

**SHANGHAI COOPERATION AS A PLATFORM FOR
REGIONAL UNDERSTANDING:
ITS ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SECURITY
POTENTIAL**

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Abstract

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is one of the newest, multi-purpose regional organization, whose agenda ranges from border security concerns (which was the initial concern of its original five members - China, Kazakhstan, Krygyzstan, Russia, Tajakistan and later Uzbekistan)¹ to economic cooperation. In fact the “Shanghai Five” came into being in Shanghai on April, 1996. The emphasis of this regional understanding was on an “Agreement on Strengthening of Confidence Building Measures in the Military Sphere in Border Regions, “subsequently followed by an understanding for the reduction of military forces on the border areas of these countries. However, it was on June 15, 2001 that six regional countries signed Shanghai Convention for “combating terrorism, extremism, and separatism – occasionally referred to as ‘the three evils’. With this the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was established, adding to the list of regional organization, with varying purposes. In short “from an ad hoc group convened to resolve security consequences from the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the organization evolved into a permanent structure with significant roles over a broad range of economic and security cooperation”.² Being located in an area, which is known for series of conflicts, the SCO in future has the potential to become more effective in nature, with an ability to resolve inter and intra societal volatile conflicts within its organizational framework. Another significant characteristic of this organization is its versatility, by virtue of encompassing a combination of varying kinds of political systems of its member states, which definitely makes it a unique bloc by itself. On the one hand, important regional players, China and Russia, as original members of SCO further enhance its significance in an international scenario. While on the other side are the newly emerging states of Central Asia, with weak political systems, still struggling to establish its institutions, as per the requirements of modern era. At current level, SCO is a combination of permanent and observer members, each having divergent interests to serve and utilize this

¹ The observer members are:- Afghanistan, India, Iran, Mongolia and Pakistan. The Dialogue members are:- Belarus, Sri Lanka and Turkey)

² Henry Plater-Zyberk with Andrew Monaghan, “Strategic Implications of the Evolving Shanghai Cooperation Organization”; Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, August 2014, p. 5

organization. The most significant observer members of SCO are Pakistan, Iran, and India, especially in a situation when new regional powers are replacing the existing international power structures. In this emerging global environment, the multi-dimensional regional organizations like SCO has to confront at least two major challenges; first to maintain its position as an effective regional bloc, by establishing strong economic linkages amongst its member, with recognition that as witnessed in history, those regional organizations which were constructed on economic agendas were more successful than the others. Thus economic cooperation is a primary source of strength for any regional organization. Relevant to mention is one of the principal point of the October 14, 2009 Beijing meeting in which the members recognized “The need to ensure the economic stability of the member states and improving their economic cooperation, to overcome the global financial and economic crisis”. Second challenge for the SCO is to construct a security related net-work against domestic terrorism, in particular, which grew in different parts of the world in the recent past. It is still to be judged that whether this grouping revolves itself around mere rhetoric and goodwill meetings or that the understandings can be translated into meaningful and concrete deliberations – and that the unique setup can become a useful platform of cooperation and establishing peace in the region, and beyond.

Keywords: SCO; China, Russia, Turkey; Pakistan