



SCO as a Passage to Regional Security: Future Developments and Opportunities for Pakistan

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Abstract

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is a pathway to promote regional security and has a strong commitment to counter security threats. The primary purpose of the organisation is to promote security, peace, and regional stability. Juxtapose SCO offers an opportunity for the member states to create direct security linkages in the region. First, the paper articulates the historical development of the SCO. Moreover, the paper evaluates SCO as a substantial pathway which is promoting the regional security effectively and how Pakistan, being a critical member state, is playing an active role in regional security. In addition, another goal is to determine how SCO member states enhance counter-terrorism cooperation at state levels as well as in the regional levels. The study shows that Pakistan supports SCO's efforts for regional cooperation in counter-terrorism, drug trafficking and planned crimes. The paper concludes that regional security is an influential tool for further development of SCO. Finally, this paper briefly looks at the developmental programs like China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that how the changing patterns in world politics promotes regional security with special focus on Pakistan.

Keywords: SCO, Regional Security, Regional Cooperation, Economic Development

1. Introduction

SCO is an organisation with strong internal structure, and its commitment concerning its agendas in the region, including the support of China is boosting and strengthening the organisation. The organization aims at maintaining peace, eradicating security threats like eliminating the menace of terrorism and other evils, promoting economic cooperation within region, providing peaceful and free environment for trade and business, development of infrastructure, advancement of science and technology, maintaining political affairs and various other areas while some areas are given more importance because of the changing global dynamics and fluctuations in the power-grabbing game in world affair. Currently, SCO focuses more on security issues by looking over the regional dynamics and circumstances. Beijing wants to create peace, harmony, and stability in the region for generating a suitable and favourable environment for trade-business, political, social, economic, and structural engagement within the states of the region.

The structure of organisation is instrumental in resolving the conflicts within its domain. As for as Pakistan is concerned, it has been suffering from multiple problems in which security issues create many difficulties in other affairs of life as well it may be economic or social and peaceful coexistence with neighbours especially India. China wants a peaceful and favourable environment for trade and business within the region; it is a suitable time for Pakistan to get benefit from the situations. Moreover, both the nations share cordial and time-tested relations for long. In addition, SCO member states are cooperating for providing a peaceful environment for trade and strengthening regional stability.

2. Literature Review

The SCO was entirely recognised in June 2001 and initially conceived as a regional security organisation. It emerged as “Shanghai Five” in 1996 with an objective of the cooperation along with facilitating bilateral military exercises between the member states. The member states included Russia, China and the four essential Central Asian countries these are Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Furthermore, it aimed at resolving the common border issues among member states that mainly emphasise on regional integration and security (Chung, 2006). SCO is an eminent regional organisation which pursues and ensures maximum security in Central Asia. SCO strives for a multidisciplinary regional cooperation, which withstands with stability, security and peace of whole the region (Matveeva & Giustozzi, 2008). The significant task of the SCO is to generate environment for economic partnerships as well as foster the economic development in the region. Under the framework of bilateral and multilateral cooperation, intentions of member States are rising for the mutual trade and investment through developing industrial cooperation and increasing economic partnership. Most recently, the essential possessions within the framework and organization have been the development of transport and energy relations. Currently, economic cooperation inside the organisation is unfairly receiving less attention than cooperation between the member states on countering drug trafficking, extremism, separatism, and terrorism.

The establishment of Regional Counter-Terrorism Structure in 2006 is a unique executive long-lasting body based on the framework for cooperation among the member states in the counterterrorism and security fields. The regional counter-terrorism structure is funded and operated within the framework set by the decision taken in the SCO concerning the fight against extremism, terrorism, and separatism. The organisation has been established for solving security problems of the region. The platform of SCO can be a bridge between resolving the old hostilities between two neighbouring countries, namely Pakistan and India, which resulted in more stability and regional growth. It will also solve the problem of terrorism from their soils which has been a great hindrance in creating peace and development within both the nations (Rehman, Ashfaq, & Khan, 2018). The changing dynamics of the global affairs and development about every field of life throughout the world require the states which have remained underdeveloped or unstable because of multiple reasons to make rational decisions for changing the fate of their nations.

