

NATO vs. SCO: A Comparative Study of Outside Powers' Military Presence in Central Asia and the Gulf

Degang Sun & Hend Elmahly

To cite this article: Degang Sun & Hend Elmahly (2019): NATO vs. SCO: A Comparative Study of Outside Powers' Military Presence in Central Asia and the Gulf, Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, DOI: [10.1080/25765949.2018.1562594](https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2018.1562594)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2018.1562594>



Published online: 04 Feb 2019.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 2



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

NATO vs. SCO: A Comparative Study of Outside Powers' Military Presence in Central Asia and the Gulf

Degang Sun and Hend Elmahly

Middle East Studies Institute, Shanghai International Studies University, Shanghai, China

ABSTRACT

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) both have geopolitical interests in Central Asia and the Gulf. The former is a military alliance, whose members have built substantial presence in the Greater Middle East, including the US military presence in Afghanistan, Djibouti, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Oman; the British military presence in Afghanistan and Bahrain; the French military presence in Afghanistan, Djibouti and the UAE. In comparison, SCO is a political bloc, whose members are at a low level of military integration. Like Russia's military presence in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, China has logistics base in Djibouti; India has military presence in Tajikistan. The three SCO members enjoy better geographical proximity, while the three NATO members are stronger in military deployments and power projection capabilities. The SCO major powers have consolidated their respective land power in Central Asia, while NATO members have obtained both land power in Afghanistan and marine power in the Gulf. While the SCO's and NATO's respective military positions have been strengthened, Central Asia and the Gulf are faced with serious economic, political and social problems and interstate conflict. In the light of this, the military presence of outside NATO and SCO powers may rest on a weak foundation and may face various hurdles in the future.

KEYWORDS

Gulf Cooperation Council; the Shanghai Cooperation Organization; military bases; balance of power; Central Asia

From the Gulf to Central Asia, NATO and the SCO have formed an important military balance. On the one hand, the Gulf and Central Asia make up one of the most important post-Cold War regions for the overseas US and NATO troops. The area has involved issues such as the Gulf War in 1991, the War in Afghanistan in 2001, the Iraq War in 2003, the responses to Iran's nuclear program, and threats brought about by the 'Arab Spring' and the 'Islamic State.' NATO members – the US, Britain and France have divided the Gulf and Central Asia into 'friend areas' and 'foe areas.' The US has deployed hard military bases in 'friend areas' of Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the UAE and Afghanistan, and has left soft military footprints in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Tajikistan (currently closed). France has deployed military bases in the UAE and

Afghanistan; Britain has deployed military bases in Bahrain and Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the US, France and the European Union have deployed military bases in Djibouti, attempting to influence the Gulf from the Horn of Africa.

On the other hand, the SCO members – Russia, China and India have also strengthened deployment of military bases in Central Asia and its bordering regions, among which the Russia-led ‘Collective Security Treaty Organization’ (CSTO) has established the Combined Forces Command and Response Force between 4,000 and 4,500 personnel, three operations of troops from Russia and Tajikistan, and two operations of troops from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. ‘With the establishment of the CSTO, Russia has established military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, providing important institutional protection. In 2017, Russia used the Hamadan air base of Iran; China has put a logistics base in Djibouti into use; and India is still using a military base in Tajikistan, albeit at a low profile.

1. US Military Deployment in the Gulf and Central Asia

The US is the leader of the NATO and the only hegemon of the world in the new era. In the Gulf and Central Asia, the US’s military deployment pertains to the US Central Command (USCENTCOM). During the initial period, it was responsible for the areas from Egypt to Pakistan, and from Kenya to Central Asia. In 2007, after the establishment of the Africa Command, the Joint Task Force-Africa Horn returned from the Central Command, and was incorporated into the Africa Command. East African countries including Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Seychelles are part of the US-Africa Command Area of Responsibility. As of November 2017, President Donald Trump had increased the number of U.S. troops and civilians working for the Department of Defense in the Middle East to 54,180 from 40,517 in the past four months, representing a 33% rise.¹

1.1. US Military Bases in Iraq

Iraq hosted the largest number of US foreign military bases in the Greater Middle East since the US invasion of Iraq. On 29 November 2011, US Vice President Biden made an unannounced visit to Baghdad, with Iraq territory’s largest military base – handing the ‘victory’ barracks over to the Iraqi government. As of December 2011, the US location successively handed over the 501 military bases to the Iraqi government, but kept the capital Baghdad’s four southern military bases, namely Hilla, Diwaniyah, Basra, and Nasiriyah, with a total garrison of 8,000, and following that, 500–800 soldiers from Iraq retreated to Kuwait.

Since 2012, the existence of the US’s military deployment decreased a step further. According to disclosures made by the US Ambassador to Iraq Stephen Beecroft, there were 16,000 US soldiers and civil staff in Iraq at the beginning of 2012. As of March 2013, this figure had decreased to 10,500, and as of the end of 2013, this figure had

¹J. Haltiwanger, ‘Trump’s secret war? US military’s presence in Middle East has grown 33 percent in past four months’, (21 November 2017), available at: <https://www.newsweek.com/trumps-secret-war-us-militarys-presence-middle-east-has-grown-33-percent-past-718089>

further decreased to approximately 5,500.² The number of US troops in Iraq dropped to one thousand in the backdrop of the Obama administration's 'pivot to Asia' strategy.

The rise of 'Islamic State' has terminated the US 'exit strategy.' On 19 June 2014, President Obama announced the sending of 300 military advisers to Iraq to assist the Iraqi Security Forces to safeguard US diplomatic and consular missions, as well as the security of US citizens, strengthening the power of the Iraqi government's attack against the 'Islamic State.'³ The National Security Strategy released by the US in 2015 indicated that Washington had adopted comprehensive measures in order to finally beat the 'Islamic State' in Iraq; the US continues to support the Iraqi government, regarding issues such as disputes between religious sects to the shadows cast by extremism, to prevent Iraq from becoming a haven for the 'Islamic State.'⁴ The Pentagon admitted in December 2017 that there were around 5,200 American forces in Iraq. In February 2018, the US-led coalition fighting 'Islamic State' announced a 'shift in focus' in its military campaign in Iraq, implying that the US troops would be 'gradually reduced,' as Iraqi government spokesman Saad al-Hadithi mentioned.⁵

1.2. US Military Bases in Kuwait

The US's most important army base in Kuwait is Camp Doha, which has become a platform for the promotion of political cooperation between the two countries. After the Iraq War, the US maintained approximately 10 military bases in Kuwait, with the most important being Camp Buehring and Camp Arifjan. Up until July 2008, approximately 20,000 US troops were deployed in Kuwait. As of 2012, the US military base in Kuwait was mainly concentrated in Camp Arifjan, the Ali Al Salem air base and Camp Buehring, with approximately 15,000 personnel.⁶

As of the first half of 2012, among the 40,000 US military personnel deployed in the Gulf, 35% (14,000) were located in the territory of Kuwait, occupying a decisive position for the US's Gulf strategy.⁷ Particularly, in regards to the location of the US's Fifth Fleet Headquarters – since the upheaval in the Middle East and subsequent turmoil in Bahrain, Kuwait was relatively stable, providing a good site for a US military base in the Gulf.

