

## Russia Plus China: Removing The US Superpower From Central Asia?\*

By Alexander G. Larin \*\*

*According to a new conception developed in the US and Russia, the advanced countries such as these two powers and probably China may unite in order to modernize (to compel to modernize, if necessary) the “failed” countries - origins of world instability - including those in the Central Asia. Here Russia’s geographic location is a valuable “international resource” for her (for Russia). The idea of the concept is that Russia should assist to the US as a junior partner and her (Russia’s) efforts will be paid for.*

*I have strong doubts that this concept can be fruitful for Russia: US’ need of Russian help in the CA is not so sharp; US’ strategy easily permits violation of the state’s sovereignty for the sake of stability and democracy while Russia does not endorse it; Russia has never got any real “payments” for its concessions to the US. Actually the main Russian and American interests in the CA are contrary to each other, their relations are a typical case of competing for regional influence.*

*American presence is perceived as a growing threat in Beijing too. This raises an old question of possibility of a certain kind of “alliance”*

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\* This article is translated from Russian by Tamara Karganova.

\*\* Dr. Larin is a fellow of the RAS Institute of Far Eastern Studies, Moscow. Dr. Larin is a PhD of Institute of Oriental Studies, Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Moscow. Dr. Larin’s field of studies are Russian - Chinese relations - history and present state, including the Chinese in Russia; China’s foreign policy; Taiwan problem and contemporary Taiwan; Russia’s international relations.

*between Russia and China, now - within regional framework. But the alliance is impossible, as before, though divergences between the two in the CA are mild. One local but crucial reasons for this conclusion is that the countries of the CA welcome US' presence. Uzbekistan is a single and, I guess, temporary exception. But Beijing's position is noteworthy: Russia historically and traditionally should occupy leading position in the region and China is willing to support Russia and act together, especially within the Shanghai Organization of Cooperation. Beijing is not planning to establish its own bases.*

*Meanwhile China is strengthening gradually its positions upon the regional matters. One can foresee the reconstruction of the "failed" states not according to the American expert's ideas of democracy but according to the Chinese model of gradual reforming. Or, at least, according to the needs of China's economy.*

*As for Russia it must by no means turn into junior partner of any great power. Russia must conduct its own independent and constructive policy in the world.*

**Key words: Strategic Triangle, Central Asia, Russia-China-US Relations, Democratization, Shanghai Organization of Cooperation**

In their Declaration of July 5, 2005, members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization articulated their wish for participants of the anti-terrorist coalition to define the end-terms for temporary use of infrastructure facilities and for presence of armed contingents in the territories of SOC member-states. Quite certainly, this advise was addressed to the United States.

On July 29, Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov demanded that the US should withdraw its armed forces from the Khanabad base within 180 days. One month earlier, Presidents Putin and Karimov signed the memorandum on Russian military and military-technical assistance to Uzbekistan, and Moscow gained the right to deploy its army units in the Uzbekistan territory in case of crisis situations.

These and other similar facts evidence both Moscow's and Beijing's intention to eliminate or at least to reduce the US military presence in the post-Soviet part of Central Asia. How far would Russia and China be able to go along the given direction? And, how effective this aspiration for the shared purpose would be in bringing the two countries closer together?

However, let us first see whether Russia has selected a correct strategic course in the given case, while Russia and US both have and work on another model of their mutual relations in Central Asia.

By Russian architects of the alternative model<sup>1</sup>, the so-called "failing" countries, accounting for the greater part of the global community, "are not capable of autonomous development and pose a serious threat to international stability". With Central Asian states placed in the same "failing" ranks, such authors say that in order to find a route

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<sup>1</sup> V.L. Inozemtsev, S. P. Karaganov. "*O mirovom poryadke XXI veka*". [On the World Order of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century], in: *Rossiya v globalnoi politike*, No. 1, January-February 2005 (<http://www.globalsecurity.org>)

from the given dangerous situation, “advanced and most powerful nations must impose the elementary order upon the ‘unfavorable’ states”, by allying for this purpose in some international “center” to be comprised evidently from “the United States, European Union, Japan, Russia, and, maybe, China and India”.

