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Introduction

The Centre for Pakistan and Gulf Studies (CPGS) is a non-partisan research institute established with a vision to innovate future prospects for peace and security in the region and beyond through undertaking research on global security, geo-politics, peace-building and conflict resolution. To this end, CPGS, in collaboration with Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), organized a roundtable discussion titled, ‘Pakistan and SCO: Building Common Understanding’, at the CPGS office.

The roundtable was organized as part of the Centre’s ongoing project on ‘Regional Integration: Road to Peace and Prosperity’, which aims at promoting a common understanding on issues of mutual interest and explore avenues of cooperation, amongst the states of South and Central Asia. The roundtable intended to enhance understanding about the significance of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in promoting regional connectivity and building understanding of the benefits for prospective members like Pakistan, and the impact of their membership on the organization as a whole. Two esteemed experts - Ambassador (R) Akram Zaki, Former Secretary General for Foreign Affairs, Pakistan and Dr Mavra Innayt, Assistant Professor, School of Politics and International Relations (SPIR), Quaid-e-Azam University (QAU) - discussed at length the various aspects of the prospective membership of Pakistan in the SCO. The discussion was chaired by General (R) S. M. Owais HI(M).

The roundtable delved into the history of the SCO, its core objectives, relevance in the world order as well as prospects for Pakistan’s membership of the SCO and possible avenues of cooperation.

The SCO is increasingly becoming significant both in regional and international affairs, due primarily to the following two reasons. First, the SCO states have vast natural energy reserves; second, they are a huge market for foreign exports and
the third is their increased geopolitical significance in the Global War on Terror (GWoT). While initially the SCO focused more on internal security aspects - like the separatist and Islamist movements inside the member countries, currently its interests have expanded and are predominantly shaped by economic interests, regional connectivity and energy trade.

The SCO's security and economic interests are now expanding to the South Asian region. Nonetheless, the collective desire to tackle non-traditional security challenges remains at the heart of the SCO coordination. During the last summit, for example, SCO countries focused on the situation in Afghanistan and matters relating to the extension of membership to Pakistan, India, Afghanistan and Iran, in addition to the usual agenda items of regional stability and economic development issues. This trajectory of the SCO agenda also highlights the intention of the current SCO states to develop a regional trade hub that includes Pakistan and its three neighbors; India, Afghanistan and Iran.
Participants
The roundtable was attended by renowned scholars, practitioners and members of the CPGS team. The complete list of participants is as follows;

President CPGS  Senator Sehar Kamran (T.I.)

Speakers  Ambassador (R) Akram Zaki  
Former Secretary General for Foreign Affairs  
Dr Mavara Inayat  
School of Politics and International Relations (SPIR), QAU Islamabad

Participants  Ambassador (R) Munawar S. Bhatti  
Lt. Gen (R) Assad Durrani, Former DG ISI  
Mr Nasir Hafeez, Faculty Member, NDU  
Mr Ronny Heine, Resident Representative KAS  
Mr Faisal Rana,  
Mr Ali Shahid Zahid  
Ms Ayesha Umir,  
Mr Sohail Ahmed  
Mr Tahir Mehmood  
Mr Fawad Haider  
Mr Shakir Bacha  
Mr Almas Haider  
Mr M Suleman Shahid  
Ms Ifrah Waqar  
Mr Tahir Ahmad  
Mr Abdul Ghafoor  
Maj (R) Farrukh James  
Ms Saima Sial  
Mr Adeela Khan  
Ms Sundus Ahmad  
Mr Mohammad Rizwan

*Various Government Officials, Research Scholars, HEC Scholars, M.Phil and PhD Students also attended the event.
Roundtable Discussion on “Pakistan Shanghai Cooperation Organistaion: Building Common Understanding”
Introductory Remarks

Senator Sehar Kamran
President CPGS

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen! Assalam-o-Alaikum!

It gives me immense pleasure to extend to you all our warmest greetings, on behalf of the Centre for Pakistan and Gulf Studies (CPGS). I am honored to welcome you all at this roundtable discussion on this issue of significant national interest - Pakistan’s prospective membership of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Today’s event is being held in collaboration with Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS). I would also like to express my appreciation for KAS, and especially to Mr Ronny Heine, for their generous support in making this endeavor a success.

