

SCO, India and Pakistan: New Perspectives and New Hopes

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Abstract:

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) held its 17th Meeting in Astana, Kazakhstan, in June 2017, which were attended by all member countries of the SCO. In the Astana Summit, India and Pakistan were admitted as a full member of the SCO. It was a vital development from South Asian perspective as two populous countries of the region joined the SCO. Parenthetically, it was the Astana Summit in 2005 where these two countries and Iran were first attended the SCO meeting as an observers. Since the establishment of the SCO, it is the first but important expansion in the organization, particularly from the economic, security and geographic dimensions. India and Pakistan are the two most important countries from South Asia. The addition of the two countries means that the SCO has achieved double spillovers in terms of coverage and functionality. The SCO will gain new impetus on the enlargement of both newly members in economic, security and other aspects. This means that the long-term idea of the expansion of the SCO has become a reality and it also means that the internal construction of the SCO is basically completed. This paper analysis the strategic significance of India and Pakistan for SCO and highlight how SCO will play its role in the keeping India and Pakistan tranquil with each other in the future?

SCO Background and Structure: An Overview

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is a growing regional organization established in 2001 to deal with future dangers comprising terrorism, extremism and separatism in the region (William E. Carroll, 2011). Earlier, it was called the Shanghai 5 with China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan member countries. The Shanghai 5 was established in 1996 mainly to deal with the boundary issues between China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (Maj. Jefferson, 2005). It was formed with the signing of the 'Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions' and 'Treaty on Reduction of Military Forces in Border Regions' (Arhama Siddiq, 2016). The Shanghai 5 evolved into SCO with the inclusion of Uzbekistan in the group in 2001. At the beginning, the SCO associated with its concentrate on the security co-operation among the member countries (Stephen Aris, 2011). The aim of the SCO's pioneers was to establish a functional mechanism for obtaining peace and stability in the region. When it comes to regional issues, the battle against terrorism is become a top priority of the SCO's objective. At the beginning summits of SCO, all the member states were agreed to combat against Separatism, Extremism, and Terrorism and signed the Shanghai Convention on Combating "three evils" (Pan Guang, 2009). The SCO comprises of eight permanent members namely: India, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russian, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. And Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia are currently observer countries of the organization. Moreover, SCO also consists of 6 dialogue partner countries namely Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey and Sri Lanka (SCO website).

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization already defined the path of joint ventures of economic, communication and trade carried out by their relevant minister level of meetings, they had established such environment for developing the economic mechanism and trade cooperation. The Charter of the SCO which is one of its earlier achievement signed in 2002, aims for consolidation mutual trust and neighborliness among member states, promotion of cooperation including in politics, economic and trade, energy, transport, tourism, education, research, advance technology, culture and environmental protection (Anna Matveeva & Antonio Giustozzi, 2008). The Charter furthermore consists of providing collective struggles to retain peace and stability in the region.

The Heads of State Council (HSC) is the SCO's main body which makes important decisions. The council gathered in a year, passes decisions and also approves suggestions on all significant SCO's concerns. After that, the Heads of Government Council (HGC) is very important body. This council also hold meeting yearly. The Council approves its annual budget, discourses joint co-operation strategy and addresses important economic co-operation matters. Along with these two main councils, SCO also holds meetings on ministries level such as: foreign affairs, parliamentary, defence, economic and trade, transportation, culture, education, health also heads of law enforcement and prosecutors general. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization has two permanent bodies, one is Secretariat located in Beijing, and the second is Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), located in Tashkent. The appointment of Secretary General of SCO and the Director of the Executive Committee of RATS done by the Heads of State Council for a three (3) years term. Currently SCO Secretary-General is Rashid Alimov from Tajikistan and Director of the Executive Committee of RATS is Yevgeny Sysoyev (Russia). At present, the SCO has two official languages Russian and Chinese (SCO, website).

