

RUSSIA-CHINA-CENTRAL ASIA: STRIVING FOR A NEW QUALITY IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Human civilization has reached the point where it recognizes the need to build international relations on the humanistic principles set forth in international law. One of these principles is the inviolability of state borders. Respecting this principle is obligatory for maintaining peace, but this does not mean that territorial questions must be absolutely static and cannot evolve.

Since the end of the Cold War, the current threats to security have shifted from ideological and military-strategic confrontation to the emergence of local conflicts and are largely related to the aggravation of old territorial disputes, inter-confessional and ethnic differences, the use of natural resources, and so on. For example, according to the data published in the third edition of a book called “Bor-

der and Territorial Disputes,"¹ there are 20 conflicts in Africa, 19 in Europe, 17 in Eastern Asia, 15 in America, and 12 in the Middle East. The claims of various countries to certain sectors of the Antarctic are seen as one territorial problem. As for Europe, it recently underwent a boom of border conflicts after the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, the repercussions of which are still being felt today.

Specialists in the problems of interstate relations distinguish territorial differences from territorial disputes. If the object (a specific territory, or section of border) and subject (the applicable legal norms) of the conflict do not coincide, this is a territorial difference, not a dispute. An example of a frequent case of territorial difference is delimitation of the border. Sometimes, as certain authors of publications in special literature believe, territorial differences can be of a state or a regional nature. If the difference is of state significance, negotiations are held, whereas at the regional level the arguments remain within specific social circles, usually those representing the interests of the people living in the border areas.

Disputes may be about who territory belongs to and delimitation of the border line. The state border is a line on the earth's surface (regardless of whether on land or sea) and the imagined vertical line that passes through the airspace and the subsurface, defines the territorial limits of a specific state, and separates its territory from that of other states and high seas. If a border is not precisely defined this could give rise to conflicts in the future.² There are a host of examples in history where, guided by the thesis of "unfavorable" delimitation of the border, the authorities of one state have waged war on a neighboring state.

The longer the border and the larger the number of states that share it, the greater the likelihood of disputed territory. For example, the Chinese border has many disputed sections, including a large part of the PRC frontier with India and Tajikistan; a 33-kilometer section of the border with the DPRK in the Pektusan mountains; the Spratly Islands (Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Brunei); the sea border with Vietnam in the Gulf of Tonkin; the Paracel Islands (which Vietnam and

Taiwan are disputing over); the Japanese Islands of Senkaku; the land section of the border with Vietnam; and Taiwan, which is considered a mutinous province.

From the legal point of view, the establishment of state borders is carried out in two stages: delimitation—the direction and positioning of borders are agreed upon and marked down on maps; demarcation—borders are established at the site.

The above problems are particularly urgent for most of the former Soviet nations. Along with the fact that the delimitation process often takes several years, a large number of claims have accumulated in these states due to the non-regulation or change in administrative borders in the Soviet Union. Today, however, Russia, as most civilized countries in the world, is proceeding from the principle of "historically developed borders" in combination with the principle of "transparency." But the events at the beginning of the 1990s put it in a difficult position. At present, there are more than 61,000 km of Russian borders, 22,000 km of which are on dry land. More than 13,500 km are new, previously unguarded borders. Forty-five of the 89 Federation constituencies, are border republics, whereby twenty-five of them became such after the Soviet Union collapsed. Russia has the longest border with Kazakhstan, which amounts to 7,500 km and applies to twelve of its constituencies. The Russian Federation borders on a total of 16 countries of the world, which is more than any other nation (the PRC borders on 13, and the U.S. on 3).³

It is interesting to note that, according to the estimates of Russian experts, about 30 of the Russian Federation constituencies' territorial claims on each other have appeared in the last ten years. For example, the capital's administration is arguing with the Moscow Region about who the Sheremetev and Vnukovo airports belong to, the Tver Region is disputing with the Yaroslavl Region over the islands in the Mologa River, and the Shadrinsk and Dolmatov districts of the Kurgan Region are gravitating toward the Sverdlov Region. Kalmykia and the Astrakhan Region are in conflict over disputed territory. Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachaevo-Cherkessia are arousing particular concern, where several politicians have

¹ *Border and Territorial Disputes*, ed. by John B. Allcock et al., Gale Research, Detroit, 1992.

² See: *Prigranichnye konflikty i spory* [http://www.strana-oz.ru/?numid=7&article=309].