The main principles and objectives of the SCO include:

- Maintaining peace and strengthening good neighbourly relations among the member states in the region;
- Developing effective measures, that are aimed at minimising the threats of extremists, combating the separatist and terrorist organisations, countering illegal migration, and arms trafficking;

- Improving general security and promoting regional economic cooperation, accelerating the open movement of goods, services technology, and capital;
- Developing cooperation in all areas like health, science and technology, culture, education, tourism and deepening economic links to cultural exchange;
- Efficient usage of transport, communications infrastructure, and development of energy systems;
- Creating helpful environments for the economic development of the region,
- Ensuring the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens of States belonging to the organization based on current legislation and national traditions;
- Developing mechanisms for integration into the global economy without losing commodity money sovereignty and joint assistance in mitigating and preventing natural and human-made disasters;

2.1. Formation of the Institutions in SCO

There are several supranational institutions according to the "Charter of the SCO". They are:

- The Council of Heads of States
- The Council of Prime Ministers
- The Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs
- Meetings of Heads of Ministers
- Council of National Coordinators

Along with these supranational institutions, there are two permanent organs of SCO known as Regional Counter-Terrorism Structure, and a Secretariat. The Council of Heads of Member States is the top decision-making body in SCO, and it calls meeting annually. The purpose of the meeting of the Heads of States is knowing about the priority of the things wise along with fostering the significant activities of the Organization. Countries preside over the organization in turn, with an annual cycle, by completing the term of office at the summit. The Heads of States set the budget of the SCO, consider, and address main economic concerns in the areas of developing interaction within the organization. The Foreign Affairs Ministers examine the current activities of the organisation, and during the sessions, they also highlight issues within the organization. If necessary, the Council may make a declaration and take decisions immediately while the Meetings of Heads of Ministries or departments are apprehended to consider specific crucial issues on the spot and develop collaboration to resolve the problem within the SCO. Since, 15th June 2001, SCO's perpetual organ is the regional counter-terrorism structure that deals with the issues of Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism in the Shanghai Convention.

2.2. Functioning Structures of SCO

The Shanghai Business Cooperation Council was established on 14th June 2006, in Shanghai. The SCO member countries joint together with the utmost authoritative representatives of the business community. The chief objective was to enlarge the programs and projects in the economic cooperation among the member states. Furthermore, develop dialogue and direct links among the financial and business circles of the member states. Identifying proper literature for such a study in a background of regional security in the framework of SCO is challenging. The domains on which SCO intends to hold are politics, economy, defence, law implementation organisations, environment protection, cultural and scientific exchange, and

education. However, it has a significant attribute that consequently stresses on “a new dogma of global security” (Akiner, 2010). In relations with the population of the member states of SCO is nearly one-fourth of the world population; therefore, it keeps the status of a large regional organization. Moreover, the structure SCO is a conduit to accomplish nonviolent consequences of any misconduct by member states and way out for resolving conflicts and the insurgent issues in China as well as Central Asia (Shambaugh, 2005).

The essential study of the SCO framework focuses not only on security issues but likewise; it also prioritises the political coherence and the economic growth among the member states (Shambaugh & Shambaugh, 2005). Similarly, President Hu in June 2012 in his interview stressed that “to the validation of the Program of Economic Cooperation and Multilateral Trade, SCO members have gained extraordinary progress in the communications, energy and cooperation projects of transportation”. He also stressed on the innovative SCO notion of enlarging advances that contain in regulating the economic globalization. Likewise, developing regional economic growth, attaining common advantage by improving members states profits based on strategic development while creating situations of progress for member states. Moreover, President Hu Jintao also suggested that “to merge the social basis of growth with the SCO” (Mariani, 2013). Additionally, he promoted the idea which based on “the harmonious society” therefore primarily development and security are so much connected.

Bernardo Mariani likewise delivered the investigation on trade progress in Central Asia and China. The third writing part predominantly highly acclaimed the existing security vulnerability in the whole regions and the instrumental role of SCO provides countermeasures for opposing threatening situation through collaboration and cooperation. In scholarly literature, “Regional Security Complex Theory” delivers conceptual pathways to recognise this approach (Buzan, Buzan, Waever, W'ver, & Buzan, 2003). The scholars also stress that the international system contains numerous regional security complexes (Buzan, Waever, Waever, & De-Wilde, 1998). SCO is a regional foundation which evolves around the socio-economic, and military concerns (Swanström, 2010).

