

TIANJIN 2025: SCO'S STRATEGIC SHOWCASE AND EMERGING GEOPOLITICAL REALIGNMENTS

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Abstract

*The SCO is a cornerstone of **Eurasian cooperation**; fostering peace, security, and **stability** across the region through a united framework of **politics, economy, and defence**. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) evolved into a pioneering multilateral framework, incepted to solve boundary issues, counter-terrorism cooperation, developed and deepened in a more political, economic, cultural, educational domains. It encompasses half of the world's population and a third of global GDP, thus wielding considerable influence in the region.¹ The 25th Shanghai Corporation organisation (SCO) summit, 2025, held in Tianjin, China, marked a significant shift in global politics. The event brought together leaders from 20 plus countries all over the world including 10-member state nations namely China, India, Russia, Iran, Pakistan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikstan with the aim of promoting cooperation and peace among its member states, as well as fostering "a new democratic, fair and rational international political and economic order."²*

This paper takes a closer look at the SCO's impact on regional stability, growth, and partnership, shedding light on its groundbreaking work in combating terrorism, boosting trade, and celebrating cultural diversity. Furthermore, delving into the strategic interests of each member state. China plays the host of the 2025 summit and key agenda setter, lays ground for 'smart power' diplomacy.

Introduction

The SCO emerged from the 'Shanghai Five' framework, which surfaced post Cold War with the primary objective of border defence. Over time, the organization has undergone a profound metamorphosis into the most influential blocks of the 21st century. Thus expanding & addressing a diverse array of critical areas. Russian and Chinese serve as the SCO's official languages, facilitating communication among member states.

The summit aims to reinforce “Global South Solidarity” & has gradually evolved into substantive stabiliser in Eurasia, relying less on formal institutional power and more on functional Cooperation.³

The optics of the summit are striking. China, India, and Russia — the so-called RIC troika, engaged in high-level dialogue, signalling a renewed willingness to coordinate on regional and global issues.

The SCO Summit (2025) themed as: “Promoting the Shanghai Spirit: SCO in Action” embodies the organisation’s commitment to fostering a harmonious, cooperative, and prosperous Eurasian community, guided by the principles of mutual trust, equality, and win-win cooperation. Its key outcomes include adaptation of the “**Tianjin Declaration**” addressing security, economic and social challenges while promoting regional cooperation and multipolar world order.⁴

Furthermore, this year has been declared the SCO year of **sustainable development** signalling a collective shift towards green growth, digital infrastructure and inclusive economic recovery.

Evolution

Looking deeper into the historical trajectory of SCO which Spans over two decades, the transformative journey has cemented the SCO's position as a cornerstone of Eurasian diplomacy.

1996- The SCO has its roots in the 'Shanghai Five' mechanism, born out of a shared desire among China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan to resolve border disputes and build trust in the post-Soviet era.

2001- With UZBEKISTAN as its newest member it evolved & was renamed as Shanghai Corporation organisation SCO, it grew into tackling, pressing issues like combating, the THREE EVILS of terrorism, separatism, and extremism. while fostering regional stability and exploring economic development and cultural exchange.

2017- Over the years, the SCO has undergone significant expansion, welcoming India and Pakistan in 2017 at Astana

2023- Iran's ascension to full membership has bolstered the SCO's presence in West Asia

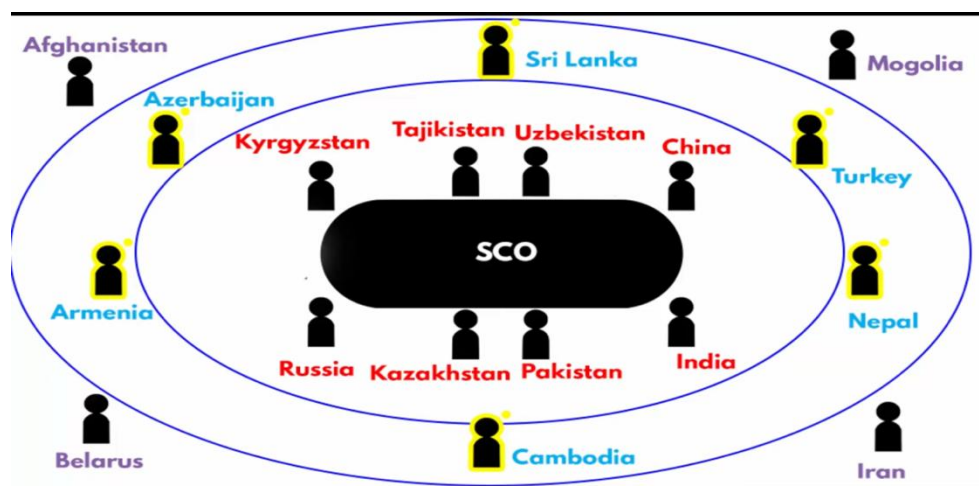
2024- Belarus - joined as a 10th full member, significantly expanded the organisation's footprint, bridging Eastern Europe and Eurasia