The purpose of this roundtable is to explore the significance and challenges to Pakistan’s bid for the membership of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and analyze contemporary strategic and geo-political concerns related to regional connectivity and energy trade. There are numerous reasons for this, including the presence of oil and gas reservoirs in the SCO states, the presence of growing markets and the recent conflicts of international significance.

Due to the prevailing situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, arising from increasing militancy and strategic rivalry between major powers, the SCO’s security and economic stakes have expanded to South Asia. During the last summit, SCO member countries deliberated on the situation in Afghanistan and matters concerning the extension of membership to Pakistan, India, Afghanistan and Iran. Regional stability and economic development related issues were also highlighted. This shows that SCO countries intend to develop a ‘trade hub’ with state partners including Pakistan and its three neighbors; India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran.
In a regional alignment of this nature, Pakistan can act as a conduit between the SCO countries and its three neighbors for two reasons. Firstly, its role in combating terrorism is vital for the region. Secondly, it provides the shortest possible trade routes, connecting to Central Asia and Iran on the one hand, and the Russian, Chinese and the Indian markets on the other. But it is also important to keep in mind whether the expansion of the SCO will facilitate in conflict resolution in volatile regional hotspots like Afghanistan and Kashmir, and could the Gwadar Port become functional without stability in Afghanistan, FATA and Balochistan?

Regional cooperation is making good headway in various regions of the world. Unfortunately this is not the case in South Asia, as SAARC countries have not been able to resolve their disputes. Moreover, SAARC is an unbalanced regional organization, where one country is larger than all the rest put together. When Pakistan, which is currently an observer in SCO, is admitted as a full member, it would be time to give China, currently an observer, full member status in SAARC. This addition will help make SAARC a balanced organization and contribute to regional peace and stability. This will also help to realize our common dream of making the 21st century ‘the century of Asia’. The destiny of the Asian peoples will be decided in Asian Capitals.
Background

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is a permanent international organization formally created on 15 June 2001 in Shanghai, China. It was originally comprised of six states, i.e. the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People’s Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan. Geographically, its member states cover an area of about three fifths of Eurasia, with a population of 1.455 billion – about a quarter of the world’s total. The working languages of the SCO are Chinese and Russian.

SCO evolved out of the ‘Shanghai Five Mechanism’, which was established between the states of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to strengthen confidence-building and disarmament in their border regions after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. To control the civil wars in the Central Asian States (CARs), in 1996, a Treaty on ‘Deepening Military Trust in the Border Regions’ was concluded between the heads of state in Shanghai. Later in 1997, an additional Treaty on ‘Reduction of Military Forces in Border Regions’ was signed in Moscow. As the first meeting of the five heads of state took place in Shanghai, the cooperation mechanism came to be known as the "Shanghai Five".

In June 2001, the heads of states of Shanghai Five and the President of Uzbekistan met in Shanghai and signed a joint Declaration on the Establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Uzbekistan joined as the organization’s sixth member. The SCO charter was signed by the heads of the member states in St. Petersburg in June 2002. The charter detailed the purposes and principles, organizational structure, form of operation, cooperation, orientation and external relations of the SCO.

An annual meeting is held in the respective member states of SCO alternately. The agenda of the organization has extended from building trust in the border
regions to mutually beneficial cooperation in the political, security, diplomatic, economic, trade and other related areas.

Main objectives of SCO are:

a) Promoting good-neighborly relations among the member countries;
b) Strengthening mutual confidence;
c) Promoting effective cooperation in politics, trade and economy;
d) Collaborating in science and technology ventures;
e) Enhancing cooperation in the field of energy, transportation, culture and tourism;
f) Ensuring peace, security and stability in the region;
g) Enhancing mutual collaboration in fighting separatism, militancy, and terrorism, and promote the establishment of a new, democratic, just and rational political and economic international order.

Heads of State Council (HSC) is the highest decision-making body in the SCO, which meets annually to take decisions and give instructions on all important issues of SCO activity. The second body, Heads of Government Council (HGC) also meets once a year to discuss the strategy for multilateral cooperation and priority directions within the framework of the organization, address pressing economic issues of cooperation as well as adopt an annual budget. A Council of National Coordinators of SCO Member States (CNC) coordinates interaction amongst member states within the SCO framework.