In December 2012, the US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta visited Kuwait, reaffirming the importance of US's deployment in Kuwait: 'Our military presence in Kuwait, as well as our military presence in the entire Gulf region, is helping to strengthen the defense capabilities of our partner countries, and is helping to prevent aggression, making us capable of dealing better with crises in the region.'⁸

²US diplomatic presence in Iraq shrinking fast', (21 March 2013), available at: <http://www.philstar.com/breaking-news/2013/03/21/922357/us-diplomatic-presence-iraq-shrinking-fast>

³B. Torreon, 'Instances of use of United States armed forces abroad, 1798-2014', Congressional Research Service, (15 September 2014), p. 33.

⁴The White House, National Security Strategy, 2015, Washington DC, (February 2015), p. 9.

⁵M. Tawfeeq, 'US will reduce troop levels in Iraq, Baghdad says', CNN, (6 February 2018), available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/02/06/middleeast/american-troops-iraq-intl/index.html>

⁶D. Cassata, 'US plans significant military presence in Kuwait', Times of Israel, (19 June 2012).

⁷Ibid.

⁸'US to retain Mideast role', Kuwait Times, (12 December 2012).

With the worsening of the Iraqi security situation in 2014 and following the occupation of Iraq's major city of Mosul by the 'Islamic State,' the US special forces departed from Kuwait for Iraq, assisting the Iraqi government to attack the 'Islamic State.' Since Trump took presidency, the US has increased its military deployment in the Gulf and the MENA area: Egypt, 455; Israel, 41; Lebanon, 110; Syria, 1,723; Turkey, 2,265; Jordan, 2,730; Iraq, 9,122; Kuwait, 16,592; Saudi Arabia, 850; Yemen, 14; Oman, 32; United Arab Emirates, 4,240; Qatar, 6,671 (as of 2018 the number has exceeded 10,000); Bahrain, 9,335.⁹ Kuwait is apparently hosting the largest number of the US troops. However, in the long run, the US may reduce its military presence in the Middle East. In December 2018, President Trump ordered the withdrawal of 2000 American troops from Syria.

1.3. US Military Bases in Qatar

Prior to the 9/11 event, the US military had leased 24 of Qatar's military installations to serve as common bases for the two countries, and these sites include Doha International Airport, Al-Saliyah military camp, Al Udeid military base, Umm Said; these are important arsenals for the US in Qatar. The US's military base in Al-Sayliyah, Qatar, has become the center and forward headquarters for the US Central Command's key military bases in locations including Djibouti, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan's capital of Dushanbe, Oman's Masirah, Afghanistan, Kandahar, and Shamsi in Baluchistan Province in Pakistan.¹⁰

In December 2002, on the basis of the US and Qatar 'Military Cooperation Agreement,' the US promised to renew its base facilities in Qatar, and as of 2002, the Central Command headquarters would be shifted from Saudi Arabia to Isa Salia, Qatar. In 2003, the US Central Command Air Operations Center shifted from Saudi Arabia's Prince Sultan air base to Qatar's Al Udeid base. This base became the US's air operations center in the Gulf, that is, the 'Combined Air Operations Center' (CAOC).¹¹ In October 2011, Karl R. Horst, the US Central Command Chief of Staff pointed out that the future of US military base deployment in the Gulf would take on a new posture, with the Central Command maintaining strong small-scale military intervention capabilities, because 'this type of military force is healthier, more effective, and more practical.'¹²

Up until the beginning of 2018, the US's largest military base in the median line of the Gulf has been Qatar's Al Udeid military base, with 10,000 personnel stationed there, becoming the US Central Command's most important forward headquarters, and the US's pivot for military action in the Gulf.

⁹J. Haltiwanger, 'Trump's secret war? US military's presence in Middle East has grown 33 percent in past four months', (21 November 2017).

¹⁰W. Arkin, *Code Names: Deciphering U.S. Military Plans, Programs and Operations in the 9/11 World* (Hanover: Steerforth Press, 2005), p. 190.

¹¹R. Looney, ed., *Handbook of US-Middle East Relations: Formative Factors and Regional Perspectives* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 395.

¹²T. Shanker and S. Myers, 'US planning troop buildup in Gulf after exit from Iraq', *New York Times*, (29 October 2011).

1.4. US Military Bases in Bahrain

In 1991, Bahrain and the US signed the 'Military Cooperation Agreement,' eligible for ten years, and it became a new historic turning point for the military cooperation of the two countries. This agreement stipulates that Bahrain shall provide the US navy and air force with port facilities. After the Gulf War, a US army made up of 17,500 personnel, and 250 combat aircraft was stationed in Bahrain's Shaykh Isa air base;¹³ Bahrain is the US's fifth naval force's headquarters and home to the Naval Support Activity Bahrain, and has become an important military strength for the US navy in the Gulf; the US had roughly 1,300 permanent military personnel stationed in Bahrain for long-term support, a 10,500-strong naval military personnel, one with a cruise missile aircraft carrier battle group, more than 20 kinds of various naval vessels, and armed personnel and facilities; the US's first expeditionary corps from its marine division have already been deployed in Bahrain.¹⁴

After the 9/11 event, the US increased its number of independent military facilities in Bahrain to seven. At the same time, the US military was still able to use Bahrain army's bases.¹⁵ The US had 4,000 army personnel stationed in Bahrain, among which the US navy's 5th fleet had 185 warships deployed in Bahrain's port, and were important support for the US wars against Afghanistan and Iraq. The US army also used Muharraq Airport and EP-3 electric intelligence aircraft to carry out reconnaissance missions against Saddam's regime in Iraq. During the Iraq war, Bahrain government allowed the US army to deploy a destroyer, forcefully ensuring the strength of the US's sea power for the security of the Persian Gulf. The US's 5th fleet also relied on Bahrain military bases, and after the war in Iraq ended, the US continued to carry out military patrols in the Gulf, guarding against smuggling and terrorist attack activity in the Gulf. As of January 2018, about 7,000 American troops were still based in Bahrain, both at the naval installation and nearby Isa Air Base.¹⁶

1.5. US Military Bases in UAE and Oman

After the outbreak of the Gulf War, the UAE fully supported the US, opened up its territorial air space to the US, allowed the deployment of the US in its territory, and provided \$100 million of aid to the armies of various countries, including \$65.72 million worth of direct aid, and \$2.18 million worth of goods and services. Moreover, Dubai's Jabel Ali became an important military port for the US navy during the Gulf War. This deep-water port can berth US aircraft carriers. Fujayrah became a key port for the US to block great powers from the Strait of Hormuz.

