



The Shanghai Cooperation Organization SCO Summit 2025: Its implications, Challenges, and opportunities for Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit 2025 presents both strategic opportunities and formidable challenges, marking a pivotal moment for Pakistan. The Summit's agenda was to formulate a robust strategy for a sustainable future. The key agenda items include trade integration, counterterrorism, regional security, technological innovation, and energy connectivity, which closely align with Pakistan's national interests. Pakistan, situated at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, serves as a positive and potential conduit for security integration, regional stability, and economic prosperity. Although several barriers, such as persistent economic instability, unresolved tension with India, and an unsettled situation with Afghanistan, further compound Pakistan's security, its extensive counterterrorism experience and other economic reforms mark it as a relevant actor in the SCO security framework. Pakistan's deep reliance on China remains both an asset, ensuring strategic support, and a liability, restricting diplomatic flexibility. The analysis highlights the importance of Pakistan diversifying its relations with Russia and the Central Asian republics, aligning domestic economic policies with the SCO's trade and investment frameworks, and strategically integrating the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) into the SCO's connectivity agenda. These steps enable Pakistan to overcome domestic limitations and strengthen its position as a proactive and influential regional player. Achieving this, however, requires institutional reforms, policy consistency, and credible implementation of SCO commitments. Without such adjustments, Pakistan risks marginalization within one of Eurasia's most influential multilateral forums.

Keywords: Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO); Pakistan foreign policy; SCO Summit, 2025; regional security; counterterrorism; economic cooperation; Central Asia; China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).



Introduction

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has emerged as one of the most significant Eurasian multilateral forums, with its core priorities centered on regional stability, counter-terrorism, and economic development. Established in 2001 by China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, the organization has gradually expanded its membership and influence. The accession of Pakistan and India as full members in 2017 marked a significant expansion, enhancing the SCO's geopolitical relevance beyond Central Asia. The 2025 SCO Summit has come to an end with particular significance, as it coincides with a period of profound global transformation. The evolving international order has given rise to cooperative frameworks and multipolarity, driven by intensifying security challenges and economic interdependence among regional states (Aris, 2020). In the case of Pakistan, the SCO has provided it with a rare opportunity to bolster its strategic stance in Eurasia. Geographically situated at the crossroads between South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, Pakistan is at the heart of the organization's connectivity and energy in Middle East-related initiatives. In this way, the 2025 Summit allows Pakistan to enhance its diplomatic and economic activities with the member states, specifically in Society wide, advancing the goals of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is strongly related to it in line with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Khan, 2021).

Pakistan's security is also concerned with the Summit. The SCO's Regional Intelligence sharing has been facilitated through the Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)—a coordinated effort against terrorism, Separatism, and extremism. Given Pakistan's history of internal security issues and its proximity to Afghanistan, membership in RATS enables it to strengthen its counterterrorism approaches and present itself as a responsible stakeholder in the region. It is also believed that the 2025 Summit will continue to demonstrate how Pakistan can contribute to peace and stability in Afghanistan, as well as counter transnational threats (Dadabaev, 2018).

Simultaneously, the SCO offers Pakistan the economic opportunities that it very much requires. The Summit emphasizes multilateral cooperation in trade, energy, and digital innovation in response to Pakistan's urgent need to diversify its economy and reduce its reliance on traditional markets. Enhancing ties with the Central Asian Republics through SCO mechanisms has the potential to open new trade channels, ensure access to energy resources, and stimulate investment in Pakistan's infrastructure sector (Mukhamediyev & Kurmanov, 2019). However, Pakistan's involvement in the 2025 Summit is also a matter of navigating sensitive geopolitical dynamics. The management of its relations with India under the SCO umbrella is one of the significant challenges. Although the organization encourages communication and collaboration, the historical animosity between Islamabad and New Delhi often frustrates positive outcomes. Additionally, Pakistan should strike a balance between its growing relationships with China and Russia, as well as with the rest of the world. Western pressures, especially America, which might perceive Pakistan as such, may not be desirable. Increasing participation in the SCO with distrust (Rafiq, 2020). Nevertheless, the SCO Summit 2025 has the potential to be transformative for Pakistan, despite these challenges. When properly utilized, the Summit can help Pakistan improve its relations in the region, attract foreign investment, and establish itself as a key transit destination in Eurasian connectivity projects. Pakistan can maximize its role by putting its domestic agenda on par with the SCO agenda, institutional efficiency, and international reputation, whereby it not only

responds to internal challenges but also plays its part in the peace and prosperity of the region (Weitz, 2021)