While no outline of state-to-state relations within the “center” is seen in the above sketch of the universal order, the authors – as they did in their earlier publications – do outline Russian-US relations in quite definite terms. So, they say, Washington was the first, who “decided to start – in its own fashion and, of course, in its own interests and according to its own perception – bringing things into order: US launched a sort of modernization process - first and foremost, in countries of Middle East and Central Asia”<sup>2</sup>. As for Russia, “being situated in the very periphery of this vast region and owing to our geopolitical position, she becomes a very important power in terms of causing influence on Washington”<sup>3</sup>. That is how they understand one of Russia’s major foreign-policy resources, especially, in Russia’s relations with the US. By all evidence, they mean that this resource should be used best of all by assisting the US in setting the order and in modernization, and that such job would be paid respectively, as any resource should bring revenues.

On their part, some political scientists in the US draw the more or less similar vector of interaction. For example, Nickolai Zlobin, Director of Russian and Asian program at the defense information center in Washington, argues that the United States, acting on its own, would not be able to cope with many problems, and it would be much more

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<sup>2</sup> Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 12.05.2003 (Dipcourier, No. 8)

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*

comfortable to resolve those on the basis of partnership relations with other countries. In Eurasia, he argues, exactly Russia could and should be such partner.<sup>4</sup>

At first glance, such model looks quite reasonable. Indeed, Russia and US both are interested in preventing outbreaks of terrorism, conflicts and chaos in Central Asia, as well as in consolidation of statehood and development of democratic principles in that region. Western analysts, too, take note of the current Russian-US rapprochement in Central Asia, as none of the two powers is willing to see new conflicts to outburst in the region.<sup>5</sup> Quite probably, the two powers would not hesitate to start cooperating closely, should this be necessary in order to eliminate disorders or to find a compromise in case of aggravated mutual frictions. At the present time, Russia-US relations are quite cool, and their activated cooperation in Central Asia would do well to both powers. However, it seems doubtful that the two parties could build solid, lasting, and strategically important cooperation on the basis of the above-described model.

First, in the last several years the threat that the regional situation would be destabilized by terrorism, separatism, religious extremism and the like non-traditional “evils”, or by state-to-state conflicts reduced tangibly and now is much less overwhelming than before. The turning point is associated with Taliban defeat by the US with support from all concerned countries. For the time being, we see a whole number of

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<sup>4</sup> Nickolai Zlobin. “*Ogranichennyye vozmozhnosti yi vozmozhnyye organichenia*” [Limited Possibilities and Possible Limitations], in: *Rossiia v globalnoi politike*, No. 1, January-February 2005: 112

<sup>5</sup> B. Eikhenbaum. “*Novaya ‘Bolshaya Igra’ v Srednei Azii*” [New ‘Big Game’ in Central Asia]. Eurasian Institute for Economic and Political Research). <http://www.iicas.org>

factors performing the preventive function – such as the US military presence, US military and economic assistance to Central Asian countries, US investments, as well as the ever stronger SCO with its anti-terrorist center, and a number of other regional organizations. The very existence of these structures curbs activities of terrorist and other destructive forces, and serves instrumental in normalization of relations between recently conflicting states. In such circumstances, the less are the above-listed threats, the less will be the reason to develop Russian-US partnership for suppression of the perils.

On the other hand, however, the US, counter to its announced missionary objectives in the region, seems to feel quite indifferent about some sorts of the world evil, which, emanating from Central Asia, seed grave concerns in Russia and in many other countries. In particular, we mean the flow of drugs from Afghanistan. As Tajikistan President Emamali Rakhmonov stated at the SCO summit, after the counter-Taliban campaign the drug traffic in the region grew three times,<sup>6</sup> while some observers assume that the United States is not interested in stopping the transit of Afghan narcotics.

Further on, Russia and the US have substantially different approaches to stabilization, which involves their respective influence on behavior of some or another state. The US strategy easily permits to violate sovereignty of a state suspected in support of terrorism, development of mass destruction weapons or violation of human rights. Russia, on the other hand, treats violation of sovereignty as undermining the fundamentals of international law, which is allowable only in special cases under the UN sanction. By all evidence, the US stands on the point

that exactly the Western-type democratic regimes are the best to provide stability, and seems to be willing to reconstruct the space of the Middle East and Central Asia exactly by the same pattern. As proven by Russia's experience, however, sometimes stability and democracy may not be in concert with one another, and great caution is required for interference in local ethnic, clan or confessional disagreements.

The above examples are sufficient to assert that Russia's geographic, economic, political and military vicinity of the Central Asian region with all of its real and perceived threats, cannot serve the foreign-policy resource that would make Russia a necessary and strategically important partner of the US.

