

# SCO summit, 2019, Bishkek

June 27, 2019

## Manifest pedagogy

SCO has got a renewed importance in the history of India with India becoming its member in 2017. It should also be analyzed in the context of resurgence of Asia with China at the forefront. More importantly how can India be benefitted from the organization should be a point of interest for aspirants

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Recent SCO summit at Bishkek and its outcomes

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SCO origin and structure

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is a **permanent intergovernmental international organisation**, the creation of which was announced on 15 June 2001 in Shanghai (China) by the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan.

- It was preceded by the Shanghai Five mechanism and entered into force in 2003.
- The Heads of State Council (HSC) is the supreme decision-making body.
- SCO's main goals are
- Strengthening mutual trust and neighbourliness among the member states;
- Promoting their effective cooperation in politics, trade, the economy, research, technology and culture and other areas;
- Making joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region;
- Moving towards the establishment of a democratic, fair and rational new international political and economic order.
- The organisation has two permanent bodies – the SCO Secretariat based in Beijing and the Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) based in Tashkent.
- SCO comprises **eight member states**, India, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.
- It has four observer states and six dialogue partners.

### Important summits

- 1<sup>st</sup> SCO summit, Shanghai, China (2001) – Uzbekistan was added to “Shanghai five” and SCO was launched.
- 4<sup>th</sup> summit, Tashkent, Uzbekistan (2004) – formally launched the Regional Anti-terrorist Structure (RATS) of the SCO.
- 5<sup>th</sup> summit, Astana, Kazakhstan (2005) – members agreed to grant observer status to India, Iran and Pakistan.
- 11<sup>th</sup> summit, Astana (2011) – India's bid for membership was considered.
- 14<sup>th</sup> summit, Dushanbe, Tajikistan (2014) – India formally

applied for SCO membership prior to the summit.

- 15<sup>th</sup> summit, Ufa , Russia (2015) – India and Pakistan accorded full membership of SCO.
- 17<sup>th</sup> summit, Astana (2017)) – India and Pakistan joined as members.

Bishkek summit of 2019 and decision taken

- Marked the second year in which India participated as a full member.
- Honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his address to the SCO leaders presented his vision for the organization in the form of **HEALTH** (healthcare cooperation, economic cooperation, alternate energy, literature and culture, terrorism-free society and humanitarian cooperation).
- He called upon member states to ensure that nations which support, promote or finance terror must be held accountable – referring to Pakistan without explicitly naming it.
- India refused to join the clause in the declaration in support of the Belt and Road Initiative, while all the other SCO members ‘reaffirmed their support’ for the Chinese initiative.
- The declaration called for ‘consistent implementation’ of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (Iran nuclear deal) and asked all participants ‘for comprehensive and effective implementation of the document,’ a year after US pulled out of it.
- The ‘Roadmap for Further Action of the SCO Afghanistan Contact Group’ was signed by the leaders.
- The Indian position of an ‘Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled inclusive peace process’ was similarly highlighted by the prime minister.
- Russian leader invited Modi to be the chief guest at the **Eastern Economic Forum** in Vladivostok in September, which would also see the annual bilateral summit being

held alongside the same.

- The India-China bilateral, coming after successful listing of Masood Azhar as a global terrorist, led to the decision to expedite border talks and plans to mark the 70th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations.
- Addressing the first **India-Kyrgyzstan** Business Forum, the Prime minister emphasised on better connectivity as being crucial for better trade ties. The two countries **signed the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement** as talks continue on the preferential trade agreement with the **Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)**.

The SCO summit for 2020 will be hosted by Russia.

It is clear that SCO has become an important venue for the member states to interact and bilateral meetings on the sidelines have garnered more attention than the multilateral summit itself. With the inclusion of India and Pakistan, it still remains to be seen if the bilateral frictions between member states would preclude more meaningful collaboration at the SCO or whether it would overcome the differences to play an active role in a changing international order.