The port of Jabel Ali in Dubai, UAE, was one of only a few ports that allow for the berthing of US aircraft carriers. At the same time, the UAE provided petroleum and logistics services to the US military's aircraft. At one time, the UAE's Jabel Ali port

¹³K. Katzman, 'Bahrain: key issues for US policy', CRS Report for Congress, (24 March 2005), p. 3.

¹⁴L. Korb and I. Moss, *Moving Beyond the Carter Doctrine: Rethinking the U.S. Military Presence in the Persian Gulf* (New York: Century Foundation Report, 2008), p. 3.

¹⁵W. Arkin, *Code Names: Deciphering U.S. Military Plans, Programs and Operations in the 9/11 World* (Hanover: Steerforth Press, 2005), p. 80.

¹⁶American military bases in Middle East: why does US have them?' (30 January 2018), available at: <https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2018/01/30/550726/How-many-military-bases-US-has-in-Middle-East>

harbored hundreds of US naval vessels, a number surpassing the US's naval vessels at any overseas harbor.¹⁷ The UAE provided a wealth of logistics supply and abundant security assurances to the US's warships harbored in Jabel Ali.

Since the Middle East upheaval commencing at the end of 2010, the US's military base in the UAE gave rise to a significant intervention effect, firstly, to continuously support the US military's activities in Afghanistan; secondly, for the GCC's military operations in Bahrain; thirdly, for the US anti-terrorism operations in Yemen; and fourthly, to intervene in the military action in Libya. In Afghanistan, the UAE and Bahrain both took part in peacekeeping operations with the US; in 2011, after the Libyan War broke out, the UAE and Qatar sent combat aircraft to the Mediterranean Sea, participating in the US-led military operations in Libya. By 2018, the US had about 5,000 troops deployed to the UAE. There were 3,500 American military personnel stationed at the Al Dhafra Air Base in Abu Dhabi, which was one of the key US military bases in the region. The US also has military base in Dubai.¹⁸

During the Gulf War in 1991, Oman, like other Gulf countries, allowed the US military and many other armies to make full use of its territorial air space and waters, with approximately 4,300 US soldiers deployed in Oman. The state's military also participated in the US military in the 'Desert Storm' operation in 1991, sending 1,000 soldiers to Saudi Arabia. In Muscat, 80 miles from Al Masnia the Desert, \$1.2 million was spent to construct a top secret military base, an extremely important base for the US to strengthen its influence in the Gulf.¹⁹ The US paid for the construction costs of this base, and the base airstrip is capable of allowing the most advanced US bombers, fighters and transport aircraft to take off from the base. Al Masnia also provided the US military with air command and control equipment, to respond to the threats created by Iran's possible blockage of the Strait of Hormuz. By 2018, the US had been using a military airport near Thumrait, a town in Dhofar Governorate, Oman, where about 200 troops were stationed.²⁰

2. British and French Military Bases in Bahrain and the UAE

As predominant NATO members, Britain and France play essential roles in NATO missions in the Gulf and Central Asia. Up until 2006, Britain deployed limited-scale military bases in Kuwait, Belize, Kenya, Afghanistan, Nepal (military training), Oman and Sierra Leone, among which two were located in the Gulf.²¹ In January 2012, the British Secretary State for Defense Philip Hammond revealed that Britain had deployed military man power in and east of the Suez Canal with 1,500 personnel in total.²² However, the specific location and function of the deployment was not revealed. If the military base garrisons in Diego Garcia and Brunei were removed, there would be

¹⁷White House, 'Fact sheet: the United States-UAE bilateral relationship', (February 2006), available at: whitehouse.com

¹⁸American military bases in Middle East: why does US have them? (30 January 2018).

¹⁹R. Looney, ed., *Handbook of US-Middle East Relations: Formative Factors and Regional Perspectives* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 426.

²⁰American military bases in Middle East: why does US have them? (30 January 2018).

²¹R. Harkavy, *Strategic Basing and the Great Powers, 1200-2000* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 149.

²²D. Stringer, 'UK mulls upping military presence in the Hormuz', *Navy Times*, (24 January 2012), available at: <http://www.navytimes.com/news/2012/01/ap-uk-mulls-upping-presence-in-hormuz-012412/>

drastic changes in the Middle East with the deployment of about 800 to 1,000 military power personnel from Britain, mainly assisting the US containment of Iran. In Al-Minhad of Dubai, UAE, the British air base has become a stronghold for Britain's recessive military presence in the Gulf; the military base in Bahrain has also become a frontier stronghold for the British Corps of Royal Marines. Former British Prime Minister Cameron also hoped Qatar, a major exporter of natural gas, to serve as a liaison and coordination center for the future of British military presence in the Gulf.²³

In December 2014, at Bahrain's Manama Dialogue, the British and Bahrain government announced that Britain would establish a permanent military base in the country. This was the first deployment of a military base since Britain's 1971 retreatment from the Suez Canal, and was also a new gain of military foothold in the Gulf. On the basis of an agreement reached by the two sides, the two countries invested 15 million British pounds to establish a military base close to the US's one: Mina Salman Port, with storage facilities, and an extra deployment of four minesweepers. The British Defense Minister Michael Fallon pointed out that the base provides a permanent foothold for the Royal Marines to expand their influence, guaranteeing more and greater warships for Britain to protect stability in the Gulf. Britain's Chief of Defense General Sir Nicholas Houghton pointed out that this base has strategic importance, and is not just a temporary military deployment, as Britain's interests with the Gulf are closely related.²⁴

Upon the signing of the base agreement, Bahrain's Foreign Minister Khalid Al Khalifa pointed out that 'Bahrain expects that this agreement will be implemented early, and hopes that together with Britain and other partners, threats to regional security will be dealt with.'²⁵ In April 2018, Britain opened its first permanent military base in Bahrain, giving the UK an expansive presence along key international shipping routes. The UK Naval support facility can house up to around 500 Royal Navy personnel, including sailors, soldiers and airmen.²⁶

Moreover, Britain has also strengthened its military presence in the UAE. In September 2012, Britain and the UAE cooperated to conduct the 8th meeting, with the UAE's head of military affairs Anwar Mohammed Gargash and Britain's representative of the Middle East and North African affairs Alistair Burt presenting at the meeting. There was an emphasis on establishing effective cooperation in the field of security, and both sides agreed at the UAE that they would take further steps to enhance the 'de-radicalization centre,' with Britain promising to provide special technical expertise. Britain seeks to develop a significant military and commercial presence in Oman's major Duqm port, where China has substantial investment as well.