This growth has not only stretched the organisation's geographic reach but also bolstered its influence on the world stage. Beyond its core membership, the SCO has forged connections with a wider community of nations.⁴

Observer States (4) – Afghanistan, Mongolia, Belarus, and Iran – take part actively in SCO initiatives,

Dialogue Partners (6)– Sri Lanka, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey, and Armenia – These nations lend their expertise and support to the organisation's endeavour at every juncture.³



Significance

SCO has evolved into the world's largest regional organisation in terms of geographical scope and population. India and China together account for 36% of world population, 24% of world area, 65% of Eurasia's & 42% of world population. Russia along with India and China accounts for 20% of the world mass. As of 2024, combined nominal GDP accounts for 23% of the world's.¹

For China- As the organisation convenes its 25th anniversary summit in Tianjin, China, reflects recognition of its contribution to national development and the city's competitive advantages as a leading port in Northern China. The 2025 Tianjin Summit marks a pivotal moment for the SCO, set against a backdrop of global turmoil.

As the world grapples with conflict, rivalry, and shifting allegiances, the SCO's anniversary summit serves as a powerful statement of cooperation and collective action. With influential leaders in attendance, the summit reaffirms the organisation's core values and charts a course for greater collaboration and stability.

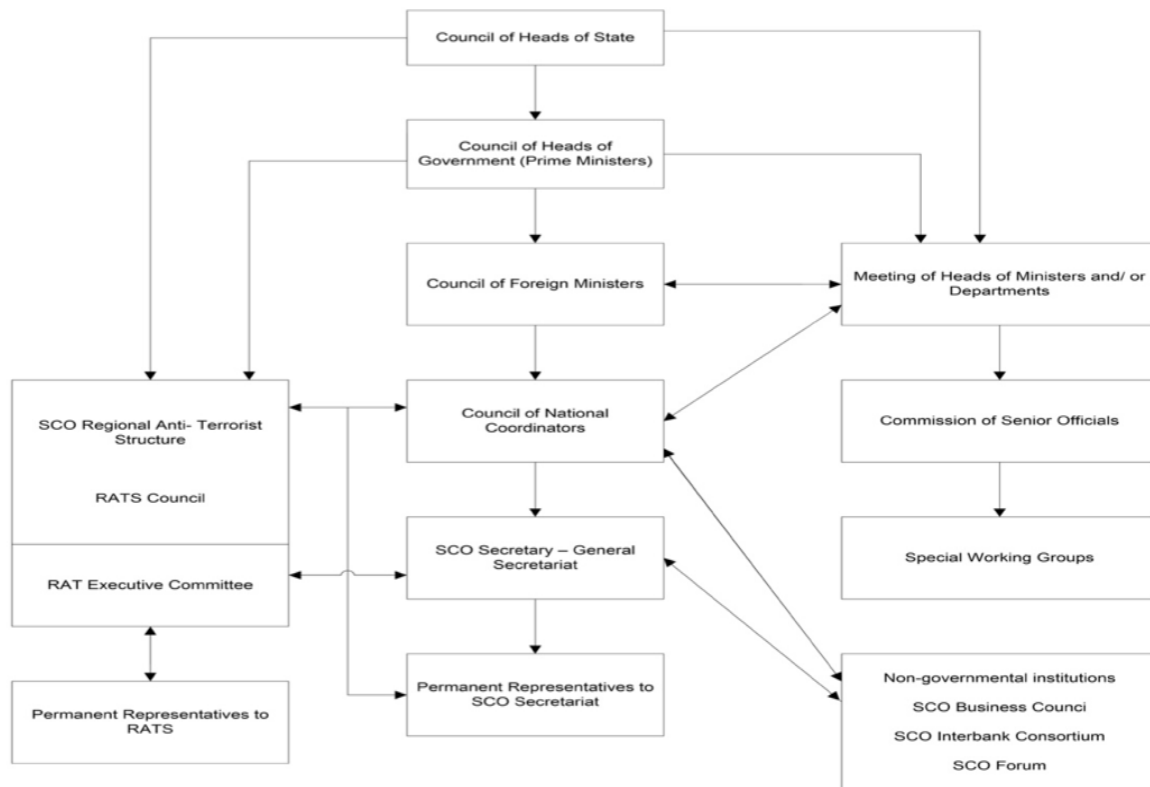
For India- India's participation reflects both pragmatism and caution.

