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## What is Driving India's and Pakistan's Interest in Joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization?

### *Strategic Insights*, Volume IV, Issue 8 (August 2005)

by [Maj Jefferson E. Turner, USAF](#)

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### Introduction

In early June 2005 at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's (SCO) foreign ministers' meeting, India, Pakistan, and Iran were recommended for SCO "observer" status. Final SCO approval for the three countries was granted a month later at the SCO heads of state meeting held July 5-6, 2005 in Astana, Kazakhstan.[1] This is a major step which accommodates each of the SCO member states' interests and position of the SCO to further support a multi-polar world. This paper seeks to specifically address what is driving India's and Pakistan's interest in joining the SCO? In order to answer this question, one must have an understanding of the SCO and its members. The SCO is comprised of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. During the SCO's evolution, other countries in the region including Mongolia, Iran, India, Pakistan, and more recently the post-Taliban Afghan government, have expressed interest, to varying degrees, in participating in this emerging regional forum.[2]

The SCO is an emerging regional organization in Central Asia, but during its short history it has largely remained an enigma. It has been characterized as a security organization, a regional forum, and an anti-terrorism coalition. Another common characterization of the SCO is as a Russian and Chinese led alliance created to counter U.S. hegemony. These explanations of the SCO have their shortfalls and provide little insight of the primary motivations and interests driving the SCO's evolution. While analysis of this larger question is important, this paper seeks to examine the possibilities and implications of either India, Pakistan or both joining the SCO as full-fledged members. In order to answer this paper's research question, it is also important to understand the current geopolitical and geoeconomic relations between Central and South Asia. What bilateral relations currently exist between India/Pakistan and Russia, China, and the Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan)? What barriers or tensions may bar future full membership? Is India more likely to be offered entry over Pakistan or vice versa? Which SCO member states support or oppose India's or Pakistan's future membership and why? Finally, what do these answers to these questions tell us about the nature of the SCO itself? Is the SCO an alliance? Is it a regional economic forum? Or is it a modern day "concert" of Central Asia?

To evaluate these questions this paper is organized into four sections. First, the paper will examine the history of the SCO, from its humble beginnings as the Shanghai Five to its modern day form. Second, the paper will explore how Indian and Pakistani pursued their Central Asian regional policies and bilateral relations with Russia, China, and the Central Asian Republics (CARs) after the collapse of the Soviet Union.[3] Third, it will consider how India and Pakistan have fared in pursuing bilateral ties with individual SCO members and examine the extent to which these ties have strengthened prospects for future membership in the SCO. Finally, the paper will conclude with an analysis of the likelihood of SCO full member status for India and/or Pakistan, as well as, what their membership might signify to the future direction of the SCO.

## The Development of the SCO

The SCO, as regional security architecture, can be seen as a logical follow up to the 1990 agreement between the former Soviet Union and China. Their goal was to ensure good neighborly ties, as well as to reduce the number of armed forces in the border regions of Central Asia. The independence of the Central Asian Republics in 1991 brought new sovereign nations into the regional discussions. The original Shanghai Agreement developed from two delegations; one group led by Russia representing the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), while the other group was Chinese.[4]

## The Shanghai “Five” Forum

The 1996 meeting in Shanghai and the 1997 meeting in Moscow laid the foundation of the modern SCO. Originally, the Shanghai Forum was formed to address a number of regional issues in Central Asia.[5] First, the Shanghai Forum was committed to fostering friendly relations and cooperation between its member states. Second, they wanted to promote mutual military trust between their countries. Finally, they wanted to reduce the number of armaments along the borders of their countries making it a 100-km demilitarized zone.[6]

The 1998 meeting of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan in Almaty, Kazakhstan marked a dramatic departure from previous conferences where things were said, but never done. The vision for the meeting was to lay the foundation “to turn the border between the five countries into a frontier of genuinely equitable and mutually advantageous cooperation.”[7] Prior to the meeting one observer noted, “The five countries will come out as independent partners in the negotiations alliance.”[8] The meeting of the Group of Five was attended by the president of each country, with the exception of Russia, which was represented by Foreign Minister Primakov instead of President Yeltsin.[9] The primary purpose of the meeting was to signify the joint statements of the 1996 and 1997 meetings, including resolving Soviet era border security legacy issues and to make the organization “weightier and more solid.”[10] During the Cold War, Central Asia held a great concentration of opposing Soviet and Chinese forces. “However, in the new conditions the countries of the region have resolved to turn what was once the major zone of tension into a zone of security.”[11]