### Importance of SCO for India

On June 9, 2017, India became a full member of the SCO. India's disconnect with Central Asia came with Partition and the loss of direct geographical links. Although Central Asia is highly endowed with natural resources, the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan and Pakistan's denial of transit prevent India from directly accessing these resources and deepening economic ties with the countries of the region. This is an important factor that led India to seek membership in SCO.

- India being an energy deficient country with increasing demands for energy, it is an assured market for the resource rich Central Asian countries and Russia.

- SCO membership could help advance talks on the construction of stalled pipelines like TAPI which is of considerable importance to India's natural gas needs.
- Another development related to India's energy requirements is the proposed Russian idea of an '**Energy Club**' for deepening interactions between producers (Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Iran) and consumers (China, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, India, Pakistan and Mongolia) while shaping a common energy system in both the regional and global contexts. Within this framework India and Russia are exploring a possible hydrocarbon pipeline route through North-West of China.
- Central Asian countries provides India with a market for its IT, telecommunications, banking, finance and pharmaceutical industries.
- Will help deepen economic ties between India and the Central Asian countries and eventually even result in a Free Trade Agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union.
- Membership in SCO is likely to help India fulfil its aspiration of playing an active role in its extended neighbourhood as well as checking the ever growing influence of China in Eurasia.
- Provides a platform for India to simultaneously engage with its traditional friend Russia as well as its rivals, China and Pakistan.
- Enables India to hinder any attempt of Pakistan to use the SCO forum for mobilising support for its anti-India activities.
- India's presence in SCO would also ensure that China does not dictate terms in Eurasia.
- India would be able to offset **China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**, by mobilising support for the **International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**.
- Eurasian powers are bound to play a major role in Afghanistan's security affairs. Russia, China and Pakistan have already started engaging the Taliban which is of concern to India. Hence it is important that India

does not get left out of the evolving situation in that country and SCO membership could help in this regard.

- India would also benefit from the **Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)** based in Tashkent, which would help gain vital intelligence inputs on the movement of terror outfits, drug-trafficking, cyber security and Public information of the region.

## Challenges

- China and Russia are co-founders of SCO and its dominant powers, hence India's ability to assert itself would be limited. In addition, India may also have to either dilute its growing partnership with the West or engage in a delicate balancing act.
- Except India, all the other members of SCO have endorsed China's BRI initiative. India's primary concern is related to the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which passes through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK). In this regard, if in future the economic policies of SCO come to be associated with the BRI network of roads and transportation, then India would face a dilemma and even a policy setback.
- Because of the state of relations between India and Pakistan, many assume that the spotlight would shift away from Central Asia towards tensions in South Asia, thus making regional cooperation hard to foster.
- Just like SAARC, India-Pakistan rivalry would be a significant threat to the proper functioning of SCO too. In this case, with the rising tensions and numerous cease-fire violations on the Line-of-Control (LoC), it is hard to assume how the two neighbours would adhere to the idea of "good-neighbourliness" prescribed in Article 1 of the SCO charter.
- Though, SCO charter prohibits the raising of bilateral issues, a conflict situation involving Kashmir might compel Russia and China to interfere to prevent any

detrimental impact on the SCO.

- With regards to RATS, India might face difficulties as the Indian understanding of terrorism is different from the other members of SCO. For SCO, terrorism coincides with regime destabilisation; whereas for India it is related to state sponsored cross border terrorism. Hence groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Afghan Taliban and Haqqani Network do not come under the ambit of the SCO anti-terror structure.

The moot point for India's strategy at the SCO, however, is not to counter China but to rather enhance economic cooperation with the Eurasian states and benefit from the security framework. Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, the development of India's relation with Central Asian countries was constrained by a lack of overland access because of both political and security reasons. That has been remedied to a large extent by the formation of the SCO where India can leverage its interests that would help it both on the domestic and the international front.