooperation. In particular, to promote economic cooperation it was important to strengthen coordination for the establishment of a banking union, and carry out cooperation with international financial institutions.¹⁰¹ In short, to the Chinese government the SCO had become not only a source of security in an uncertain and threatening world, but also an opportunity for expanding its market, diversifying its energy supplies, demonstrating to the world the benign nature of China’s rise, and advocating a new type of multilateral cooperation.¹⁰² However, Russia and the Central Asian countries showed a certain caution, being more oriented towards a multilateral market and the removal of a *de facto* Chinese economic takeover of that area.¹⁰³ In the same period, Russia’s President Putin stressed bilateral economic ties, especially the work of Russian energy companies in China. In addition, in November 2005 the two governments agreed to double oil exports to China and to consider constructing an oil

¹⁰⁰ See M. LANTEIGNE, *China, Energy Security and Central Asian Diplomacy: Bilateral and Multilateral Approaches*, in I. OVERLAND - H. KJAERNET - A. KENDALL - TAYLOR, eds., *Caspian Energy Politics: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan*, Abingdon- New York, NY, Routledge, 2010, p. 104.

¹⁰¹ See *Hu Jintao Attends the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit and Delivers an Important Speech*, July 5, 2005, in https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/hzxcfels_665834/t202787.shtml [accessed on May 28, 2019].

¹⁰² See J. QINGGUO, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: China’s Experiment in Multilateral Leadership*, Sapporo, Japan, Slavic-Eurasian Research Center, June 2007, p. 120, in src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no16_2_ses/05_jia.pdf [accessed on May 28, 2019].

¹⁰³ See MARKETOS, *China’s Energy Geopolitics*, cit., p. 46.

pipeline from Russia to China and a gas-transmission project from Eastern Siberia to China's Far East.¹⁰⁴

3. The Sino-Russian Connection

One of the main works on the SCO is the monograph by Bobo Lo, *Axis of Convenience*, stressing how the partnership between the two leaders of the East was based on strategic common interests and a shared vision of national priorities. The author underlines two main reasons of Russia's rationale for partnership with China. The first one was what could be called "global strategic". In a few words, Russia at the end of the second Putin mandate was far more stable and more influential abroad, but it was still a relatively minor player on the world stage. Hence, the Russian President understood that his country needed to make common cause with other Powers in order to exercise a serious influence in international affairs. From this point of view, China represented both the present and the future, with apparently unlimited economic, political, and military potential. Russia was supposed to become the strategic, as well as civilisational, bridge between East and West, and possibly even the "third pole" in the multi-polar world of the future. On the other hand, Beijing did not view Russia as a strategic counterweight to the United States. Moscow was regarded as too weak to perform such a role and, in any event, it would be reluctant to act on behalf of Chinese interests. Moreover, China was believed to enjoy far greater strategic choice than Russia, due to working relations with the United States and the EU, close ties with ASEAN members and the Republic of Korea, as well as an expanding Chinese presence in Africa and South America. In short, Beijing was committed to portraying the "strategic partnership" with Russia as a supplement, not an alternative, to its burgeoning ties with the United States and Europe. Energy was another major dividend of the partnership with Moscow. Moscow saw energy as the twenty-first-century equivalent of nuclear weapons, that is the main instrument of power projection.

¹⁰⁴ See M. DE HAAS, *Report No. 3 – Russian-Chinese Security Relations: Moscow's Threat from the East?*, The Hague, Netherlands Institute of International Relations, March 2013, p. 16.

Within this vision, China served as leverage against the West. For Beijing, however, Russia was only one of the many suppliers of its energy needs.¹⁰⁵

A somewhat different point of view is the one expressed by Alexander Lukin in the recent work *China and Russia*, highlighting how Beijing saw that the two countries shared common views on most international issues, and above all both envisaged a future world based on multi-polarity. The Chinese Foreign Minister explained this unity in an interview on June 24, 2007: «China and Russia hold common positions on such major issues as working to establish a multi-polar world, and establishing a just and rational international order».¹⁰⁶ To summarise, Lukin stresses the following reasons motivating Moscow's needs: 1) cooperation with China was extremely important to Russia's geopolitical and international interests, as both pursued a world not dominated by a single Power; 2) China was an important strategic partner for Russia, as the Kremlin's desire to become increasingly independent and powerful naturally made it necessary to develop relations with Beijing; 3) China was one of Russia's most important economic partners; 4) within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, China was able to work with Russia to help achieve their common objectives in Central Asia; 5) Russia needed China as a partner in the project of reforming the international financial system.¹⁰⁷ Despite this, we should not forget the rise of China's soft power, like Joseph Nye wrote in an article published in the «Wall Street Journal Asia» in November 2005. As a matter of fact, Beijing's active participation in international peacekeeping operations under UN auspices and its increasingly cooperative stance in global institutions such as the World Trade Organisation, had the purpose to give an image of China as a good international citizen.¹⁰⁸

As concerned the Russian stance, the Kremlin aimed at establishing closer ties with the Asian partner; hence, at the SCO Moscow summit of 2005 the question of energy trade surfaced. The joint communiqué, in fact, stated that it had become by then necessary to

¹⁰⁵ See B. LO, *Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing, and the New Geopolitics*, London-Washington, D.C., Chatham House-Brookings Institution Press, 2008, pp. 43-47.