The SCO has two permanent bodies, the Secretariat and the Regional Counter-Terrorism Structure (RCTS), in Beijing and Tashkent respectively. Its Secretary-General and RCTS Executive Committee Director are appointed by the HSC for a period of three years.

Over the years, as the organization has continues to grow and flourish, its role has expanded. Five regional countries i.e. Mongolia, Pakistan, India, Iran, and
Afghanistan have joined as observers. Turkey, Sri Lanka and Belarus are dialogue partners. If the population of observer countries is added to that of the member’s countries, it covers nearly half of the world’s population.

**Pakistan and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)**

Geo-strategically and geo-politically, Pakistan and the SCO member states share common interests and tackle common threats. For SCO, the issues of separatism, militancy, extremism, terrorism and drug trafficking are of grave concern, whereas Pakistan is at the front line of all the battles against these challenges. This commonality of purpose has eased prospects for enhanced cooperation between the two, which strengthens Pakistan’s case for full membership. Against this backdrop, SCO member states have also supported Pakistan’s position as a member country. Pakistan is currently an observer state, and its full membership status is under consideration. China, in this regard, has affirmed its support for the extension of full membership to Pakistan.
Key Issues

For effective discussion and to delimit the scope of an otherwise extensive debate, the following key issues were identified prior to the roundtable:

i. What are Pakistan’s prospects for membership of SCO?
ii. What are the common grounds that bring Pakistan and the SCO onto a single platform?
iii. How can Pakistan represent the interests of SCO?
iv. Can SCO play a role in conflict resolution in the South Asian region?
v. How can Pakistan neutralize the ‘US factor’ vis-à-vis SCO?
vi. Will the expanded SCO (including Pakistan, India and Afghanistan), have the ability to settle the remaining explosive hotspots in Asia, like Afghanistan and Kashmir?

Discussion Summary

SCO: The Historical Context

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian States (CARs), China and Russia were faced with four fundamental challenges; Separatism, Terrorism, Extremism and Drug Trafficking.

Among the member states, Russia and China have a significant role because of their global and regional importance as major powers. Initially, the Russian Federation was betwixt and between whither to focus its interests; in Europe or in Asia. Its efforts to bolster cooperation with the West and to prevent the Eastward expansion of NATO, particularly towards the energy rich Central Asia, did not succeed. This was cause for deep concern for Russia, as it regarded this region as “Near Abroad”, with extensive Russian influence through the Common Wealth of Independent States (CIS). China was also concerned about
the growing American influence in Central Asia, a region from where it hoped to meet its growing energy requirements. Further concerns unsettling China included supply of sophisticated weapons and aircraft by the US to Taiwan, in violation of Sino-US agreements. The gradual rapprochement between Russia and China since 1989 cumulated in the signing of a “strategic partnership” in 1996, which in turn led to closer links with three Central Asian States and the establishment of the Shanghai Five arrangement for enhancing security. In 2001, Shanghai Five mechanism was upgraded into the SCO.

**Structure and Functions of SCO**

The Philip Taylor model on regional organizations argues that in order to understand the nature of an organization, understanding the nature of the relationship of its members, its structure, functions and statutes is vital. With regard to the SCO, the relationship among the member countries is significant. Russia and China as two major powers with strong economies, have over the years improved their relations. Both have managed to establish a ‘harmony of interests’. Formerly, all member states were faced with the problems of separatism, terrorism, drug trafficking and growing influence of the West; these collective problems brought them onto a single platform. It can therefore be argued that initially the primary drivers behind the SCO were security-oriented.

Now the focus of the SCO has shifted towards economic development and regional trade. If the SCO is compared with the European Union (EU) or the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), for example, both the EU and
ASEAN were formed for economic integration and development, unlike the security-based orientation of the SCO. However, the difference is that the interstate relationships in the cases of the EU and ASEAN were managed by security guarantees from the United States. In the case of the SCO, however, there were no such guarantees from the outside world. This factor has been responsible for the slow pace of integration amongst SCO states.

The structure and functions of the SCO today focus on both the security and economic aspects of the organization, on account of which the argument for the SCO’s recent tilt towards economic cooperation is made. The SCO has joint mechanisms for counter-terrorism as well as drug trafficking, with an increasing focus on economic ventures. The most interesting feature of this organization is that it is balanced by the presence of two major powers, while the smaller states of the region have greater economic potential, in terms of oil and gas reserves. Such balance helps reduce the chances of manipulation of the organization by the major powers. Moreover, China’s success as an economic power on world stage is increasingly making the SCO stronger in comparison to other regional organizations.