The real essence of Russian-American relations in Central Asia does not invite too much partnership. In fact, the United States pushed Russia away from the dominating positions in the zone of Russia's traditional, natural and strategically important interests. The US itself has settled down in Central Asia 'for a good long while', and withdrawal of US military facilities – counter to predictions by some political observers in Russia – has been postponed indefinitely. The US general objective number one is to strengthen its political influence in the region and thus to have a decisive say in distribution of Central Asian hydrocarbons and other natural resources. Objective number two – “to modernize” the local states – is closely linked with and subordinated to the first one. Indeed, modernization, initiated externally, cannot be qualified as modernization unless it creates favorable climate for foreign business.

The US general objectives and Russia's interests run are targeted in

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<sup>6</sup> Nezavisimaya gazeta, 15.06.2004

different directions. So far, the two rivals just started to compete in the given field and operate, so to say, at distance. However, their implicit fight for the bigger amount of influence in some or another post-Soviet republic has been underway for quite a time already, and has become perfectly explicit in Uzbekistan. On the other hand, just to response to the plans of Western states to build a new pipeline system in Central Asia, Russia has activated her cooperation with the regional partners in production and, especially, transportation of hydrocarbon resources.

US military installations in Central Asian countries extend the arch of NATO bases circumventing Russia in the west and south. This circumstance cannot and should not be neglected.

Chinese political analysts do have enough reason to state that “Strategic balance of big-power forces would be sustained for a certain time; further on, however, their aggravating struggle would cause the gradually growing impacts on the level of security in Central Asia”.<sup>7</sup>

The US expansion is quite visibly wrapped in the well-tested propaganda gift-pack. The label says: “In principle, Washington is quite willing to see Russia as its main strategic partner in Eurasia, from the Caspian Sea through to the Far East”.<sup>8</sup> However, US observers say, Russia, when acting alone, is not capable of securing stability in the given space and in its own area of the war on terror – that is, in Chechnya. Therefore, they conclude, the US has no other choice but to undertake a part of such commitments to the world community. “Should we soon

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<sup>7</sup> *Guoji zhanlue yanjiu*, 2004, No. 2, p. 43

<sup>8</sup> Nickolai Zlobin. “*Ogranichennye vozmozhnosti yi vozmozhnye organichenia*” [Limited Possibilities and Possible Limitations], in: *Rossiia v globalnoi politike*, No. 1, January-February 2005: 107

witness the growing Western activity in the post-Soviet space, this will be generated to a big extent by the growing doubts about Russia's ability to perform the role of a regional broker".<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, Washington claims that its task is not to squeeze Russia away, but rather, on the contrary, "to strengthen her role of an ally in the fight on terror as well as in building the new global system of security and stability".<sup>10</sup>

With such passages, Washington seeks at least to alleviate Moscow's reaction to US infiltration in the zone of Russia's traditional influence. The best option for the United States would be to have partnership with Russia, but the partnership should be 'asymmetric', fitting the weight categories of the two powers, while Russia is expected to trade off her interests and humbly follow the lead of the US policy. Certainly, Washington would do everything to assign and support such role for Russia.

Of course, nobody says such things openly and directly. However, it is being made clear that Washington is not satisfied with Russia's policy, because the latter is perceived as the ever more imperial and would "the ever more often come in contradiction with US interests".<sup>11</sup> Such approach shows nothing else but the intention to make Russia a junior partner of the US.

As for the concrete spheres, in which Russia is advised to undertake "the mission to introduce, to protect and to realize US fundamental interests, which generally do not run counter to her own ones",<sup>12</sup> (this

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Op. cit.: 105

<sup>11</sup> Op. cit.: 107

<sup>12</sup> Op. cit.: 112

“compliance” of interests between the two powers has been discussed above – A.L.), the US party quite graciously leaves the choice of such spheres to Russia. As US Ambassador Vershbow said expressively, “There is the asymmetry in the question as how important Russia is for America and how important America is for Russia. Russia must prove her importance for America”.<sup>13</sup> In reality, the pressure, exerted by the US on Russia in 2004 in order to force her – quite successfully – to sign off 80% of Iraqi debts serves an ample evidence of the future “asymmetric” partnership.