The five countries also took a “principled position on the nuclear tests carried out by India and Pakistan.”[12] This unanimity demonstrated the SCO’s concern over issues which could lead to regional instability and “reflects their confidence and determination in nuclear non-proliferation and prevention of nuclear tests.”[13] In addition, the Chinese took the opportunity at this gathering to meet specifically with Kazakhstan to resolve border dispute issues between their countries.[14]

The 1999 Shanghai Five meeting in Bishkek was significant in that the members began to talk about reviving the “silk road” economy. The new “silk road” involves the economic integration of the Central Asian Republics, Russia, and China through trade and investment, especially in the oil and gas sectors. However, China was already busy mapping out its plans for the SCO prior to September 11, 2001. Chinese President Jiang Zemin called on the member nations to continue

their cooperation “to guarantee regional security, crack down on the forces of religious extremism and ethnic separatism, as well as combating international terrorist activities.”[15] Additionally, the post conference joint communiqué urged SCO members to develop further cooperation between ministries of defense and interior.[16]

The 2000 meeting in Dushanbe, Tajikistan marked the first Shanghai Forum’s reaction to U.S. foreign policy. The NATO war in Yugoslavia was conducted without UN Security Council approval. China and Russia, bitter by the war, used the joint communiqué to state the importance of maintaining UN authority, particularly that of the Security Council. As well as “calling for a more effective role for the UN in conflict resolution, the communiqué also condemned the use of human rights for undermining the national sovereignty of states.”[17] Furthermore, the joint communiqué called for the establishment of a counter-terrorism center in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan “to jointly combat national separatism, international terrorism, and religious extremism,” as well as preventing trans-border activities.[18] The anti-terrorism center was planned to “serve as the legal basis to start substantial cooperation in security issues and offer a more effective means for the fledging organization to combat terrorism together.”[19] Additionally, Uzbekistan attended this conference as an observer and applied for SCO membership.

## The SCO’s Creation

The sixth meeting of the Shanghai Five in 2001 was preceded by several key meetings attended by the members’ general staffs and foreign ministers. The grouping of five members[20] was gaining its legs as a regional forum and organization. Uzbekistan became a full member and the group became known as the “Shanghai Cooperation Organization.” This face lift was ushered in by a series of policy decisions and conventions. The communiqué on arms control reaffirmed the SCO’s support for the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty and opposition to the U.S. National Missile Defense (NMD) program, as well as declaring Central Asia as a nuclear free zone.[21] The attendees also came out in support of the UN charter and pledged noninterference in each others internal affairs.[22] The SCO also indicated that they wanted to start a dialogue with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) regional forum. The heads of state also agreed to speed up institutionalization of cooperation mechanisms in areas of border security, confidence building, anti-terrorist, separatist and extremist activities, economic cooperation, and social/cultural exchanges, as well as a mechanism for dispute resolution among SCO partners.[23] The main output of this conference was the “The Shanghai Convention on fighting Terrorism, Separatism and Extremisms.” The Convention’s twenty-one articles continued to focus the SCO on regional security issues, while downplaying any notion of the SCO as a military alliance.[24] According to Georgiy Bovt, at the SCO’s initial formation, its members considered “the Afghan regime their main adversary and planter of terrorism and narcotics.”[25]

In the past the SCO’s agenda had been primarily driven by security concerns, including the reduction of state tensions over border disputes, and by providing for stability in the highly ethnic fragmented region. Economic coordination had not developed beyond existing bilateral ties. Economic cooperation was still taking a backseat to security concerns and occupied “a strictly marginal position in the work of the youthful forum.”[26] This can be attributed to Russia’s existing investments in the Central Asian states’ energy resource firms and distribution infrastructure mixed with its attempts to use the CIS and the Eurasian Economic Community to wield economic influence in the region.[27]

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the SCO began to evolve more rapidly. The U.S. led Operation ENDURING FREEDOM brought U.S. forces to Central Asia. While the Chinese and Russians recognized the United States’ right to respond to the sources responsible for the terrorist attacks, the establishment of U.S. airbases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan raised concerns. The SCO was forced to hastily push forward the establishment of a planned anti-terrorism center. In June 2002, the SCO signed the *Agreement between the member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on Regional Anti-terrorist structure*. This agreement was

significant as it called for a clear-cut legal framework “for the establishment at the regional level of practical interaction in the struggle against terrorism, separatism, and extremism.”[28] In addition, the SCO regional anti-terror center was renamed the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS).

