

## Iran and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Counter-Hegemony as Common Purpose

Ali G. Dizboni, Royal Military College of Canada\*

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was established in June 2001 by the People's Republic of China, the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Mongolia, India, Pakistan, and the Islamic Republic of Iran have subsequently obtained observer status in the organization. The creation of the SCO triggered various reactions worldwide, which ranged from indifference, suspicion, to/and demands for cooperation. Iran was quick to seize SCO's potential and to relinquish the official position of non-alignment it has held since 1979 and to apply for full membership in the SCO on March 24, 2008. This article analyzes the rationale for the shift from the Islamic Republic of Iran's (IRI) traditional policy of non-alignment to seek full membership in SCO. While focusing on IRI, the article argues that the changes in US global hegemony have created opportunities for the three key actors of Iran, Russia, and China to consolidate their regional influence and to curb US hegemony in Central Asia.

### Introduction

The Shanghai Five was founded once Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan signed the *Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions* in 1996. The official purpose of this organization was to increase collaborative efforts between member states and reduce their respective military border deployment. The Shanghai Five evolved into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) when the five members and Uzbekistan signed the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism on June 15, 2001. Iran was granted observer status in the SCO in 2005.

The SCO is an economic and politically influential organization for a plethora of reasons. First, full member and observer states in the SCO possess 40% of the world population. Second, four of its members are nuclear powers and others hold some of the largest oil and gas reserves in the world. Third, the SCO acts as a forum to pursue a new vision of Asian regional cooperation with institutionalized economic and security objectives. These three factors have ushered in a new era of opportunities and constraints for other regional and international players.

Some balance of power theorists believe a militarily strong SCO creates constraints on US interests and influence in central Asia (Beehner and Bhattacharji, 2008). Constraints on United States' influence can be evidenced by the SCO's denial of US application for observer status. This impedes the ability of Washington to affect SCO decision-making processes. For example, SCO urged the U.S. to set a timetable for pulling out its troops from SCO member states. Additionally, Uzbekistan's request for the U.S. to close its airbase in Karshi-Khanabad (south-eastern Uzbekistan) was fully supported by the organization. Thus, many believe the SCO is emerging as a new Euro-Asian power bloc without US interference (Perelman, 2005).

Iran has altered its foreign policy position of neutrality to pursue benefits from extensive security-economic cooperation between itself and SCO nation-states. Furthermore, Iranian government officials continue to aggressively pursue and openly advocate for full membership in the SCO. These developments provide the background for the following research question: This article analyzes the rationale for the shift from the Islamic Republic of Iran's (IRI) traditional policy of non-alignment to seek full membership in SCO. While focusing on IRI, the article argues that the changes in US global hegemony have created opportunities for the three key actors of Iran, Russia, and China to consolidate their regional influence and to curb US hegemony in Central Asia.

First, we shall focus on the concept of 'hegemony' and the fundamental changes in the global hegemony of the United States since World War II. Second, we shall discuss structural opportunities that made it possible for SCO to emerge. Third, we shall examine how Iran perceives its advantages from shifting its position vis-à-vis the international and regional (Middle Eastern and Central Asian) systems it belongs to.

## **Hegemony in the International System**

In general, foreign policy theories are classified into two categories: behavioral and systemic (structural) (Jackson and Sorensen 2007, 227-37). Behaviorism emphasizes the idiosyncrasies in the decision-making process as it is defined by its participants' belief system. The perceptions and interests of decision-makers primarily shape foreign policy choices. The second approach examines the causal relationship between the international system and state foreign policy (Waltz 2008) Characteristics of the international system, such as the relative distribution of power, anarchical or hierarchical nature of authority, shape the decision-making processes of states. For the sake of this article, we believe systemic analysis and its core concept hegemony, provide an adequate analysis of the impetus behind the emergence of SCO and the Iranian decision to join it.

The concept of hegemony was created by Marxist political theorist Antonio Gramsci to explain the sociology of power in domestic politics. The concept was later extrapolated to explain the transformation in US global power. Gramscianists diverge on the nature of hegemony. The minimalists believe hegemony refers to political power that is based on the consent of the governed. The maximalists contend that coercion and consent are necessary components of hegemonic power (Femia, 1981: 37). The hegemonic state predominantly exerts influence through intellectual, moral, and cultural persuasion and can resort to hard power when required.