¹⁰⁶ See LUKIN, *China and Russia*, cit., p. 49.

¹⁰⁷ See *ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

¹⁰⁸ See Y.S. NYE, *The Rise of China's Soft Power*, in «Wall Street Journal Asia», December 29, 2005, in <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/rise-chinas-soft-power> [accessed on May 31, 2019].

embark on practical implementation of the Action Plan drafted at the meeting of February 19, 2005 in Bishkek, on “pilot” projects in the field of energy, transport, telecommunications, science and technology. The meeting of heads of ministries in charge of foreign economic and trade activities was then in charge of reviewing the issue of the soonest establishment of *ad hoc* working groups on fuel and energy complex.¹⁰⁹ To tell the truth, the formal idea to set up an energy club within the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation was formulated by President Putin at the Dushambe meeting of 2006, when he said: «I believe that creating a SCO energy club is a pressing issue [...] Russia is considering financing some projects in the economic sphere [...]».¹¹⁰ During the same meeting, President Hu appealed the two sides to implement a development programme for the 2006-2010 period as soon as possible, saying the two countries could further cooperate in the energy field.¹¹¹ At the same time, China hoped to intensify cooperation with other members of the SCO in the oil sector. «Cooperation in the oil sector enjoys rosy prospects and will benefit all the SCO members», said Zhou Jiping, deputy general manager of China National Petroleum Corporation.¹¹²

Actually, Moscow and Beijing had very different understandings of energy security. For the former it meant security of demand, particularly for pipeline gas. In fact, oil and gas accounted for over sixty per cent of Russia’s exports in value terms and over half of federal budget revenues. China’s conception of energy security, on the other hand, was focused on the more conventional understanding of security of supply.¹¹³ According to Bobo Lo, China pursued a multi-continental approach to acquiring equity in energy ventures. Over the longer term, Beijing had no interest in Russia becoming a monopoly or strategic supplier of its energy needs. Instead, China was expected to view Russia as a “limited-use” partner, of far less importance than its main sources in the Persian Gulf and

¹⁰⁹ See *Joint Communiqué Meeting of the Council of Heads of Government (Prime Ministers) of the SCO Member States*, October 26, 2005, in <http://eng.sectsc.org/documents/> [accessed on May 31, 2019].

¹¹⁰ *Russia’s President Putin Proposes SCO “Energy Club”*, June 15, 2006, in <https://www.news.tj/en/news/russias-president-putin-proposes-sco-energy-club>, accessed on June 1, 2019.

¹¹¹ See *China, Russia Agree to Enhance co-op within SCO*, June 15, 2006, in http://www.gov.cn/misc/2006-06/15/content_311499.htm [accessed on June 1, 2019].

¹¹² See *China Seeks co-op in Oil Sector within SCO*, June 15, 2006, in http://www.gov.cn/misc/2006-06/15/content_311359.htm [accessed on June 1, 2019].

¹¹³ See D. YERGIN, *Ensuring Energy Security*, in «Foreign Affairs», LXXXV, 2, March-April 2006, p. 77, in https://www.un.org/ga/61/second/daniel_yergin_energyscurity.pdf [accessed on June 1, 2019].

Africa.¹¹⁴ On the other hand, Russia was repeatedly stating its interest in diversifying its energy exports away from an overreliance on European customers. Putin sought to promote a vision of Russia as a modern great Power and energy was to be the key to this transformation. Instead, rather like nuclear weapons during the Cold War, energy ended up being identified with aggressive power. China, on the other hand, played a pivotal role in facilitating Russia's pursuit of an "independent" foreign policy by reinforcing Moscow's self-confidence vis-à-vis the West, thus Chinese geopolitical insurance had become more valuable to Moscow than Russian energy was to Beijing.¹¹⁵

The official Chinese press pointed out in 2006 that effective cooperation between China and Russia in the fields of world security and crisis handling indicated that the Sino-Russian strategic partnership had become an important factor in ushering in a multinational framework of world politics and bringing equality into international relations, adding that the prospects of cooperation in the field of energy were expected to increase strategic interdependence.¹¹⁶ According to Chinese scholars, one of the most striking features of the improvement of Sino-Russian relations was the relatively weak position of Russia compared with the rising posture of China at the time of their rapprochement, stating that Moscow could not influence China the way the Soviet Union did. In short, most Chinese academics thought that Russia had accepted the reality of a "Rising China" in the global economy. With regard to the uniqueness of Russia's strategic situation, Chinese scholars and policymakers saw three defining factors. Firstly, they believed that Russia's geographical location created a conflicted identity for the Russian nation. Although more closely linked to Western civilisation, and considering themselves superior to the Asian one, Russians were thought to define their own uniqueness as being linked to their Eastern Orthodox Christian faith. Secondly, Russia was said to have a history of military imperialism, unlike China. Thirdly, Russia wanted what former Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov had called "Sovereign Democracy," a special Russian model of democracy based on a multi-party managed system. China, on the other hand,

¹¹⁴ See LO, *Axis of Convenience*, cit., p. 143.

¹¹⁵ See *ibid.*, pp. 151-152.