Apart from the military exchanges between both sides, Britain's military presence in the Gulf is also part of a multilateral military alliance – in the form of NATO. On 1 December 2005, NATO's Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, visited Doha, and attended a seminar titled 'NATO's Role in Gulf Security.' Scheffer was the first NATO Secretary General that had visited the Gulf, and emphasized the importance of NATO

²³G. Stansfield and S. Kelly, 'A return to east of Suez? UK military deployment to the Gulf', RUSI Briefing Paper, (April 2013), pp. 2-4.

²⁴'Britain to open new military base in Bahrain', *The Peninsula*, (7 December 2014).

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶'Bahrain hosts first British permanent military base in Gulf', *Al-Arabiya*, (5 April 2018), available at: <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/gulf/2018/04/05/Bahrain-hosts-first-British-permanent-military-base-in-Gulf.html>

and the GCC strengthening their security cooperation in the new era. Britain became an important pushing force for the promotion of security cooperation between NATO and the GCC.

Since its completion in 2009, France has three facilities at the Abu Dhabi military base in the UAE: (1) Its naval base is located in the port of Zayed, covering an area of 0.12 square kilometers, and with a 300-meter-long of deep-water wharf, powerful features, and comprehensive facilities, and in the future, dockable like the 'Charles De Gaulle' nuclear-powered aircraft carrier; (2) Its air force facilities are located in the outskirts of Abu Dhabi at the Zafira air base, which allows for the taking off of fighters such as the 'Phantom' and the 'Rafale.' (3) The barracks of its military training camp are located in the downtown area of Abu Dhabi at the Zayed barracks.²⁷

First, French base in the UAE has the function of military training. Abu Dhabi is located in the Gulf's desert region, an area with hot temperatures and little rainfall. French military training at home lacks such hot desert temperature conditions. France's military base in Abu Dhabi assists its air base and ground force to use the unique natural conditions there to strengthen its military training, helping them to adapt to hot and dry desert conditions.²⁸

Second, France's military bases in the UAE have been greatly improved in its mobility and political influence in the Gulf, strengthening the state's security coordination capability with the UAE. Since the end of 2009, France's military base in Abu Dhabi, UAE, has had a total of 500 personnel deployed there, including army, navy and air forces as well as military police.²⁹ In an interview with the media, former President of France Nicolas Sarkozy said: 'What we can guarantee is that, if your (UAE) security is threatened, France will stand together with you; Iran's acquisition of nuclear arsenal is unacceptable.'³⁰

In November 2010, following the worsening of Iran's nuclear crisis, France's six 'Rafale' arrived at the BA-104 Al Dhafra air base in Abu Dhabi. Since the middle of 2011, with the governments of Yemen and Bahrain falling into revolts threatening the regime stability, the number of military personnel of France's increased to 650.³¹ The UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahayan pointed out that France had promoted French-UAE military cooperation with its military base in Abu Dhabi, an 'important cornerstone' for the UAE security.³²

Third, France's military base in Abu Dhabi has logistics capabilities for its naval craft to provide services for carrying out the tasks in the Gulf and Red Sea, including patrols, anti-piracy and joint military drills. In 2009, the UAE's former chief of naval staff Rear Admiral Ahmed al Tunajji attended the France-UAE military cooperation and pointed out that France's military base in the UAE is different from the traditional meaning of a military base, and is also different from the US's military operation bases

²⁷M. Saltmarsh, 'France opens first military bases in the Gulf', *New York Times*, (26 May 2009).

²⁸'French bases in UAE', (26 May 2009), available at: <http://www.defenseworld.net/go/defensenews.jsp?id=3098&h=First%20French%20foreign%20military%20base%20in%2050%20years%20opens%20in%20the%20UAE>

²⁹'La France crée une base militaire face à l'Iran', *Le Figaro*, (15 January 2008).

³⁰'Iran slams UAE over French military base', *Tehran Times*, (27 May 2009).

³¹D. Stringer, 'UK mulls upping military presence in the Hormuz', *Navy Times*, (24 January 2012).

³²'Sarkozy opens French military base in Abu Dhabi', *France24*, (26 May 2009), available at: <http://www.france24.com/en/20090526-sarkozy-inaugurates-frances-first-gulf-base-abu-dhabi-military>

in Qatar and Bahrain, as the base in Abu Dhabi is more of a logistics base, letting French sailors recondition at the base while in the Indian Ocean and Gulf regions.³³

Obviously, the British and French military presence in the Gulf, albeit limited in scale, have consolidated the NATO's influence and capability of regional deterrence and interention.

3. The US, British and French Military Presence in Central Asia

After the Afghanistan war broke out in 2001, the US and NATO used bases from 40 countries to send military combatants, logistics personnel and military materials.³⁴ All of the US's military bases in Central Asia are air and army ones, especially as the military airfields of these countries mostly have relatively long airstrips. This provides important guarantees for the US, NATO and the International Security Assistance Force ('ISAF') to carry out battle, deterrence, reconnaissance, logistics support.³⁵

3.1. In Afghanistan

Afghanistan is the hub for the US, UK, France and NATO as the whole to project power in the Eurasia heartland, to curb terrorism and balance China and Russia. ISAF installations in Afghanistan was used during the NATO-led War in Afghanistan, such as airbases, forward operating bases, main operating bases, combat outposts, firebases, and patrol bases used by NATO forces across the six ISAF regional commands: Regional Command Capital, Regional Command East, Regional Command North, Regional Command South, Regional Command Southwest, and Regional Command West.³⁶

In November 2017, the NATO Defense Ministers and NATO Afghanistan Mission Representatives held a meeting at NATO headquarters of Brussels. NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg said NATO's troops that stationed in Afghanistan would increase from 13 thousand to 16 thousand.³⁷

In 2017, Taliban, the 'Islamic State' and 'Haqqani Network,' launched repeated terrorist attacks resulting in a high number of casualties. On 21 April, a terrorist attack carried out by Taliban resulted in at least 140 casualties; on 31 May, a bombing attack in Kabul resulted in more than 150 casualties. The 'Islamic State' has been continuously dispersing, thereby making Afghanistan a choice for terrorists to regain their strength. Up until June 2017, it had 3,500 jihadists threatening the security of Afghanistan and its neighboring countries.

In the first seven months of 2017, the total number of civilian lives claimed by terrorist attacks was equal to the total number of civilian lives lost in 2009 and 2010 from terrorist attacks. Thus, in August 2017, the US President Trump delivered a

³³'French bases in UAE', (26 May 2009).

³⁴T. Landford, *9/11 and the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2012), p. 45.