Pakistan's goals of reduction of extremism, territorial integrity, and ornamental border security correspond with SCO's agreement. Pakistan is profound to contribute to future intelligence sharing cooperation as well as counter-terrorism exercises. Central Asian states may also constitute on similar regional security complex. SCO forum offers member states to safeguard, protect, stabilise, and secure the region from terrorist threats. Therefore, the SCO's security plan has been extended to substantial emphasis on transnational issues, which could not be successfully addressed by member states alone. Consequently, SCO offers a new pathway of commitment to the member states, which led them to work together to address and counter security threats (Lanteigne, 2006).

3. Methods and Material

The study mostly based on qualitative research initially devoted to introducing the history and the development of the SCO along with its organizational structure. In this section descriptive method have been followed along with using mostly official SCO documents such as joint declarations, action plans, declarations, and agreements, but also focuses on secondary literature dealing with the problem of regional security. It tries to explain the behaviour of the state in the SCO based on historical security streams and more profound political nature of the security concept. In the next section, it endeavoured to answer a secondary research question,

namely to what extent the SCO articulates on security issues and how Pakistan has an indispensable role in regional security. Likewise, the SCO also analysed as a platform that is supposed to perform different tasks in the region. To this end, it will pursue peace with coherence and cooperation in three areas: political, economic, and military. Attention has been also paid to the evaluation of whether developmental programs like CPEC, a flagship project of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and changing patterns will promote regional security and find out its impacts on the security situation of Pakistan.

4. Discussion and Findings

Pakistan, as SCO member, has a robust commitment to increase its different approach and perform an active part in the regional security and stability. Similarly, the enlargement of Gwadar Port may transform Islamabad as an enormous trade and energy corridor for the member states of SCO (Zeb, 2006). The biggest challenge, along with other difficulties for SCO nations, is combating terrorism. While using this regional platform states can improve the security situation while, Pakistan as a full member state can effectively perform its role against terrorism in the region. By countering terrorism and terrorist activities, states would be able to ensure economic growth along with creating new markets, especially in the energy sector. The role of SCO has become an essential element of regional as well as international security which hugely sponsors peace and stability. The SCO's priorities in the future will remain around regional security and stability. Today, SCO is an organization which is spreading and increasing its influence around the world.

The SCO has generally been growing as an indispensable Eurasian alliance. However, it is debatable matter whether SCO can appear in a short time as a counterbalance to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO] (Khamraev, 2004). Many spectators of security seem convinced that the SCO would slowly arrive to counterbalance NATO's regional expansion in Asia. Employing Russian and Iranian support, SCO works to curb regional existence of American diplomatic influence. Despite frequent renunciation of the aggressive nature of the SCO and changes among members in the field of security and military cooperation. In addition, some of the creations of the SCO reveal that it is gradually evolving towards an advanced security organization. This progress linked at regional and geographical level with an amalgamation of political and military measures.

The advancement of SCO was a visible growth in the pitch of modern global politics generally and regional politics specifically (Tavares, 2009). The regional contributors considered SCO as an organisation that fights for maintaining peace and eliminating security threats. Pakistan, because of its imminent geopolitical place, keeps the status of an essential player in the South Asian region. Islamabad observed the organisation as a giant to enclose its geostrategic benefits and track its genuine motive towards security & peace along with the long-term economic affluence of the region. SCO has mainly two long-lasting coordinating bodies; Regional Anti-terrorist Structure (RATS) and secretariat for administrative supports which provide inside assistance to the member states against terrorist activities. Moreover, the RATS has been established in 2004 for maintaining the security and stability in the region (Matveeva & Giustozzi, 2008).