¹¹⁶ See *China, Russia more than just Good Neighbours*, in «China Daily», March 20, 2006, in http://www.gov.cn/misc/2006-03/20/content_231369.htm [accessed on June 2, 2019].

preferred a one-party system with popular participation. The self-image of the Chinese was one open to the world, pro-market and pro-diversity, whilst the Russians were viewed as being more insular and nationalistic in the economic and trade domains. Some Chinese scholars went as far as to say that Beijing and Moscow had a greater need for the West than they did for each other, thus reinforcing mutual misunderstanding and distrust.¹¹⁷

At the summit of 2006, President Putin suggested launching an SCO energy club, or gas OPEC. In particular, the Kremlin was interested in taking part in multilateral cooperation within such a framework in order to diversify export channels and decrease political risks on global oil and gas markets. On that occasion, the *ad hoc* Working Group on Energy had been mandated to explore the possibility of establishing the SCO Energy Club.¹¹⁸ Putin's proposal provoked fears in the West that Russia might use its energy wealth for political purposes. In the same days, Stephen Blank wrote that if Moscow and Tehran successfully managed to form such a "club", then they would be able to exercise the same power as the one that Saudi Arabia possessed in OPEC, also allowing Russia to provide Iran with help in developing its refining capacity.¹¹⁹ An interesting interpretation is the one given by Nargis Kassenova, who compares the prospects of the SCO Energy Club with other similar alliances promoted by Russia in the previous years. In January 2002, for example, Putin had proposed the formation of a Eurasian Gas Alliance with Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, with the purpose to stabilise prices and help solve the issue of the division of Caspian reserves. As concerned the SCO Energy Club, Moscow hoped to make the organisation more attractive to other States like India, as well as remind Europe that Russian sources could reach other markets, thus counterbalancing NATO as an energy security guarantor. As a matter of fact, Putin proposed the Club only weeks after China had received its first shipment of pipeline oil from Kazakhstan. On the other hand, Chinese experts expressed doubts over the viability of such a project. In fact, Beijing and Moscow did not have the same priorities, as the former was an importer

¹¹⁷ See C. YEUNG - N. BJELAKOVIC, *The Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership: Views from Beijing and Moscow*, in «The Journal of Slavic Military Studies», XXIII, 2, May 2010, pp. 255-257.

¹¹⁸ See *Joint Communiqué Meeting of the Council of Heads of Government (Prime Ministers) of the SCO Members States*, September 15, 2006 in <http://eng.sectSCO.org/documents/> [accessed on June 3, 2019].

¹¹⁹ See S. BLANK, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization as an "Energy Club": Portents for the Future*, October 4, 2006, in <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/11121-analytical-articles-caci-analyst-2006-10-4-art-11121.html> [accessed on June 3, 2019].

interested in supplies and construction of facilities, while the latter was an exporter considering Central Asia as an appendix of its energy export policy. Though not officially rejecting Putin's proposals, the Chinese felt more comfortable in dealing with bilateral relations.¹²⁰ From the outlook of the Central Asian Republics, the framework of the SCO was seen as an important source for economic investment to aid their ailing domestic economies.¹²¹

4. American reactions

The Americans had a completely different attitude. An example of how negative the Russian point of view is, may be found in the pages by Yuri Morozov on «Far Eastern Affairs». The author, in fact, says that Washington, due to economic interests and the will to keep unilateralism, was working towards the disintegration of Eurasia by supporting radicalism, separatist movements, and inciting internal civil conflicts.¹²² Whether this was true or not, Professor S. Frederick Starr, chairman of the Central Asia and Caucasus Institute, published a 36-page paper titled *A Greater Central Asia Partnership for Afghanistan and its Neighbors* in March 2005. Actually, Starr was quoting the Silk Road Strategy Act accepted in the Congress in 1999, which outlined the policies of the US towards Central Asia and the Caucasus. The document advocated that the US foreign policy should be condensed to democracy building, liberal market policies, preservation of human rights and regional economic integration.¹²³ In short, Starr claimed that there were not any effective region-wide structures promoting security and development across all of Greater Central Asia and explained the lack of other regional initiatives: a) Russia's Commonwealth of Independent States was functionally dead; b) the Central Asian common market was stillborn; c) Japan's "Six Plus One" programme took a region wide approach to development but not to security, and it excluded Afghanistan; d) the Shanghai

¹²⁰ See N. KASSENOVA, *The Shanghai Cooperation Energy Club: Purposes and Prospects*, in OVERLAND - KJAERNET - KENDALL - TAYLOR, eds., *Caspian Energy Politics*, cit., pp. 166-169.

¹²¹ See S. ARIS, *Eurasian Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 78.

¹²² See Y.V. MOROZOV, *Integration Projects for Eurasia: The Approaches of China, Russia, and the United States*, in «Far Eastern Affairs», 3, 2016, p. 26.

¹²³ See *Silk Road Strategy Act of 1999*, 106th Congress, First Session, S. 579, in <https://www.congress.gov/bill/106th-congress/senate-bill/579/text> [accessed on June 3, 2019].