³⁵O. Olikier and T. Szayna, eds., *Faultlines of Conflict in Central Asia and the South Caucasus: Implications for the US Army*, (Santa Monica, Calif: Rand Corporation, MG-1598, 2003), p. 253.

³⁶'International security assistance force', available at: <https://www.nato.int/isaf/topics/chronology/index.html>

³⁷'NATO's troops that stationed in Afghanistan would increase from 13 thousand to 16 thousand', (10 November 2017), available at: <http://news.sina.com.cn/o/2017-11-10/doc-ifynsait6887608.shtml>

speech on Afghanistan and the situation in South Asia, and announced an increase of 4,000 soldiers to Afghanistan, and the number of US troops in Afghanistan had totaled 12,000. Trump has also intensified airstrikes in Afghanistan dramatically in addition to U.S. troop presence there. As of 31 October 2017, the U.S. had dropped 3,554 bombs in Afghanistan in that year alone, which is almost three times it dropped in 2016 and four times in 2015.³⁸

3.2. In Uzbekistan

NATO was interested in Uzbekistan, and it was regarded as the hub for the largest military alliance's power projection in Central Asia. Shahjahanabad military base was a large-scale air base of the former Soviet Union, and is one of Uzbekistan's largest air bases, with an airstrip 2,500 meters in length and 40 meters in width, assisting with take-offs and landings of the US's large-scale aircraft carriers. During the initial period of the Afghanistan War of 2001, the US made a total deployment of 4,000 US soldiers during its leasing of military bases in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, with the main military force being the US's 416th Air Expeditionary Operations Group. In NATO's attacks against Taliban and 'Al Qaeda,' the Shahjahanabad military base played an important role, which strongly supported the US's search and rescue operations in Afghanistan.³⁹

The US's use of Shahjahanabad air base includes the deployment of 1,500 personnel and drones, and became the command center of the special forces, and supports the launch of attacks against the 'Al Qaeda' and Taliban. This base has also become a key one for the transit of US personnel and materials.⁴⁰ In 2002, Uzbekistan's President Karimov visited Washington, and the two governments signed the 'Strategic Cooperation Partnership Agreement,' with both sides reiterating comprehensive cooperation in the security field, and of which Shahjahanabad air base became the most important military base for the US in Central Asia. The US provided a huge amount of economic aid to the host country. From 2001 to 2002, US aid to Uzbekistan increased from US\$1 million to US\$6 million.⁴¹

In May 2005, in Andijan, Uzbekistan, a revolt against the government occurred, resulting in 100 deaths, and several hundred injuries.⁴² At this time, the over-reaction by Uzbekistan attracted fierce discontentment from the US government, and the Bush administration criticized the Uzbekistan government for 'violating human rights,' and harshly blaming that reforms for democratization were not put in place. An independent investigation was made into this 'massacre' incident. This action worsened US-Uzbekistan relations.

³⁸J. Haltiwanger, 'Trump's secret war? US military's presence In Middle East has grown 33 percent in past four months', (21 November 2017).

³⁹S. Akbarzadeh, 'Keeping Central Asia stable', *Third World Quarterly* 25(4), (2004), p. 689.

⁴⁰T. Landford, *9/11 and the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2012), p. 104.

⁴¹S. Cornell, 'The United States and Central Asia: in the steppes to stay?' *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 17(2), (2004), p. 241.

⁴²P. Duncan, 'Russia, NATO and the 'war on terror': competition and co-operation in Central Asia after 11 September 2001', in O. Tanrisever, ed., *Afghanistan and Central Asia: NATO's Role in Regional Security since 9/11* (Washington DC: IOS Press, 2013), p. 138.

In face of the NATO pressure, the government of Uzbekistan sought help from the SCO. The Uzbekistan government demanded that the US shut down its military base within half a month, only keeping a small number of German troops in the military base in Termiz in south-east Uzbekistan. In July 2005, the SCO urged that the US set a schedule to the shut down its military base in Uzbekistan. Member states from the SCO such as China and Russia expressed their welcome for Uzbekistan's more independent policy, and supported Uzbekistan to adopt its own counter-terror campaign to address social unrest. In November of that year, the US shut down its military base in the country, but refused to pay the rent for the base; President Karimov then took a step further towards China and Russia, and criticized the US for architecting the 'Andijan event.'⁴³

After Trump took presidency, there is sign that Uzbekistan's relations with the NATO and the US are improving. In November 2017, a man drove a truck into a crowd in a busy bicycle lane near the World Trade Center in New York, killing eight people and injuring 12 others. The suspect was confirmed to be Sayfullo Habibullaevic Saipov, a citizen of Uzbekistan. Following the incident, Uzbekistan's President Mikheev announced that there would be close governmental cooperation with President Trump, and that they would be fighting together against terrorism. On 19 December 2017, Trump made a phone call to Uzbekistan's President, emphasizing that there would be strengthened cooperation in the future in order to respond to regional security threats.

3.3. In Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan was another hub for the NATO members to launch war against the Taliban regime in 2001. In December 2001, at Manas Airport close to Kyrgyzstan's capital, Bishkek, the US established a military base, and the US 376th expeditionary unit was stationed there. At the same time, US allied forces from Spain, France, Australia, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, and South Korea, were also stationed at the base.

The Manas air base has an area of 15 hectares, the longest airstrip in Central Asia, and is also one of the most important military bases in Central Asia with an annual rental of \$1.74 million. It also served as a transfer station for material transport services to Afghanistan for the US's large-scale military transport aircraft including the C-130 and C-17, and was an important air base for US fighter aircraft and tankers. Manas air base is used by the US, NATO and the ISAF, and became one of the most important forward operating sites and post resupply sites for attacks against the 'Al Qaeda' and the Taliban.

At one time, this base had 3,000 US troops, fighter aircraft, transport aircraft and tankers deployed there, and had an important role including transporting personnel, military equipment and material goods to Afghanistan.⁴⁴ Moreover, on the basis of the agreement reached between the US and Kyrgyzstan, the US has already planned to establish a counterterrorism training center in the Kent region of southern Kyrgyzstan.

⁴³E. Troitskiy, 'US policy in Central Asia and regional security', *Global Security* 21(3), (July 2007), p. 427.

⁴⁴T. Landford, 9/11 and the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2012), p. 104.

In February 2009, the Kyrgyzstan parliament, through its government, passed an act regarding the abrogation of the agreement to lease Manas air base to the US military and another 11 militaries from the international anti-terrorism coalition. Subsequently, the US and Kyrgyzstan signed a new agreement for the use of Manas International Airport, and changed it to a 'transit transport center.' The base has an annual rental of \$63 million, and with other construction fees, the US paid approximately \$1.5 billion.⁴⁵

Two issues had arisen during the course of the US and other allied nations using the Manas military base. The first was that Kyrgyzstan considers payment by the US for the military base was too low. The Kyrgyzstan government has not yet obtained sufficient material compensation. The second was that with the US troops in Kyrgyzstan, numerous killings of local Kyrgyz civilians have taken place, giving rise to fierce discontentment by society.

