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Issue Brief

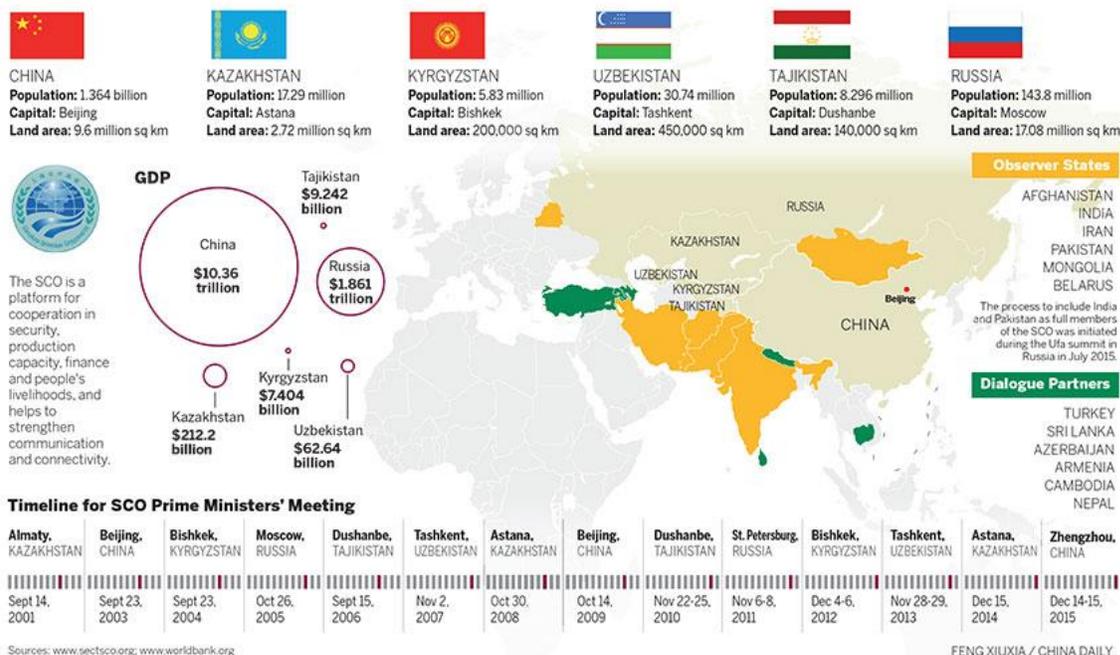
Significance of Pakistan's membership of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

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China has always favoured close ties with its neighbours and promotion of regional harmony. In its attempt to stabilise Central Asia, it engaged with the newly formed states after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and successfully negotiated border settlements. It did not seek to expand its influence in the region at the expense of a weakened Moscow, but worked alongside the Russians in order to ensure effective diplomacy.¹ Mutual cooperation between these countries led to the formation of Shanghai Five in 1996, that later became Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in 2001.

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation at a glance



The SCO embodies the desire of its member states to resolve regional issues collectively. The organisation is geared to promote goodwill between its members through interaction and consensus building. Focusing solely on security issues in the beginning, states began to utilise this forum to extend economic cooperation in early 2000s. With the launch of China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative, the significance of SCO in regional diplomacy is likely to increase manifold as all its members are part of China's economic expansion plan. This week, the Chinese newspaper, *Global Times*, highlighted that OBOR has been well-supported by SCO and Pakistan's entry will encourage more countries to join China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).² Pakistan, along with India, is expected to become full member of SCO in the next summit taking place in June 2017.³

The setback of the last Heart of Asia Conference should serve as a signal to adjust the direction of Pakistan's regional diplomatic initiatives. Pakistan wants to promote peace and stability in the region, but growing hostility between countries on both sides of the border has raised tensions in South Asia. India and Afghanistan appear to be on the same page when it comes to blaming Pakistan for instability in the region. On the other hand, the international community too, has been silent on India's recent violations at the Line of Control in Kashmir and the Working Boundary and its threats of blocking water flowing into Pakistan from its side of the border.

Multiple avenues like the United Nations, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summits, and bilateral dialogues have so far fallen short in resolving long-standing disputes between the two countries and thus, keeping Pakistan vulnerable to cross border agitations.

With a long standing shortfall in its energy requirement, Pakistan has become an energy starved country and requires partnerships with resource rich Central Asian states to address its future challenges in the energy field. Pakistan can be a vital ally for Central Asian states given its prowess in fighting militancy and geographical location which offers these countries a land link to the Arabian Sea and beyond. By engaging in strategic dialogues with them, Pakistan can further signify its importance in regional stability. As future prospects of all the member states are intertwined, the SCO can play an effective role in initiating meaningful dialogue between Pakistan and India as well. A key aspect of SCO is that, unlike SAARC, it is non-hegemonic and can foster a balanced exchange between the two countries.

Agreements on CASA 1000 power project and Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project reflect the economic interdependence of Central and South Asian countries. For such projects to materialise, it is essential that South Asian countries refrain from aggression against one another. Long-term security and economic cooperation must not be compromised over short-term national interests. Therefore, the role of SCO as a facilitator of intergovernmental cooperation could be pivotal in supporting regional stability and Pakistan's progress.

Notes and References:

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- ¹ https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/ipi_e_pub_shanghai_cooperation.pdf
 - ² <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1037800.shtml>
 - ³ <http://nation.com.pk/national/11-Mar-2017/pakistan-india-to-become-sco-members-in-june>