How can hegemonic power be measured objectively? Quoting E.H. Carr, Joseph Nye (2008, 55) said that “there are three forms of international power: military, economic and ideas. The first two are, also expressed as coercion and inducement, fall under the heading of ‘hard power’, while the third belongs to ‘soft power’ or ‘the power of attraction’”. Similarly, other experts believe that the fate of a hegemonic order depends on the interaction of these three factors, namely the “ability of the hegemon to sustain its economic, military and technological leadership, the degree to which potential challengers perceive themselves as benefiting from the existing hegemonic order; and the propensity for hegemonic over-extension [. . .] hegemonic systems involve elements of both anarchy and hierarchy” (Nexon and Wright 2007, 254).

## **US Hegemony in International Relations**

The quintessential contemporary example of a hegemonic power is the United States. Wallerstein defines U.S. hegemony in terms of its “control over the global market, its lack of competition militarily, and its role as the ‘cultural center of the World’” (Gandasegui 2007, 6). Harvey classifies the American hegemony into three periods including from 1870 to 1945 as the rise of the bourgeoisie Imperialism and 1945 to 1970 as the age of the American hegemony and from 1970 to 2000 as neo-liberal hegemony (Harvey, 2003; 42-74). To Wallerstein, the American hegemony appeared from the economic recession of 1873. He believes that the decline of the British hegemony paved the way for the two major powers, namely, the US and Germany to move forward and to gain greater shares in the world market. Between the years 1873-1914 these two states surpassed United Kingdom in terms of their share in the global rate of growth and became the poles of major economic fields such as steel, automobile (in US) and petrochemicals (in Germany). The defeat of Germany in both World Wars left US as the supreme political and economic power expanding over two-third of the globe. (Wallerstein, 2004: 24). In other words, for the period of Post-World War II, we are able to identify both periods of rise and symptoms of relative decline. While from 1945 until around 1960 the US exercised unquestioned hegemony in the world-system (Hoogvelt, 2001), it began to decline during the period between 1970 and 2001.

For the purposes of this paper, the hegemon refers to the supreme power in the world system (at global level) or international system (at regional level) when its authority is based on both force and consent. Conversely, if either consent or superior power is absent, it no longer qualifies for hegemonic status and becomes seriously vulnerable to counter hegemonic states. We believe that the major characteristic of U.S. hegemony in the post-1945 era was its ability to combine coercion and consensus to assert its world leadership. Without such combination it would have been very difficult for the United States to sustain its hegemonic position over a long span of time.

### **The process of the relative decline of US Hegemony**

To Fry (2007, 1), three fundamental factors may compromise U.S. hegemonic power: “1) negative trends within the United States itself which, if left unchecked, will severely erode the U.S. capacity to be the most powerful and influential national actor on the international stage; 2) the rise of formidable competitors elsewhere in the world who will play much more influential roles within the next three decades; and 3) changing dynamics and exigencies found within the rapidly evolving global system which will entrench the interdependence and multilateralism on the one hand and mitigate the influence of any single dominant national actor on the other”.

The following factors contributed to the relative decline of U.S. hegemony after 1960: the Vietnam War (1961-1975), the radical social changes since 1968, the collapse of Soviet Union in 1989- 1991, and the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. An additional argument can be made to include the Iranian Revolution of 1979 as the fifth factor that contributed to the decline of US hegemonic power in Middle East. These changes seriously affected both coercion and consent components of US hegemony.

The first military failure in a proxy war against Vietnamese communists supported by Soviet Union has created some unprecedented results for the US status as a hegemonic power. First, the heavy financial burden of war, the exhaustion of US gold reserve after the 1971 financial crisis in order to maintain the Bretton woods System. Due to NIC competition US import exceeded in large part its exports. That created a huge deficit in the foreign trade and balance of payments. Second, both international prestige and national imperial self-confidence image have been affected. The anti-Vietnam War in the United States became an international phenomenon since 1968. Initially an antiwar movement in the US, it took very large proportion with its components of anti-capitalism, anti-colonialism and a criticism of inequalities in both US and other Western bloc countries as young, middle-class educated Westerners questioned US moral leadership. The Non-Alignment movement in the Developing World was a reaction to the decreasing global prestige of US. It is true that these social movements were inspired by some form of socialist ideas and values.

