My research seeks to address the question: "Under what conditions does Russia cooperate with China given decades of political tensions between Moscow and Beijing?" In order to answer this question, I study the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) because it is the only regional organization in the post-Soviet space to contain both Russia and China. I use archival material from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and interviews with policy experts in Moscow to evaluate Russia's geopolitical motives in this Chinese-led organization. My research also includes a case study in Kazan that investigates the degree to which the domestic growth of Wahhabism serves as a potential motivation for Russian rapprochement with China.
Founded on June 15, 2001, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization consists of six core members: Russia, China, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Since its inauguration, the SCO has admitted Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Mongolia, and India as observers as well as Turkey, Belarus and Sri Lanka as dialogue partners. The nucleus of the SCO dates from 1996 with the "Shanghai-Five" and the signing of two treaties entitled, the Shanghai Agreement on Confidence Building in the Military Field and the Agreement on Mutual Reduction of Military Forces in the Border Areas in 1997. These agreements were intended to resolve mutual border disputes among Russia, China, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan.

Part of the SCO’s broad policy agenda is to coordinate member actions against what it terms the “three evils:” terrorism, extremism, and separatism. For example, nearly twenty years prior to the SCO, the former Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Qian Qichen told his Russian counterpart, Andrei Kozyrev that both Russia and China share the dangers of "Islamic fundamentalism" and "national separatism." In June 2001, the SCO organized a convention defining these long discussed terms along common lines. In order to help states pursue these objectives, the SCO has instituted its own internal organization to monitor security concerns. The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (RATS SCO), established on June 7, 2002, supports an extensive list of security objectives. The RATS is tasked with developing proposals on how to coordinate cooperation among members and to supervise the responsiveness of other SCO bodies in meeting the challenges of the charter’s three evils.

Since 2002, Russia and China have participated in a series of counter-terrorism exercises under the SCO’s framework. “Peace Mission 2007,” for example, was the first large-scale military exercise conducted on Russian and Chinese territory involving all of the SCO’s full-members. Personnel from internal security agencies and military forces underscored the operation’s ostensibly anti-terrorist objectives. According to press reports, “about 4,000 troops and 80 aircraft from China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan were involved in the joint exercises.” Of these 4,000 troops, Russia and China contributed 2,000 and 1,600 personnel respectively to Peace Mission 2007.

Given these developments, the case of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is paradoxical because of its potential to facilitate cooperation between Russia and China – a relationship that has been fraught with historical challenges. Even today there is still the perception among Russians that, "China, under the guise of economic cooperation, pursued a deliberate policy of resettling their surplus population in the northeastern provinces to the RFE and Siberia." One would therefore expect Russia to be more protective of its interests in such a strategic area and to not create new commitments with China. My research helps resolve this apparent contradiction through Chinese-Russian interests in the SCO.
RESEARCH PROCESS AND RESULTS

I conducted my research over a six-month period during which I analyzed archival documents from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and conducted semi-structured interviews with academics, journalists, and policy experts. Approximately 60 percent of the interviews were conducted in Moscow and the remaining Russian interviews were completed in Kazan. After completing my fellowship, I pursued additional surveys in Shanghai, China with other SCO specialists.

Interview Techniques
My interviews in Moscow focused on understanding the development and reasons for Russia's foreign policy in the SCO. My questions probed three possible reasons for cooperation: the sale of hydrocarbon resources, counter-balancing American influence, and Russia’s struggle with militant Islamic radicalism. At the conclusion of each interview, I utilized a numbered card sorting technique that measured the relative importance of these reasons. The purpose of this so-called "Q method" was to test the significance of each explanation by selectively measuring expert judgment on the SCO. Through aggregating quantitative data on how Russian experts prioritize the causes for cooperation, it was possible to derive the most salient explanation.

Q Methodology
Each person examined 25 cards with statements that pertained to the three explanations and sorted them into piles based on their relative importance. They then ordered the cards on a chart in the form of a pyramid. Statements of less importance were placed on the left and statements of greater importance were placed on the right. These statements aligned with numbered columns on the chart with "-4" as least important and "+4" as most important. The column in the middle was reserved for neutral statements. Respondents were only able to place a maximum of two cards on either end of the chart with an increasing number of cards in each column toward the center. The design of the chart therefore approximated a normal distribution of responses.