Cooperation Organisation combined security and economic concerns, but ignored political development; e) NATO was active in the five former Soviet States and in Afghanistan, but it had no strategy or overarching structure of engagement with the region.¹²⁴

To tell the truth, it was no secret that US companies had a stake in the Eastern energy market. Bush and Putin had signed a joint declaration energy cooperation and accordingly the ministers had been instructed to continue their energy dialogue, concentrating on ways to enhance energy security, improve the transparency of the business and investment environment.¹²⁵ Curiously enough, the Russian Foreign Ministers delivered a speech whose attitude was not so conciliatory towards the United States. In fact, Lavrov stated that the world community was going through the complex stage of formation of a new system of international relations. The SCO could and should make its constructive contribution to the establishment of its basic principles, that is mutual respect and reliance upon international law and the Charter of the United Nations. The establishment of such approaches was particularly topical for Central Asia, towards whose stability the Russian Federation was profoundly interested.¹²⁶

Starr's ideas influenced the government somehow, as in October 2005 the State Department's South Asia section was given responsibility for reviewing the policy towards five Central Asian countries. A few months later, in April 2006, the Assistant Secretary of State, Richard Boucher, spoke before the House of Representatives' Committee on Foreign Affairs. In his report, he made it clear that Russia and China were not regarded as major players in the area. To advance regional economic development and integration, he said, Washington pursued a strategic dialogue with the countries of the region, including Afghanistan, helping build new links among the countries of the broader region and connect them more closely to the rest of the world. Likewise, the

¹²⁴ See S.F. STARR, *A Partnership for Central Asia*, in «Foreign Affairs», LXXXIV, 4, July-August 2005, pp. 164-178.

¹²⁵ See *Joint Statement on Russian-U.S. Energy Cooperation*, January 24, 2005, in <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/3564> [accessed on June 4, 2019].

¹²⁶ See *Speech by Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov at Plenary Session of Foreign Ministers Council of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Astana*, February 25, 2005, in http://www.mid.ru/en/press_service/minister_speeches/-/asset_publisher/7OvQR5KJWVmR/content/id/447618 [accessed on June 4, 2019].

promotion of freedom through democratic and economic reform was a key pillar of the American strategy, also in order for foreign investors to feel confident in the rule-of-law before committing to large and risky ventures.¹²⁷ Within the overall China-US relationship, the energy factor could play a significant role either in reducing or in enhancing mutual trust. Some Chinese scholars believed that strategic resources were of a zero-sum nature, and that competition for strategic resources between China and the US would inevitably lead to the outbreak of conflicts.¹²⁸ On the other hand, energy could also be seen as a source of cooperation. On this question, Kenneth Lieberthal and Mikkal E. Herberg wrote in 2006 that the energy sector provided an arena in which US-China cooperation could be beneficial, both in signalling a relatively benign American posture towards China's development and in providing for outcomes that were in the long term interests of the US. What was at stake, we can read in the report for the National Bureau of Asian Research titled *China's Search for Energy Security: Implications for U.S. Policy*, was the global governance of oil. Due to China's growing scale of oil imports and its market impact, in fact, China was also developing its own strategic petroleum reserves. Since all importers were supposed to benefit from reduced prices in a crisis, there was likely to be growing resentment that China would be "free-riding" on emergency oil releases during a crisis.¹²⁹

Nonetheless, Beijing sought to allay foreign apprehensions over its growing power by articulating the proposition of China's "peaceful rise." In a 2005 «Foreign Affairs» article by Zheng Bijian, a quasi-official policy statement was released, giving assurance that China had adopted a strategy to achieve a new international political and economic order through incremental reforms and the democratisation of international relations. Hence, the Asian Power had no intention to follow the path of Germany leading up to World War

¹²⁷ See R.A. BOUCHER, *Statement to the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia: U.S. Policy in Central Asia: Balancing Priorities (Part II)*, April 26, 2006, in <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rm/2006/65292.htm> [accessed on June 4, 2019].

¹²⁸ See Z. HONG, *China and India: The Quest for Energy Resources in the Twenty-First Century*, London, Routledge, 2012, p. 9.

¹²⁹ See K. LIEBERTHAL - M. HERBERG, *China's Search for Energy Security: Implications for U.S. Policy*, NBR Analysis XVII, 1, April 2006, pp. 20-21, in <https://understandchinaenergy.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Chinas-Search-for-Energy-Security-Implications-for-U.S.-Policy-NBR-Analysis.pdf> [accessed on June 4, 2019].

I or those of Germany and Japan leading up to World War II.¹³⁰ Washington's response was to articulate the concept of China as a "responsible stakeholder" in the international system, shouldering additional responsibilities. In a 2005 speech at the National Committee on United States-China Relations, Robert Zoellick, then Deputy Secretary of State, responded to Zheng's article by inviting China to become a privileged member, and shaper, of the international system. Simply put, the China of the early XXI century was not the Soviet Union of the late 1940s, as it did not seek to spread radical, anti-American ideologies. Moreover, while not yet democratic, Beijing did not see itself in a twilight conflict against democracy and capitalism around the globe. Most importantly, China did not believe that its future depended on overturning the fundamental order of the international system. As an outcome of that, China was invited to work with the United States to develop diverse sources of energy.¹³¹ Almost concurrently, Hu Jintao delivered a speech at the United Nations General Assembly reaffirming the importance of the UN system as a framework for international security and development and outlined what China stood for. While reiterating that the Dragon favoured the trend towards democratisation of world affairs, the President insisted that his country would pursue its goals peacefully and within the framework of the UN system.¹³² Hu's speech recalled the Sino-Russian joint statement of XXI century world order delivered the previous Spring, on grounds of which the problems facing mankind could only be solved on the basis of universally recognised principles and norms of international law and in a fair and rational world order. Therefore, the international community should thoroughly renounce the mentality of confrontation and alignment, should not pursue the right to monopolise or dominate world affairs, and should not divide countries into a leading camp and a subordinate camp. Hence, the international community was requested to pay close

¹³⁰ See Z. BIJIAN, *China's Peaceful Rise to Great Power Status*, in «Foreign Affairs», LXXXIV, 5, September-October 2005, p. 22.