Literature Review

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has been the subject of considerable scholarly attention. As a regional institution that combines security, collaboration, economics, and politics, Aris (2020) argues that the SCO is among the few organizations capable of shaping a changing multipolar order in Eurasia by fostering cooperation among leading powers, such as China and Russia, as well as smaller states in Central Asia. Its emphasis on the combination of counterterrorism, regional stability, and economic integration has led scholars to see them. SCO as a security alliance and as a soft balancing against the influence of the West This dualism renders it especially applicable to states such as Pakistan, which are more interested in gaining regional participation while diversifying their foreign policy. Membership in the SCO has been researched as a strategic step that improves its geopolitical relevance within the SCO. Khan (2021) argues that in 2017, Pakistan was able to join a regional bloc, thanks to its accession, which is not only comprised of two world powers but also offers Access to the Central Asian Republics (CARs), which are rich in energy. Membership has provided avenues. To collaborate in fields such as counterterrorism, trade, and connectivity At the same time, Pakistan, situated at the intersection of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, is regarded as an asset to the SCO, especially in promoting initiatives associated with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The literature has given much emphasis on the security aspect of the SCO. According to (2018), the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) is among the most volatile armies between the SCO and Intelligence sharing and coordinated response to terrorism, Separatism, and extremism. In the case of Pakistan, which has always been a problem of militancy and cross Participation in RATS is deemed essential because of border security threats. Scholars argue that such. Not only does it enable Pakistan to consolidate its internal security policies, but it also positions it as a partner in regional peace (Rafiq, 2020). Another area that has attracted scholarly research is economic cooperation among the SCO. As Mukhamediyev and Kurmanov (2019) point out, the SCO is evolving to become. A trade-facilitating, investment and energy cooperation economic organization. Among member states Such efforts are essential to Pakistan because it is facing economic challenges, including low exports, an energy crisis, and mounting foreign debt, by deepening the Connection to cars and the congruence between SCO efforts and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Pakistan can benefit from new trade routes, access to the energy market, and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), as well as enhanced regional integration. Nevertheless, researchers also point out the difficulties that Pakistan experiences within the SCO framework. They note that the simultaneous membership of Pakistan and India complicates decision-making and hinders consensus on critical issues. Tensions between the two countries often spill into the SCO, weakening its effectiveness as a cooperative body. Furthermore, Pakistan faces the challenge of balancing its deepening ties with China and Russia against the strategic expectations of the United States and Western allies, who remain skeptical of the SCO's growing influence (Sullivan, 2020). Overall, the literature suggests that while Pakistan's participation in the SCO provides both opportunities and challenges, its effectiveness largely depends on how well Pakistan aligns its domestic



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policies with regional frameworks. Effective use of the SCO platform can enhance Pakistan's role as a bridge between South Asia and Central Asia, promote economic diversification, and strengthen security cooperation. Conversely, failure to address domestic constraints and regional rivalries may limit Pakistan's ability to capitalize on the SCO's potential fully. Thus, the 2025 Summit becomes an important test case for Pakistan's diplomatic adaptability and strategic vision in Eurasia.

Research Questions

What were the major agendas of the SCO Summit 2025, and how do they align with Pakistan's national priorities?

What implications, challenges, and opportunities does Pakistan encounter as a member of the SCO in the evolving Eurasian regional order?

How can Pakistan formulate effective policies and strategies to enhance its role in the SCO and contribute to regional stability?