However, this global spread of Socialist ideology and Soviet competition to US hegemony came to end in 1991. Unlike the dominant view, a number of experts believe that the fall of the Soviet Union has paradoxically accelerated the pace of decline in U.S. global hegemony. For Wallerstein and Amin (Amin, 1997, 31-39), the collapse of the Soviet Union strengthened counter-hegemonic forces by removing America's most pressing military threat and eroding the *raison d'être* of American interventionism and its anti-Communist ideology. According to Gandasegui Jr. (2007, 149), "US foreign policy was based on containment, and it enabled the country to address its strategic goals in terms of crusade against the expanding of 'Soviet Empire'. Since the Soviet menace disappeared, the United States has been unable to develop a solid policy capable of legitimizing its worldwide presence." Although American governments believe recent conflicts in the Middle East legitimize hegemonic foreign policies, it has created a commitment- capability gap between resources and foreign policy objectives. For example, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 exemplified the Bush Administration's unilateral approach to the use of military power to achieve its goals.

The last development to challenge U.S. hegemony was the Iranian Revolution of 1979. The Revolution was the climax of at least 14 political upheavals in the Developing World from 1974 to 1980 (Halliday, 1991). The significance of the Iranian Revolution cannot be underestimated for two reasons. First, the fall of Pahlavi dynasty, America's strongest ally in region, meant that U.S. hegemony could no longer rely on a proxy in the Persian Gulf region. Second, Iran's Islamic Revolution acquired substantial support throughout the Muslim world because it provided an alternative model to the American liberalism. Politically it stressed non-alignment in foreign policy, self-sufficiency and anti- capitalism in economics and seemingly indigenous cultural models against the American way of life (Hoogvelt, 2001: 197-215; Webb, 2005). The cumulative result of these developments is that the United States sometimes attempts to military coercion to enforce its domination. This is symptomatic of its relative decline of hegemony in the face of counter-hegemonic forces and powers. As Nexonand Wright (2007, 267) write: "Despite enjoying tremendous military advantage over its nearest peer- competitors, the United States currently exercises less control over the security policy of its Western European and East European and East Asian allies than it did during the Cold War. Its use of indirect rule in the economic spheres has also declined [ . . . ]. Current trends, moreover point towards a diminishment in the ability of the United States to use its economic position to control the behavior of other polities. As other states, most notably China, gain greater economic leverage, they will be able to provide alternative sources of economic, military, and political support to actual or potential American peripheries." Most authors agree that the global hegemony of the United States will certainly decline while others talk about a post-American 21st century (Zakaria, 2008).

## **The Shangai Cooperation Organization**

The decline in US hegemonic power creates structural opportunities for the emergence of SCO.

### **A New Strategic Context in Central Asia**

The American post 9-11 global antiwar strategy has three objectives: The first set of objectives pertains to military intervention in Afghanistan, the establishment of military bases in different countries like Uzbekistan, and the creation of security alliances with regional state powers. Second, the United States seeks to exploit political and economic opportunities in the region and curb Russian and Chinese power. For example, The United States is currently attempting to secure oil and gas contracts in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan over Russia and China. Finally, U.S. policy-makers adopted a long-term strategy to promote democratic transition in the various countries of the region and shape the region's politics. Taken together, these steps constitute a major shift in the geopolitical significance of the region for U.S. strategic thinking.

The United States has been unable to effectively fulfill its strategy however due to significant challenges in the region. The realization of these goals was impeded because Central Asian states were ambivalent towards increases in US influence. As one expert asserts:

“After 9/11 the United States took advantage of counter-terrorism to continuously expand its military presence in Central Asia, though in comparison to military deployment in other regions, this was relatively weak. On the other hand though the degree of welcome expressed by the Central Asian states with regard to U.S. influence differed, in the main they hoped to use U.S. investment and technology for economic development, and use United States as a balance on the influence of other powers. They certainly did not wish to see the United States push other powers out of the region forming a U.S. regional monopoly and dominance, or even more become involved in disputes between the United States and China, becoming part of the U.S. strategic encirclement of China. Since the establishment of the SCO the relations between China and each of the countries of Central Asia has notably progressed, so that this will become a favorable factor in further expanding the international space of China in the new century (quoted in Kerr and Swinton, 2008:131).”