¹³¹ See R.B. ZOELLICK, *Remarks to National Committee on U.S.-China Relations: Whither China - From Membership to Responsibility?*, September 21, 2005, in <https://2001-2009.state.gov/s/d/former/zoellick/rem/53682.htm> [accessed on June 5, 2019].

¹³² See HU JINTAO, *Statement at the United Nations Summit: Build towards a Harmonious World of Lasting Peace and Common Prosperity*, September 15, 2005, in <https://www.un.org/webcast/summit2005/statements15/china050915eng.pdf> [accessed on June 5, 2019].

attention to the issue of eliminating the gap in the development levels of developing and developed countries.¹³³

To tell the truth, in those days rather an alarming view of the SCO was surfacing in the United States, that is the one regarding the Organisation as a strategic challenger to Washington and NATO military presence in Central Asia. This concept gained currency in July 2005, when, at the SCO annual summit in Astana, a communiqué was issued, declaring that U.S. military bases in Central Asia had served their initial purpose to stabilise Afghanistan and should be placed on a timetable for withdrawal.¹³⁴ Just a few days later, the government of Uzbekistan issued an eviction notice for US forces to be completely withdrawn from the Karshi-Khanabad facility by November 2005. Among academics, the SCO Astana statement and K2 eviction were held up as examples of “soft-balancing” against the United States. Robert Pape defined soft-balancing as «[...] actions that do not directly challenge US military preponderance but that use non military tools to delay, frustrate and undermine aggressive unilateral US policies».¹³⁵ On the contrary, Alexander Cooley states that the hostile SCO reaction to US military presence in Uzbekistan was the culmination of regional concern that the West was planning more “Coloured Revolutions” in Central Asia, intending to overthrow regimes under the guise of promoting democracy. The collapse of Askar Akayev’s regime in Kyrgyzstan’s “Tulip Revolution” in March 2005 had sent shock waves across the region and marked the first regime change in Central Asia since its independence. Russia was convinced that these regime changes were directed against Moscow and were intended to bring pro-Western governments to power; China was concerned that such democratising forces might spill over and destabilise its Western province of Xinjiang. Central Asian leaders believed they might also become targets.¹³⁶

¹³³ See *Full Text of China-Russia Joint Statement on 21st Century World Order*, July 1, 2005, in <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1436001/posts> [accessed on June 5, 2019].

¹³⁴ See *Declaration by the Heads of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, July 5, 2005, in eng.sectsc.org/load/197543/ [accessed on June 5, 2019].

¹³⁵ See R.A. PAPE, *Soft Balancing against the United States*, in «International Security», XXX, 1, Summer 2005, p. 10.

¹³⁶ See A. COOLEY, *Russia and the Recent Evolution of the SCO: Issues and Challenges for U.S. Policy*, in T. COLTON - T. FRYE - R. LEGVOLD, eds., *The Policy World Meets Academia: Designing U.S. Policy toward Russia*, Cambridge, MA, The American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2010, p. 10.

From the point of view of the Americans, instead, before 2005 Congressional Research reports on Central Asia had just mentioned the SCO in few words. According to Zhao Weiming, there were several reasons for that: first of all, when the SCO was established, the United States' national power was vigorous and the Bush Administration was quite confident of American predominance. Then, at that time the economic situation of Russia was at low tide. Moreover, at first the SCO was focused on internal questions. Finally, due to Sino-Russian rivalry, Washington thought that the two Powers would never work together against the US.¹³⁷ After the SCO Astana summit, the mainstream view was that the United States should establish a positive dialogue with the SCO, in order to prevent the Organisation from becoming a tool in Russian and Chinese hands to dominate Central Asia, especially bearing in mind that US application to achieve observer status had been rejected, while that of Iran had been accepted.¹³⁸ Therefore, July 2005 was a turning point for American strategists, as the SCO grew importance while it was being believed to pose a threat to US national interests. In particular, Russia and China were blamed of having played a key role in pushing Central Asian countries to close their military bases to American troops. At the same time, the Organisation had acquired the goal to provide an effective forum to coordinate common efforts to prevent Washington from interfering in their domestic affairs.¹³⁹ Within such a scenario, the United States National Security Strategy of 2006 stated that it was necessary to work closely with Russia on strategic issues of common interest and to manage questions on which there were differing interests. The point was that Russia had great influence not only in Europe and its own immediate neighbourhood, but also in many other regions of vital interest to Washington. Hence, the Kremlin was supposed to be encouraged to respect the values of freedom and democracy at home and not to impede the cause of freedom and democracy in other areas. Unfortunately, we can read in the document, recent trends were pointing towards a diminishing commitment to democratic freedoms and institutions. Instead, as a

¹³⁷ See Z. WEIMING, *Relations between the SCO and United States*, in FREDHOLM, ed., *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Eurasian Geopolitics*, cit., p. 119.

