



## SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANISATION – ISLAMABAD SUMMIT & INDIA: PAPER III



The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is a significant international platform that has emerged as a powerful regional body focusing on economic, political, and security issues in Eurasia. As the SCO prepares for its 2024 summit in Islamabad, it brings to the forefront key discussions on regional security, economic collaboration, and geopolitical tensions. The summit also carries implications for member countries like India, whose participation adds an essential dimension to the evolving dynamics of the SCO.

### Background on the SCO

The SCO was established on June 15, 2001, in Shanghai, China, as a successor to the "Shanghai Five," a group formed in 1996 comprising China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. The organization was founded to address common security concerns, promote regional cooperation, and build mutual trust among its members. In 2017, the group expanded to include India and Pakistan, reflecting the growing importance of the South Asian region in the SCO's geopolitical landscape.

The SCO has now grown into a significant transregional organization with nine member states, including China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Iran (which joined as a full member in 2023). The organization focuses on promoting regional security, economic development, cultural exchange, and cooperation in combating terrorism, separatism, and extremism.



## The Present Summit in Islamabad and Its Agenda

The upcoming 2024 SCO summit in Islamabad on October 15-16 marks a significant diplomatic event, with participation from various regional leaders. Under Pakistan's chairmanship, the summit will gather leaders such as India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, Chinese Premier Li Qiang, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, and other prominent figures from Central Asian countries and Iran.

The summit's agenda will focus on several critical issues, including:

- **Regional Security and Counterterrorism:** Reinforcing efforts to combat the "three evils" of terrorism, extremism, and separatism.
- **Economic Cooperation:** Enhancing trade and investment opportunities, promoting regional connectivity, and addressing challenges related to debt in developing countries.
- **Climate Change and Technological Developments:** Exploring solutions to mitigate the impact of climate change and leveraging technology for sustainable growth.
- **Reformed Multilateralism:** Discussing the need for reforms in global institutions like the United Nations, including the Security Council, to make them more representative and inclusive.

The summit is set against a backdrop of unresolved regional tensions, including the longstanding conflict between India and Pakistan, and the military standoff between India and China in eastern Ladakh. These tensions add complexity to the proceedings, influencing the diplomatic interactions and outcomes of the summit.

### Concerns of the Indian Foreign Minister

S. Jaishankar's participation marks the first high-level visit by an Indian official to Pakistan in nearly a decade, underscoring the importance of India's engagement with the SCO despite strained bilateral relations. His address focused on India's core concerns, including:

1. **Cross-Border Terrorism:** India's emphasis on countering terrorism, particularly from Pakistan, will be a focal point. Jaishankar has consistently stressed that regional connectivity and economic cooperation cannot thrive amid persistent security threats.
2. **Territorial Integrity and Sovereignty:** The minister will likely highlight the importance of respecting the territorial boundaries of member states, indirectly addressing China's assertive behavior along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with India.
3. **Need for Genuine Multilateral Cooperation:** Jaishankar's remarks will advocate for partnerships based on mutual respect and adherence to international norms, reflecting India's vision for a more balanced and stable regional order.



## India-SCO Cooperation

India has been actively involved in the SCO since becoming an observer in 2005 and a full member in 2017. The country views the SCO as a platform to foster regional peace and stability, enhance connectivity, and counter terrorism. India's cooperation with the SCO has focused on several key areas:

1. **Security Collaboration:** India participates in joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, and counter-terrorism initiatives under the SCO framework, contributing to regional security.
2. **Economic Engagement:** New Delhi has supported initiatives to improve regional trade, energy cooperation, and infrastructure development, such as the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), which can bolster connectivity with Central Asia and Russia.
3. **Cultural Diplomacy:** India promotes cultural exchange programs, education, and people-to-people interactions to strengthen ties with SCO member nations.