³ See: A.A. Kurtov, "Granitsa s Kazakhstanom—novy rubezh Rossii," *Analytik*, No. 2, 2002.

long been calling for separation, which is understood as ethnic demarcation.

The unresolved territorial disputes and claims between individual countries in themselves are undermining stability and harboring a threat not only to regional, but also frequently to global security. First, they affect the interests of a large number of members of the regional community, and second, they could shift to the active phase in the very near future. A graphic illustration of this is the development of the conflict in 2003 between Spain and Morocco over an uninhabited island in the Mediterranean Sea called Perehil, which quickly escalated from the diplomatic phase to a military stand-off. This again showed that territorial claims are still capable of influencing interstate relations, even in thriving Europe.

The Asia-Pacific Region has just as many territorial problems as other regions. For example, an unresolved border problem is spoiling relations between Beijing and Delhi to this very day. China is making claims to a mountainous region of Indian territory 90,000 sq. km in area to the south of the McMahon Line in the current state of Arunachal Pradesh, over which an armed conflict flared up in 1962. And India is claiming a 34,000 sq. km area in Aksai Chin in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, where the Chinese have built a main highway joining Tibet and Xinjiang. Japan is the only state in the world which currently has territorial claims against Russia at the official level. Tokyo is demanding the return of the so-called "northern territories," which

include the islands of Shikotan, Kunashir, Iturup, and the Habomai group of islands.

China, along with Taiwan, is making claims to the Senkaku islands in the East China Sea, which belong to Japan. Japan and the Republic of Korea are in dispute over who the Takeshima islets (the Korean name for Tokto) belong to, which are located in the Sea of Japan. The territorial question in China's relations with Vietnam has still not been settled, since Beijing is making claims on the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea, which are under the jurisdiction of Hanoi.

Summing up what has been said, it can be maintained that the situation with respect to territorial demarcation is rather serious, whereby China is one of the states which have the largest number of territorial claims on its neighbors. This means that unresolved demarcation problems relating to its land and sea borders will continue to have a negative effect on Beijing's relations with certain neighbors in the region for a long time to come. On the contrary, a different picture is developing with the settlement of territorial problems inherited from the former Soviet Union by China, Russia, and the countries of Central Asia. The most significant territorial claims have already been resolved among them, although this required tedious and painstaking work. After all, by the beginning of the negotiation process on these problems in 1964, 25 sections had been identified and recognized as "disputed," the total area of which topped 34,000 sq. km.

The Search for Solutions

Russia and China have been resolving their border problems for several centuries. The time factor is usually an additional thorn in the side of the settlement process. The simplest way to resolve these problems is well known, that is, take a ruler and draw the borders on a map. This is how the borders of many African states were designated, for example, Algeria, Mali, Libya, Egypt, Angola, and Chad. Several sections of border between the U.S. and Canada, and between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were established in essentially the same way. Sometimes state borders lie along parallels and meridians. For example, before Vietnam was united, the border between its North and South parts lay along the 17th parallel. In Africa, approximately 40 percent of the borders lie along parallels and meridians.

In China, borders were never drawn with such ease. Not until the 1960s, under Mao Zedong, was it suggested that the former agreements in this area should be reconsidered. But their legal denouement was placed on the shoulders of the new sovereign states of the post-Soviet space, when present-day Russia and the Central Asian countries were experiencing difficulties with transferring the economy to the market, and China, vice versa, was actively raising its potential in different areas and vectors. For example, in 1997, the 15th CPC Congress formulated the prospects for the country's development until

2010, whereby the task was set to double its GDP, and by the middle of the century, that is, by the hundredth anniversary of the PRC, to complete modernization and create a powerful “civilized, democratic, and socialist state.”

In order to implement such grandiose plans, China must at least resolve the border problems with its neighbors. Otherwise, the inevitable build-up in competition on the world markets might take on undesirable political implications for the PRC leadership, which Beijing wants to avoid. Of course Russia was target No. 1 for China in this respect. First, the length of the border between these two countries is more than 4,000 km long, and second, Russia has all the resources China needs to modernize its economy. In so doing, the matter concerns not only its raw materials, including oil and natural gas, but also the vast sales market for Chinese commodities. Nor can we discount the PRC’s plans to use Russia (like several other nations) as an ally in carrying out its task to create a “single China.”