¹³⁸ See Y. HONGXI, *The Evolution of the U.S. Attitude towards the SCO*, *ibid.*, p. 133.

¹³⁹ See *Problems in Central Asian Security: Testimony of Dr. Stephen Blank US Army War College Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013 to the Subcommittee on Central Asia, Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, December 15, 2009, in <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/BlankTestimony091215a1.pdf> [accessed on June 6, 2019].

responsible stakeholder China was called to fulfilling its obligations and works with the United States and others. The Bush Administration encouraged Beijing to continue down the road of reform and openness towards liberty, stability, and prosperity. Despite this, Chinese leaders were being accused of continuing China's military expansion in a non-transparent way, and acting as if they could somehow "lock up" energy supplies around the world or seek to direct markets rather than opening them up.¹⁴⁰

As it was easy to predict, such words about democracy and human rights were interpreted in a completely different way in the Eastern capitals. Just a month after the publication of the afore mentioned document, the President of the United States met his Chinese colleague, who promptly responded to reporters asking him when China would become a democracy with free elections: «I don't know, what do you mean by democracy? What I can tell you is that we've always believed in China that if there is no democracy, there will be no modernisation, [...] In the future, we will, in the light of China's own national conditions and the will of the Chinese people, continue to move ahead the political restructuring and to develop a socialist democracy». ¹⁴¹ Engagement without considering rightful Chinese concerns and interests could be interpreted by the Chinese as a comprehensive containment strategy. Hence, on one hand the United States aimed at encouraging China towards participation in the open, global, market-based economic order; on the other hand, China's concerns over political stability, national unity, and State sovereignty had to be recognised and respected.¹⁴²

Conclusions

China's soft power was emphasised by Joshua Kurlantzick, who spoke about the dangers for the United States of Beijing's newfound diplomatic skills. He saw China vying with the United States for hegemony not just regionally, but globally: «China may become the

¹⁴⁰ See *The National Security Strategy of the United States of the America*, March 2006, in <http://media.leeds.ac.uk/papers/pmt/exhibits/2628/nss2006.pdf> [accessed on June 6, 2019].

¹⁴¹ *Remarks Following a Meeting with President Hu Jintao of China and an Exchange with Reporters*, April 20, 2006, in PPPUS, George W. Bush, 2006, Book I, pp. 754-758, in <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-2006-book1/html/PPP-2006-book1-doc-pg754.htm> [accessed on June 6, 2019].

¹⁴² See Z. ZHU, *Us-China Relations in the 21st Century: Power Transition and Peace*, London-New York, NY, Routledge, 2006, pp. 176-177.

first nation since the fall of the Soviet Union that could seriously challenge the United States for control of the international system».¹⁴³ In late 2005, the American commentator Charles Krauthammer adopted a similar zero-sum perspective by viewing even the prospect of China's diplomatic success in promoting North Korean denuclearisation as potentially bad for the United States. Beijing would gain in relative power terms vis-à-vis the United States, marking China's emergence from an economic and demographic dynamo to a major actor on the world stage.¹⁴⁴ To tell the truth, the Americans were not the only ones worried about the emergence of China. As an evidence of this, Putin gave an interview saying that the overall positive picture of trade and economic cooperation with China was not all perfect. Russian exports of machinery and equipment to China, for example, had almost halved in 2005, but at the same time there had been a steady rise of goods flowing from China to Russia.¹⁴⁵

Actually, public opinion in the United States thought that also in Russia the situation of democracy and human rights was getting worse. Nonetheless, cooperation with the Kremlin was always regarded as a mutual interest on issues like counter-terrorism and counter-proliferation.¹⁴⁶ To tell the truth, we realise how diplomatic Bush was when dealing with the question of democracy in Russia, when he said that he understood there would be a Russian-style, different from the line followed in the United States.¹⁴⁷ On the question of democratic principles, a real watershed was the hearing of Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher before the Congress Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe. In fact, what worried the Commission most was perhaps the implications of the SCO for democratisation and human rights in Central Asia, as the organisation had

¹⁴³ J. KURLANTZICK, *How China is Changing Global Diplomacy: Cultural Revolution*, in «New Republic», June 27, 2005, in <http://databank.isranet.org/article.asp?article=1084> [accessed on June 7, 2019].

¹⁴⁴ See C. KRAUTHAMMER, *China's Moment*, in «Washington Post», September 23, 2005, quoted in T.J. CHRISTENSEN, *Fostering Stability or Creating a Monster? The Rise of China and U.S. Policy toward East Asia*, in «International Security», XXXI, Summer 2006, 1, p. 100.

¹⁴⁵ See *Written Interview Given by President Vladimir Putin to Chinese News Agency Xinhua*, March 20, 2006, in <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23492> [accessed on June 7, 2019].

¹⁴⁶ See *Press Briefing by National Security Advisor Steve Hadley on the President's Trip to Russia and Germany*, July 10, 2006, in <https://2001-2009.state.gov/e/eeb/rls/rm/2006/68815.htm> [accessed on June 8, 2019].