The SCO previously conducted joint military exercises against this monstrous phenomenon. Furthermore, SCO has already set up to eliminate illicit drug transportation and extensive trade in Afghanistan (Fels, 2013). Additionally, the SCO has an arrangement in Afghanistan to push

it in the direction of the peace process and stability. Pakistan is playing an active part in creating stability and starting the peace process in Afghanistan. The SCO also contributes meaningfully for the growth of Pakistan towards anti-terrorism competencies, primarily by the RATS. Pakistan has been involved in bilateral anti-terrorism cooperation agreements with other states. RATS could also support the member states and Pakistan in maintaining and institutionalising anti-terrorism cooperation to fight against terrorist activities. The member states regularly carry out joint anti-terrorism exercises through the RATS mechanism; they ensure the exchange of information and cooperate closely in the field of anti-drug activities (Qadir & Rehman, 2016). Although the developing military cooperation between member countries, the SCO does not perform as a military alliance like NATO because few member states have previously had collective security apparatus in a place such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

Pakistan's distinctive geography deals with acute land links of the interconnectivity for the commercial and trade accomplishments that are mutually beneficial for the all states of the region in one way or other. However, the current circumstances of energy trade will be one of the top priority areas. Furthermore, Pakistan performs a crucial part in the arrival of the North-South Trade along with providing an energy corridor with favourable opportunities for multiple member states via land route and pipeline links to Gwadar then to Central Asian states. The Pak-China MoU on the launch of the Kashghar-Gwadar road and railways is positive progress and a right direction for all regional stakeholders. The SCO provides an opportunity for Pakistan to create new links in the world economy. Pakistan after getting membership of the organization has completed its procedures; likewise, it must use its proven capabilities to hydrocarbon capitals and the combined use of water resources, therefore, Islamabad should actively begin its presence on the forums like Business Council of SCO along with Business Forum and the Interbank Association.

CPEC is now progressing well via completing and functioning of majority of its projects. This mega project will open economic zones and build transport networks all over Pakistan (Adnan & Fatima, 2016). Moreover, CPEC will perform the role of an economic corridor via an infrastructure revolution throughout the country. Better trade and investment structure provide an opportunity to not only China but also the SCO's regional member states to boost their economies through collaboration and cooperation. Currently, Pakistan's global trade with the SCO member states because of multiple reasons is not likely at such level which it should be but even it can benefit from SCO through using policies based on rationality. Pakistan experiences quite jovial relations with member countries; therefore, it is time to show a tilt towards SCO nations by strengthening trade and economic ties (Rehman, Hakim, Khan, & Khan, 2018). Active participation in trade, security and other areas could be beneficial for Pakistan's national interest in coming days while seeking ties and alliance with the US which time and again remains sour. In this regard, Islamabad needs a stable and reliable partnerships that can be achieved through active ties with the SCO member states including China.

Pakistan as a valuable regional player and China as an emerging giant both share a historical association with Central Asian regional colleagues. In addition, CPEC is a combination of short-term, mid-term and long-term projects along with the creation and development of roads that link Pakistan's Gwadar city with the Chinese city of Kashgar. Connecting and advancing power lines under the project will help the people of Pakistan and China to reduce the menace of the energy crisis. The purpose of this project is to expand the links between the two countries, promote bilateral relations, enhance the system of agriculture, and reduce poverty. Then the

president of Pakistan Mamnoon Hussain visited China in February 2014 to discuss the CPEC plan in Pakistan. In this regard, for the start and continuation of the project in 2014 China announced an investment of \$45 billion for the advancement of energy and infrastructure projects in Pakistan which has increased over time, currently reaching almost \$65 billion (see, Abid & Ashfaq, 2015; Khatoun, Rahim, Ali, 2018).

SCO plans to establish regional stability which links the member countries and strengthen their policies by keeping aside their bilateral differences for the common good. This forum offers that the aggressive neighbours meet and resolve their various problems during the meeting of leaders. For Pakistan, the most important political imperative is to develop bilateral relations with India which has remained rude since their independence. Both countries have suffered a lot because of their unhealthy relations. In these circumstances, SCO could play the role of a bridge between Delhi and Islamabad through playing a role in the transformation of Indian policies on a regional basis to resolve the remaining elongated issues with Pakistan. By doing this would generate a favourable environment in which both the states experience a regular market in economic activities, this would create a friendly environment among other member states as a regional colleague. This environment provides India with an opportunity to become capable of gaining entrance to Central Asia via Kabul and Lahore which eventually ties-up with the new project of Silk Road (Fallon, 2015). In this regard, recently Islamabad has shown its positive attitude by announcing the opening of Kartarpur corridor for Hindu Sikh community without the requirements and process of visa which can be helpful in normalizing the relations between two states.