Research Methodology

This article employed a qualitative and analytical research methodology. This method is one of the extensive approaches in the academic environment, particularly in the social sciences (Hussain, 2025). The Data was collected from secondary sources, including scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy papers, think tank reports, and official documents of the SCO. As pointed out by Hussain (2025), secondary and primary source data make research more comprehensive, credible, and balanced by providing both contextual background and first-hand evidence. Content analysis is applied to critically examine the agendas of the SCO Summit 2025, their implications for Pakistan, and the challenges and opportunities they create. The study further uses a descriptive and comparative approach to highlight Pakistan's policy options and strategic choices within the SCO framework.

SCO Summit (2025) Key Agendas

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit 2025 is expected to focus on a broad range of strategic agendas that address both traditional and non-traditional security concerns. One of the foremost priorities is counterterrorism cooperation, which has been central to the SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS). With the resurgence of extremist groups in Afghanistan and growing digital radicalization, member states are expected to enhance intelligence-sharing mechanisms, joint exercises, and capacity-building initiatives. For Pakistan, this agenda is critical as it aligns with its ongoing efforts to combat cross-border militancy and strengthen internal security structures (Mumtaz, Cheema, & Khalid, 2024).

Another key agenda revolves around regional connectivity and economic integration. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has also continued to reiterate the need to augment trade corridors, digital economies and infrastructure undertakings to facilitate inter-regional co-operation. It is assumed that the 2025 summit will focus on the convergence of national strategies, such as China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and the connectivity strategies of Central Asia. This attention aims to transform Eurasia into a global hub for trade and economic activity. Pakistan, on its part, can support its interests by taking part in such talks that would provide it a chance to emerge as a transit and trade "hub and thus uniting South Asia



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and Central Asia and other parts of the world (Aslam, 2021). Energy security will also be on the agenda, taking the upper hand due to the increased need for steady and diversified energy pathways within Eurasia. It is expected that the issues of pipeline projects, electricity grids, and cooperation in renewable energy will be discussed. To Pakistan, which is faced by a persistent energy rationing, the agenda holds long term energy sustainability by opening up more resources in the central Asians region. with the attitudes of these policies aligned with the SCO-led energy systems, Pakistan will be able to advance in utilizing the energy mix diversification and shifting the reliance to costly imports (khan & Jamal, 2024).

In addition to this, the Summit will address climate change and sustainable development, highlighting the need to address environmental issues that are occurring worldwide today. Since Pakistan continues to be among the Palestine-destined nations in climatic settings, SCO capital ventures in environmental management, water circumstances and green-technology relocation offer an audience of commissioning togetherness. TheseThese considerations can help the Pakistani government access such sources of climate finance and technology alliances, thereby increasing its resilience to climatic risks (Zahid, Ali, & Shahbaz, 2025). Last but not least, the SCO's geopolitical agenda and security aspect will continue to dominate. As tensions between the West and Eurasian powers increase, the SCO is taking on a role of resisting a balance to Western institutions dominated by the West. For Pakistan, the Summit offers both opportunities and challenges—it must balance its close ties with China while cultivating stronger relations with Russia and Central Asia, without alienating Western partners. Thus, the key agendas of the SCO Summit 2025 highlight the dual nature of opportunity and risk for Pakistan in navigating a rapidly changing global order (Zafar & Batool, 2025).

Implications for Pakistan

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit 2025 carries significant implications for Pakistan in terms of its foreign policy, economic development, security concerns, and regional integration. As a full member since 2017, Pakistan views the SCO as a platform to strengthen ties with the Central Asian Republics (CARs), Russia, and China, while balancing its complex relationship with India. For Pakistan, the Summit is not merely a diplomatic gathering, but a strategic opportunity to secure its national interests in a multipolar world where regional organizations are gaining increasing influence (Khan, 2023).