## The Summit's Significance for India and Its Impact in the Future

The 2024 SCO summit holds particular significance for India, providing an opportunity to address regional challenges and reaffirm its strategic interests in Eurasia. Key aspects of the summit's importance for India include:

4. **Platform for Diplomatic Engagement:** Despite ongoing tensions with both Pakistan and China, the summit offers a channel for India to express its concerns, advocate for regional stability, and seek common ground on issues like counterterrorism and economic cooperation.
5. **Strengthening Strategic Partnerships:** India can leverage its participation to deepen ties with Central Asian nations, Russia, and Iran, enhancing its role in the region's economic and security landscape. The summit serves as a venue for India to promote connectivity initiatives that align with its interests.
6. **Navigating Geopolitical Complexities:** As India balances its relationships with major powers like Russia and China while maintaining its independent foreign policy, the SCO platform allows India to play a constructive role in shaping regional dynamics. This is particularly relevant given the recent border disputes with China and the evolving situation in Afghanistan.

In the future, India's active engagement with the SCO could lead to:

7. **Increased Economic Opportunities:** Enhancing trade routes, investment in infrastructure, and participation in regional projects.
8. **Enhanced Regional Security:** Continued collaboration on counter-terrorism and joint



military exercises, bolstering India's security framework.

9. **Potential Resolution of Border Tensions:** While immediate resolution is unlikely, sustained dialogue within multilateral settings could facilitate diplomatic solutions to disputes.

## Conclusion

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation remains a vital forum for addressing regional security and economic issues. The 2024 summit in Islamabad will not only highlight the SCO's role in promoting cooperation among member states but also bring to the forefront the complexities of South Asian geopolitics. For India, the summit serves as an opportunity to engage with its neighbors constructively, address mutual concerns, and advocate for an inclusive regional order based on mutual respect and sovereignty.

As the SCO continues to expand its scope and influence, India's active participation will be crucial in shaping the future trajectory of the organization and fostering a stable, prosperous, and integrated Eurasian region. The upcoming summit will thus be a litmus test for India's diplomatic strategy and its ability to navigate a challenging regional environment while pursuing its broader geopolitical objectives.

## MAIN PRACTICE QUESTION

**Discuss the significance of India's participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), especially in the context of regional security, economic collaboration, and geopolitical challenges. How does India's engagement with the SCO impact its relations with neighboring countries, and what strategic advantages does it seek to gain through this multilateral platform? (Answer in 250 words)**

## Answer Guidelines:

To effectively answer this question, aspirants should address the following points:

### 1. Introduction to India's Role in the SCO:

- Briefly mention India's membership in the SCO since 2017 and its active participation since becoming an observer in 2005.
- Highlight India's reasons for engaging with the SCO, such as regional security, counter-terrorism, economic development, and cultural exchange.

### 2. Significance for Regional Security:

- Explain how India's participation helps address common security threats, including terrorism, extremism, and separatism, in coordination with other



member states.

- Mention India's involvement in joint military exercises and intelligence sharing to strengthen regional stability.

### 3. Economic Collaboration and Connectivity:

- Discuss India's interests in promoting trade routes, energy cooperation, and infrastructure projects like the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).
- Highlight how India's engagement supports its "Connect Central Asia" policy and broader economic goals.

### 4. Geopolitical Challenges and Strategic Advantages:

- Address India's approach to balancing its relationships with major powers such as Russia and China while asserting its independent foreign policy.
- Explain how the SCO provides India with a platform to address issues related to China's Belt and Road Initiative and to counter Pakistan's influence.

### 5. Impact on Relations with Neighboring Countries:

- Evaluate how participation in the SCO affects India's ties with Pakistan and China, considering tensions like border disputes and cross-border terrorism.
- Mention opportunities for dialogue, even if bilateral talks are not the primary focus.

### 6. Conclusion:

- Summarize India's strategic advantages in using the SCO to enhance its role as a regional power and promote peace, stability, and economic integration in Eurasia.

### Evaluation Criteria:

- Clarity and coherence in discussing India's role and significance in the SCO.
- Depth of understanding of regional security, economic, and geopolitical factors.
- Ability to integrate India's strategic interests with the broader goals of the SCO.
- Balanced analysis of challenges and potential opportunities for India.

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