Pakistan's status in SCO as a full member is essential in the regional and global framework. Pakistan could also help as a hub to increase trade and energy by offering a sensitive link between the SCO states and South Asia. Furthermore, SCO, in collaboration with Pakistan, can prove to be an optimistic part of the reforms and reconstruction of war-ridden Afghanistan. Since a stable and peaceful Afghanistan is in the interest of both Kabul and all stakeholders of the region. SCO brings together the official heads of state every year to discuss issues of regional security as could be controlled on time and interregional cooperation mechanism for creating desirable areas for development. Despite renouncing the registration of a new full member of the organization, it has engaged the neighbouring countries closely through multiple means like communication groups, official observers, and dialogue partners to pursue their common interests.

The al-Qaeda-led terrorist groups have remained pretentiousness challenge to the national security of the Eurasian states. At present, all member states of the organisation have been facing the challenges of terrorist attacks. Suggestively, the terrorist organizations' hubs are operating all over the world, including Eurasia. These terrorist organizations have influence and presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan's former FATA region. Therefore, a comprehensive strategy for countering terrorism is crucial for both SCO and Pakistan (Rehman, Rahman, & Ali, 2018). The testimony also states that variations in civilisations should be valued as the relations between civilisations should be built on equal grounds to advance each other's power and promote regional development. In this regard, SCO positively provides an opportunity to the member states as well as other connected states to fight against the global security threats posed by terrorist networks or other entities at regional and global levels.

SCO is a platform where member states express their genuine concerns over the various matters which, in their view, could destabilise the global and regional strategic peace. For example,

state officials, during a meeting on June 7, 2012 expressed a desire that the setup of missile defence system by a country or a group of countries irrespective of looking over the other regional and global complexities, could lead towards the security dilemma in the regional and global strategic environment. SCO strives for the regional growth and stability in Afghanistan while its member states also condemn the US operations and indubitable NATO strategy in the East. However, SCO's agreements do not support the argument that this would be a military alliance which will allow US pre-eminence to dominate world politics as well as to balance world politics with the help of strategic partnership and NATO (Herd & Kriendler, 2013).

Over the last decade, the SCO has primarily established exclusive regional cooperation that grounded on the "Shanghai spirit". Furthermore, SCO forum's useful step is to contain the powers of South Asia, which try to carry influence over regional affairs through the perpetual discussion and collaboration on the origin of shared principles. The cooperative decision-making approach of SCO member states hinders the happening of many misconducts and ills, for instance, it allows checking the authoritative manners through controlling the influential members' interference in the internal matters of the smaller member states as to prevent bilateral conflicts among neighbours. Besides, the smaller member states play an appropriate role in the organization and maximise their benefits in today's globalised and unified economic and security situations. There is no regional organization which exchanges two-way relations used by countries nor does it fully resolve the persistent tensions among violent neighbours. While the SCO may be able to resolve conflicts between member states because the strategy of non-interference under it recommends frequent use of diplomatic approaches to influence movements within the group.

The growth of SCO would strengthen law enforcement agencies to disrupt terrorist organisations. For both regional players namely Pakistan and India could ascend important countries within SCO structure in future and they can successfully contribute to the economic stability as well as in the regional security of South Asia. Pakistan and India need multiple works of economic development and progress in which some of them remain at top priority. Furthermore, Islamabad and Delhi have been struggling to achieve cooperation in energy security, develop collaboration in the transport connectivity among Asia and Europe to increase trade and assistance to deal with the growing problems of terrorism and drug trafficking (Idrees, Naazer, & Ashfaq, 2017).

SCO is the significant organisation in Eurasia and will develop its influence and vistas in the security, political and economic affairs throughout the South Asian region. Subsequently, granting full membership position to India and Pakistan, the organisation becomes one of the most important regional organisations in the world. Since, SCO is the only organisation that includes Russia, Pakistan, China, and India four states which have the status of nuclear weapon states. The presence of four nuclear-weapon states in SCO ensures the balance of power within the region. Moreover, the member states consider it as a platform for the development of economic, social, and political stability in the region. Consequently, SCO can perform a vital role in economic cooperation, military collaboration, maintaining peace, anti-terrorism, social integration, and regional stability.