Into this multipolar script, India turns out to be a nation now squeezed by US tariffs, but suddenly re engaging, both China and Russia at highest levels. After years of strained relations with China, a tentative thaw has emerged through trade recalibration (reopening of trade routes at *Lipulekh, Shipkila & Nathu-la*), border deescalation measures (revive pilgrimage visits), and the restoration of direct flights.

These confidence building measures unseen since Galwan clash 2020 reflects India's cooperation to mend relations with China and to counter terrorism, perpetuated by other members.

India finds itself at the centre of 3 axis Courtied by Russia, Reconciled with China, & Pressured by USA. Therefore, Tianjin gives India to play all sides at once.⁴

Structure



Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shanghai_Cooperation_Organisation

At the helm of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) lies the.

COUNCIL of HEAD of STATES (HSC), the supreme decision-making body that convenes annually to adopt pivotal decisions and guidelines.

- Complementing the HSC is the Heads of Government Council (HGC), which meets yearly to strategise multilateral cooperation, address pressing economic issues, and approve the organisation's annual budget.

Beyond the HSC and HGC meetings, the SCO fosters dialogue through various mechanisms, including gatherings of parliamentary leaders, security council secretaries, ministers, law enforcement officials, and supreme court justices.

The Council of National Coordinators (CNC) ensures a unified approach to regional cooperation.⁵

Key Contributions

The SCO has the potential to act as a catalyst for achieving regional integration among Asian countries and promoting stability across borders.

1. Security Cooperation



- The SCO was born to tackle the dark trio of terrorism, separatism, and extremism. Its anti-terror hub in Tashkent is the nerve center, coordinating the fight against these threats.
- Regular joint military drills under the “Peace Mission” banner have enhanced interoperability, with large-scale exercises in 2007 and 2021 showcasing collective counterterrorism readiness.
- Protecting borders and tackling the narcotics trade, with a watchful eye on Afghanistan's fragile situation.

Notably, despite sensitivities around sovereignty, the SCO has successfully brought together nations under one umbrella with historically complex relationships, such as India and Pakistan, to participate in joint military exercises, fostering a unique spirit of cooperation and mutual understanding.

2.Economic Cooperation



Economic collaboration has emerged as a cornerstone of the SCO's mandate, driving growth and development across the region.

- SCO controls about 20% of the world oil reserve and 44% of natural gas. To boost economic ties, the SCO has set up the **Interbank Consortium** and hosts annual Business Forums, facilitating trade and investment.
- Meanwhile, the proposed **Energy Club** established in 2013 has linked producers like Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, and consumers like China, India, and Turkey, thus harnessing the vast energy potential.
- China's Belt and Road Initiative turbocharge the SCO's economic clout, connecting member states through vital trade routes like CPEC and INSTC - where India, Iran, and Russia coordinate

3.Cultural & Diplomatic Engagements

Beyond hard security and economics, the SCO has fostered people-to-people ties.

- **SCO University**, a network of 70+ institutions, facilitates joint academic programs and exchanges.
- Cultural initiatives, such as the SCO Arts Festival and Youth Council, promote cross-border engagement, sports, and entrepreneurship.
- Diplomatically, the SCO has provided a platform for adversarial states—such as India and Pakistan, to engage in dialogue, while deepening Sino-Russian coordination and projecting solidarity across the Global South, particularly with the entry of Iran and Belarus.