In so doing, since the end of the 1980s, we have become witnesses to historical changes in the relations between the two largest Eurasian states. The phobias inherent in Moscow and Beijing’s foreign policy since the cultural revolution in China have receded into the past. Gradually the political elites of both states have begun to establish an equal and trusting partnership. As the leaders of both countries state, the 21st century should be a century of their strategic cooperation. Essentially the matter concerns one of the most significant events which could predetermine the future development of the Russian and Chinese nations. Partnership, based on the values of contemporary civilization and not a bloc alliance aimed against a third party, is the main meaning invested in the formula of the new relations between Moscow and Beijing. Their goal has been defined and construction is underway. The new mechanisms of cooperation must still be streamlined, it is not enough for the heads of state to put their signatures at the bottom of the interstate agreements. But the process has been launched. Of course, one of the constants in the cooperation process between the two states is the resolution of border problems.

A working group of representatives from China and a joint delegation of representatives from Russia, Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, and Tajikistan was created for the negotiations on this question held in September 1992 in Minsk. It held its first meeting in April 1993, whereby it was decided to observe the terms and principles for conducting negotiations used by Soviet and Chinese government delegations. The sides began discussing delimitation of the border line in those sections where it had not yet been agreed upon.

The pragmatic stance of China’s new leaders helped the settlement process to gain the necessary momentum. The Russian-Chinese border has two large sections, the eastern and the western, which are separated by Mongolia. It should be noted that experts have been working for almost thirty years (with a few interruptions) on its most complicated and longest eastern part, which is 4,200 km long. An agreement on this problem was signed on 16 May, 1991 by the then Soviet Union and China. But it did not come into force until 16 May, 1992, after its ratification by the Supreme Soviet of Russia. The ratification certificate signed by the country’s president noted that the Russian Federation, continuing to carry out the rights and obligations under international contracts signed by the Soviet Union, will carry out the obligations under this agreement. But the agreement on the western section of the border, which is 55 km long, was entered on 3 September, 1994. This made it possible to eliminate many disputed questions which for many years had been a most severe irritant in relations between these countries.⁴

For the first time in the more than three-century history of their relations, the two neighboring states acquired as civilized a border as they could get, that is, one that was precisely designated at the site, and, most important, one they both recognized.

On 16 July, 2001, in Moscow, during a visit by PRC Chairman Jiang Zeming to Russia, the Treaty on Good-Neighborly Relations, Friendship, and Cooperation was signed, in which the sides officially stated they had no territorial claims against each other. This meant a qualitatively new level of cooperation between the two states. It is significant that the Treaty does not have any ideological underlying motive, as was characteristic of similar documents during the Soviet period. Article 6 of the mentioned document states:

⁴ ITAR-TASS, “Puls planety,” 27 November, 1996, page “AK”-1.

“Noting with satisfaction the absence of mutual territorial claims, the signatories to the treaty are filled with determination to turn the border between them into a border of eternal peace and friendship, which will be handed down from generation to generation, and are exerting active efforts to make this a reality.” But even after the demarcation work was complete, all the border problems did not disappear once and for all. Two disputed sections remained, which the sides could not find a mutually acceptable solution for. So they were removed from the agreement after conceding to continue negotiations on them. For the time being, the status quo will be observed, meaning that no violation of the demarcation line on the disputed sections is permitted.

Both of these sections are on the eastern part of the border. One of them is the so-called Fuyang Triangle, which the Russian mass media designate as the Khabarovsk Junction. In reality it is the islands of Tarabarov and Bolshoi Ussuriiskiy on the Amur River in the direct vicinity of the region’s large industrial center, Khabarovsk. The second is the Bolshoi Island on the Argun River. Negotiations on these sections are still going on.

On the whole, it should be stated that formation of the Russian-Chinese border is complete. The political features of this process lie in the fact that the border was established not as the result of widespread wars, but during diplomatic negotiations in which both sides had the same number of victories and defeats. The compromises Moscow made in 1991-1999 endowed Russian-Chinese cooperation with a new quality and turned it into a strategic partnership with realistic features and clout.

Delimitation of Borders in Central Asia

Right up until the mid-18th century, an official border could not be drawn between Russia and China in Central Asia for many reasons.⁵ The first Russian-Chinese document in this area, the Peking Treaty of 1860 on regulation of these frontiers, did not resolve the territorial problem, as indeed was the unfortunate fate of all the subsequent ones.