At the May 2003 meeting in Moscow, the leaders reached a consensus on the architecture of the future institutional organization of the SCO. The most significant actions taken by the SCO heads of state was establishing an office of the SCO secretariat, which would be situated in Beijing, as well as the decision to launch a regional anti-terrorism center by January 1, 2004.[29] While both Russia and China have a huge stake in the future success of the SCO, the Chinese were clearly the big diplomatic winner in the short-term. Finalizing the “SCO Charter validates Beijing’s ‘new security concept’ of promoting multilateral approaches to regional security, as opposed to U.S.-led bilateral alliances or other security relationships.”[30] The Moscow SCO summit also decided to move the Executive Committee of the SCO regional anti-terror center from Bishkek to Tashkent in Uzbekistan.[31] Furthermore, the SCO conducted its first joint exercise during August 7-12, 2003.[32]

Shortly after the meeting in Moscow, the SCO held a follow up economic cooperation and integration ministerial meeting in Beijing. The Prime Ministers settled on a budget for the organization’s secretariat and the Tashkent anti-terrorism center. The officials codified six additional documents toward the institutionalization of the SCO. The documents solidified multi-lateral economic and trade cooperation, the 2004 SCO budget, and the “rules and regulations on salary and allowances for staff members of the permanent [SCO] body.”[33] In addition, other documents covered the “anti-terrorism institution and personnel arrangement, technical initiation of the SCO permanent body, and a joint communiqué of the consultation.”[34] An outside observer noted: “With the institutional arrangements and administrative functions taking shape, the group should be able to deal with events and threats it had previously been criticized as incapable of handling.”[35]

With its institutional mechanisms in place, the SCO was ready to coordinate its activities with the Asian-Pacific region. The June 2004 meeting in Tashkent further solidified the SCO’s framework, including approving Mongolia as a SCO observer. In addition to discussing the security and stability in the region, including the remnants of the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and other Islamic extremist groups, Russia put forth an initiative to create a SCO-Afghanistan contact group to revive the Afghan economy. The SCO members also signed an agreement outlining cooperation in the fight against illicit drug trading. Russian President Putin “emphasized the importance of the SCO countries’ participation in the implementation of the initiative to create external anti-drug security belts around Afghanistan.”[36] The heads of state also agreed to set up a SCO regional development fund, as well as plans to hold an economic forum.[37]

The next SCO summit meeting was held July 2005 in Astana, Kazakhstan which had planned to “focus on the economy.”[38] Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov indicated the SCO also plans to establish a comprehensive regional development fund and business council at the next summit meeting.[39] Lavrov indicated that the 2005 meeting may go a long way toward solving regional problems: “Last year’s security and stability initiatives are being implemented, and contacts are being established with other organizations.”[40] He further remarked that the “documents on cooperation with ASEAN and the CIS are being drafted, and the SCO has received an official observer status at the UN General Assembly. This creates new possibilities for the solution of regional problems.”[41]

However, the 2005 summit produced one highly publicized communiqué. This SCO communiqué called for the United States to establish a time table for the redeployment of its forces from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The SCO justification was reportedly based on the U.S. led anti-terrorism coalition’s completion of the active military phase of operations in Afghanistan. The SCO permanent members recognized, even in their own assessment as to the impact of their

organization as regional antiterrorist structure had marginal results, and that its influence over processes in Central Asia had been minimal due to the U.S. presence.[42]

Others have speculated that Uzbek President Karimov was behind the general push for the anti-U.S. declaration—specifically, as a singular response to U.S. criticism of the regime's refusal to permit an international investigation into events in Andijon.[43] Moscow has backed Tashkent's during its latest downturn in relations with the United States, but has also pursued its own interests by “incorporating in the declaration the paragraph about the timeframe for the US bases' stay in Central Asia. This can be seen as responding to Washington for the tough stance espoused by US-backed Georgia on the withdrawal of Russian bases from its territory.”[44] Though the Russians have now seemed to have distanced themselves from calling on the United States to establish a time-table for removing its troops from its Central Asian airbases.