¹⁴⁷ See *The President's News Conference with President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia in Strelina, Russia*, July 15, 2006, in PPPUS, George W. Bush, 2006, Book II, pp. 1394-1401, in <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-2006-book2/html/PPP-2006-book2-doc-pg1394-2.htm> [accessed on June 7, 2019].

vocally opposed the exportation of democracy. A further rise in SCO influence, according to the report, could only encourage the governments of Central Asia in more repressive and less reformist policies. Such a situation was contrary to United States interests, oriented to the transition of the Central Asian countries to democracy and market economies. Long-term stability was supposed to come from a process of democratic change, and Washington had to help the countries of the area develop their own democracies and economies. The Executive therefore believed that NATO played an important role in maintaining and strengthening relations, both among the Central Asian nations and between them and the outside world. In particular, China was said to pursue its interests in the region without asking any questions about democracy and human rights, accepting to deal with all sorts of regimes.¹⁴⁸ Having said that, Stephen Blank underlined that the great game in Asia was not just about geostrategic or energy access, but also about political and ideological values, such as democratisation. Though the United States was not trying to overthrow governments in the area, the opposite was widely believed, thus allowing Beijing and Moscow ample scope to influence governments very concerned about their own internal and external security. From such a negative point of view, it was possible to see that there was an identity in Russo-Chinese approaches to world politics, which led them to try and drive the SCO in ways against American foreign policy objectives. At the same time, China viewed the American military and ideological presence in Central Asia as a source of strategic encirclement and had tried very hard to put pressure on both Kyrgyzstan and supported Uzbekistan in persuading them to push the Americans out. Furthermore, the minute US troops had been removed from the scene in Uzbekistan, Beijing had made inquiries as to whether or not it could move into Karshi-Khanabad, and the Russians had promptly stopped it, thus showing that the Sino-Russian rivalry in Central Asia still existed. There were also differences between them as to where the SCO was going to go. Russia flirted with the idea of it being a military alliance, while

¹⁴⁸ See *Statement of Hon. Richard Boucher, Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, in The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Is it Undermining US Interests in Central Asia?: Hearing before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, One Hundred Ninth Congress, September 26, 2006, Washington, D.C., US Government Printing Office, 2008, in <https://www.csce.gov/sites/helsinkicommission.house.gov/files/The%20Shanghai%20Cooperation%20Organization%20Is%20it%20Undermining%20U.S.%20Interests%20in%20Central%20Asia.pdf> [accessed on June 7, 2009].*

the Chinese had come out openly against such a project. In a few words, the SCO was seen as a work in progress and Blank said it was an organisation whose orientation was to a significant degree anti-American, but showing very little capability of developing into an anti-NATO or an anti-OSCE.¹⁴⁹

If we analyse the other point of view, China's National Defence of 2006 stated that the United States was accelerating military deployment to enhance its capability in the Asia-Pacific region, strengthening the alliance with Japan in pursuit of operational integration. In particular, what Chinese authorities stressed was the fact that Japan's military posture was becoming more external-oriented. Moreover, though the United States had reiterated that it would adhere to the "one China" policy, it continued to sell advanced weapons to Taiwan.¹⁵⁰ A few months previously, Hu Jintao had made a speech calling for a "harmonious society" among SCO members and proposing: a) long-term treaties of good neighbourhood, friendship and cooperation; b) stronger working level partnerships; c) human and cultural exchanges; d) openness and cooperation for the purpose of world peace.¹⁵¹ As concerned the Russians, on February 10, 2007, at the Munich Conference on Security Policy Vladimir Putin spoke about the importance of a multi-polar world. The President's words expressed Russian disappointment at what the United States had been developed since the 1990s. In particular, he accused the White House of having practically set up a world «[...] in which there is one master, one sovereign. [...] And this certainly has nothing in common with democracy. [...] One state and, of course, first and foremost the United States, has overstepped its national borders in every way». What the Russian President proposed, instead, was exactly the opposite, that is a multi-polar world, where a sort of balance of power could have acted as a mediator among different interests. What Putin showed anger and concern about was the question of NATO enlargement, which three years previously had included the Baltic States of Latvia,

¹⁴⁹ See *Statement of Dr. Stephen Blank, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ See *China's National Defense in 2006*, issued by the Information Office of the State Council People's Republic of China, December 29, 2006, in <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/china/doctrine/wp2006.html#2> [accessed on June 9, 2019].

¹⁵¹ See M. MASUDA, *China's SCO Policy in the Regional Security Architecture*, pp. 5-6, in <https://www.tkfd.or.jp/en/> [accessed on May 24, 2019].