2025: Tianjin Summit

China builds a stage of power. The 25th SCO Summit, the largest in its history has brought together more than 20 world leaders and international organisations.

For Beijing, this is not a routine diplomacy, it is choreography timed to the week of China's Grand World war victory parade, marking the 80th anniversary of Fascism's defeat. It's Double act to show power and defiance.

The Summit in Tianjin: Chinese president chaired the meeting of SCO council of heads of state where he and other members state leaders engaged in in-depth discussions on diverse topics.

Tianjin today serves not only just a strategic choice but also a symbol of China's openness. It is a strategic hub of industrial modernisation and global trade, thus underscoring the SCO's economic priorities, the Belt and Road Initiative. Here, maritime and land routes intersect. Tianjin has long made a practical contribution to SCO activities. An example being the international educational project "Luban Workshop," which has become part of the organisation's initiatives.⁷

Key Highlights Of Summit -This year introduced **SCO plus format** that allows to engage with other countries and organisations beyond its full member states. Xi Jinping not only hosted 10 members but also brought in UN Nations and dialogue partners (Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Azerbaijan, and Vietnam).

1. Leaders endorsed a new SCO's **10-year development strategy** aimed at deepening trade links, harmonising, customs frameworks, and creating mechanisms for pooled funding to strengthen institutional debt and resilience.
2. Following the council of heads of states, there was a **SCO plus** meeting on the topic, "Turning multilateralism into Action, ensuring regional security, and promoting sustainable development."
3. The **Tianjin Declaration** noted of the formation of a common vision of the idea of creating a community of shared future for mankind and developing dialogue on the idea of "One Earth. One Family. One Future", with the member states

calling on the international community to join the **SCO** Initiative "On Global Unity for a Just World, Harmony and Development."⁸

4. **Financial Corporation** is another pillar, gaining momentum. China's promotion of Yuan based digital payment systems and pilot projects for cross-border settlement drew interest from members seeking to insulate themselves from currency, volatility, and unilateral sanctions.

While proposals for SCO development bank and an expanded bank consortium have progress slowly, they reflect a shared ambition to gradually reduced reliance on the US dollar without provoking open confrontation, thus laying the groundwork for a more autonomous regional trading system.⁹

5. The SCO emerged as an important forum for amplifying the **voice of the global South**. In a world of intensifying geopolitical rivalry, the absence of western participation highlights its character as a platform for dialogue outside, traditional power blocs.¹⁰

6. Organisation also provides a way to **safeguard sovereignty**, pursue developmental goals and **balance relations** with both east and west. Does functioning less as an ideological alliance and more as a pragmatic forum where diverse actors from sanction hit economy to reform emerging markets- can coordinate policy and manage disputes.¹¹

7. **Connectivity initiatives**-Including the integration of **ports** in industrial zones and Overland corridors-demonstrate the organisation ability to translate political dialogue into developmental outcomes. These projects enhance energy flows, improve market access, and foster investment opportunities, providing tangible incentives for cooperation.¹²

8. **Reflecting India's** vision for SCO which is guided by 3 pillars, namely **Security, Connectivity and Opportunity**, Thus, implying stability towards the growth of countries, **India's** connectivity endeavours for Afghanistan and Central Asia, and suggestion for creation of a **Civilisational Dialogue Forum** to bring to the world cultural aspects of **SCO** member countries.¹³

9. **Laos** accepted as a new dialogue partner.¹⁴

Implications For India – India's Strategic Calculus

Advantages

1. Strategic diversification – delicate balancing act between competing global powers thus offering wider options beyond West
2. Energy security – access to Russia and Eastern Asian resources.
3. Trade buffer – alternative markets to offset US tariffs.
4. Diplomatic signalling – displays multipolar foreign policy.
5. Regional presence – marking a seat at the Eurasian table.

Disadvantages

1. China dominance – agenda is skewed with Beijing's interest.
2. Pakistan factor – blocks consensus, and fuels mistrust.
3. Divergent interests, SCO priorities don't align with India
4. Security risk – sensitive data shared with rivals in the room.
5. Economic limits -economic corridors tilt towards China.¹⁵

By sitting at the same table as China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan, and Central Asia, India projects itself as a power that can navigate multiple caps while carefully dealing with bilateral issues. This dual posture highlights the SO broad significance.