Russian President Putin commented that there was “nothing out of the ordinary” by the SCO seeking a requested time table. Further, he highlighted that the SCO in pursuit of its anti-terrorism agenda did not need to establish SCO military bases and that in practical terms Russia considered military issues to be a part of the CIS CSTO purview.[45] Sergey Prokhodko, a Putin presidential aide when asked if the subject of withdrawing U.S. forces had come up during the G-8 Summit in Scotland replied: “no. The question is of strictly applied nature.”[46] Others suggest that this SCO proclamation is empty because besides the rhetorical value, the United States seems to be the only country able to effectively maintain some semblance of stability in the region. The basic problem for the Central Asian states is that they “are incapable of resolving their own geopolitical fate without the patronage—including military—of stronger powers.”[47] Furthermore, Russia lacks the capability to and unwilling to let the United States be replaced by China, which has its own issues to commit its resources toward.[48]

Others regional reactions were mixed. Muhiddin “Kabiri said that the leaders of the SCO states considered the USA's presence as one of the factors for ‘colour revolutions’ on post-Soviet territory.”[49] The Kyrgyz foreign minister recognized the past benefits of the U.S. presence in the region. Although, she pointed out that the duration of the anti-terrorist coalition's military bases in the SCO countries in Central Asia would be “directly connected with changes in the situation in Afghanistan.”[50]

## **India's and Pakistan's Initial Foreign Policies and Strategic Incentives toward Central Asia (1991-2000)**

In order to understand what is driving India's and Pakistan's interests in joining the SCO, it is important to understand how they view their regional interests in Central Asia, as well as their relations with the SCO members. Historically, Central and South Asia were linked until the Khanates of Bukhara and Khiva came under Russian control during the mid nineteenth century. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, changes to the regional political map have once again led to speculation as to whether past historical ties will be revived and how far old patterns of relations will be restored. The current security environment in Central Asia presents both challenges and opportunities for India and Pakistan to influence regional affairs.[51] India and Pakistan tend to balance one another in their regional economic and security policies. However, one's failure does not necessarily equate to future predictions of the others' success.

According to Juli A. MacDonald, “India and Pakistan squandered opportunities to develop closer relations with the new Central Asian states in the early 1990s.”[52] In the months leading up to September 11, 2001, both countries adjusted to fundamental changes in their strategic environment. India and Pakistan recognized that Central Asia was to play a critical role in their foreign policy calculations. India and Pakistan faced similar challenges regarding development of their regional policies in Central Asia. First, they are peer competitors in the region. Indian political elites have increasingly referred to Central Asia as part of “their ‘extended strategic

neighborhood' and as a region with which they share a range of strategic interests.”[53] While Pakistani political elites view Central Asia “important because it gives Pakistan what they refer to as ‘strategic depth’.”[54] Second, Central Asia is viewed “as an arena that is critical to larger geopolitical competitions and realignments” in the post-Cold War environment.[55] For India this aspect is based on perceived threats whether from Chinese encirclement or regional instability generated by the Afghan Taliban government. India also views the potential lack of access to a new east-west economic corridor—replacing the Cold War north-south orientation—as troubling. Finally, Central Asia represents an area for potential cooperation and conflict with the United States over state interests (e.g. countering Chinese influence or energy development and transportation routes). A third aspect of India’s and Pakistan’s thinking toward Central Asia concerns non-energy related economic interests and increased trade relations.[56] Finally, MacDonald contends that energy resources (e.g. oil, gas, and hydropower) and pipeline politics will be a major driving force in relations between Central and South Asia.[57]

## India

India’s “interest in the Central Asia region comes from a mixture of politico-strategic concerns and, perhaps to a lesser extent, perceived commercial prospects.”[58] India’s initial reaction to the newly independent states of Central Asia, was like China’s, largely defensive in nature. The rapid growth of Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey’s influence in Central Asia generated a growing “concern and resentment in Indian nationalist circles.”[59] The Indian political elites saw Pakistan’s rapid rapprochement in Central Asia as an attempt to establish a bloc of Islam states.[60] Anthony Hyman argues that some Indian political elites interpreted the independence of the Central Asian states “in an alarmist fashion, as a highly unwelcome strengthening of Pakistan’s regional position, with five potential new allies.”[61] Of particular note were the reports claiming Pakistan had acquired enriched uranium from Tajikistan and Kazakhstan while India’s own efforts to acquire the same material from Kyrgyzstan, under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards, had languished.[62] However, fear of a new Muslim fundamentalist belt was largely overplayed by Indian nationalists, media discussions, and reporting.