In March 2011, Kyrgyzstan's interim president Roza Otunbaeva made a formal visit to Washington, and the two countries reached a consensus to extend the US use of the Manas military base until July 2014.⁴⁶ However, in October 2011, the newly elected president of Kyrgyzstan, Almazbek Atambayev, announced that he complied with Kyrgyzstan and the US's signing of the agreement regarding the US's use of the transfer station of Manas International Airport. However, he would not sign again the agreement after July 2014, thereby canceling the US military's right to use the Manas military base.⁴⁷ In 2013, the parliament in Kyrgyzstan agreed with 91 votes in favour and 5 votes in opposition, and passed a regulation. Thus, Kyrgyzstan closed off the US military's operations in Manas in July 2014.

This is a strategic base, and in a period of 12 years, it was stationed with 5,300,000 soldiers from the US, NATO and ISAF, and was the US's biggest military base in Central Asia.

In recent years, Kyrgyz government has strengthened its ties with the SCO, and its relations with the US and NATO are aloof. In 2015, the US State Department announced the awarding of the Good Samaritan Sakharov 'Human Rights Defender,' with the US Assistant Secretary of State Malinowski presenting the award to the Good Samaritan named Askarov. US intervention in Kyrgyzstan's internal affairs gave rise to strong dissatisfaction from the government of Kyrgyzstan. In July 2015, Kyrgyz Prime Minister Sariyev signed a bill, declaring unilateral abolition from a 22-year cooperation agreement between Kyrgyzstan and the US. The US expressed its disappointment over Kyrgyzstan's decision.

4. Russian Military Presence in Central Asia

Central Asia is the heartland of the SCO, and it is particularly perceived by Russia as a 'traditional sphere of influence' and vital national interest. Through the signing of the military agreement – the 'Collective Security Treaty Organization' (CSTO), Russia

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 183.

⁴⁶Z. Chotaev, 'The great powers in Central Asia: policies of the US and Russia', in O. Tanrisever, ed., *Afghanistan and Central Asia: NATO's Role in Regional Security since 9/11* (Washington DC: IOS Press, 2013), p. 151.

⁴⁷US Department of Defense, 'Report on progress toward security and stability in Afghanistan', Report to Congress, (November 2012), p. 147.

reincorporated Central Asia's Commonwealth of Independent States' into its development trajectory, establishing Russia's position and role in the security affairs of Central Asia, and pursuing Russia's 21st century 'Monroe Doctrine' in Eurasia.

Firstly, Russia's military presence in Kazakhstan was mainly the Soviet's establishment in 1955 of the Baikonur spaceflight launch center and anti-missile radar station. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan became the only nuclear power in Central Asia. To carry out the denuclearization of Kazakhstan and other independent Soviet countries, in 1992 the US Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger took US\$4 million worth of special funds for the process of denuclearizing the former Soviet countries, and this aid plan was sustained until 1995.⁴⁸ Despite this, Russia still surpassed the US, becoming the most important player to influence the situation in Kazakhstan. In 1994, Russia and Kazakhstan signed an agreement, stipulating that Russia could lease the space launch and anti-missile radar facilities in Kazakhstan's territory for the next 20 years, launching Russia's national defense, economy, technology and commercial spacecraft. To protect these aviation and space facilities, Russia has deployed military force in Kazakhstan that is still there today.

Secondly, Kyrgyzstan is the only country in Central Asia to permit the two potentially competitive great powers – the US and Russia, to simultaneously deploy military bases in its country. In October 2003, Russia set up an air base in Kent, Kyrgyzstan, and provides approximately \$20 million each year in financial aid as compensation. On 31 July 2009, at a summit of the leaders of the CSTO held in Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan, Russian President Medvedev and Kyrgyz President Bakiyev signed a memorandum, with both sides deciding the conditions for the deployment of a base in the south of Kyrgyzstan. Also the two sides signed a memorandum for questions relating to the base status. The agreement is effective for 49 years and will automatically renew for another 25 years upon its expiry. The agreement also stipulates that Russia can deploy no more than one additional camp of military troops as well as a military training center for the two countries.⁴⁹

Since the beginning of the 21st century, Russia's military personnel deployed at this base are mainly from Russian 5th air force. This base is also a nucleus for the CSTO and rapid response force of Russia and certain countries from the Commonwealth of Independent States. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia re-established its first extraterritorial military base there, and it is also Russia's biggest overseas military base nowadays. It is located 20km east of Kyrgyzstan's capital of Bishkek, close to the US military's Manas air base. The establishment of this base not only strengthened Russia's military project in Pakistan, but also helped protect the interests of expatriates after the outbreak of the 'color revolution' in Kyrgyzstan, intervene in Afghanistan's affairs, and act as a stronghold to attack extremist groups in Central Asia, becoming an important symbol for the military race, carried out by the US and Russia in Kyrgyzstan.

⁴⁸H. Katouzian and H. Shahidi, *Iran in the 21st Century: Politics, Economics and Conflict* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 123.

⁴⁹Владимир Соновьев, Бек Орозалиев. Успехи коинтеграции—России удалось договориться с участниками ОДКБ// Коммерсантъ. № 139/п (4194) от 03.08.2009.

Thirdly, Russia has also established a military base in Tajikistan. Tajikistan is one of the most backward countries in Central Asia and hosted the 201st Motor Rifle Division in the Soviet era. At present, part of the 201st Motor Rifle Division has already retreated from Tajikistan's territory, with remaining forces stationed at a training ground and in Tajikistan's capital, Dushanbe, operating as patrol missions. Due to the similar language of the Tajik and Iranian people, Iran considers Tajikistan to be an important partner and hopes that with this fulcrum, it will lead to the development of relations between Iran and the countries in Central Asia.⁵⁰ Russia is staying alert to Iran and other countries intervening in 'Russia's backyard.'⁵¹ Russia and Tajikistan cooperated closely to strike Taliban and extremist forces and smuggling, and safeguard the stability of Tajikistan. In 2012, Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon said after a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow that Tajikistan's parliament will ratify an agreement extending Russia's military presence in the country until 2042.⁵²

By January 2018, Tajikistan was hosting the 201st Military Base, Russia's largest base abroad. The base is stationed in two separate locations in Dushanbe and in Qurghonteppa, Khatlon Province, and hosts an estimated 6,000–7,000 troops. According to analysts, without the base there, Russia would immediately lose influence over Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan and Iran; if Russia leaves, it may lose Central Asia forever, the way it lost influence over Poland, the Czech Republic and other countries in Eastern Europe.⁵³

5. India's Military Presence in Tajikistan

Prior to 9/11, India, Russia and Tajikistan cooperated closely to curb Afghan Taliban. India established a military hospital to support the Northern Alliance against the Taliban in the southeastern region of Tajikistan's capital, Dushanbe, 130 km from the small town of Farkhor. The hospital was shut down shortly after opening.