Implications For China-Strategic Role As “Smart Power” In SCO

SCO is not just a regional club, but the embryo of a multipolar world order.

The unique feature of the SCO is its ability to use political and diplomatic methods for resolving international problems. This “smart power” makes the organization attractive to others. United Nations once sceptical has recognised SCO as an important instrument of security and integration in the Eurasian region ¹⁶

China has played a pivotal role in shaping the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) since its inception in 2001. By **design**, the SCO has evolved into a flexible and dynamic political-security forum, deliberately avoiding the rigidity of a traditional alliance. China's **economic** influence within the SCO is unmistakable, from Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has seamlessly integrated corridors like CPEC and Central Asia-West Asia into SCO discussions.¹⁷

Through the **SCO Interbank Consortium** and **Business Council**, Beijing has fostered trade and investment, effectively binding member states to Chinese capital and markets. In the **security** realm, China has leveraged the RATS mechanism and joint "Peace Mission" drills to counter terrorism and maintain stability in Xinjiang, all while carefully balancing Russia's military dominance.¹⁸

Moreover, China has astutely employed **soft power tools**, such as SCO University, youth exchanges, and cultural diplomacy, to promote the "Shanghai Spirit" of sovereignty and multipolarity. This nuanced approach has enabled China to reinforce its leadership and centrality in Eurasian affairs, demonstrating a masterful blend of economic, cultural, and security strategies – a testament to its smart power diplomacy.¹⁹

Global Implications

As the world grapples with shifting power dynamics, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is gearing up to strengthen its global presence, with economic cooperation taking center stage. The organisation's two-decade journey has yielded significant achievements, and now, intensifying multilateral economic cooperation is paramount to ensure a stable future.²⁰

In these uncertain times, the SCO is stepping up its economic game, driven by its member countries working together to build stronger trade and economic ties.

1. Strengthening Multipolarity

The SCO acts as a counterweight to Western-led institutions such as NATO, the G7, and the Bretton Woods system. By uniting China, Russia, India, and key Central Asian states, alongside newer members like Iran and Belarus—the SCO underscores the shift toward a **multipolar world**, and United States is no longer the sole arbiter of global security and economic routes.²¹

2. Security Cooperation and Stability

The SCO promotes regional stability through joint counterterrorism efforts and military drills, showing countries outside the Western bloc how to tackle common security dangers together.

3. Economic and Energy Corridors

The SCO is teaming up with China's Belt and Road Initiative to supercharge growth in infrastructure, energy, and trade across Eurasia. As connections between nations strengthen, they may start to move away from traditional Western trade routes. This could be a game-changer for global supply chains and create new financial opportunities for SCO members, helping them break free from Western-dominated systems.²²

4. Voice of the Global South

By welcoming countries like Iran and Belarus into its fold, and engaging with nations like Turkey, the SCO is amplifying the perspectives of the Global South. It's challenging the status quo by promoting a different set of values - sovereignty, non-interference, and equality - and shaping the global conversation, from the UN to other international forums."²³

Conclusion

The SCO's global implications lie not in creating a rival bloc to the West but in **reshaping the international order toward multipolarity**, offering new platforms for security, trade, and diplomacy. Its continued evolution will influence how power, resources, and norms are contested in the 21st century.²⁴

This paper has sought to understand the complexities and shed light on the ever-evolving role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization within the complex web of global geopolitics and economics. As we have navigated the labyrinth of this relationship, we have discovered a story of safety collaboration, monetary integration, and unwavering pursuit of a shared vision.²⁵

The **SCO** Summit 2025 reflects the growing importance of multipolarity in global governance as the west focuses on transactional bullying thus alienating most of its allies. From **India** and **China** to Russia and beyond, ancient civilisations are forging a

new axis of influence built on resilience, cooperation, and multipolar ambition, the East is no longer the periphery, it is the centre. The Tianjin submit may not rewrite the rules of international order, but it will reinforce crucial message in a fragmented world: Incremental cooperation, still matters!

Disclaimer

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