Strategic benefits of India and Pakistan for SCO:

At the Ufa summit in Russia 2015, SCO granted Pakistan and India as a full member countries. It is an important advancement from South Asian point of view as both Pakistan and India populated (China Daily, 2017) and nuclear power nations of the region joined the SCO. The entry of newly members India and Pakistan in SCO means that the group will share 25% of the world's GDP, 44% of the world's population, and expanding its geographical opportunity to South Asia. The SCO, covering about 3/5th of the Eurasian land, will play a greater role in maintaining regional stability and optimizing the world order (China Daily, 2017). Moreover, the most direct consequence of this SCO's expansion will further added new developments in the regional level. At the beginning of the establishment of the SCO, the member countries realize the need of security and economic cooperation in the regional level. The security cooperation against the three evil evils has emerged under the ravages of the 9/11 events (Dmitri Trofimov, 2002). Although anti-terrorism military exercises and anti-terrorism information exchanges among the member countries of the SCO showed very effective results to control the three evils but still roots of terrorism is active in Central Asia and current worsen security situation of the Afghanistan is alarming for the region stability (Dr. Muhammad Saif ur Rehman, 2014). Russia is much concern about the presence of about Daesh (ISIS) particularly in Afghanistan because Chechnya Muslims are fighting for freedom from Russia. On the other hand, instability in the Afghanistan also concern for China because china already invested a huge money in Afghanistan (Zeng Xiangyu, 2011) and also China's One Belt One Road cannot reach to the desire goals without stability in the region. The joining of India and Pakistan in the SCO will now expecting to achieve regional issues, especially in security situation of the Afghanistan. Both members participation in the security co-operation further strengthen the SCO's security activities within the region.

The Middle East crises further let the expansion of the Daesh (ISIS) in the Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia. Moreover, withdraw of the American forces in Afghanistan is leaving a power vacuum (Erik Herejk Ribeiro & Maria Gabriela Vieira, 2016). It could create conflicts between the govt. of Afghanistan and Taliban group in high level. Moscow also offered army training and advance military equipment to the Afghanistan's government, in spite of this, Russia will not trust on their potential to achieve an upper hand over the Taliban group. Here, Shanghai cooperation organization hoping with their new full members India and Pakistan for their role in the regional political stability. This enlargement contributes to its own stature as well as increases their political and security responsibilities, which makes it a better important bloc. On the other hand, Pakistan had launched many oppressions against the "Tehreek e Taliban e Pakistan" and Pakistan considered like a master mind of launching oppressions against the terrorism, the tangible example is "Zarb-e-Azb" oppression, which was carried against the "Tehreek e Taliban e Pakistan" in 2014 (Nation news, 2016). So there for, Russia and China know very much that Pakistan can be very much beneficial for oppression against terrorism and extremism. With the inclusion of India as a big state in economical and military size, increases the importance of the Shanghai cooperation organization (SCO) rendering it more audible, well balanced and also effective. India also very important country in the peace process of Afghanistan and has been forefront to combat global terrorism. And India is very close with government of Afghanistan and has been invested huge bulk of money in the infrastructure development of the Afghanistan. At the platform of SCO, where now all of neighbors of Afghanistan, along with Pakistan and India will provide a good stage for develop an extensive regional political, security and economic roadmap to promote security and stability in the country.

On the other hand, economically both India and Pakistan will provide SCO member countries with connectivity linkage with South Asia and Arabian Sea. India as emerging economic giant country in the Asia and second largest country in population. To rise its regional trade, commerce and economic markets, India want to access in Central Asia. China government also willing to work cooperatively with India and also support each other (Indian express, 2017). China already confidence that new member countries India and Pakistan will be able to actively join the "one belt one road" initiative. Although, India has doubts on OBOR. India believes that China's one belt one road initiative is conflict with the India in economic race. Second, India believes that this will weaken the traditional influence of India in South Asia, but now being a member of SCO India and China will enhance mutual trust, strengthen mutual cooperation. China believe that "One belt one road" initiative is a call for cooperation from all countries. On the other hand, there are six corridors under the China's One Belt One Road initiative (OBOR), CPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor) is one of those six corridors. CPEC is also considering a framework of regional connectivity and game changer from researchers. It not only advantage for China and Pakistan but also have affirmative impact on Afghanistan, India, Iran, and Central Asian Republic. And Iran has already showed her willingness of support in the CPEC (The Express Tribune, 2015). Moreover, through CPEC Pakistan will be able to connecting South Asia and China to Central Asia, West Asia and Eurasia. This connectivity will provide many opportunities for Central Asian Republic's economic and trade developments (Muhammad Hanif, 2017).

Will SCO platform bring India and Pakistan closer in future?