In 2002, India and Russia along with Tajikistan signed the 'Trilateral Security Cooperation Agreement,' pursuing institutionalization of cooperation between the three countries in counter-terrorism. On the one hand, the presence of India's military base in Tajikistan aims to attack the Taliban forces; on the other hand, India also hopes to contain Pakistan. With Russia's tacit permission, India turned Farkhor into a counter-terror air base to be jointly used by the militaries of India and Tajikistan. India's combat aircraft use two airport hangers, and the third hanger is used by Tajikistan. India deployed 40 flight crew members to this base, and provided training guidance to Tajikistan's air force.⁵⁴

⁵⁰H. Katouzian and H. Shahidi, *Iran in the 21st Century: Politics, Economics and Conflict* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 131-132.

⁵¹R. Harkavy, *Strategic Basing and the Great Powers, 1200-2000* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 148.

⁵²'Tajikistan extends Russia's military presence', available at: <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/tajikistan-extends-russias-military-presence>

⁵³N. Bahrom, 'Kremlin's heightened military interest in Tajikistan raises 'Greater Russia' alarm', available at: http://central.asia-news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_ca/features/2018/01/19/feature-02

⁵⁴Military Observer, *Strategic Pivot: The Global 50 Military Bases* (Beijing: Chemical Industry Press, 2015), p. 80.

India's air base in Farkhor was previously a Soviet one and remained discarded up until after the Cold War. According to an agreement by the two countries, the government of Tajikistan government gave India's air and army base permanent right to use Farkhor's air base. Thus, this base was used by India's military as a transport transit station to assist operations in Afghanistan.⁵⁵ In 2003, Indian government put five million rubles (roughly US\$10 million) into reconstruction, and in 2005 it formally established an air base.⁵⁶

According to *The India Express*, this air base became India's first overseas military base; based on revelations from *Jane's Defence Weekly*, India deployed two 'MiG'-29, altogether 12 Russian-made 'MiG' jet fighter aircraft. More than 40 Indian officers and soldiers were stationed at this stronghold, thus utilizing the control tower of this military base. From 1997 to 2001, India's major work at the military base of Tajikistan was to train Afghani Northern Alliance guerilla forces to make attacks on the Taliban; after the 9/11 event, this base was mainly responsible for military deterrence, training Tajik troops to perform various tasks.⁵⁷ China's former ambassador to India Cheng Ruisheng pointed out that India's establishment of its first overseas military base in Central Asia (Farkhor) was aimed at giving play to the effect of big powers, and has multiple purposes including making attacks against terrorism, containing Kashmir extremists and defending energy interests.⁵⁸

After India obtained its first overseas military base in Farkhor, it tried to take one step further and expand its military presence in Tajikistan. India had its eyes on another military base – the Ayni air base. In 2002–2010, India made a total input of \$70 million to renew the Ayni air base of Tajikistan. It is also called the Gissar air base, just 15 km from the capital of Dushanbe. India extended its aircraft airstrip (extended to 3,200 meters), constructed an air traffic control tower equipped with a navigation system with advanced facilities, and tried to establish the military base in Tajikistan. India deployed a 'MiG'-17 helicopter squad and also deployed a 'MiG'-29 fighter jet.

Through India's establishment of an air base in Ayni, it has established command, control, communication and intelligence networks, advocating India's attacks against Jihad extremists in Kashmir, and forming strategic containment of Pakistan. India has also strengthened its power projection capabilities to grab ample resources from Central Asia.⁵⁹ In 2006, Indian government announced that its military base in Tajikistan had been set up, and that approximately 150 Indian troops would be deployed to this base, along with workers and military advisors.⁶⁰ However, up until now, this base has been in a 'dormant state,' and has not officially been put to use.⁶¹

India has been slow to implement a military base in Tajikistan mainly for political rather than financial reasons. Although the governments of Russia and India have established comprehensive and strategic cooperative relations, Russia is dissatisfied

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 80-81.

⁵⁶'Farkhor air base', available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Farkhor_Air_Base

⁵⁷N. Walsh, 'India flexes its muscles with first foreign military base', *The Guardian*, (26 April 2006).

⁵⁸R. Cheng, 'India is building its first overseas military base', *World Affairs Magazine*, No. 23, (2003), p. 8.

⁵⁹R. Pandit, 'Indian forces get foothold in Central Asia', *Times of India*, (17 July 2007).

⁶⁰'India facing eviction from Tajikistan military base?', available at: <http://www.india-defence.com/reports-3550>

⁶¹R. Sharma, 'India's Ayni military base in Tajikistan is Russia-locked', (26 October 2012), available at: http://indrus.in/articles/2012/10/26/indias_ayni_military_base_in_tajikistan_is_russia-locked_18661.html

with India's purchase of US arms, opposes India's meddling in Central Asia affairs, and more so, is unhappy with India's establishment of an air base in Russia's backyard. In October 2011, India's Minister of Defence A.K. Antony informed Russia of New Delhi's desire to establish a second military base in Ayni, Tajikistan, but India was not given permission from Russia. Due to pressure from Russia, Tajikistan's Foreign Minister Hamrokhon Zarifi announced in 2011 that the Tajik government would only discuss with Russia on the questions of usage of the air base in Ayni. Although India's army commander-in-chief Vijay Kumar Singh visited Tajikistan and in 2012 Tajik President Emomali Rahmon visited India, there has been no progress in the negotiations of both sides until now. Tajikistan has consistently refused India's lease of the air base in Ayni, and India's efforts to deploy a military base in Central Asia have been frustrated.⁶²

6. China's Military Presence in the Greater Middle East

Like Russia, China is the founding member of the SCO and the predominant geo-economic player in Central Asia and the Gulf. Although it shied away from the idea of establishing military bases abroad in the past, it began to change its idea in recent years. In January 2018, *Ferghana News* reported that China would build a military base in the Northern Province of Afghanistan, and, according to the news agency, Tariq Shah Bahrami, the Defense Minister of Afghanistan was already expecting a Chinese expert delegation to discuss the location and further technicalities for the base. The *Ferghana News'* interlocutor, General Dawlat Waziri of the Ministry of Defense of Afghanistan, said that the agreement to set up the base was reached in December 2017 in Beijing, when a high-level delegation led by Afghan Minister of Defense Tariq Shah Bahrami met with Vice Chairman of Central Military Commission Xu Qiliang.⁶³ However, Chinese government denied that. In the foreseeable future, it's unclear whether China would build a fortress in Afghanistan or in Central Asian States.