So, what does the US side offer to Russia in exchange for Russia’s at least partial sacrifice of her own interests? Would Washington be more amicable in its decision-making on investments, transfer of advanced technologies, granting of trade benefits, restructuring and sign-off of debts, etc. – that is, would Russia’s most urgent needs be considered and satisfied? Alas, nothing of such kind is offered from Washington, except a rather vague promise “to turn towards Russia”. Therefore, there is no reason for Moscow to count on any generous reward for her concessions.

Elimination of traditional and non-traditional threats plus domestic stabilization in Central Asian countries would service Russia’s interests even better than those of the US. If, for example, Russia and US together undertake some actions against terrorists, a successful outcome would do good to both actors. Exactly such benefit would be deemed as Russia’s prize for her participation, because she would receive no other reward from the US. Such was the case after the operation in Afghanistan, and such would be the case in future. There is nothing strange in the given arrangement, and it would be strange to expect that the desired ‘golden

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<sup>13</sup> [Nezavisimaya gazeta](#), 08.04.2002

rain' would fall on Russia from the West for her partnership with the US in Central Asian "region of instability" or elsewhere.

At this point, we would see the end of Russia's hypothetical if any resource for her relations with the United States. Much is said these days about Russia's potential allegedly laid in her middle position between the two clusters – that is, between prosperity and instability. However, such position is neither a resource nor a trump card. It is a buffer position, and buffer always undertakes the tremors emanating from the zone of instability. The buffer would receive support from the rears only if/when those in the rears feel the danger of a blow that would destroy the buffer and destroy themselves. Around Russia, no such situation is evident now or is expected to take shape in the foreseeable future.

The US advent in Central Asia is seen as a threat not only in Moscow, but in Beijing, too. The reason is obvious – the long efforts, taken by the PRC in order to build a friendly space around its borders, now have quite questionable chances for success. Related to production and testing of missiles and nuclear weapons, the strategic facilities in Xinjiang have become more vulnerable, while new chances appear for foreign interference in ethnic relations within the same province. Commenting on US actions in Central Asia, Chinese experts note: "It was only for a short term that in the US security strategy and foreign policy the priority was given to war on terror. The main task of the American strategy is 'to deter' and 'to encircle' China".<sup>14</sup>

In the broader context, the US policy is seen in the PRC as realization

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<sup>14</sup> Dangjin Zhong "Ya da guo zhengzhi: chu zi Zhongguo shi jiao de pinggu". [Current Policy of Great Powers in Central Asia: A View From China], in: Guoji jingji pinglun, 2003, No. 7-8: 64

of Bush Doctrine, aiming at “US global domination to be reached through the use of military and other force”.<sup>15</sup> Today, Beijing is not at all delighted by the current stand of Washington in the counter-terrorist struggle: “China, manifesting its abidance by principles, extended maximal assistance and support to the United States in the war on terror”, note political scientists in the PRC. “However, the US does not at all intend to reciprocate swiftly. Apart from placing the ‘East Turkestan’ in the list of terrorist organizations, the US assistance to China appears very insignificant”.<sup>16</sup>

All political-science publications in the PRC unanimously interpret the US strategy in Central Asia and in Asia at large as targeted against China. There is no discord of assessments – Chinese are free from the “junior partner” syndrome and do not cherish illusions that the US would be more generous if China becomes its “handy” partner in the unstable area of Central Asia or elsewhere. China already feels sufficiently strong to make the US reckon China, while the longed-for foreign capitals are attracted successfully by the favorable investment climate.

US intentions in the energy sphere, too, are not quite in line with China’s plans. The would-be largest consumer of energy resources in the region, China sees the US as a potential rival seeking to turn the flow of hydrocarbons to the West.

Also, Beijing cannot but disapprove the US course to democratization of Central Asian government regimes – that is, to their pro-US reorientation in international affairs.

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<sup>15</sup> China Daily. 01.11.2005

<sup>16</sup> Guoji wenti yanjiu, 2005, No. 2: 17

Offensively occupying the political, economic and force space, where Russia and China would like to have their playground, the US quite naturally provokes them to organize resilience against American expansion. Professed in Washington, the dogmatic and Messianic approach to Western-style reconstruction of authoritarian regimes actually plays into hands of Moscow and Beijing, because such reconstruction would impinge on the interests of regionally dominating political forces and incite them against the United States. The events of 2005 in Andizhan (Uzbekistan) served an ample case in point. As known, in Andizhan disorders, where hundreds of people were killed, the US took the position, which was quite unfavorable and even dangerous for President Karimov – Washington demanded an independent investigation and later on acted against return of refugees into Karimov's domain. In response, the Uzbek side blamed the US Embassy for instigation of rebels, while Uzbekistan President demanded withdrawal of US troops. In that conflict, Tashkent gained support on the part of SCO member-states – especially, from Russia that replaced US as a military partner of Uzbekistan.

