

Rise of "Shanghai Cooperation Organisation"

What is the issue?

 $n\n$

\n

- \bullet The recent "Shanghai Cooperation Organisation" (SCO) summit in Qingdao (China) was the 1st for India and Pakistan as full time members. \n
- \bullet SCO has risen as an internationally important grouping due to the profile of its members and the under-performance of other international forums. $\$

 $n\n$

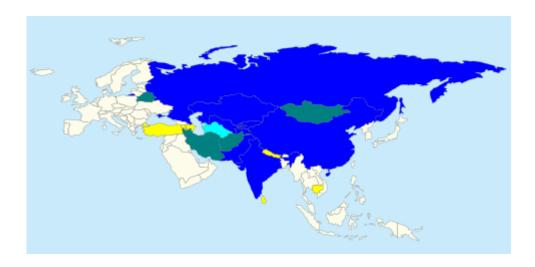
What is the history of SCO?

 $n\n$

\n

- The SCO grew out of the Shanghai Five grouping (Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan), which was set up in 1996.
- \bullet While its initial goal was t0 resolve boundary disputes in the region, it has evolved into a security and economic cooperation block over the years. \n
- In 2001, Uzbekistan was also admitted as a member and the organization was re-christened as "Shanghai Cooperation Organisation" (SCO).
- While India and Pakistan have been observers since 2005, in the 2017 SCO meet, both were admitted as full members.

 $n\n$



 $n\n$

Blue: Member countries, **Green:** Observers Countries, **Yellow:** Dialogue Partners

 $n\$

Why is SCO critical for India?

 $n\n$

- **Significance** The admission of India and Pakistan has expanded the geographical, demographic and economic profile of the SCO.
- SCO now has about half the world's population and a quarter of its GDP and its boundary extend southwards to the Indian Ocean.
- The SCO's relevance for India lies in geography, economics and geopolitics as its members occupies a huge landmass adjacent to India's neighbourhood.
- Central Asian SCO members border Afghanistan and a narrow strip of land separates southern Tajikistan from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.
- **Logistics** When you have complicated relations with your neighbours, it makes sense to strengthen relations with your neighbours' neighbours.
- With Pakistan joining the Organisation and Afghanistan and Iran knocking on the doors for membership, the logic of India's membership becomes stronger.
- Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, the optimal development of India's relations with Central Asian countries has been constrained severely.
- Factors like lack of overland access through Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran,

and politico-security concerns proved difficult to overcome.

With new multimodal transport corridors now envisaged through Iran, there
are again prospects of invigorating trade and investment links with this
region.

\n

 $n\n$

What are the political equations within SCO?

 $n\n$

\n

- In the formative years of the SCO, Russia pushed strongly for India to join it, to somewhat balance China's economic dominance in Central Asia.
- \bullet China's own insecurities made them obstruct Indian entry into the grouping back then, which help it maintain its clout over the organisation. \n
- Currently, with China having grown confident with a strong economic might, it seems to have grown more inclined to accept Indian membership.
- Notably, the central Asian region is the hotbed for China's ambitious "Belt and Road Initiative" and Indian participation will help further this.
- \bullet Nonetheless, it has secured the simultaneous admission of Pakistan into the SCO as a counterbalance to India's motives. $\mbox{\sc N}$
- \bullet In this context, India too has managed to carve out a niche role for itself in the region alongside China and Russia through active diplomatic outreaches. \n
- Also, thus far, Indo-Pak equations within the forum have been pleasant, betraying naysayers who speculated turbulence due to the new entrants.

 $n\n$

What are the aspects to lookout for India and Pakistan in SCO?

 $n\n$

- **Border Dispute** Russian President Putin has suggested that cooperation within SCO may pave the way for an India-Pakistan rapprochement.
- He also recalled that SCO membership had facilitated resolution of China's boundary disputes with Russia and Central Asian countries.

\n

- While the circumstances are not comparable, and Indo-Pak disputes are not merely border related, the hope expressed is nonetheless a positive sign.
- Significantly, China made substantial concessions to settle its boundary disputes with Russia and Central Asia, in pursuit of larger strategic objectives.

\n

- **Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure** RATS as a principle organ of SCO, coordinates for security and stability, through intelligence-sharing.
- \bullet India and Pakistan, which exchange mutual recriminations in such matters, have to find ways of cooperating in the RATS. $\$
- **Defence cooperation** India has agreed to participate in the SCO's counter-terrorism military exercises in Russia later this year.
- Here, Indian and Pakistani troops will likely operate together, an event that has never occurred before.
- Reconciling Indian and Pakistani perspectives in the SCO's initiatives on Afghanistan would be yet another challenge.

 $n\n$

How does the future of SCO look?

 $n\n$

\n

- **Dilution** The expansion of SCO has diluted its unanimity on hitherto shared perspectives on certain critical issues.
- Notably, India and Pakistan aren't signatories of "Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty", a provision that was held in high regard by SCO.
- India's reservations on China's BRI are accommodated by excluding the project from the list of endorsed programs of SCO.
- \bullet Even the anti-terrorism initiatives and documented statements are being diluted cautiously to accommodate divergent opinions on the same. \n

 $n\n$

• **Eastern Grouping** - The structural strengthen and diversity of the group as an alliance of eastern power has seen SCO rise as a potent counter to the west.

\n

 $n\n$

\n

- While some seen this as a continuation of cold war political equations of the Soviet Block, there has been a drastic change in the rhetoric.
- \bullet Notably, the anti-west stands of SCO are not stringently pronounced like the Soviet era, and the U.S. has a working relationship with many SCO members. \n
- Chinese Dominance The worldwide retreat of U.S. under the inward looking regime of Mr. Trump is paving the way for the stoic rise of China.
- \bullet SCO like organisations are seeing China consolidate its structural base in the international forum, forcing even Russia to fall in line. \n

 $n\n$

Source: The Hindu