The emergence of China as a powerful state further impeded the achievement of US hegemonic objectives. In 2005 Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick did not mince words when he warned China against trying to achieve dominance in Asia. More specifically, the US maintained its extensive military bases in Japan, South Korea and Guam and also tried to channel or limit China's regional ambitions through proxy containment policies. As one author put it: “U.S. policy seeks to accelerate the economic and military rise of the key Asian states with the power potential and

ambitions to constrain China's ability to dominate its region" (Twining, 2007, 79). What Washington is looking for are proxies that can protect U.S. interest; its warming relations to India seem to bear this out. This approach has had limited success however, as Russia and China have united against American efforts to marginalize both countries.

### **SCO Gradualist Approach vis-à-vis U.S. Expansionism in Asia**

The SCO used these structural alterations in the international system to consolidate and gradually expand their sphere of influence. The initial mission statement and objectives of the SCO include the "strengthening mutual trust, friendship and good-neighborly relations among the member countries; promoting their effective cooperation in politics, trade and economy, science and technology, culture, education, energy, transportation, ecology and other fields; making joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region, to establish a new, democratic, just and rational political and economic international order" (Hausheng, 2002).

After such a minimalist declaration, the leaders of the member states adopted the SCO Charter at the Saint Petersburg Summit on July 7, 2002 which enshrined the organization's goals, principles and main orientations. These include:

- cooperating and strengthening mutual confidence and good neighborly relations among member states;
- promoting their effective cooperation in politics, trade and economy, science and technology, culture as well as education, energy, transportation, tourism, environmental protection and other fields;
- making joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region, to move towards the establishment of a new, democratic, just and minimal political and economic international order, respect for each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, mutual non-use or threat of use of force.
- equality among all member states; settlement of all questions through consultations; non-alignment and no directing against any other country or organization;
- opening to the outside world and willingness to carry out all forms of dialogues, exchanges and cooperation with other countries and relevant international or regional organizations (SCO, 2002).

SCO members also signed an agreement to create a regional antiterrorist structure. SCO members have since developed mutual trust and broadened the field of cooperation beyond the settlement of border issues (Len, 2004: 52). The first expansion of co-operation into new areas commenced

at the 6th annual summit on June 15, 2001, with Uzbekistan as a new member, and created new mechanisms to consolidate their relations. Council of Prime Ministers was established to operate alongside the Council of Heads of Government; in both cases meetings are held on an annual basis. Similarly, a Council of National Coordinators was established and sought to coordinate activities among relevant ministries and departments of SCO member states. The joint Russian-Chinese military exercises dubbed “Peace Mission” of August 2005 went beyond a simple joint drill to improve anti-terror capability. This involved about 8,800 troops (7,000 Chinese and 1,800 Russian) from three forces, 17 jet fighters, 140 military ships and submarines, plus helicopters. While avoiding anything that might be interpreted as a direct provocation to the United States, Chinese and Russian military authorities after the exercises said they were opposed to the militarization of space and foreign intervention. Some military analysts have speculated that behind these joint exercises the two nations might be rehearsing possible interventions in North Korea, Central Asia and Taiwan. In any event Russia has begun selling some of its top rate military hardware (strategic jet fighters and cruise missiles) to China (Perelman 2005, 42-44).

### **The Russian and Chinese Rationale to Support the SCO**

Russia and China support the SCO because they share individual and common concerns over U.S. intentions and capabilities in Central Asia and seek to eliminate or at least minimize U.S. presence and influence. Both China and Russia believe that its domestic security problems, i.e. terrorism, separatism and religious extremism are better resolved through SCO framework. However, the SCO allows high levels of influence over other Central Asian countries and to adopt a more active policy towards US expansionism. Therefore, SCO enhances each member’s comparative advantage vis-à-vis what they could do if they went alone.

Russia supports the SCO because they possess a strong desire to reclaim Superpower status. Russia perceives itself as a Eurasian power that has vested interests in European and Central Asian affairs. For Moscow, SCO is a geopolitical asset and as *experts* say (Kerr and Swinton 2008, 136): “Russia has staked its future return to great power status on its capacity to command strategic resources in Central Eurasia, to manage alignments and to oppose Islamism and color revolutions” (2008, 138). Russia’s control over international energy markets is seriously threatened by US corporate activism in investment and exploitation projects in Caucasian and Central Asia. The US was successful to circumvent the oil pipeline transit route from the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea, which lost significant revenues for Russia.