**SCO and Geo-politics**

In Western Countries, the SCO is sometimes known as the “Eastern NATO”. This perception is far from the truth. While member states certainly do have some military cooperation, the SCO does not have a standing army. It is certainly not like NATO, or even like the old “Warsaw Pact”. The SCO has enhanced the internal security of the region against the core issues that led to its formation, and to some extent restricted the further expansion of NATO, thereby achieving its objective of halting the extension of Western influence in the region.
Pakistan’s Historical Ties with CARs

Pakistan has deep cultural and religious affinity and historical links with Central Asia. Its ties with CARs were at a standstill when that region was a part of the USSR, but in 1991, with the dissolution of the USSR, this changed. In December 1991, Pakistan accorded formal recognition to the Russian Federation and other states, including the Central Asian States, with a vision to develop close cooperation with newly independent states of Central Asia.

In November 1992, these six new states - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan as well as Afghanistan - were formally admitted as members of expanded Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) – the organization that was born of the ‘Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD)’, Pakistan’s initiative for regional development. This increased the total membership of the ECO from the original three to ten members.

In February 1993, ECO Foreign Ministers Conference was organized by Pakistan, in Quetta, Baluchistan. A detailed “Quetta Plan of Action” was adopted for developing close Economic and Trade relations and building road and railway lines for providing access to the sea to the landlocked Central Asian states at Gwadar. There was a great potential in Central Asia to become a region of progress and prosperity. Unfortunately, continued conflict and instability in Afghanistan has proven to be the greatest barrier in this regard. Nonetheless, ECO has made progress in various fields, and Pakistan’s links with Central Asian States, including the four members of SCO, have been strengthened.
Limiting American Influence

Questions were raised during the discussion with regard to the American influence in the region, as two of the SCO member states are strategic competitors with the United States. Russia and the US have time and again been faced with difficult relations at best, and India has been pitted against China with American support to counter the Chinese influence in the region. In this context, it is important to note that India and China have recently improved their bilateral trade to a great extent. The US has also had to accommodate China as a potential cooperator, as the former faces economic challenges, as well as insurgency in Afghanistan. For Pakistan, given the ever-evolving geo-political alignments in the region, it would not be a prudent strategy to engage in either containment or strategic rivalry.

SCO: Case for Pakistan’s Membership

Pakistan was admitted to the SCO as an Observer in 2005, and has attended all important meetings of the organization. Pakistan’s leaders have been pushing the country’s case for full membership, and China, an important member of the SCO and time-tested, all weather friend of Pakistan has supported this bid. Four Central Asian members of the SCO are Pakistan’s friends and partners in the ECO, and enjoy strong bilateral ties with the latter. As a victim of the three ‘evils’ of “Terrorism, Extremism and Separatism”, the country has followed developments in Central Asia with great interest, and has been very keen to learn from the experiences of the SCO member states.

Participation in SCO meetings has also provided Pakistan the opportunity to increase contacts and cooperation with the Russian Federation. The criterion
for admission of new members was decided in 2010. In 2011, even the Russian Federation supported Pakistan’s full membership. Similarly, Russia has also supported India’s membership, and China has reciprocated by giving its consent.

In West Asia, Pakistan developed close cooperation with the Middle East, with whom it has strong historical, cultural and religious bonds. In 1964, Pakistan started Regional Cooperation with Iran and Turkey by creating an institution known as ‘Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD)’, with headquarters at Tehran. RCD was discontinued after the Iranian Revolution of 1979, but it was revived in 1985, under a new name - the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), with which many of the SCO member states are now affiliated.

Pakistan’s geography, history and cultural background place it in a unique strategic position. It lies at the tri-junction of South Asia, West Asia, and Central Asia, and can effectively act as a conduit between the SCO and the rest of the world.

At the next SCO Summit, Mongolia, Pakistan, India, Iran and possibly Afghanistan are expected to become full members.