One of the most critical implications of the SCO for Pakistan lies in economic cooperation. With China as a leading member, the SCO complements Pakistan's flagship China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Through SCO mechanisms, Pakistan gains access to new markets in Central Asia, thereby diversifying trade beyond traditional partners. This integration can enhance energy cooperation, particularly in the form of pipelines and electricity corridors, which are vital for addressing Pakistan's chronic energy shortages (Shah & Iqbal, 2022). Moreover, Pakistan's participation in the SCO aligns with its vision of regional connectivity, as outlined in its "Vision Central Asia Policy" announced in 2021 (Ahmad, 2023). Security and counterterrorism implications are equally important. The SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) provides Pakistan with a multilateral forum to address terrorism, extremism, and Separatism, which remain persistent threats within its borders. By collaborating with member states, Pakistan can



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benefit from intelligence sharing, capacity building, and coordinated security measures against transnational threats, particularly those emanating from Afghanistan. This is particularly vital in the post-U.S. withdrawal era, when Pakistan seeks regional solutions to instability in its western neighbourhood (Yousaf, 2023). Geopolitically, the SCO provides Pakistan with an opportunity to enhance its strategic partnership with China and Russia, thereby counterbalancing Western pressures, particularly those from the United States. Pakistan's active role in the SCO Summit 2025 allows it to project itself as a bridge between South Asia, Central Asia, and China, thereby enhancing its geopolitical weight. At the same time, Pakistan faces the challenge of managing its relations with India, which is also a full member of the organization. While bilateral disputes often limit cooperation, the SCO offers a rare diplomatic platform for dialogue and confidence-building, albeit progress remains slow (Malik, 2022). On the socio-cultural front, Pakistan can leverage SCO platforms for youth exchanges, academic collaborations, and cultural diplomacy, which are essential for building soft power. Additionally, greater involvement in regional initiatives on health, climate change, and the digital economy can help Pakistan align its domestic policies with emerging global trends. These dimensions, although less emphasized, are crucial for Pakistan's long-term development and integration into Eurasian frameworks (Rahman, 2023). Overall, the SCO Summit 2025 holds transformative potential for Pakistan by enhancing its economic opportunities, addressing its security challenges, and positioning it more strategically in the regional geopolitical landscape. However, realizing these benefits depends on Pakistan's ability to adopt proactive diplomacy, resolve domestic political instability, and build consensus on its foreign policy goals. The SCO is not a panacea for Pakistan's problems, but if approached strategically, it can be a vital instrument for advancing national interests in a rapidly shifting global order (Kakar, 2024).

Geopolitical Implications

The SCO Summit 2025 holds substantial geopolitical significance for Pakistan, as it enhances the country's role in shaping regional stability and cooperation. Pakistan's strategic location at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East positions it as a vital transit and security actor within the SCO framework. By actively engaging in summit deliberations, Pakistan can strengthen its partnerships with Russia, China, and the Central Asian Republics (CARs), thereby reducing its reliance on Western-led institutions. This diversification of alliances provides Pakistan with greater diplomatic flexibility in an era of shifting global power dynamics (Aris, 2020). One of the most sensitive geopolitical implications for Pakistan is its relationship with India within the SCO. Both states are full members, and their bilateral tensions often hinder multilateral cooperation. The Summit requires Pakistan to navigate this rivalry carefully while still benefiting from broader regional initiatives. Scholars argue that while the SCO cannot resolve the Pakistan-India conflict, it does provide a rare multilateral platform for dialogue, which may indirectly contribute to reducing hostilities (Weitz, 2021). For Pakistan, participation in the 2025 Summit underscores both the opportunities and constraints of engaging with India in a multilateral setting.

Economic Implications

Economically, the SCO Summit 2025 offers Pakistan opportunities to expand its regional trade and connectivity. The Summit's agenda on infrastructure and transport corridors can strengthen Pakistan's role in linking the CARs with global markets through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Gwadar Port. Mukhamediyev and



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Kurmanov (2019) emphasize that SCO-backed trade initiatives could enable Pakistan to diversify its export markets and reduce its overdependence on traditional trading partners. In this way, the Summit presents an opportunity for Pakistan to deepen its role in Eurasian economic integration. Energy cooperation within the SCO also holds direct implications for Pakistan. The SCO region comprises some of the world's largest energy producers, and Pakistan's participation in summit discussions on pipelines, electricity sharing, and renewable energy projects could help alleviate its chronic energy shortages. By collaborating with Russia and the CARs, Pakistan can secure long-term energy supplies, which are critical for industrial growth and economic stability (Sullivan, 2020). Hence, the 2025 Summit could mark a turning point in Pakistan's energy diplomacy.