Likewise, Pakistan and India after getting permanent membership of SCO may enable it as a strategic and significant competitor to NATO by the acceleration of regional union and cooperation (Bhadrakumar, 2007). Since SCO has become a multi-faced regional organisation at an international level, it is highly active in Pakistan. CPEC is the most prominent current

example of economic cooperation and collaboration for the imminent development of the country. In addition, SCO carries on its progress via involving itself is broadening its impact on the region through security considerations. With the rapid change and increase in economic and political cooperation between member states, SCO is also operational in military and security cooperation in the region of Asia. On the other hand, by keeping regional security as a vital mission, it works on three major areas: terrorism, regional separatism, and religious extremism. Pakistan has suffered significantly at the hands of terrorist organisations therefore the recent activities, actions and active engagement with China and SCO show that Islamabad is serious in countering terrorist activities within country. Most of the operations by Pakistan against the terrorist groups have been successful in wiping out the terrorist activities from the country (see, Salim, Semetko, & Zehraa, 2018). In this regard, China and SCO could provide it with a platform to seek support of the member states in completely eliminating the menace of terrorism from its soil.

China being an influential and vital power in SCO has been investing heavily in Pakistan through CPEC. It provides China a transit towards the Central Asian states through which it can quickly fulfil its energy and economic needs via investing less and generating faster routes than earlier ones. In this regard, China wants to stabilise the region through infrastructure revolution under BRI like America had done through other European organisations to rebuild Europe after destruction of the World War II (Muzaffar, Yaseen, & Rahim, 2017). However, the policies of US show that it is reluctant in stability of the region especially in those positive measures which can benefit China. Therefore, it is considered that the US has evolved its relations with the regional countries on its own interest instead of working for the peace, stability and progress of the region. While it's the priority of China to engage with regional states to create stability in neighbouring nations for generating the market for its goods and involvement regarding other trade, business and cultural relations, these are the circumstances where interests of both China and Pakistan converge for creating stability in the region.

5. Conclusion

SCO is an evolving pathway to promote regional security and has a strong commitment to counter security threats amongst its member countries. At the same time, SCO contributes to providing an opportunity for the member states to create direct security linkages. China and Pakistan rapidly develop cooperative counter-terrorism strategies which significantly promote regional security along with improving the security situation of Pakistan. The platform provided by SCO is possibly backing in harmonising the varied interests in the organization which have a substantial influence on the safety of the region. Pakistan persuaded that the SCO platform one of the substantial platforms in the upcoming years and it will successfully disburse the regional security in future. Consequently, SCO offers a new pathway of commitment to the member states which led to bringing these states together to address and counter security threats. The SCO member countries are busy in counter-terrorism by their regional podium. Likewise, the SCO forum offers member states to safeguard, protect, stable, and secure the region from terrorist threats. Finally, SCO's security agenda has been prolonged to focus mostly on transnational issues which could not be successfully addressed by any member state alone which needs collaboration and cooperation of all member states simultaneously.

By looking over the works and activities of these multiple regional organisations like NATO, SCO etc. it shows that efficiencies, role and problem-solving activities of regional organisations look more productive or successful when it comes to their near region/states.

However, it is observed that the involvement of organization beyond the states of the region will not remain such severe and active as compared to their regional and close nations. European states are the founding fathers of NATO; therefore, the most influential states in the organisation are European states. These regional states within NATO are successful in creating stability and peace in the region. However, when it comes to the involvement of America and NATO forces in other areas like Afghanistan and the Middle Eastern nations, they are not considered much successful in creating the peace, stability, and progress within these regions. There can be multiple reasons behind the failure of such organisations beyond the region. But Pakistan, being a part of the American group since long, does not get enough appreciation by them and has remained unsuccessful in complete eradication of terrorism and security issues as well as economic issues. SCO, being a regional organization and age-old Chinese friendship with Pakistan could benefit Islamabad in many ways through which it can take it on the path of peace and progress in future.

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