Four Central Asian members of SCO are Pakistan’s friends and partners in the ECO, and they also have strong bilateral ties with Pakistan.
Role of SCO: Prospects of lowering Tensions in South Asia

An interesting aspect of the SCO is that it started as an organization to address security concerns, border tensions, border disputes, cross-border smuggling, terrorism, extremism, separatism etc. Gradually it has moved towards political issues, economic and cultural cooperation. Most other regional organizations including EEC, ASEAN, SAARC, ECO, started with agenda of economic cooperation and some gradually moved to political and security cooperation. While the EEC has grown into the European Union, the SCO since 2007 is moving towards Regional Economic Cooperation, via big projects in the energy sector.

The SCO has played a positive role in reducing tensions, settling border disputes, maintaining stability and developing cooperation between its original member states. It is also clear that the SCO will soon be expanded, and full membership accorded to various observers. When Pakistan and India are admitted as full members of the SCO, they will be expected to honor the spirit and rules of the organization. This can only be a step towards normalization of relations between the two states, if perhaps of limited efficacy.
Speaker Transcripts

First Speaker:

Ambassador Akram Zaki
Former Secretary General for Foreign Affairs

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), whose member states host around one fourth of human population, was officially established in 2001. The SCO is an extension of “Shanghai Five” established in 1996, as a strategic partnership between five states China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, by signing the “Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions”. The main purpose of the SCO at the time of its formation was to resolve border disputes and meet security threats.

Among its member states the Russia and China have significant role because of their global and regional importance as major powers. Initially, Russia was betwixt and between whether to focus on its interests in Europe or in Asia. Its efforts to bolster cooperation with the West and to prevent the Eastward expansion of NATO did not succeed. Russia was concerned about it “Near Abroad” where it wanted to retain influence through Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

Next door China was also concerned by growing American influence in Central Asia, from where it hoped to meet its growing energy requirements. China was also deeply unhappy by supply of sophisticated weapons and aircraft to Taiwan by USA, in violation of Sino-US agreements. Russia and China which were gradually moving closer since 1989, signed “strategic partnership” in 1996, and also joined together with three Central Asian States and established Shanghai V arrangement for enhancing security.

In 2001, Shanghai Five mechanism was praised and upgraded into SCO. Uzbekistan, which had remained aloof, also joined the group. The name was changed and a new International Institution called SCO came into being, on June 15, 2001, when six Heads of States signed the Declaration of Shanghai Cooperation Organization. On July 16, 2001, Russia and China, the organization's two leading nations, signed the 'Treaty of Good Neighborliness' and Friendly Cooperation. In June 2002, the leaders of the SCO countries signed the SCO Charter giving details of the organization's purposes, principles, structures etc.
This organization has continued to grow and flourish. Its role has expanded. Five regional countries i.e. Magnolia, Pakistan, India, Iran, and Afghanistan have since joined as Observers. Turkey, Sri Lanka and Belarus are dialogue partners. If the population of Observer countries is added to that of the member’s countries, it will be nearly half of the world population.

In Western Countries SCO, is sometimes called “Eastern NATO”. This is not correct. In fact, it is far from the truth. While SCO countries have some military cooperation and a few joint military exercises have also been conducted In October 2007, the SCO also signed an agreement with Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). However, SCO has no standing army; it is certainly not like NATO, or even like the old “Warsaw Pact”. SCO has enhanced internal security of the region against “Terrorism, Extremism and Separatism” and to some extent restricted further expansion of NATO.

Pakistan and some other observers have been seeking full membership of SCO. Pakistan, a victim of the three evils of “Terrorism, Extremism and Separatism” has been watching the developments in Central Asia with great interest and has been very keen to become full member of this dynamic organization. Pakistan’s case has been almost finalized.

Pakistan’s geography, history and cultural background have placed Pakistan in a unique strategic position. Pakistan is at the tri-junction of South Asia, West Asia, and Central Asia. Since independence in 1947, the focus of Pakistan’s Foreign Policy has been on South Asia, because of conflicts, wars and continued tension with India. Still, Pakistan has been making efforts for Cooperation in South Asia through South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

In West Asia, Pakistan has been developing close cooperation with all counties of Middle East with whom it had strong historical, cultural and religious bonds. In 1964, Pakistan started Regional Cooperation with Iran and Turkey by creating an Institution called Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) with headquarters at Tehran. RCD was discontinued after the Iranian Revolution of 1979, but it was revived in 1985, under a new name: Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO).