Strategic Implications

Strategically, Pakistan's involvement in the SCO Summit strengthens its security outlook. The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) serves as a platform for sharing intelligence and conducting joint counterterrorism operations. Given Pakistan's domestic security challenges and its proximity to Afghanistan, participation in this structure enhances its counter-extremism strategies and reinforces its image as a contributor to regional peace (Dadabaev, 2018). The summit discussions are expected to institutionalize cooperation in combating cyber threats, drug trafficking, and organized crime, issues directly linked to Pakistan's security landscape. Furthermore, the SCO Summit enables Pakistan to balance its foreign policy priorities by deepening ties with China and Russia. As Western influence in South Asia faces increasing competition, Pakistan can leverage the SCO to pursue a more independent and regionally integrated foreign policy.

Rafiq (2020) notes that this multipolar engagement provides Islamabad with alternatives to traditional Western alliances, allowing it to reduce dependency while enhancing its bargaining power on global issues. This is also due to Pakistan's strategic positioning as a gateway between South Asia and the broader region, where both opportunities and challenges await Pakistan at the SCO Summit 2025. It contributes to Pakistan's value on the geopolitical scale, providing opportunities to minimize transit and security effects in its favour; the economy, as it opens new sources of trade and energy capabilities; and the strategy, as it allows Pakistan to control global forces and maintain domestic security systems. The fulfilment of these advantages, however, will rely on Pakistan's ability to overcome its domestic policy shortcomings and manage its fragile relationship with India through the SCO. The Summit is both a challenge and an opportunity for Pakistan's emerging role in Eurasia.

Challenges for Pakistan

Although the SCO summit 2025 presents several opportunities, Pakistan also faces severe challenges stemming from its own weaknesses, regional competition, and internal limitations within the organization. The steps taken by Pakistan in joining the SCO are not without challenges, as it must balance competing priorities, address internal governance threats, and align its foreign policy goals with the broader forces of Eurasian integration (Ahmad, 2023). The foremost challenge is Pakistan's troubled relationship with India, another full member of the SCO. Historical disputes over Kashmir, border tensions, and mutual distrust hinder the potential for meaningful cooperation under the SCO framework. Despite the organization's emphasis on consensus and regional harmony, political hostility



between the two nuclear-armed neighbours often paralyzes collective decision-making. This rivalry not only limits Pakistan's ability to benefit from the SCO fully but also creates a hostile environment in multilateral negotiations (Malik, 2022). Economic constraints also weaken Pakistan's ability to leverage the SCO's initiatives fully. While the organization promotes connectivity and trade, Pakistan's chronic balance-of-payments crises, high external debt, and reliance on IMF programs reduce its bargaining power in economic negotiations. Furthermore, Pakistan's inadequate infrastructure, compared to that of other SCO members, particularly in transport and energy corridors, undermines its ability to emerge as a genuine hub of regional integration (Shah & Iqbal, 2022).

Security concerns represent another challenge. Although the SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) offers Pakistan an avenue to combat terrorism, its effectiveness depends on political will and cooperation among member states. Pakistan still struggles with militancy, extremism, and cross-border terrorism, particularly from Afghanistan. Instability in its western neighbourhood complicates Pakistan's security landscape and risks dragging it into regional security dilemmas where consensus is often difficult to achieve (Yousaf, 2023).