Delimitation began in 1992 within in the framework of the working group mentioned above, although the Chinese side insisted on a bilateral format. For the young states, which were supposed to hold negotiations with the PCR on the basis of legal succession, but did not have the archives of legal, methodological, historical, and other documents necessary for this, this format was vitally important. The principle of “joint delegation” made it possible for Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, and Tajikistan to obtain the necessary documents from the Russian Foreign Ministry, including the corresponding protocols from the Soviet-Sino negotiations. It should be noted that at the negotiations on the problem of transborder water resources, which Kazakhstan is currently holding independently, Beijing, as officials in Astana note, is taking a tough stance and does not consent to Moscow participating in them.

Delimitation of the state border between the Central Asian republics and China can be considered complete. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the new independent states have made significant concessions to China in the process, not only on the question of transferring territory, but also on related border problems. For example, in the Shanghai Agreement on Confidence-Building Measures in the Border Region (April 1996), the states came to terms on the formation of a 200-kilometer maximum demilitarized zone. Despite all the positive significance of this decision, it must be noted that this obligation was enforced at a time when precise delimitation of the border line itself had not been designated.

In July 1996, Bishkek and Beijing signed a treaty on separate parts of the Chinese-Kyrgyz border of 900 km in length, according to which Kyrgyzstan conceded 87,000 hectares of its territory to China,

⁵ Precise borders in the current understanding of this term were simply not technically established at that time. What is more, the Great Steppe was a region where the territory was constantly subordinate to neighboring states, and so it was impossible to define its legal status from the viewpoint of present-day international law.

whereby the disputed Bidel section was divided in the ratio of 70 percent to Kyrgyzstan and 30 percent to China, 161 sq. km on the Han-Tengri section (39 percent of its territory) was given to the PRC, the Boz-Amir-Khodzhent section (20 hectares) was transferred in its entirety, and 19 sq. km of the 891 sq. km in the Uzengyu-Kuush section was handed over.

It should be emphasized that the very concept of “disputed territory” has become a topic of the negotiation process, primarily on the initiative of the Chinese side. Beijing has been consistently and deliberately introducing this term into circulation, making it a household phrase for politicians. For example, on 27 December, 1992, it recognized Kirghizia in its then borders, but the corresponding document at that time did not even mention the existence of disputed territory. Kyrgyzstan has historically established borders with China, as a legal successor of both the Russian empire and the U.S.S.R. The border question was regulated between czarist Russia and China. Beijing also recognized the Soviet Union in the borders that existed at the time it was recognized. The U.S.S.R., as the successor of the czarist empire, retained this territory, but it preferred not to discuss its disputed nature publicly at the supreme level, although it held long and strained negotiations with Beijing. In 1964, the U.S.S.R. and PRC exchanged maps, on which, as we have already noted, the ideas of the sides with respect to 25 sections (including five sections on the Tien Shan stretch) did not coincide. Between 1964 and 1982, these countries held negotiations on the question of marking the line of the Kirghiz-Chinese border through a section to the west of the Bidel Pass (the basin of the Uzengyu-Kuush River), which ended in failure.

On 26 August, 1999, an agreement was signed on the intersecting point of the state border among China, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. At that time, Bishkek and Beijing entered an additional agreement, which was ratified by the Kyrgyz parliament. According to this agreement, Kyrgyzstan also conceded several areas to China, which the country’s political opposition forces used against the republic’s president, Askar Akaev. For example, in 2002, they organized mass acts of protest accompanied by violence both on their part, and on the part of the authorities. During the disturbances on 17-18 March, 2002 in the Aksy District of the Dzhahal-Abad Region, six civilians were killed and more than 80 wounded. Later the Bishkek-Osh highway was closed. The acts of protest also spread to the republic’s capital. The president had difficulty convincing the parliamentary deputies to agree to transfer the territory to China. Only on the second attempt did the senate ratify this treaty. But in order to defuse the situation, Askar Akaev was forced to disband the government headed by Kurmanbek Bakiev. The head of the presidential administration Amanbek Karypkulov also resigned.

In order to justify making the territorial concessions to China, the Kyrgyzstan authorities are arguing that the republic now possesses the main alpine runs on the Han-Tengri peak⁶ (80 percent), from which it will receive enormous revenue from developing tourism. Whereas official Bishkek characterizes the territory transferred to the PRC as “no-man’s land and inaccessible wasteland” that have no practical value.