Pakistan’s historical ties with Central Asia had been interrupted, when that region was part of USSR. In 1991, when I had the honor to Head the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the USSR, was in the process of unraveling. We were keenly watching the developments, especially in Central Asian States with which we had deep cultural and religious links in history. In December 1991, we accorded formal Recognition to Russian Republic and other states including Central Asian States. In the presence of visiting Vice President of Russia, Alexander Rutskoi, the flag of the
Russian Federation replaced the USSR flag on the Russian Embassy at Islamabad on December 21, 1991.

Our vision was to develop close cooperation with newly independent states of Central Asia, with which we had historical, cultural and religious ties. The instrument used was expansion of ECO with cooperation of Iran and Turkey.

In November 1992, six newly independent states of Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan as well as Afghanistan were formally admitted as members of expanded ECO. Thus the total membership was increased from the original three to ten members.

In February 1993, Foreign Ministers Conference of ten ECO countries were organized by Pakistan, at Quetta, Baluchistan. A detailed “Quetta Plan of Action” was adopted for developing close Economic and Trade relations and building road and railway line for providing access to the sea to landlocked Central Asian states at GWADAR. There was a great potential to make this a region of progress and prosperity. Unfortunately continued conflict and instability in Afghanistan proved a great barrier. However, ECO has made progress in various fields and Pakistan’s links with Central Asian States, including the four which are members of SCO, have been strengthened.

Pakistan, which was admitted SCO as Observer in 2005, has been attending several important meetings of SCO. Pakistan’s leaders have been pleading the case for full membership. China, an important member of the SCO, has time tested and all weather friendship with Pakistan. In 2005, China and Pakistan signed a Treaty of “Friendship Cooperation and good Neighborliness” to give legal cover to their multidimensional and comprehensive cooperation and to raise this friendship to a “Strategic Partnership”. Four Central Asian members of SCO are Pakistan’s friends and partners in the ECO, and they also have strong bilateral ties with Pakistan.

Participation in SCO meetings has provided Pakistan the opportunity to increase contacts and increase cooperation with Russian Federation also. The criteria for admission of new members was decided in 2010 and in 2011, even the Russian Federation supported Pakistan’s full membership. Similarly, Russia has been supporting India’s membership and China has given its consent. At the next SCO Summit Mongolia, Pakistan, India, and possibly Afghanistan are expected to become full members. The chances of Iran are not bright, because Iran is under UN sanctions.
Pakistan and SCO: Building Common Understanding

When Pakistan, India and others are admitted as full members of SCO, they will be expected to honor the spirit and rules of the organization. It is interesting that Shanghai Five mechanism was started with the purpose of the reducing border tensions by cutting down troops, for which they had signed “Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions”. Will India, Pakistan and Afghanistan do this after becoming full members?

An interesting aspect of SCO is that it started as an organization to meet security concerns, border tensions, border disputes, cross border smuggling, terrorism, extremism, separatism etc. Gradually it moved towards political issues, economic and cultural cooperation. Most other regional organizations including EEC, ASEAN, SAARC, ECO, started with agenda of economic cooperation and some gradually moved to political and security cooperation. While, EEC has grown into European Union, SCO since 2007 is moving towards Regional Economic Cooperation, including big projects in energy sector like Pipelines etc.

SCO has played a positive role in reducing tensions, settling border disputes, maintaining stability and developing cooperation between member states. It is also clear that membership of SCO, is going to be extended, by giving full membership to some Observers.

The question now is, can this dynamic and growing organization play a constructive role in stabilizing the enlarged region covering countries like Pakistan, India and Afghanistan, where terrorism and extremism are flourishing and taking heavy toll of human life and separatist movements are also threatening the stability and security of countries. Will the expanded SCO, have the ability to settle the remaining explosive hotspots in Asia, like Afghanistan and Kashmir? Can the Gwadar Port be fully developed and necessary road and rail links, as envisaged in the Quetta Plan of Action of 1993, be developed without stabilizing Afghanistan, FATA, and Baluchistan? Similarly, can the proposed Kashgar to Gwadar motorway and railway link be realized to make Pakistan a corridor for energy cooperation and trade, without peace and stability?