The US defeat in Uzbekistan reveals another factor, once overlooked in Washington: owing to the higher oil prices and additional revenues, Russia has gained the bigger opportunities to operate in the post-Soviet space more intensively. The proofs can be found, for example, in the current consolidation of Russia-Kyrgyzstan armed group and in growing supplies of Russian weaponry to Kyrgyzstan. Also, it seems appropriate to refer to the statement by Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who spoke of the need to use oil, gas and electric energy as diplomatic

resources in relations with the neighbor CIS countries.<sup>17</sup> By all evidence, to supplement the given circumstance, some CIS countries now hope for the more substantial assistance on the part of China.

Thus, Tashkent's break with Washington has been caused by defects of the US policy and activation of Russian policy in Central Asia.

All these factors, however, are not weighty enough to undermine the US military presence in the region. First, the reserves that Russia and China can allocate for counter-US action in Central Asia are quite limited. The perimeter of Russia's confrontation with her neighbors in the post-Soviet space is too long, while China, on its part, does not feel like undertaking the main burden in standing counter the US either in Central Asia or elsewhere.

Second, leaders of Central Asian countries (unless Americans touch them on the raw) for quite understandable economic considerations sense the US presence quite positively. Their joint call on the SCO behalf to set the schedule for withdrawal of US troops is motivated by the intention to grip the chance and to raise stakes in their bargain with the US. In the given case, Washington is not unwilling to pay – the higher rent revenues for the Manas military base, plus 200 million USD as financial aid were promised to Kyrgyzstan, and in exchange the Kyrgyz government did not withhold its consent for enlargement of the same base.<sup>18</sup> By experts' forecasts, the US military presence in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan may grow, as after withdrawal of its troops from Iraq, scheduled for 2006, the US would be able to pay bigger attention to

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<sup>17</sup> Nezavisimaya gazeta, 13.10.2005

<sup>18</sup> Nezavisimaya gazeta, 28.07.2005

Central Asia.

So, should the US choose to postpone infiltration of democratic values in the given region to the better time and proceed to a more pragmatic policy without inciting the local ruling elites against itself, then its positions in Central Asia would become invulnerable for many years ahead.

Another question: Can it happen in the course of lasting although not too fierce rivalry with the US that the Russian-Chinese cooperation would be featured by a sort of alliance, let it be informal and placed within the regional limits?

Such prospect does not appear realistic. The formula 'Russia Plus China Versus US' would be realized only in a latent form of a vague trend – although, with sporadic fountains of rivalry springing around some major economic projects – for example, such as oil pipeline construction. The foregoing can be explained by the following factors.

First, the Russia-China alliance may destroy their beloved offspring named SCO – the more so that no borders between the zones of influence are visible in Central Asia. The region is an area of coexistence for such organizations as SCO, CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization), EurasEC (Eurasian Economic Cooperation, now merging with Central Asian Cooperation Organization), and, on the other part – Partnership for Peace and NATO, which allotted a vast “zone of responsibility” for itself. The same states of Central Asia are members in organizations on both sides and receive assistance from both parts. Political or economic influence of Russia prevails in some states and of the United States in other ones, but none of those feels committed to lean to one pole only. By

all evidence, such situation would last for quite a time.

Second, some of Russia's and China's interests are not in perfect harmony, although such disconcert does not go to the level of sharp contradictions.

China's strategy in Central Asia and within SCO has the following objectives:

- *in the economic sphere*: to get access to raw materials as well as to fuel and energy resources of the region and to promote its commodities on the regional markets;
- *in security sphere*: to eradicate or at least to minimize separatism and other current threats; to counter the possible growth of US political and military presence in the vicinity of north-western borders of the PRC;
- *as a precondition for, and concomitantly as an implication of the above-listed objective* – to strengthen China's political influence.

Central Asian countries welcome China and see the latter as a new rich partner, potential investor and sponsor of their development. Apart from all other benefits, arrival of such partner would consolidate their positions in the dialogue with Russia. The US presence is treated in Central Asia in similar terms.