The SCO's pioneer member countries are expecting cordial relationship between India and Pakistan, will definitely encourage regional stability and improve integration in South Asia. The spokesperson of the ministry of foreign affairs of China Hua Chunying, stated that India and Pakistan will firmly obey the charter of the SCO and also promote the SCO spirit, comprising the concept of good neighborliness. It is always expected that the two nations develop their relations moreover add a meaningful motivation into SCO further advancement (Hindustan Times, 2017). As we known, India and Pakistan have been a continually tense bilateral relationship for a long decades. The Kashmir issue had become a main source of instability and military conflict in South Asia and the military confrontation and direct conflict between the two sides. In fact, the people of India and Pakistan also do not want to see this. They all have a hope for stable and peaceful environment. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization will now provide such a platform for India and Pakistan. The SCO is considered to be one of the most successful diplomatic platform. This diplomatic platform has various such characteristics. Firstly, SCO is a platform for mutual cooperation. SCO have developed a new stage of full cooperation in energy, transportation, finance, education and humanities sectors within member countries. Whereas economic and security cooperation is core and necessary two wheels of the SCO. This mutual cooperation could be make hope for the beginning cooperation between India and Pakistan together with other member countries. In an interview with the media, Pakistani Ex-Prime Minister Sharif said that India and Pakistan's accession in the SCO can promote cooperation between the two countries; improve bilateral relations and mutual benefit on the basis of cooperation (Malik Muhammad Ashraf, 2017). Secondly, Shanghai Cooperation Organization is a platform for dialogue. The annual meeting of the heads of state, head of the government and various other ministries make smooth path of the dialogue between India and Pakistan. Moreover, this kind of dialogue and communication has always been a topic of discussion among the parties to exchange of positive views. Even if there are contradictions and differences between member states in certain areas, there is no discussion of conflicts and differences on this platform.

Thirdly, The SCO Charter also orders not to target third parties, which reflects the principle of non-alignment. According to the article 1 of SCO Charter "strengthening mutual trust, friendship and good neighborliness between the member Countries" (Charter of SCO). However, the SCO does not target third parties and is open to cooperation with the international organizations. Moreover, the SCO summit of heads of state has invited representatives of many organizations to participate. On the other hand SCO have four observer countries and six dialogue partner countries. Therefore, this platform is always open. Shanghai 5 was the pioneer of the SCO established on the basis of the dialogue mechanism among its first five members. But its rapid institutional development like Secretariat, RATS and others make SCO composed of platforms of different stages, moreover the constantly new development in institutions build SCO a larger platform. These all platforms of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization further provide the good platform and good opportunity to the India and Pakistan to resolve their problems. And also such issues will not impose any impact on the under development of the SCO. These platforms in the SCO enhancing the "Shanghai Spirit" value, which is based on mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, negotiation, respect and seeks common development. This value concept is not only the ideology of the SCO platform but has actually become an important concept for building a new inter-state relationship.

Conclusion:

In SCO, India and Pakistan via a number of diplomatic steps that may encourage both sides to make finish off to the very old conflicts as well as violence between the two neighboring countries. This achievement of SCO will be remarkable landmark and also will facilitate many others to counsel the organization for their concerns which will certainly create the SCO highly effective player alongside the UNO in the global political aspect. Moreover, India and Pakistan widens its opportunity and creates much more possibilities as well as positive aspects instead of complexities for both parties. Multiplied co-operation with SCO member countries on economic and trade, military, energy, culture and connectivity are the probably benefits for both countries.

The positive role of the SCO in this region is very clear. Before it was extended, it had been sixteen years ago. It proved that as a new international organization after the cold war, it was a principle that was accompanied by non-alignment, adhering to mutual trust, mutual benefit and equality consultation. As a result, it is fruitful in security cooperation and economic cooperation. Without the SCO, the region of Central Asia could not have the current peace and prosperity, and it could be as volatile as the Middle East. In this regard, the SCO has the ability to maintain regional security. After India and Pakistan are joined, this capacity will only be strengthened, not weakened, our influence will be further expanded, and the prospects for economic cooperation are also very worthy of expectation. In addition, the newly members India and Pakistan with regard to connectivity and infrastructure opportunities, bring South Asia close to Central Asia with more an alternative possible routes and connect to Europe. Constrained access to land connectivity has impeded the development of the whole region. The two South Asian powers India and Pakistan can eliminate the gap and establish the concomitance. This is

definitely not only the belief of the SCO but also the expectations of the whole world.

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