In time, India’s government took a more sanguine view toward the Central Asia regimes. It came to an understanding “that none of the republics wanted the Islamic factor to count in their foreign relations, and that India quite as much as Pakistan could keep or gain further influence with these essentially secular-minded governments.”[63] Anita Inder Singh argues that India’s positive reengagement with the Central Asian states emerged due to new international and geopolitical realities. For Singh, India’s attempts to establish “good relations with them is a matter of pragmatism as India’s neighbors and rivals, Pakistan and China, are interested in the region.”[64] India was able to capitalize on its past ties with the Soviet Union to press its advantage in Central Asia. India’s prestige can largely be attributed to its culture, general goodwill, and “as an old and trusted friend the Soviet era.”[65]

Today, India is turning to the SCO not for security purposes but for economic motivations. India’s interest in Central Asia and the SCO, by and large, is the result of its existing bilateral economic agenda. According to Singh, “India regards economic cooperation as the best way to counter Pakistan’s influence in Central Asia.”[66] The lynchpins of India’s Central Asian regional economic policies have been Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

During the 1990s, “the actual volume of Indian trade with Central Asia remained modest.”[67] India was able to secure both economic and security agreements with Uzbekistan.[68] India was also able to increase cooperation with Kazakhstan in the areas of technology exchanges and participation in space programs associated with the Baikonur cosmodrome.[69] India also offered \$5 million in trade credits to both Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. Finally, India increased cooperation with Tajikistan despite its internal instability. However, it was set back in its attempts to open an embassy in Dushanbe. Overall India was received well by the newly independent Central Asia states, but returned home with little to show for their efforts. A major constraint on

India's efforts was that it had little funds to back up the goodwill visits. The "cash-strapped Indian Government, its budget vetted by the International Monetary Fund, could offer only training programs and, in some cases, trade credits."<sup>[70]</sup> Regardless of these government limitations, "Indian private companies were reportedly looking closely at Tajikistan's investment potential in silver, pharmaceuticals, coal, granite, and leather goods for joint ventures."<sup>[71]</sup>

Despite its good standing and strong bilateral relationship with Russia, Ross H. Munro contends, "[i]n the final analysis, it was the overall weakness of India's economy, and not just the budgetary straits the New Delhi government was in, that limited India's ability to make an impact on the new republics."<sup>[72]</sup> China was able to displace India by "offering cheaper and better quality consumer goods, including Hong Kong-designed and Chinese-made garments, to the five republics."<sup>[73]</sup> A position China still maintains today.<sup>[74]</sup> By 1992, India's economic ambitions were stymied, and its political elites became less concerned about the region.

## Pakistan

Pakistan's ambitions to form an Islamic bloc failed to materialize.<sup>[75]</sup> During the 1990s, Pakistan targeted the Central Asian states for better relations, but it did not yield the results initially sought. Pakistani political elites' visions of forming "a Muslim security belt stretching from Turkey to Pakistan with Central Asia as the 'buckle,' to provide both 'strategic depth' and needed allies in her policy struggles over Afghanistan and Kashmir," were quickly dashed.<sup>[76]</sup> Pakistan's support for the Taliban is a lingering source of friction between the Central Asian states. Fear of a spillover into the Tajik civil war and Taliban support from the IMU in Uzbekistan, only further isolated Pakistan from Central Asia.<sup>[77]</sup> In addition, the Central Asia states reestablished their ties with Russia as its main security partner in the region through the May 1992 CIS collective security agreement. During the 1990's, Pakistan was forced to shift its focus in Central Asia to establishing bilateral economic and cultural ties and offering assistance on regional issues, such as counter narcotics.

Pakistan's initial forays into Central Asia emphasized the economic dimension of its foreign policy goals. The primary bilateral mechanism used by Pakistan was the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO),<sup>[78]</sup> which sought to create a common market for goods and services as well as to develop capital and financial markets between Muslim countries.<sup>[79]</sup> Pakistan wanted access to Central Asia's energy resources and natural materials while offering to export textiles, machinery, and telecommunications equipment. The process was started with high-level delegation visits to Central Asia between November-December 1991. The result was \$30 million in credit offers were tendered to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan "to establish joint ventures in cotton, textiles, garments, pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, surgical instruments, telecommunications, and agro-industry."<sup>[80]</sup> In the summer of 1992, Pakistan was also able to seal agreements with Uzbekistan "for the establishment of a satellite communications link, construction of highways, joint production of telecommunications equipment and the manufacture in Pakistan of rolling stock for Central Asian Railways."<sup>[81]</sup>

According to Dianne L. Smith, "Pakistan has had mixed success in bringing these bilateral agreements to fruition. They reflect the gap between intent and capability."<sup>[82]</sup> Smith attributes these constraints to a lack of direct geographic access to the region, regional instability, Pakistan's LOC infrastructure, and its lack of financial resources.<sup>[83]</sup> The final blow to Pakistan's early economic aspirations in Central Asia was the establishment of the Shanghai Five in 1996, followed by the creation of the SCO in 2001.