Pakistan and SCO, have common interest in combating “Terrorism, Separatism, Extremism Drug trade, and organized crime” which threaten their stability and hamper their development. Pakistan has special strategic partnership with China; it is also developing bilateral Political and Economic relations with Russian Federation. China and Russia are the two important members of the SCO. With the other four Central Asian states of SCO, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, Pakistan not only have good bilateral relations, but there also common members of Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). The links between Pakistan and SCO are already well established, and Pakistan being an observer in SCO, gets several opportunities
during SCO meetings to develop common understanding with them. These opportunities will further increase when Pakistan is formally admitted of SCO.

Regional cooperation is making good progress in various regions of the world. Unfortunately this is not the case in South Asia, because SAARC countries have not been able to resolve their disputes. Secondly SAARC is an unbalanced regional organization, where one country is larger than other put to gather. If and when India and Pakistan, who are now observers, become full members of SCO, it would be time to make China, currently an observer at SAARC to be made a full member of SAARC. This will make a SAARC balance organization and contribute to regional peace and stability. This will also help to realize our common dream of making 21st century the century of Asia. The destiny of the Asian peoples will be decided in Asian Capitals.
Second Speaker:

Dr. Mavara Inayat
School of Politics and International Relations (SPIR), QAU

Philip Taylor argues that if you want to understand the nature of an organization, you need to understand the nature of relationship of its members, structures, functions and statutes of the organization. In this regard if we look at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the relationship of the member countries is significant. There are two major powers that have strong economies, and over the years their relations have improved. Both the major powers have harmony of interests. In the beginning all the member states faced the problem of separatism, terrorism, drug trafficking and growing influence of the West which brought them to a single platform. It can therefore be argued that at the initial stages the primary driver to build the SCO was security oriented. Now the SCO has shifted towards economic development and regional trade. If we compare this aspect of the SCO with that of the European Union (EU), EU was formed for economic integration and development. Similarly, the primary objective of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) was economic integration and development. However, in case of European Union and ASEAN that differentiate them from SCO is that the interstate relations in the former two were managed by the security guarantees from the United States whereas in the latter there had no guarantee from the outside world, therefore, the members’ states facing common threats came closer together.

Regarding the structures and functions of those structures, we see both the security and economic aspects prominent. For example, there is a joint mechanism for counter terrorism and drug trafficking at the same time SCO has now shifted its focus to economy. The most interesting feature of this organization is that it is balanced by the presence of two major powers. The smaller states of the region have greater potential in terms of reservoirs of oil and gas. The balancing factor makes it possible that none of the major powers can manipulate the organization. Finally, the China’s success as an economic power on world stage makes the organization stronger comparably to other regional organizations.

As far as Pakistan’s cooperation is concerned, the geo-strategic realities and relations with member states are the two factors that make Pakistan’s position strong as a partner. Firstly, the Pakistan provides access to West Asia through Iran and the Arabian Sea, which is vital for the energy and trade for the China, Central Asia and Russia. Secondly, Pakistan’s economic and security cooperation with China brings the SCO member states and Pakistan closer. The structures and functions of the organization and the problems of Pakistan are lined up in the same direction.
In this regard it is not only that Pakistan needs SCO cooperation or membership, rather Pakistan’s cooperation is much needed by the Central Asian States, China, and Russia to the extent that the future of this region is dependent upon Pakistan. Its help is required in Afghanistan as China’s has recently shown its interest in Afghanistan. Similarly, the China and the SCO members find Pakistan as a conduit between the World and SCO region which can be strengthened further by Pak-China Economic Corridor (PCEC). In this regard, the main challenge for Pakistan is the establishment of peace inside Pakistan and Afghanistan. The efforts taken by the armed forces of Pakistan are commendable.

An interesting aspect of the SCO is that it started as an organization to address security concerns, border tensions, border disputes, cross-border smuggling, terrorism, extremism, separatism etc. Gradually it has moved towards political issues, economic and cultural cooperation. Most other regional organizations including EEC, ASEAN, SAARC, ECO, started with agenda of economic cooperation and some gradually moved to political and security cooperation. While the EEC has grown into the European Union, the SCO since 2007 is moving towards Regional Economic Cooperation, via big projects in the energy sector.

The SCO has played a positive role in reducing tensions, settling border disputes, maintaining stability and developing cooperation between member states. It is also clear that the SCO will soon be expanded, and full membership will be accorded to various observers.

The question now is whether this dynamic and growing organization can play a constructive role in stabilizing the enlarged region, covering countries like Pakistan, India and Afghanistan, where terrorism and extremism are rife and taking a heavy toll on everyday life, and separatist movements are threatening the stability and security of these countries.

