



Russia Wants SCO Help in Syria

OE Watch Commentary: Over the past 15 years, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has hosted joint military exercises among member countries where the nominal enemy has usually been defined as an international terrorist group. From the Kremlin's perspective, besides helping to streamline C2 procedures, these exercises have demonstrated that Russia has important allies within Eurasia in the fight against terrorism. In the brief accompanying excerpt from the centrist daily, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, the author questions why Russia's SCO partners are willing to partake in training exercises against terrorists, yet do not see the need to assist Russia in its ongoing fight against actual terrorists in Syria.

The article begins by briefly describing the results of the 23 April SCO summit in Beijing, where defense and foreign ministers discussed the agenda "for the summit meeting of SCO member states' heads to be held in China at the beginning of June 2018," and where the fight against terrorism will be a major topic. The author then points out that Russia is not the only SCO member which "clearly has a certain interest in this conflict-ridden region" of Syria, and since "the countries united around the SCO are seen by Russia as partners and allies which basically share and support its foreign policy steps," it begs the question as to why these "partners and allies" are not doing more to help Russia in Syria.

The article goes on to describe the proposed scenario for the SCO "Peace Mission-2018 joint exercise on Russian territory" which will be conducted in August, and which will include the "new weapons and means of fighting bandit formations currently in use by Russian and Syrian subunits in Syria." The article quotes a Russian general who bluntly points out that while "the SCO countries organize joint maneuvers and collaborate with each other in resolving combat training tasks... so far not a single SCO country has supported Russia in real combat operations on Syrian territory."

In September 2015, when the Kremlin intervened militarily in Syria, it asserted that the Assad government had requested Russian aid in fighting international terrorism on Syrian soil. All indications suggest that this decision was made without the approval and/or coordination with the SCO. For Russian leaders to now complain of the SCO's lack of support reveals both the weak integration of this organization and Russia's parochial decision-making process. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

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Source: Vladimir Mukhin, "ШОС готовит 'Мирную миссию' против террористов (SCO Prepares 'Peace Mission' Against Terrorists,)" *Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online*, 24 April 2018. http://www.ng.ru/politics/2018-04-24/2_7219_shos.html

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization [SCO] countries will continue to boost the level of their collaboration in the defense sphere. And Russia continues to play the leading role in the SCO in the field of the practical dissemination of combat experience of the fight against terrorists acquired in Syria. That experience will be demonstrated in particular at the Peace Mission joint military maneuvers which will be held this year on Russian Federation territory.

The summit of SCO states' defense ministers was held in Beijing 23 April at the same time as the conference of foreign ministers of the countries belonging to the organization. These summits of the leaders of the military and diplomatic departments are seen as the main stage in preparing for the summit meeting of SCO member states' heads to be held in China at the beginning of June 2018. And topics connected to the fight against terrorism and the consolidation of common security in the SCO's zone of responsibility should be among the main ones at the meeting.

But each country also has tasks of its own. For Russia they are also connected to the fact that so far it is the only SCO country to be taking part in the protracted military conflict in the Middle East, seeking to implement its own geopolitical and economic objectives. The other SCO countries clearly have a certain interest in this conflict-ridden region too...

...The countries united around the SCO are seen by Russia as partners and allies which basically share and support its foreign policy steps...Especially as in implementing its geopolitical and military-economic objectives, Russia is taking part in the Syrian conflict as the main player, as the state from which many other countries want to borrow military experience.

Addressing his counterparts 23 April, Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu stated that "the time has come to activate the cooperation between the SCO's defense departments and to pool our efforts to safeguard our common security...He observed that the Russian Federation Defense Ministry is proposing "to fully consider Russian combat experience acquired in Syria when conducting the Peace Mission-2018 joint exercise on Russian territory in August."

...The new Peace Mission-2018 military exercises will take place a long way from conflict regions. They will take place in Chelyabinskaya Oblast at the Chebarkul' training area...

*Military expert Lieutenant General Yuriy Netkachev is convinced that new weapons and means of fighting bandit formations currently in use by Russian and Syrian subunits in Syria will be on display at the maneuvers.... The general told *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* that on the military plane the concept of the exercises in fighting terrorists is clear to him. "It is something else that is unclear to me. The SCO countries organize joint maneuvers and collaborate with each other in resolving combat training tasks. But so far not a single SCO country has supported Russia in real combat operations on Syrian territory...But in reality Russia is the only country from that organization to be fighting in Syria. Why is that happening?" Netkachev asks.*