The same goes for delimitation of the border in Kazakhstan. In April 1994, the republic signed a treaty with the PRC which defined the border line along its entire length (1,782 km), apart from two sections in the region of the Sary-Cheldy River (the Taldykurgan Region) and the Chagan-Obo and Baimurza passes (the Semipalatinsk Region). The dispute between the sides was about a 944 sq. km area of Kazakhstan. On 24 September, 1997, an additional agreement was entered, which completed the process of final delimitation. Kazakhstan made concessions on the disputed border regions, as a result of which it was given 537 sq. km and China received 407 sq. km. It is worth noting that in so doing Kazakhstan agreed to dismantle its extremely important engineering fortification facilities on the border and give the PRC one of the national shrines—the mountain peak of Han-Tengri, which is related to the Kazakh’s system of faith, Tengrianism. The country’s authorities assessed this step as a major diplomatic achievement, maintaining that they had succeeded in finding a solution to a problem that Soviet diplomacy had been unable to resolve for 70 years.⁷

⁶ The Han-Tengri peak is located where the borders of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and China meet.

⁷ See: M.B. Kasymbekov, “Osobennosti vneshnei politiki Kazakhstana v otnoshenii KNR i SShA,” *Analytik*, No. 2, 2002, p. 42.

Signing the intergovernmental protocol on demarcation of the state border line and standard copies of topographical maps of the state borders completed the territorial delimitation process that went on for many years between these states.

China also had territorial problems with Tajikistan. Beijing made claims to a significant part of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region. Territorial delimitation in this section had not been carried out before; at one time, the so-called "Anglo-Russian border line" passed through here. But taking into account the difficult domestic political situation in the country, China was loath to push for final regulation of this 500-km-long section of border, although non-settlement of the border problems was set forth as early as the Declaration adopted during a visit by Tajik President Emomali Rakhmonov to the PRC in March 1993. But it appears an end is in sight to the lack of clarity in relations between Beijing and Dushanbe.

Pursuant to the agreements signed during President Rakhmonov's visit to the PRC in 1999, Tajikistan retained full jurisdiction over the disputed section in the region of the Karazak Pass and conceded to China 68 percent of another section of approximately 200 sq. km close to the Markansu River. The sides agreed that negotiations on the third, largest uncoordinated section, Bolshoi Pamir of 30,000 sq. km in area located to the south of the Uz-Bel Pass, would continue.⁸ Until they ended, both countries had to observe the status quo on the border between the two states.

On 17 May, 2002, an Additional Agreement was signed, according to which Tajikistan agreed to transfer 1,000 sq. km of the 28,000 "disputed" territory in the Bolshoi Pamir area to the PRC. According to the statement of the Tajik side, this territory is "a mountainous area of approximately 5,000 meters above sea level with no pastureland or population."⁹

At present, it can be stated that China has largely resolved all of its territorial problems with its neighboring Asian CIS states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Kazakhstan was the first to finish legal registration of the state border with the PRC, and for five years carried out its demarcation. Kyrgyzstan has only started demarcation of the border, and Tajikistan has not yet entirely agreed on its mutual frontier lines with the PRC.

Of course, the position of the Central Asian states can be understood. Although they made some obvious territorial concessions, they showed Beijing their genuine desire to eliminate the unresolved problems between the sides that interfere with establishing beneficial regional relations.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization

The process that began in 1989 with the negotiations on confidence-building measures on the Soviet-Sino border to reinforce the negotiations already underway between the Soviet Union and PRC on border issues, and then transformed into negotiations on confidence-building measures and cutbacks in armed forces between Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, on the one hand, and China, on the other, made it possible for these countries to gradually form a climate of trust and security along the entire length of the former Soviet-Sino border and create prerequisites for further cooperation within the framework of the Five.

The Shanghai Five Organization emerged in 1996 as a natural reaction to the serious threat of Central Asia turning into a region of permanent instability due to the acute activation of international terrorism, religious extremism, and national separatism. What is more, this was a good opportunity for Russia and China to join the efforts and potential of the Central Asian states under their aegis in order to put the reins on possible American expansion in the region. At the same time, China declared itself a nation claiming a new role in world politics. After all, this international organization is the first structure of its kind to be created on Beijing's initiative.¹⁰

⁸ See: S. Luzianin, "O Damanskom pozabyto navsegda," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 4 February, 2002, p. 10.