The bipolar traditional Great Game becomes triangular as Russia's nostalgia meets Chinese ambitions. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization provides China with a triple strategic advantage (Sheives, 2006). First, the SCO provides China with strategic depth so that it can project its political and economic power and influence onto Central Asia. This area is traditionally perceived to be within historical sphere of influence (Welt, 2006). The Chinese SCO membership represents an important foreign policy shift from its traditional reluctance towards formal involvement in regional security arrangements and from its conventional passive diplomacy in this region. As an institutional framework it is useful for close cooperation with its neighbors against terrorism, extremism, separatism and cross-border criminal groups. The primary target for China's anti-terrorism campaign remains the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), which advocates the independence of Xingjian (East Turkistan), allegedly supported by Osama bin Laden. China has in fact been able to count on the support of SCO member and observer states in its campaign against the ETIM (Wanandi, 2004).

Second, economic cooperation within SCO directly contributes to China's attempt to develop its western regions, which offer land-based routes for energy and other imports. Central Asia can be for China what the Middle East is to the United States: a guarantee for energy security. Central Asian oil output and reserves and China's increasing reliance on them have made SCO crucially important for China's energy security and overall development. China's Membership in the SCO has been instrumental in the generation of higher levels of trust with seven of its close neighbors that share approximately three-quarters of its total land border. This trust builds a zone of stability and development that stretches from Central Asia to South Asia and the Middle East and creates a favorable international environment to expand influence and proactive diplomacy (Godwin, 2004). Leivia (2007, 13) substantiates this perspective with the following quotation: "Chinese economic production was 13.2 percent of world economic production based on purchasing power parity in 2004. This represents 63 percent of U.S. production in 2004 and is far greater than that of Germany, France, Italy and Spain combined and almost double that of Japan. Third, SCO for China represents a way to manage its trilateral relations with Russia and the United States. Beijing desires a stable bilateral relationship with Washington and wants a closer strategic co-operation through the SCO with Moscow (Zhang, 2005: 240-43).

SCO ambitions grow as it becomes more consolidated to admit new members. In the 2006 SCO summit Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov said that member states "should if needed, help neighboring states block and possibly destroy" invaders (Petrou, 2006). This subtle anti-American agenda has sent encouraging to other smaller states with huge resources but under tremendous US pressures.

### **Iranian Motivations for SCO Partnership**

The IRI has pursued a foreign policy of non-alignment towards Western and Eastern powers since the establishment of the Islamic regime in 1979. Thus, they have not sought membership in regional security organizations or signed multinational security treaties. Iran altered its foreign policy after thirty years however for two reasons. First, while the rapprochement between Iran and both China and Russia had already started, the failure of moderate President Khatami (1997-2005) in rapprochement with US and the Bush speech on the Axis of Evil helped the rise of Neoconservatives in Iran. Second and more importantly, opposition from Russia and China offered Iran a way to achieve its security needs through the SCO and avoid US sanctions for its nuclear program. Closer political and economic ties between Iran and SCO member states, particularly Russia and China, would create mutual interests so that Iran can expect that its SCO partners would not take a neutral stand should its stability and security come under threat (Brummer, 2007: 193).

The strong SCO-oriented foreign policy of Tehran could create beneficial political and economic opportunities. The success of Iran's nuclear program (avoid increasing US, EU sanctions and pressure on its nuclear program) and the country's full integration into the SCO may also drastically change the world's energy balance of power. More specifically, natural gas in the SCO zone would represent 50% of total world reserves and its share of oil would increase to 18%. (Brummer, 2007: 2). This would effectively weaken the role of O.P.E.C. in setting prices, production targets and the overall stability of the global energy market. In fact, in addition to military cooperation China and Russia are both heavily involved in Iran's economy, especially energy. For instance, China's Zhuhai Zhenrong Corporation and Sinopec have both signed 25-year contracts to develop Iranian oil and gas fields. Iran's eastward shift meant pursuing an active strategy to gain permanent SCO membership and to gain greater leverage in its dealing with the European Union and the United States (Vakil, 2006).