## India's and Pakistan's 21st Century Foreign Policies and Strategic Incentives toward Central Asia and the SCO

The SCO has severely limited Pakistan's aspirations in Central Asia. The SCO has curtailed Pakistan's attempts at establishing "strategic depth" by seeking new Islamic allies in a collective security arrangement. The SCO also has offered regional non-Islamic powers that are in a more favorable geographic position, such as Russia and China, the opportunity to exploit the regions' energy resources. Joining the SCO may offer Pakistan the best channel to revisit its 1990s objectives and goals in Central Asia.

India's "Look East" foreign policy orientation seeks to enhance economic and military ties with countries in Southeast Asia. While its "Look West" policy, which is directed toward the Middle East and Central Asia, has not yet developed into a coherent strategy. India's demand for energy resources is largely driven by three factors: the rapid growth of its economy; the status of its domestic energy sector; and its attempts at diversifying its oil and gas imports.<sup>[84]</sup> If India is serious about increasing its access to energy resources in Central Asia and the Middle East, it will have to come to a political arrangement with Pakistan.<sup>[85]</sup> However, this foreign policy track of economic interdependence may compete with India's future regional goals and lingering security concerns.

India's 21st century ambition to be a global power has one major consequence. Its aspiration to "rise to a global status would be to leave Pakistan trailing behind as a minor regional power that could no longer threaten India's vital interests."<sup>[86]</sup> Joining the SCO would build on India's existing bilateral economic and military ties with the Central Asian states and Russia. Improving military logistics with Iran, Tajikistan,<sup>[87]</sup> Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan<sup>[88]</sup> and Uzbekistan<sup>[89]</sup> is critical to India's strategic vision. Joining the SCO may also make establishing a permanent, stable relationship with China more likely.<sup>[90]</sup> However, the events of September 11, 2001 may impact India's long-term regional calculus.<sup>[91]</sup>

Post September 11th, India's diplomatic charge into Central Asia has largely been driven by its future energy requirements.<sup>[92]</sup> Strategic repositioning also weighs in India's security calculations since the Taliban government was ousted from Afghanistan.<sup>[93]</sup> According to Rahul Bedi, the United States' continued presence in the Central Asian region and the Chinese-India nuclear rivalry are "also fueling New Delhi's 'forward' Central Asian policy."<sup>[94]</sup> Although "India remains powerless to engineer or overtly influence the 'New Game,' its size, military, and nuclear capability make it a not altogether insignificant part of the complex jigsaw" puzzle.<sup>[95]</sup>

Russia fully supports India's entry into the SCO as a full fledged member. Russia and India share a "broad congruence on a whole range of strategic issues. But it is the defense and military technical cooperation which is the lynchpin of the strategic partnership."<sup>[96]</sup> Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev also has openly supported India's inclusion in the SCO, as well as becoming a permanent member of the UN Security Council.<sup>[97]</sup> Nevertheless, India may be having second thoughts on joining the SCO with Russia and China as a "strategic triangle" promoting a multi-polar world. India's growing strategic partnership with the United States may "likely put Delhi in an awkward situation if it did indeed join the SCO given the organization's revised, albeit unstated, charter of containing Washington's burgeoning influence in the region."<sup>[98]</sup> New Delhi is also extremely cautious about joining any security forum, especially with China as a leading player, especially if China's military and nuclear partner Pakistan is also a likely member.<sup>[99]</sup> A senior Indian diplomat commented that until "SCO membership rules are finalized we cannot assess whether joining it will be advantageous or not for India."<sup>[100]</sup> The officials further indicated "that the key to India's relations with the Central Asian Region depended largely on China's response to the U.S. military presence in the region."<sup>[101]</sup>