Case Study
In order to characterize more precisely the sources, extent, and nature of Islamic radicalism in Russia, my case study investigated the presence of Wahhabism in Tatarstan's Muslim community. I chose Kazan specifically because it is the capital of Tatarstan and serves as a hub for about 30 percent of the area's population. It also hosts many researchers and religious officials who study the local practice of Islam. As a "crucial case," it tests, in principle, whether a proposition holds true in the most unlikely of circumstances. In this instance, by identifying radicalism in an area that is a model for Orthodox-Muslim relations, I was able to explore whether Wahhabism is a systemic challenge for Russia. Furthermore, based on the proposition that wealth reduces conflict, if a portion of the inhabitants of Kazan, the center of one of Russia's most wealthy regions, share militant views, then Wahhabism is probably present in less developed areas.

Locations
The interviews in Moscow were with experts at the following institutions: the Federation Council, Institute for World Economics and International Relations, INFO SCO, Institute of Far Eastern Studies, The Moscow Times, the Higher School of Economics, Institute of CIS Countries, Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, the Carnegie Center – Moscow, the Moscow State Institute for International Relations, the Center for Strategic Conjecture, and the Central Asian Analytic Group. In Kazan, I conducted interviews over a two-week period with faculty at Kazan Federal University, Kazan State Technological University, the Russian Islamic University, the Center of Islamic Culture, and the Council of Ulema of the Russian Association of Islamic Agreement.

In Shanghai, I completed additional surveys over 18 days with researchers at Shanghai University, the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, Shanghai Institutes of International Studies, and Tongji University.

Interview Results in Moscow
According to one member of the Valdai Discussion Club, it is unlikely that Russia's ongoing rapprochement with China in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has been motivated by sales of natural gas and oil despite Russia's heavy economic reliance on natural resources. In contrast to Russian rhetoric about
the creation of a SCO energy club, Russia and China sign contracts with Central Asian states outside of the SCO's multi-lateral framework. The latest gas deal between Russia and China, which was reached on May 21, 2014, is an example of this largely bi-lateral relationship.

Russia has seen, however, a role for China in Central Asia, a region that has solely been under Russia's strategic sphere of influence. For example, a former member of the Russian State Duma suggested that Russia originally wanted Chinese investment and economic activity in its near abroad to increase regional stability. He explained that Russia has had a turbulent history in Central Asia given a legacy of imperial and Soviet oppression. China, in contrast, is a relatively new actor in Central Asia that does not bear Russia's historical burdens in the region. It therefore can more easily reach agreements with Central Asian states. Russian leaders interpreted this engagement by China as a politically low risk method to develop Central Asia without straining Russia's finances. They anticipated that such economic development would in turn provide the basis for long-term stability. However, he qualified these views by adding that the SCO is still mainly about establishing a "multi-polar world."

A senior journalist who writes for a Moscow-based newspaper analyzed the Kremlin's motives in Central Asia similarly. Although the journalist prioritized the containment of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the prevention of large scale violence in the region, he still believed that anti-Americanism was a leading factor in Russian foreign policy.

Interview Results in Kazan

Based on my interviews in Kazan with academics, local imams, and other researchers, the data suggest that Wahhabism is present in Tatarstan. One of the leading authorities on Islamic history in Russia and Muslim institutions characterized groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir that operate in Russia and Central Asia as Wahhabist. He specifically explained that these groups seek to create a state that is similar to Saudi Arabia: a religious autocracy that is financed by petrochemicals. However, only a small percentage of the population of Tatarstan could be considered Wahhabi. According to a scholar at one of Kazan's universities, only 4 percent of Tatarstan's population consists of practicing Muslims, and of those who practice Islam, only 3-5 percent are "radical."

Out of a total population of 3,786,400 people, I therefore estimate that there are possibly between 4,500 to 7,500 radical Islamists in Tatarstan.

Interview Results in Shanghai

A group of faculty from Shanghai University, for example, kindly organized a round table meeting during which they discussed how Arabs from the Persian Gulf were the main cause of Islamic extremism in Xinjiang and Central Asia. They explained that groups of Muslims from Saudi Arabia helped import Wahhabist traditions from the Middle East by traveling to Xinjiang during the late 1980's and early 1990's. A senior scholar at the meeting said that some Uyghurs in China have now prohibited their traditions of dancing, listening to music, and ethnic dress due to the introduction of Wahhabism.