China hasn't built military presence in the Gulf, but it has vital energy interest in the region. Instead, it has built a logistics base in Djibouti, where the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) may project its military power from the city state to safeguard its Gulf interests. The logistics base is operated by the PLAN, located in the Horn of Africa. It is the PLAN's first overseas military base and was built at a cost of US\$590 million. China's logistics base in Djibouti would serve her interests to promote and enhance stability along the coast of Somalia in the Gulf of Aden, as well as her energy interest in the Gulf. Djibouti's most important economic asset depends on the shipping routes between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean. The significance of her strategic location lies on the west side of the Bab-el-Mandeb, which connects the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, as well as an important transshipment gate for containers.

China would play a vital role in combating piracy and maintaining economic stability and international maritime security, with more flexibility and fuel autonomy

⁶²R Muzaleysky, 'India fails to gain a military foothold in Tajikistan', (2 February 2011), available at: <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5485>

⁶³K Toktomushev, 'China's military base in Afghanistan: is China really building a military base in the northern province of Afghanistan?' *The Diplomat*, (18 January 2018).

Table 1. NATO vs. SCO Members' Military Bases in the Gulf and Central Asia: A Comparison

	NATO members' military bases	SCO members' military presence
Essence of cooperation	Collective defense	Collective security
Intra-state relations	Military	Political
Predominant mission	Responsibility to protect	Non-intervention
Strategic priority	The Gulf and Afghanistan	Central Asia and Djibouti
Use of force	Unilateral or multilateral actions	Seeking the UN authorization
Attitude towards sovereignty	Spreading color revolution	Respecting sovereignty
Shared values	Democracy for peace	Development for peace
Major military base users	US, UK, and France	Russia, China and India
Promoting political reform of the host countries	Seldom	No

through securing access to the port for replenishment. The security of strategic shipping routes would have a positive impact on the whole Arabian Sea. Besides, China's base will provide Chinese peacekeepers support for humanitarian operations, intelligence collection, counter-terrorism, as well as for increasing the cooperative security between China and African countries; it will serve more and more African peacekeepers through its own or together with troop-contributing African governments. This would be less costly than training African peacekeepers in China.

Kyrgyzstan is the meeting point of NATO and Russian bases in Central Asia; Djibouti is the meeting point of NATO and Chinese bases in the Arabian Sea. At present, Djibouti is hosting four great powers' troops: France, the US, Japan and China: two are from NATO, and one is from SCO. In 2018, the United States Department of Defense issued a NOTAM reporting instances of laser attacks against pilots flying near the base. The Chinese Defense Ministry called the accusations 'untrue' and asked the United States 'not to swiftly speculate or make accusations.'⁶⁴ In the foreseeable future, Djibouti may serve as a platform for NATO and SCO members to cooperate and compete simultaneously.

Conclusion

NATO is a military alliance; SCO is a political coalition. So far, the Gulf is the NATO countries' 'inner lake' while Central Asia is the 'backyard' of the SCO. In the Greater Middle East, the priority of SCO is still Central Asia and Djibouti, while the NATO members' strategic interest is in the Gulf and Afghanistan.

As indicated in Table 1, NATO members have much stronger military presence than their SCO counterparts in the Gulf and Central Asia, but the latter enjoy advantages of geographical proximity. The NATO members' military deployment in Central Asia and the Gulf are highly integrated for joint influence and power projection; however, the SCO so far hasn't had collective military bases abroad, and their military integration is still at a low level. Russia, China and India are cautious to each other's military presence, just as they are cautious to NATO members' military presence in the Gulf and Central Asia.

As indicated above, NATO and the SCO do have competitive relations in Eurasia. The former consists of mostly marine powers, who regard the Gulf as its strategic

⁶⁴S. Nebehay, 'US warns on Russia's new space weapons', 2018, Reuters, available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_People%27s_Liberation_Army_Support_Base_in_Djibouti

priority; the latter are composed of land powers, who designate Central Asia as its vital interest. The structural contradiction between NATO and SCO, propelled by great powers' military presence, will make it hard for SCO to develop strategic partnership with GCC as the whole. In the future, however, the West Asian countries, such as Iran, Turkey and Qatar will probably be potential candidates for the SCO membership, and Central Asian countries will be NATO's new frontier for power projection.

On 9–10 June 2018, the SCO summit was held in Qingdao city of China; India and Pakistan became the formal members; Iranian President Rouhani was invited, who participated in the summit. In recent years, SCO has sought new members in the Gulf, and since Iran is now a 10-year observer, it has great possibility. In January 2016, Chinese President Xi Jinping expressed Beijing's support for Iranian full membership in the SCO during his state visit to Tehran. The removal of sanctions in 2016 has opened the possibility of Iran joining, with Putin stating, 'We believe that after Iran's nuclear problem was solved and United Nations sanctions lifted, there have been no obstacles left.' Turkey is already a dialogue partner, and given its discords with the US and EU, it could consider membership eventually as well. The Gulf leaders also have significant trade relations with China, India, and Pakistan. Iranian possible membership could be the catalyst for the GCC members requesting a seat at the SCO table in the future.⁶⁵ Qatar is sandwiched by Iran and Saudi Arabia, two Gulf Giants. The discord Between Saudi-UAE-Bahrain coalition and Qatar in 2017 may compel Qatar to join SCO to counterbalance the neighboring hostilities in the years to come.

With the SCO striding westward, the NATO may penetrate eastward into Central Asia, and it will continue to consolidate its ties with Central Asian countries through Partnership for Peace (PfP).

In a word, while the SCO's and NATO's military positions have been strengthened, the host countries in both regions are faced with serious economic, political and social problems and inter-state conflict. In the light of this, the military presence of outside powers may rest on a weak foundation. Political change may undermine the military presence of the big powers concerned. Therefore, the NATO and the SCO have both scored a relative success in military terms within the region which matters to the user nations, but both may find their military presence counts for little in the face of the local political, economic and social change as well as good governance.

Acknowledgement

This paper was submitted to the Gulf Research Meeting held by the Gulf Research Centre Cambridge, at the University of Cambridge from July 31 to 3 August 2018. Degang Sun would like to express his sincere appreciation to Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

⁶⁵J. Fulton, 'Could the SCO expand into the Middle East?' Qatar Tribune, (26 February 2018).

Funding

The authors are indebted to China's Ministry of Education program "Theoretical and Empirical Studies of China's Participation in the Middle East Security Affairs" (16JJDGJW011), to the "Shu Guang" Project of Shanghai Municipal Education Commission and Shanghai Education Development Foundation (15SG29).