Post September 11th, Pakistan has found a new ally in Central Asia and a strong supporter for its membership in the SCO. Uzbekistan seems ready to move past the Pakistani government's former support for radical Islamic groups in Central Asia.<sup>[102]</sup> Security issues and increased bilateral economic cooperation were on the agenda during a recent meeting in Tashkent. Presidents Islam Karimov and Pervez Musharraf both see a common threat from extremism,

terrorism, organized crime and narcotics trafficking. Both leaders want to destroy the root causes of terrorism. Economically, Uzbekistan is interested in gaining accesses to Pakistan's major Indian Ocean ports of Karachi and Gwadar. Despite this latest goodwill, the specter of Islamic radicals who fled Uzbekistan and sought refuge in Pakistan remains a "delicate issue."<sup>[103]</sup> One may speculate as to whether a new regional North-South axis is forming between Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, all strong political and military allies of the U.S.' Global War on Terrorism. If this is the case, Pakistan's bid to become a member of the SCO may have strong implications on the overall SCO orientation, potentially creating a pro-U.S. support bloc. In this case, the Indian elites which have historically suspected an U.S.-Pakistan-China strategic triangle aimed at limiting India's rise to a great power status might well pursue a counter policy by establishing an India-Iran-Tajikistan triangle. Regardless of myth or fact, one should expect a continued game of "one-upmanship" as India and Pakistan seek greater security and economic ties in Central Asia.

## **The Debate and Implications for Adding New Members**

China has been very supportive of Pakistan's entry into the SCO, which can also be seen as a counter balance to India. Pakistan's interest in joining the SCO may have started out as a security interest against terrorism. However, many of the Central Asian regimes find Pakistan's past pro-Taliban policy unsettling. Lingered fears of Pakistani ISI support for radical Islamic-oriented movements may continue to be the main reason why the CARs would not support Pakistan's entry into the SCO. Additionally, current Pakistani governmental support of U.S. foreign policy in Afghanistan and Central Asia may pose additional challenges to membership. Meanwhile it is also imperative for Pakistan to maintain friendly ties with Russia and strengthen their friendship with China, which are the two dominant players in the SCO. Russia is keenly aware of China's preference toward Pakistan over India joining the SCO. Indeed, Moscow's preference toward India versus Pakistan makes either country's entry into the SCO less likely, so long as there is a balance of power between Russia and China within the SCO. However, if India joins the SCO first, Pakistan will mostly likely claim that India will use this to their advantage. Pakistan anticipates that India, as a SCO member, would cite Pakistan's alleged support of terrorism and Islamic extremism in Kashmir to oppose their entry.

Economic and political interests are India's prime motivation for joining the SCO, as well as security interests in SCO membership. Two security issues confront India. First, the ongoing border disputes with China. Second, India is concerned over Islamic groupings with ties to Pakistani madrassahs, spilling over into Kashmir. Russia's support for India's inclusion is largely attributed to their past military and technical cooperation, as well as their desire to counterbalance a rising China. India has been politically neutral to Central Asia. Central Asia has not been a staple of Indian Foreign policy calculations. Economic access to the oil and gas sectors and commercial export markets of Central Asia make sense for India's rapidly growing economy. India may still seek to counter Pakistan's ambition by denying them "strategic depth." In the end, the decision to add India or Pakistan to the SCO will be a telling indication as to whether it is Moscow or Beijing that has the political diplomatic mechanisms to control the orientation of the SCO.

The implications of the SCO becoming a regional and global powerhouse should concern U.S. policy makers. A SCO expansion to include other regional states risks adding unsettled "frozen conflicts" into the harmony of the organization's achievements in economic and security agreements. Adding new members also increases the risks of bringing the SCO in direct confrontation with U.S. foreign policy interests in Central Asia. With a unanimous requirement for accessions, the SCO will most likely wait to add new full-fledged members, with the exception of Mongolia, which is considered a Central Asian state. However, India, Pakistan, Iran, and even Afghanistan may be granted observer status in the interim to promote the SCO economic and regional security agenda. Although, prior to any agreement to add additional SCO members, short-term security and stability concerns will need to be addressed and will be the primary driving factor in selecting new members. Once these security issues are addressed the SCO can