Pakistan and the SCO have common interest in combating “Terrorism, Separatism, Extremism Drug trade, and organized crime”, all of which threaten their stability and hamper their development. Pakistan has a special strategic partnership with China; it is also developing bilateral, political and economic relations with the Russian Federation. China and Russia are the two important members of the SCO. With the other four Central Asian states of SCO, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, Pakistan would not only have good bilateral relations, but would productively engage with them in the organizational context of SCO as well as the ECO. The links between Pakistan and SCO are already well established; Pakistan being an observer in SCO gets several opportunities during meetings to develop common understanding with member states. These opportunities will further increase when Pakistan is formally admitted as a member state in SCO.
Conclusion

Contrary to SAARC, the SCO is a balanced organization and Pakistan’s relations with China will not allow India to damage the interests of Pakistan. This organization is in the interest of South Asia as a whole and has largely evolved from focusing on security issues to that of regionally connectivity and economic trade. This offers an opportunity for Pakistan, whose geostrategic location can help it act as a conduit between SCO member countries and its neighboring states. The Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline (in a post-sanctions scenario), as well as the Turkmenistan Afghanistan Pakistan India Pipeline (TAPI) are two examples of opportunities that stem from such regional cooperation, and can only be realized if and when this cooperation is institutionalized through organizations like the SCO. Furthermore, the forum can also act a venue for conflict resolution in the region.

It is not only Pakistan that would appreciate SCO cooperation or membership, but also Pakistan’s cooperation is vital for many of the Central Asian States, as well as China, and Russia. Pakistan has legitimate stakes and a vital role to play in Afghanistan’s stability and in securing the Chinese interests. The Pakistan-China Economic Corridor (CPEC) further strengthens these ties.

Pakistan’s membership bid, therefore, should be considered on a priority basis, to enhance areas of mutual cooperation for regional connectivity trade and prosperity. The main challenge for Pakistan, in this context, is the establishment of peace inside Pakistan and Afghanistan. The efforts taken by the armed forces of Pakistan are commendable.
Recommendations

At the end of the roundtable, various recommendations were proposed to promote Pakistan’s full membership in the SCO, and utilizing SCO’s potential role in promoting regional connectivity, conflict resolution and enhanced opportunities for economic collaboration and trade. These recommendations are as follows:

1. Pakistan has extensive experience in the counter-terrorism domain; member states can benefit from this experience by participating in joint counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism exercises.

2. Pakistan should improve its relations with Russia and other SCO members, so that a common understanding on issues of mutual interest may be developed.

3. The principle of non-interference and neutrality should be maintained to safeguard the interests of the smaller states in the SCO.

4. People to people contacts should be improved by envisaging free travel across the region. For this purpose, infrastructure, road and rail connectivity should be improved.

5. SCO can become a collective instrument for lowering of tensions between India and Pakistan, considering its initial aims included lowering border tensions and confidence building among neighboring states. In this regard, Pakistan should deliberate on various alternative policy options for dispute resolution before gaining full membership of SCO. Efforts for lowering of tensions and regional harmony in South Asia, facilitated by SCO, would truly make this century the ‘century of Asia’.

6. The SCO countries especially China and Russia should help Pakistan to develop its coastal areas and ports, to make it a potential trade hub and an alternative route to the world market.

7. Joining SCO will neither affect nor undermine Pakistan’s bilateral relations with great powers like Russia, China as well as other Central Asian states.
Pakistan should develop an independent and diverse foreign policy to complement its bilateral relations through efforts towards enhanced regionalism, connectivity and economic prosperity.

8. Pakistan, after becoming a full member of SCO, should make earnest efforts for an early membership of China in SAARC. This will make SAARC a balanced organization by helping neutralize the overarching Indian influence in SAARC, and help contribute to regional peace and stability.

9. China and Russia, as strong economic powers with global clout should cooperate with South Asia, particularly Pakistan for enhanced investment and infrastructure development opportunities, science and technology, culture and education. This should be a priority for the SCO in general, as it has an increased stake in the stability of the region to promote its goal of connectivity for trade.

10. Pakistan should develop an independent eastern worldview, based on its own national interests, culture and values, that can help overcome the popular and skewed western narratives.