

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

We have three consecutive issues with special topics to date. For this issue, and the forthcoming November issue, we have decided to leave the topic open. We encourage all readers to submit interesting, original, and thought-provoking articles relating to China's and Eurasia's security for the upcoming November issue. I am also pleased to announce that the February issue will be guest-edited by Dr. Erica Marat who will devote the entire issue to the role of Military Institutions in Eurasia and the post-Soviet space. All interested contributors should contact her at [emarat@silkroadstudies.org](mailto:emarat@silkroadstudies.org) with their proposed topics.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization recently celebrated its 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Shanghai and it is maturing quickly, seemingly with the emerging aim of becoming the dominant organization in the region. This development has sparked heated discussions over the success of SCO, its functionality, not to mention its future orientation. China has especially been singled out as an actor that has sought to use the SCO as a means to advance its interests in the region. Its role in Central Asia has even been debated within the SCO and China has at times been, more or less openly, accused to aspire to dominate the region. However, its intention is mitigated by many factors, such as the lack of financial resources, difficulties in implementing economic cooperation agreements signed among member states and most importantly, its fellow SCO partner, Russia. The SCO's future depends to a large extent on future relations between China and Russia. In many ways, the Sino-Russo relationship is the soft underbelly of SCO. The limitations in cooperation between China and Russia have been raised by some and it does appear that there are more incompatibilities than compatibilities between the two.

There is a growing competition of influence in Central Asia, not only between Russia and China, but increasingly involving India, Pakistan, the European Union and the United States, leading to strained relations in some cases. However, the question remains as to whether a new "Great Game" is developing in the region, or if this is simply friendly, or at least non-military, competition over trade and energy. India, Pakistan and Iran are currently SCO observers, but they aspire to become permanent members of the organization. The current SCO members have been reluctant to accept such a move, partly due to the practical problems this would entail, and possibly because of the geopolitical implications enlargement would bring forth at this junction. In particular, Iran's declaration that it intends to join the SCO is seen as an attempt to draw extra support from Russia and China over its

controversial nuclear program so as to counter pressure from Europe and the United States.

The role of energy resources is a recurring theme that runs through this issue. Many contributors examine the impact energy resources have for the development of the region albeit from different angles, ranging from political governance and market reform issues in resource-rich countries in Eurasia, to the potential threat of a “gas OPEC” in Eurasia, to Turkmenistan’s attempts to break free of Russia’s monopoly on its gas exports by tapping the Chinese gas market, as well as China and India’s reliance on critical sea-lines for energy imports.

Besides the topic of energy in Eurasia, we should also remind ourselves that soft security threats continue to threaten the region and its individual states. Afghanistan’s new record opium harvest looks at first sight to be one of the most important challenges in the area, with decreasing prices on heroin and increased supply flowing through Eurasia. This will impact economic development negatively. An increased illegal sector focused on trafficking and other illegal activities typically follows in the steps of the narcotics trade. They lead to the financing of terrorists, separatists and the cooption of political elites in many of the countries involved. Attempts have been made to offset this progression, but recent developments in the Afghan narco-industry suggest that the international community has failed to counter this threat. Moreover, the social and humanitarian effects on the population are increasingly disturbing. Increased rates of HIV/AIDS seem to be developing in the footsteps of the narco industry. Moreover, the lack of health care and education are increasingly identified as important factors to combat insecurity in the region at large. These are all topics that deserve greater attention.

Finally, on behalf of the CEF team, we hope you enjoy this issue!

Niklas Swanström  
Editor, CEF Quarterly  
[nswanstrom@silkroadstudies.org](mailto:nswanstrom@silkroadstudies.org)