focus its agenda on achieving the long-term goal of economic integration required to launch a new “silk road.” Given the current state of play and alignment, there are two likely scenarios for SCO expansion in the south: Russia-China-Iran or Russia-China-India. Current Uzbekistan support for Pakistan may be limited to Uzbek President Karimov’s regional positioning and the continued instability in Afghanistan. However, the most dangerous scenario would be for a future SCO containing Russia, China, India, and Iran. Any SCO enlargement which adds additional nuclear powers could destabilize all of Central and South Asia. This event would further complicate U.S. foreign policy for decades to come, making the security and stability of the Caucasus and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline that much more vital in U.S. strategic national interests.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, although full SCO membership for India, Pakistan and Iran may be a distant reality, the SCO should not be considered a defensive alliance directed against the U.S. at the present time.[104] By offering “observer” status to each country at the same time, the SCO members have taken a pragmatic approach toward promoting their interests by leveraging the existing good neighborly ties throughout the region. This step may reduce any tensions associated with offering membership to some and not others. All parties recognize the importance of regional cooperation and interdependence to meet the challenges of regional security, long-term economic cooperation, and increased cultural ties. Today, the SCO shows strong characteristics of economic and security interdependence, however, prior SCO annual meetings and resulting joint declarations do not represent more than a talk shop. The most significant tangible results of these meetings have been the significant bilateral economic arrangements worked out in side bar, state-to-state meetings. However, promoting regional security against the “three evils”—terrorism, separatism, and extremism—is the primary motivation for all SCO members.[105] Thus, the SCO in its current form should be, at most, narrowly considered a modern day “Concert” of Central Asia, even though the SCO did not act to halt the overthrow of the Akayev regime in Kyrgyzstan in April 2005.[106]

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3. For the purpose of this paper CARs refers to the Central Asian states which are members of the SCO. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan are members of the SCO, while Turkmenistan has remained committed to its neutral stance and non-alignment policy under President Saparmurat Niyazov.

4. The original parties to the Shanghai Five were China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. Only after the 2001 meeting was Uzbekistan added to the grouping, resulting in the modern day SCO.

5. The Shanghai Forum may also be referred to as the Shanghai Five prior to 2001, when it became the SCO, with the addition of Uzbekistan to the regional grouping.

6. These issues remain valid today. However, some have speculated that China and Russia have larger plans for the modern SCO. Specifically, "to counter U.S. policies of economic penetration of the oil-rich Caspian Basin and to facilitate a global balance of power through a multi-polar order that would frustrate U.S. hegemonic goals." Cited from Dr. Maqbool Ahmad Bhatti: "Role of the Shanghai-5," *Karachi Dawn (Internet version-WWW)* (in English), June 16, 2000. FBIS Document ID: SAP20000716000029.

7. Vladimir Akimov, "Five Nation Almaty Meeting ion July to Promote Friendship," *Moscow ITAR-TASS* (in English), June 24, 1998. FBIS Document ID: FTS19980624000387.

8. *Ibid.*

9. It was unclear why President Yeltsin did not attend the conference. Several theories are that he did not attend due to a dispute with Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev over allocation of Caspian Sea resources or, more logically, due to internal Russia political tensions. Regardless, the Beijing reaction was reported as not positive. Despite the successes of the conference, Moscow may have started to lose influence over Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan early in the Shanghai Forum meetings. This poses several interesting questions: What impact, if any, did Boris Yeltsin's absence play in the initial stages of the SCO development? Did Yeltsin's administration view the Shanghai Forum as just another bi- or multi-lateral agreement that complimented other alliances with former Soviet Union states? Did the lack of Russian leadership from the outset or the ineptitude of the Yeltsin regime allow China to begin to dominate the future SCO agenda from the start? See: Igor Rotar, "Group of Five Without Yeltsin: Statement on Development of Mutual Trust To Be Signed in Almaty Today," *Moscow Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (in Russian), July 3, 1998. FBIS Document ID: FTS19980703000821.

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12. "Kazakh Envoy Comments on Almaty Summit," *Beijing Review* 30, 8-9, July 27, 1998. FBIS Document ID: FTS19980807002137.

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14. Kuanysh Sultanov, ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the People's Republic of China, clearly identified the reasons behind the Almaty summit: "A summit of the heads of bordering states absolutely does not mean uniting in some sort of bloc, nor is it designed as a counterbalance against anybody. They come together out of common interest in the fields of peaceful coexistence and economic cooperation." *Ibid.*, 12.

15. Dr. Maqbool Ahmad Bhatti: "Role of the Shanghai-5," *Karachi Dawn (Internet version-WWW in English)*, June 16, 2000. FBIS Document ID: SAP20000716000029.

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