Iranian leaders also explicitly state the strategic significance of the SCO. They believe the organization is an act of defiance against and a mechanism to counter American hegemony (Ehteshami & Zweiri, 2007:107). At the opening ceremony of the 14th International Congress on Central Asia and Caucasus held in November 2006 in Tehran, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mohammadi (2006) stressed Iran's objectives in achieving SCO membership, and pointed to the objective of SCO as "to form a new international political and economic system,". He also added that "while some SCO member and observer states have been targeted by great powers like the United States and the United Kingdom for political and propaganda attacks, the constructive opportunities for cooperation among the organization's member and observer states

should not be allowed to be affected by it". The advisor to Iran's Supreme Leader in international affairs, Ali Akbar Velayati, went with President Ahmadinejad to the 2007 SCO Summit in Shanghai and said that "SCO was created mainly to counter NATO expansion in the East and Iran has a significant role to play in fulfilling such a goal". He added that "the alliance of the SCO member states, which comprising half of world's population and one quarter of the world's landmass as well as the largest reserve in natural resources, would make the organization the largest power of the world" (IRNA 2007). In 2006 and 2007 Iranian President Ahmadinejad did not miss the opportunity to attend SCO summits. At every occasion he underscored the organization's potential to counter the unipolar system and U.S. hegemony. (Islamic Republic of Iran President Website, June 2006).

Notwithstanding President Ahmadinejad's bombastic and sometimes vitriolic public ideological statements, some specialists view his foreign policy as mixture of ideological discourse and pragmatic realist understanding of power relations (Ehteshami and Zweiri, 2007:107). As Iran applied for formal SCO membership in 2006, Ahmadinejad said "we're seeking to expand SCO and make it a powerful and influential structure at the regional as well as international levels. The organization has to be able to deal with threats and should resist unlawful interventions and military actions by other states in the region." In press conference a year later he said that "in addition to the preservation of peace in the region, SCO can play an effective role in the promotion of international peace and security and dealing with threats as well as resisting unlawful interventions of global hegemony" (IRI President Website,2007).

Ahmadinejad government's defiance of US threats paid off. Immediately after the recent rigged elections (12th June 2009), both Moscow and Beijing congratulated his election to the second mandate and on 15th June amid wide protests over election results in Iran, he attended SCO security & trade meeting in Russia. Both China and Russia expressed their opposition to any further sanction by UN Security Council against Tehran. The alliance of Ahmadinejad government and Russian regime pushed demonstrators in Tehran to chant Death to Russia Instead of death to America. Moreover, IRI were unusually silent over Chinese violent repression of Uyghur Muslims in the Western provinces on 5 July 2009.

## **Conclusion**

As the United States failed to maintain its ascendancy in the post-Cold War unipolar world, overstretched abroad and stressed by financial recession and colossal budget deficit, its hegemony came in for a challenge. More importantly, there was a new entity that could bring that challenge, but one that was very different from the Moscow-dominated Communist bloc. Not only is the

Shanghai Cooperation Organization free from the ideological baggage that the Warsaw Pact once carried but power within it was relatively better distributed with no internal hegemon of its own. With two regional-cum-global powers playing each other off but sharing a common purpose, i.e. resist U.S. power in Central Asia and worldwide, Iran was best placed to take advantage of the opportunity structures emerging in the new world system.

By achieving membership in SCO Iran could meet two of its strategic objectives. First, it can better manage its tense relations with the United States since it will no longer be internationally isolated. Iran could also bargain with the organization's principal members, Russia and China, for their support and enhance its security. Second, SCO membership can provide substantial support to the Iranian nuclear policy. China and Russia, beside technological support, have so far opposed any furthering of Security Council sanctions against Iran.

Will this bode ill for international stability? Some scholars say no. For them, the emergence of SCO is having a positive impact on international stability. As Nye put it (2008: 67), in the context of globalization U.S. unipolarity is somewhat transient. The prevailing trend in international is and must be towards cooperative leadership. The case of North Korea's nuclear program is a case in point where SCO's two major powers successfully managed to get the United States to drop its dogmatic stance in favor of a more accommodating and multilateral position. For authors like Luttwak (2006) this means preserving the balance of power among major states. The rise of China, Russia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is thus a healthy development and can only contribute to international stability, forcing the United States to play a more sober, but feasible role in the world. If the past has taught anything, it is that every hegemon will sooner or later find out that its hegemony comes with a hefty price, with escalating costs that are ultimately counterproductive and impossible to bear.

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