⁹ *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 23 May, 2002.

¹⁰ This problem is discussed in greater detail in: Ye. Kokhokin, "Shanghai Five: Present Realities and Future Prospects," *Strategic Digest*, Vol. XXXI, No. 7, July 2001, Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses, New Delhi.

In June 2001, the Shanghai Five, which had by this time expanded to include Uzbekistan, was transformed into the SCO, a regional cooperation organization. Its goal was to strengthen mutual trust, friendship, and good-neighborly relations, and encourage efficient cooperation in political, trade and economic, scientific and technological, cultural, educational, energy, transportation, environmental, and other areas. The member states assumed responsibility to join their efforts in maintaining and ensuring peace, security, and stability in the region, and in building a new, democratic, just, and rational political and economic international order. In June 2002, the heads of state of this structure signed the SCO Charter in St. Petersburg, which laid the legislative basis for cooperation. The Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism, as well as the agreement on a regional antiterrorism structure signed by the heads of state in 2001 and 2002, demonstrated the beginning of a stable period in developing cooperation in security.

Economic relations were not left out of the picture either. During a meeting between the prime ministers of the member states in Almaty (2001), a Memorandum on the Basic Goals and Areas of Regional Economic Cooperation and on Creating Favorable Conditions in Trade and Investments was adopted. Regional economic cooperation was placed on the right track in September 2003, when a program of multilateral trade and economic ties encompassing primarily energy, transportation, and hydro engineering was adopted at a meeting of the heads of government of the SCO countries in Beijing.

The Moscow summit held in the spring of 2003 designated the end of the institutionalization and formation of the organizational foundations of this regional structure and the creation of the necessary legal basis for bringing the member states up to a qualitatively new level of cooperation. The new PRC leader, Hu Jintao, who participated in these summits for the first time, was able to make closer acquaintance with his colleagues and discuss a wide range of questions with them, which was very important, since China occupies a prominent place in this organization. The fight against international terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking, and organized crime was a topic of primary discussion. Special emphasis was placed on the activity of the extremist Islamic organization Hizb ut-Tahrir, which is posing an increasing threat in the region.

Since 1 January, 2004, the SCO began functioning as a full-fledged international organization with its own standing bodies. Its Secretariat has begun working in Beijing, and a Regional Antiterrorist Center has opened in Tashkent. The organization has also formed its own budget (for 2004 it amounted to 3.5 million dollars). Plans for developing cooperation in culture have appeared, for example, the Council of Heads of Government supported Kazakhstan's initiative to hold the first culture festival among the organization's member states.

Today Chinese experts highly evaluate the strategic possibilities of the SCO for realizing the political interests of Beijing in Central Asia.¹¹ It not only managed to finally resolve its territorial problems with the help of this organization by entering treaties with Moscow, Astana, Bishkek, and Dushanbe on delimitation of the border, but also to ensure the necessary conditions for political stability in its border regions based on the contractual-legal foundation drawn up by the member states. Now, according to PRC Chairman Hu Jintao, the main task is "accelerating the creation of efficient structures within the SCO," whereby the economic component comes to the fore.

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The current situation in the world is very contradictory, although it is characterized by certain processes of relative stabilization. The unresolved territorial problems can still be classified as the most serious threats to regional security. As world history shows, the non-settlement of border issues is one of the main reasons for tension and conflicts among the states. But it appears that this problem can be resolved fairly easily with the political will of the leaders of the states concerned. Russia, China, Kazakhstan,

¹¹ See: Zhuan Qishan, "Does the SCO have Strategic Value for China?" [<http://www.999junshi.com>].

Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan have shown how this approach works in practice by focusing on the unifying, rather than separating, function of state borders. The new international organization, the SCO, that arose during the negotiations on the border, significantly expanded the original range of tasks. Today its goal is to develop multilateral cooperation among the participants, including in such areas as security and defense, the economy, foreign policy, culture, and education. What is more, by resolving the disputed territorial problems, the countries' nascent striving to develop regional cooperation can be expected to strengthen stability in the Eurasian subregion. And normalization of the situation in the region will help to develop multilateral relations, which in the future should lead to economic growth in these countries. Whatever the case, the experience of the SCO will be beneficial not only for resolving territorial problems, but also for creating an international security system.