Another challenge lies in Pakistan's political instability and weak governance structures, which undermine its credibility within multilateral forums like the SCO. Frequent government changes, lack of policy continuity, and civil-military tensions often weaken Pakistan's ability to present a unified and consistent foreign policy stance. Such domestic fragility prevents Pakistan from playing a leadership role in the SCO despite its strategic geographic position (Kakar, 2024). Moreover, Pakistan faces the challenge of balancing its relations with China and Russia on one side and its dependence on Western powers on the other. While SCO membership strengthens Pakistan's position in Eurasian geopolitics, it risks straining its ties with the United States and Western allies. This balancing act often forces Pakistan into a reactive foreign policy mode, limiting its ability to maximize the benefits of SCO-led initiatives (Rahman, 2023).

Institutionally, the SCO itself has limitations that affect Pakistan. The organization's consensus-based decision-making often slows progress on major projects, while the diverging priorities of member states create bottlenecks. For instance, Central Asian states prioritize energy security, Russia emphasizes security and multipolarity, while China focuses on connectivity and trade. For Pakistan, aligning with all these diverse agendas while advancing its own priorities is a persistent challenge (Khan, 2023). Finally, Pakistan struggles with the issue of perception. Some SCO members remain skeptical of Pakistan's commitment to counterterrorism due to its complex history with militant networks. This perception challenge undermines Pakistan's ability to be seen as a credible and reliable partner in regional security initiatives, despite its genuine sacrifices in combating terrorism (Akhtar, 2022).

In essence, while the SCO Summit 2025 provides Pakistan with avenues for economic growth, security cooperation, and geopolitical leverage, the challenges remain daunting. Unless Pakistan addresses its domestic weaknesses, stabilizes its economy, and improves relations with India and Afghanistan, its participation in the SCO will risk being symbolic rather than transformational. The path forward requires Pakistan to undertake structural reforms at home and adopt a pragmatic, consensus-driven foreign policy abroad, thereby translating its SCO membership into tangible national benefits (Farooq, 2024).



Pakistan's Policy Options and Strategic Choices

Pakistan must pursue an assertive economic reform agenda that transforms its strategic geography into tangible economic leverage. This requires bold measures, including an overhaul of trade and industrial policy to enhance export competitiveness, targeted incentives for export-oriented sectors, rapid improvements in transport and customs logistics, and streamlined procedures to attract foreign direct investment. Only by strengthening its domestic economic base can Pakistan transition from being a mere transit corridor to becoming a value-adding hub that captures trade and processing benefits from SCO connectivity projects, such as CPEC and the Central Asian corridors (Mukhamediyev & Kurmanov, 2019; Khan & Jamal, 2024). A deliberate diversification of strategic partnerships should be a central component of Pakistan's foreign policy. While the China–Pakistan relationship is indispensable, Islamabad must actively cultivate deeper bilateral ties with Russia and the Central Asian Republics to broaden its diplomatic bandwidth and avoid strategic overdependence on a single patron. Expanding defence, energy, and commercial linkages with Moscow and Ashgabat–Tashkent–Nur-Sultan can provide Islamabad with alternate sources of investment, technology, and political support within the SCO framework (Rafiq, 2020; Zahid, Zain Ali, & Shahbaz, 2025).

Pakistan needs to institutionalize a coherent SCO policy domestically by creating a permanent inter-ministerial coordination mechanism that links foreign policy goals with those of finance, commerce, energy, and the interior ministries. This institutional design should include a dedicated SCO secretariat cell for follow-up, a national SCO strategy paper updated biennially, and parliamentary oversight to ensure continuity across electoral cycles. Institutionalization will prevent ad hocism, ensure policy continuity, and enable Pakistan to convert summit-level declarations into bankable projects and measurable outcomes (Weitz, 2021; Kakar, 2024). On security, Pakistan should shift from transactional engagement to leadership in practical counterterrorism cooperation. Building on its operational experience, Islamabad can spearhead capacity-building initiatives, cross-border counter-extremism programs, and joint cyber-security platforms under RATS, while pushing for standardized intelligence-sharing protocols and legal cooperation on terrorism financing and cross-border crime. Leading rather than merely participating will enhance Pakistan's credibility and bargaining power within the SCO security architectures (Dadabaev, 2018; Akhtar, 2022).