Archives

In addition to my surveys, I collected transcripts of diplomatic meetings, governmental reports, annotated summaries of academic articles, and policy commentaries on Chinese-Russian relations from the Archive of the Russian Foreign Ministry. Recorded diplomatic conversations from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example, also describe regional concerns about the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in the years preceding the SCO. In a meeting between the Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Georgiy Kunadze and the American Assistant Secretary of State, Winston Lord, Kunadze expressed that, "It is true that they [leaders in the Chinese government] do not see the main threat from Mongolia, but rather from Central Asia in connection with the spread of Islamic fundamentalism...the spread of Islamic fundamentalism causes concern in China and Central Asia." Moreover, in an interview with one of Russia's leading experts on Islam, I confirmed that current Chinese policy is still concerned with Islamic fundamentalism and specifically designed to prevent the entry of Arabs into China.
CONTINUING RESEARCH

Since the end of my fellowship, I have been coding and summarizing my findings for my doctorate in global affairs. However, there are still a number of people and places that could provide further records on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Wahhabism in Russia.

Russia
I would like to continue searching for information in additional archives in Moscow including the Central Archive of the FSB, State Archive of the Russian Federation, Operational Archive of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Services (SVR), and the Archive of the President of Russia. In particular, the Central Archive of the FSB could provide valuable data given Russia's history of domestic terrorism. In February and March of 2014, I visited the FSB and SVR to pursue archival information, but was ultimately denied access.

In terms of interviews, there are a number of researchers at the Moscow State Institute for International Relations who could contribute a unique perspective. These researchers include: Alexander Lukin, Vitaly Vorobev, Valery Denisov, Andrey Ivanov, and Alexei Fedorovich.

China
According to professors at Shanghai University, researchers at the Academy of Social Sciences in Xinjiang have studied the connection between Wahhabi ideology and Uyghur separatism in detail and could provide more data. I would like to travel to this institution in order to collect specific information on how separatist groups such as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement and other entities receive Wahhabist support. Since I found it difficult to pinpoint the exact ways in which suspected terrorist groups receive assistance from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and other Arab states, I would like to visit the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the SCO in Tashkent. People with whom I have conducted interviews at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and Central Eurasia Analytic Group have done work with the SCO in Uzbekistan and could help with such a trip.

Finally, before the end of my dissertation, I will conduct additional research at the SCO Secretariat in Beijing. I am still very interested in locating the most current archival documents that are kept at the Secretariat.

RELEVANCE TO POLICY COMMUNITY

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization operates as a conduit for the evolving relationship between Russia and China in Central Asia. This linkage between Russia, Central Asia, and East Asia can affect American foreign policy in terms of counter-terrorism and geostrategic planning in the following ways:

- Russia and China are both very concerned with Islamic groups within their own borders and in neighboring countries such as Afghanistan. Since the SCO is an organization that aims to ensure the stability of Central Asia, Russia's objectives should coincide well with American interests in the region. Given the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan and the possible resurgence of the Taliban, the future of Afghanistan is still of paramount importance to the United States. America will need as much assistance as possible to guarantee Central Asia's security from militants in Afghanistan. Russia can therefore be a valuable partner for the United States and, at least in principle, help ease America's security burden.

- Unfortunately, Russian-American relations are arguably at their lowest point since the Cold War because of the Ukrainian crisis. The enlargement of NATO and America's support of the government in western Ukraine have arguably sustained anti-Americanism among Russian leaders who would like closer political ties with China. The SCO gives Russia a forum to facilitate this relationship as tensions continue with the United States. However, as suggested by one of IMEMO's senior researchers, Russia does not necessarily object to America itself, but rather it objects to the preponderance of American power in the world.

- The SCO is the largest regional organization in the world which Americans generally neglect. With the Chinese-Russian relationship at its core, the SCO may serve to buttress an alliance against US interests in Central Asia; however, it may also serve to complement American interests in the War on Terror.
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17 Interview with Russian journalist, interview by Michael Zboray, Moscow, Russia, March 30, 2014

18 Interview with Russian scholar, interview by Michael Zboray, Kazan, Russia, June 24, 2014

19 Interview with Russian academic, interview by Michael Zboray, Kazan, Russia, June 11, 2014

20 Interview with Chinese scholar, interview by Michael Zboray, Shanghai, China, July 28, 2014


ENDNOTES


5 Interview with senior policy expert, interviewed by Michael Zboray, Moscow, Russia, March 20, 2014

6 Interview with former member of the Russian State Duma, interview by Michael Zboray, Moscow, Russia, February 24, 2014

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*Please note that the listed interviews were conducted under confidentiality.
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