Estonia and Lithuania, wondering why it was necessary to put military infrastructures on Russian borders.¹⁵²

What the Bush Administration openly claimed was the right for the United States, as a global Power, to pursue normal relationships in Central Asia, particularly when dealing with energy supplies, or on issues of terrorism, or considering American interests in the democratic development of countries around the world.¹⁵³ On an important question such as Sino-Russian relations within the SCO frame, instead, Stephen Aris reminded that Moscow was not so enthusiastic about Chinese interest in reducing trade barriers, with the ultimate goal to achieve a common market area. The Russian government, in fact, feared cheap Chinese goods would flood both Russian and Central Asian economies.¹⁵⁴ As concerned free market, President Bush viewed the growth of China as an opportunity to work with, as a growing middle class in China was fine for US exporters. Therefore, the Americans were working with Hu Jintao to convince him to help convert his economy from one of savers into one of consumers.¹⁵⁵ Perhaps the most significant speech on the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation was the one given by Deputy Assistant Secretary Evan A. Feigenbaum on September 6, 2007. Put it in a sharply way, what exactly was the relationship between two huge continental Powers, Russia and China, and the SCO smaller Central Asian members? And what was even more important: was the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation directed against the United States? These were the questions the Bush Administration was asking itself quite frequently. To be candid, the only certain thing was that the Americans put Central Asian matters at the centre of their own approach to that part of the world. Indeed, they also sought to work with Russia and China, with

¹⁵² See V. PUTIN, *Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy*, February 10, 2007, in <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034> [accessed on June 7, 2019].

¹⁵³ See *Secretary Condoleezza Rice: Press Roundtable in Moscow, Russia*, May 15, 2007, in <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2007/may/84922.htm> [accessed on June 9, 2019].

¹⁵⁴ See S. ARIS, *Russian-Chinese Relations through the lens of the SCO*, in *Russie.Nei. Visions* No. 34, Paris, Russia/NIS Center, September 2008, p. 13, available in https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/Ifri_RNV_Aris_SCO_Eng.pdf [accessed on June 9, 2019].

¹⁵⁵ See *Roundtable Interview of the President by Foreign Media Print*, August 30, 2007, in <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/08/20070831.html> [accessed on June 9, 2019].

the aim to have US interests, role and presence respected. Finally, the White House did not want Iranian participation in the SCO, even as an observer.¹⁵⁶

Actually, by reading Hu Jintao's speeches, we can easily figure out how the relationship between China and Russia was maybe closer than the Americans thought or hoped. As an evidence of this, Hu seemed to repeat what Putin had affirmed in Munich, when he said that the way towards a multi-polar world was irreversible and the international balance of power was changing in favour of the maintenance of world peace. At the same time, he specified, hegemonism and power politics still existed, posing difficulties and challenges to world peace and development. We can say that Chinese leaders had been coherent during the years, by keeping on quoting the same principle of democracy in international relations, which meant respect for national sovereignty, security, and any political system: «We respect the right of the people of all countries to independently choose their own development path. We will never interfere in the internal affairs of other countries or impose our own will on them [...] China opposes all forms of hegemonism and power politics and will never seek hegemony or engage in expansion».¹⁵⁷ As we can see, while on trade and financial matters it was not so difficult to find common ground, the question became much harder when dealing with principles and ideology. The geopolitical game taking place on the international chess board did not allow compromises on universal values such as democracy, equality among countries, and human rights. Obviously, no one could ignore a massive energy supplier like Russia, and above all a practically never ending market like the Chinese one. Differences emerged on economic issues as well, and this was object of interesting reflections by Henry Kissinger, with which we can conclude this work. China's economic rise and growing US-China economic interdependence set up a sort of daily controversy, writes the former Secretary of State, with American frustrations and Chinese suspicions about American intentions. As concerned currency policies, in fact, in the American viewed the low value

¹⁵⁶ See E.A. FEIGENBAUM, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Future of Central Asia*, September 6, 2007, in <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rm/2007/91858.htm> [accessed on June 9, 2019].

¹⁵⁷ *Full Text of Hu Jintao's Report at 17th Party Congress: Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive for New Victories in Building a moderately Prosperous Society in all*, October 15, 2007, in http://www.csc.it/upload/doc/full_text_of_hu_jintaos_report_at_17th_party_congress_qiushi_journal.pdf [accessed on June 11, 2019].

of the Renminbi as currency manipulation favouring Chinese companies and contributing to the loss of American jobs. On the other hand, Beijing said that the pursuit of a currency policy favouring domestic manufacturers was rather an expression of China's need for political stability.¹⁵⁸ Kissinger's opinion was that the United States treated economic issues from the point of view of the requirements of global growth, while China considered mainly the political implications, both domestic and international.¹⁵⁹ The point was that China's neighbours were being inevitably drawn into its orbit, while Asian countries suspicious of Chinese intentions saw Washington as a natural ally, thus augmenting tensions in the area. In such a context, the United States ended up appearing the loser, whose wealth and influence were being spent on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and whose economic troubles had been eroded in a more dynamic Asia.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ «There is no basis for a drastic appreciation of the renminbi», said Premier Wen Jiabao in 2010, «You don't know how many Chinese companies would go bankrupt». D. BARBOZA, *Chinese Leader Fields Executives' Questions*, September 22, 2010, in <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/23/business/23yuan.html> [accessed on June 11, 2019].

¹⁵⁹ See H.A. KISSINGER, *On China*, London, Allen Lane, 2011, pp. 494-495.

¹⁶⁰ See E. WONG, *China's Disputes in Asia Buttress Influence of U.S.*, September 22, 2010, in <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/23/world/asia/23china.html?action=click&contentCollection=Business%20Day&module=RelatedCoverage®ion=EndOfArticle&pgtype=article> [accessed on June 11, 2019].