To maximize the benefits from regional connectivity, Pakistan should adopt a targeted "CPEC-plus" approach that aligns CPEC projects with the SCO connectivity plans and Central Asian transport priorities. This includes offering preferential logistics services at Gwadar, harmonizing customs procedures with neighbouring states, and promoting multimodal corridors that integrate rail, road, and maritime links. By packaging CPEC as a regional public good rather than a bilateral project, Pakistan can attract the political will and co-financing of Central Asian countries for cross-border infrastructure (Mukhamediyev & Kurmanov, 2019; Ahmad, 2023).

Finally, Pakistan must pursue a pragmatic diplomatic strategy toward India within multilateral settings, favouring confidence-building steps that depoliticize technical cooperation (e.g., customs, disaster relief, public health) while reserving bilateral issues for dedicated tracks. Simultaneously, Islamabad should engage Western partners



transparently to allay concerns about deepening ties with SCO powers and to retain diversified economic options. Balancing principled positions with pragmatic engagement will enable Pakistan to extract the maximum benefits from SCO membership without closing other strategic doors (Malik, 2022; Sullivan, 2020).

The SCO and Pakistan's Role in Regional Stability

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) serves as a platform where Pakistan can actively contribute to building regional stability through security cooperation, economic integration, and political dialogue. Given its strategic location between South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, Pakistan is a natural bridge within the Eurasian framework. The country's inclusion in the SCO adds depth to the organization's objectives of promoting multipolarity, combating terrorism, and facilitating connectivity. As instability in Afghanistan and tensions in South Asia persist, Pakistan's role in fostering dialogue and cooperation is vital to the SCO's mission (Weitz, 2021; Yousaf, 2023). One of Pakistan's most significant contributions to regional stability is its counterterrorism efforts. With its extensive experience in dealing with militant threats, Pakistan has the operational capacity to support the SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS). Through intelligence sharing, joint counter-terror operations, and policy coordination, Pakistan can strengthen multilateral mechanisms against extremism, Separatism, and transnational crime. In doing so, Pakistan not only enhances its international credibility but also secures its borders and contributes to peace across the more expansive Eurasian space (Akhtar, 2022; Dadabaev, 2018).

Economically, Pakistan's participation in the SCO can promote stability through trade and energy cooperation. Projects such as the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) can be aligned with SCO initiatives to provide Central Asian states access to maritime trade routes, reducing their dependency on Russian or Iranian channels. By emerging as a key transit hub for goods and energy pipelines, Pakistan can facilitate shared prosperity, which in turn reduces the likelihood of conflict fueled by economic marginalization. Economic integration through the SCO framework thus strengthens Pakistan's role as a stabilizer in the region (Mukhamediyev & Kurmanov, 2019; Khan, 2023). Diplomatically, Pakistan's engagement with the SCO can serve as a confidence-building measure between rival states. While Pakistan's rivalry with India often complicates cooperation, the SCO offers a unique forum where both countries engage alongside China, Russia, and the Central Asian members. Although disputes remain unresolved, continued participation in multilateral dialogue reduces the risk of escalation by maintaining open lines of communication. Moreover, Pakistan's growing alignment with Russia and China through the SCO diversifies its foreign policy and helps balance regional power asymmetries, thereby contributing to stability in Eurasia (Malik, 2022; Rafiq, 2020).

Pakistan also plays a stabilizing role by advocating for Afghanistan's inclusion in SCO-led frameworks. Given that Afghanistan's security is directly linked to the stability of South and Central Asia, Pakistan's facilitation of dialogue between Kabul and regional powers can anchor long-term peace initiatives. If Afghanistan is gradually integrated into SCO's connectivity and counterterrorism agendas, Pakistan can emerge as a key broker of stability and cooperation (Yousaf, 2023; Farooq, 2024).