No doubt that China, having appeared in the zone of Russia's traditional interests and welcomed there by the new states, would operate as their alternative partner, which thus would deprive Russia of her monopoly position and weaken her political as well as economic status. For example, construction of the oil pipeline from Kazakhstan to China would reduce Kazakhstan's dependence on transit of its oil to Russia.

Some observers already discuss possibilities for transformation of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan into the zone of China's influence. By the way, once in while some Chinese academics argue in press that Russia "seeks to preserve and expand her control and influence in the southern belt of the CIS, and such intention bears certain features of expansionism".<sup>19</sup>

On their part, Russian pro-US-minded politicians readily discuss confrontation of Russia's and China's interests in Central Asia. In their loudly voiced view, Moscow should unite with Washington in order not to let Chinese domination in Central Asia. "For Americans, we can be junior partners, but for China – only junior vassals", argues one of such authors.<sup>20</sup>

In reality, however, everybody sees clearly that the current differences between Moscow and Beijing with regard to Central Asia are not at all irreconcilable. In their discussions with Russian colleagues, Chinese experts say bluntly that China intends to operate in Central Asia in no other way but together with Russia and with SCO. China, they say, wants to see consolidation of Russia's economic, political and security positions in the region. Counter to the rumors circulating in mass media, China neither intends to build its own military bases in Central Asia, nor shows any special interest in deployment of collectively held facilities.

In development of Russia-China cooperation, special role is provided for SCO, and there are serious grounds for such assignment. Within SCO, however, each member-state has its own interests, and the benefits coming from membership cannot be at all times the same and equal for everybody. It is believed widely that establishment of SCO

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<sup>19</sup> Op.cit.: 62

<sup>20</sup> Nezavisimaya gazeta, 13.07.2005

turned out more beneficial for China than for Russia. Indeed, while Russia had been enjoying broad ties and influence in Central Asia since the long time ago, for China the SCO served the ever first reliable instrument to assert its permanent presence in the given region. Therefore, China is so proud with its initiator role in foundation of SCO, and announces the latter as innovative phenomena in the history of China's foreign policy as well as in the history of international relations in Central Asia. Step by step, China gradually moves forward to playing the role of the leader and the main center of gravitation within SCO. In this context, China's recent offer to lend 1 billion USD to the former Soviet republics can be qualified as a quite meaningful overture.

With all its broad potential, SCO has not yet become an arena of Russia-China cooperation. For example, so far Russia cannot accept China's grand proposal on setting the free-trade regime within the framework of SCO. Countering the drug traffic is a potentially important avenue of cooperation that has become most timely as Russian border-guard units withdrew from Tajikistan and thus its border with Afghanistan is left unprotected.

In life of Central Asia, too, SOC plays a limited role so far. Its main function is to serve a preventive or prophylactic instrument against terrorism and other modern threats in the region. (This merit should be divided between SCO and United States). While performance of the given function requires certain efforts to be taken by SCO members, there is no need for them to build up such efforts further on. As far as the economic sphere is concerned, a number of fundamental factors stand in the way of progressive cooperation – such as different interests of SCO member-countries, insufficiency of infrastructure facilities in the region,

need in big investments, etc. Therefore, SCO sometimes is understated as a 'discussion club'. Neither China nor other member-countries intend at all to squeeze their Central Asian policy within the framework of SCO, as they actively develop bilateral ties with one another and participate in other international organizations. Events in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan did not require any interference on the part of SCO, and this circumstance serves an extra evidence of its modest role in the regional life.

In future, however, significance of SCO would grow – first and foremost, through activation of the economic component. Hence, China will become the increasingly weighty factor in Central Asian affairs, and the Chinese model of economic reforms will probably gain the even wider popularity.

What impact will SCO strengthening cause to Russia's and China's relations with the United States? Today, when SCO does not haste to satisfy the US request to be admitted in the observer capacity, it is difficult to answer this question. However, apart from rivalry, certain imperatives of cooperation, too, are evident within the framework of the Big Triangle because interaction among the three powers appears necessary as a precondition for enhancement of stability in Central Asia – first, for competition among the Big Three to be peaceful and civilized; and, second, in order to prevent conflagration of conflicts, terrorist acts and other similar evils lingering in the region. The three powers could also cooperate in planning and realization of social and humanitarian actions as well as in conducting joint military exercises. Of course, all such prospects might become a reality only with active co-participation of other states in the region.