Ultimately, Pakistan's role in the SCO is both an opportunity and a responsibility. By prioritizing multilateralism, advancing shared security goals, and promoting economic interdependence, Pakistan can shape the organization into a platform that counters instability and fosters a multipolar regional order. The extent to which Pakistan succeeds will depend on its domestic reforms, ability to overcome bilateral hostilities, and strategic balancing between Eastern and Western partners. Nevertheless, as a nuclear power situated at the crossroads of Eurasia, Pakistan's role in SCO-driven stability is indispensable (Ahmad, 2023; Kakar, 2024).

Conclusion

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit 2025 emerges as a landmark event that underscores Pakistan's growing role in Eurasian politics, economics, and security. For Islamabad, the Summit is more than a diplomatic gathering; it is a strategic opportunity to reposition itself as a bridge between South Asia, Central Asia, and China's Belt and Road Initiative. Pakistan's participation highlights both the immense opportunities and the daunting challenges it faces—ranging from leveraging CPEC and energy corridors to grappling with internal economic fragility, governance inefficiencies, and persistent tensions with India. However, the SCO provides Pakistan with an unmatched opportunity to enhance connectivity in the region, expanding its foreign policy without being dependent on the West and positioning itself as a responsible player. In terms of regional peace and stability, Pakistan's participation in the SCO has far more profound implications than its involvement in the organization. Borders. Through donating to counterterrorism under the regional anti-terrorist structure (RATS), the Afghan peace and rebuilding, and trade connection with the region, as a beneficiary, Pakistan can become a guarantor of not only the Central Asian republics.

Regional stability. This type of role demands that Islamabad move beyond the narrow bilateral rivalries. Adopt a multilateral, collaborative attitude with a focus on shared security and collective. Prosperity. Such a strategic shift would improve Pakistan's diplomatic position and strengthen its standing. Power bargaining in a world that is becoming multipolar. In the future, Pakistan's environmental stability within the SCO will be determined by its alignment. Domestic reforms with local engagements. Institutional, economic diversification. Consistency and moderate diplomacy against China, Russia, and India will be a significant determinant in providing. The future applicability of Pakistan in the organization In case these challenges are addressed. Vision and consistency can make Pakistan more than a passive actor. A news shaper in the SCO model Conclusively, the 2025 summit can turn out to be not only an external but also an internal stimulus for Pakistan's renewal, making it possible to reestablish itself as a stabilizing force and a force of regional integration in Eurasia.

Recommendations

1. Pakistan must actively cultivate stronger bilateral ties with Russia and the Central Asian Republics, reducing its overreliance on China and projecting itself as an independent and credible regional actor.
2. Undertake Bold Economic Reforms. Comprehensive reforms in taxation, trade policy, and industrial capacity are urgently needed for Pakistan to capitalize on SCO-driven economic opportunities and transform itself into a regional trade hub.
3. Capitalise on Energy Corridors. Pakistan should aggressively pursue pipeline projects, electricity connectivity, and renewable energy collaborations within the



SCO framework to address domestic shortages and establish itself as an energy transit state.

4. Defuse Regional Hostilities. Instead of letting bilateral disputes dominate SCO forums, Pakistan should adopt a pragmatic approach to diplomacy with India, utilizing backchannel negotiations and confidence-building measures to foster multilateral cooperation.
5. Lead in with its hard-earned experience, Pakistan must position itself as a security guarantor by spearheading SCO joint drills, intelligence networks, and deradicalization programs against terrorism and extremism.
6. Fixing institutional Weaknesses, strengthening governance capacity, ensuring policy continuity, and empowering specialized institutions are necessary for Pakistan to implement the SCO agreements and avoid diplomatic setbacks effectively.
7. Pakistan can utilize the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a regional connectivity platform and integrate it into the broader connectivity framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). CPEC being treated as a gateway would help the Central Asian states access the South Asian market and other global markets, promoting economic integration in the region.
8. Pakistan should also promote stability in the region by promoting an inclusive political settlement in Afghanistan and through dialogue between the SCO members. In this way, Pakistan will be able to rebrand itself as a stabilizer and an inevitable peace-time ally in the region.



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