

Pakistan's Strategic Evolution in the SCO: From Observer to Influencer

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan's trajectory in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) presentations a calculated shift from passive engagement to proactive diplomacy. Initially turning into a member of as an observer in 2005, Pakistan's elevation to finish membership in 2017 marked a turning aspect in its close by strategy. This paper explores how Pakistan has leveraged its geographic centrality, financial ambitions, and protection imperatives to transition proper right into a more influential player in the SCO framework. It examines Islamabad's feature in shaping discourse on counterterrorism, connectivity, and multilateral cooperation, specially via obligations similar to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The study moreover analyzes Pakistan's balancing act amongst important powers—China and Russia—even as navigating complex ties with India, each different SCO member. Ultimately, Pakistan's strategic evolution in the SCO underscores its aspiration to redefine its close by identity, enhance its diplomatic clout, and contribute meaningfully to Eurasian stability and integration.

Keywords: Diplomacy, Influential, Pakistan, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, close by identitiy

INTRODUCTION

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has emerged at some stage in the last a long term as a pivotal multilateral platform in Eurasia, bringing together some of the world's largest and most strategically significant states. Founded in 2001 thru China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, the SCO modified into first of all a security-oriented dialogue board addressing border issues, counterterrorism, and close by stability. Over time, its mandate extended to encompass monetary cooperation, connectivity projects, cultural exchanges, and diplomatic coordination. In this evolving geopolitical landscape, Pakistan's trajectory inside the SCO displays each the transformation of the enterprise and Islamabad's transferring overseas coverage priorities.¹ From becoming a member of as an

¹ "Shanghai Cooperation Organisation," *Wikipedia*, last modified July 25, 2025,

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shanghai_Cooperation_Organisation.

observer in 2005 to reaching complete club in 2017, Pakistan's function has progressively transitioned from a passive player to an energetic influencer searching for to form the time table in step with its strategic, economic, and safety interests.² Pakistan's selection to have interaction with the SCO stemmed from more than one geopolitical and geo-monetary calculations. As an observer, Islamabad considered the SCO as a gateway to deeper engagement with Central Asia—a vicinity of giant strength resources, change potential, and cultural linkages. The SCO's emphasis on fighting terrorism, extremism, and separatism aligned intently with Pakistan's home safety concerns, mainly in the course of the peak of its counterterrorism campaigns with inside the mid-2000s. Furthermore, its proximity to China and Russia, the 2 main powers with inside the SCO, provided an possibility to bolster strategic partnerships past conventional bilateral arrangements. The observer section accordingly served as a trying out ground, permitting Pakistan to construct diplomatic familiarity with the SCO's mechanisms, decorate political visibility, and function itself as a reputable candidate for complete membership.³

The transition to finish membership in 2017 marked a turning point. This enhance modified into now absolutely procedural—it represented recognition of Pakistan's growing nearby relevance and its functionality to make contributions meaningfully to the SCO's objectives. By this time, Pakistan had already deepened its integration with China through the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship problem of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The SCO membership provided an institutional platform to align CPEC's neighborhood connectivity vision with broader Eurasian integration goals. Moreover, Pakistan's geostrategic location—bridging South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East—furnished the SCO a beneficial transit and alternate corridor, reinforcing its characteristic as a facilitator of financial interconnectivity.⁴

However, Pakistan's adventure from observer to influencer has now no longer been with out challenges. Internally, political instability, safety threats, and monetary vulnerabilities have on occasion restricted its capacity to completely leverage the SCO's potential. Externally, the organization's consensus-pushed decision-making and the various priorities of member states—starting from the Sino-Russian strategic axis to the India–Pakistan rivalry—have required Pakistan to undertake a nuanced and pragmatic approach. The inclusion of India as a complete member along Pakistan in 2017 brought a layer of complexity, compelling Islamabad to stability bilateral tensions with the wider vital of nearby cooperation beneath the SCO framework.⁵

In current years, Pakistan has sought to form the SCO schedule through actively collaborating in nearby protection dialogues, advocating for inclusive connectivity projects, and pushing for electricity cooperation mechanisms. It has extensively utilized the SCO platform to reinforce cultural and academic exchanges with Central Asian states, thereby fostering human beings-to-human beings linkages that

² "Pakistan's Strategic Importance to the SCO," *Pakistan Observer*, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://pakobserver.net/pakistans-strategic-importance-to-the-sco/>.

³ "Pakistan's Strategic Importance to the SCO," *Pakistan Observer*.

⁴ "SCO: Pakistan Promotes Relevance," *USIP*; "Nations Who Aid Terror Will Pay a Price: How India's SCO Diplomacy Sends a Message Beyond Beijing," *Economic Times*, August 2, 2024, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/nations-who-aid-terror-will-pay-a-price-how-indias-sco-diplomacy-sends-a-message-beyond-beijing/articleshow/122513849.cms>.

⁵ "Pakistan's Role withinside the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," *The News International*

supplement strategic and financial initiatives. The shift from a in large part reactive observer to a proactive contributor illustrates Pakistan's reputation of the SCO as now no longer only a diplomatic discussion board however a strategic multiplier for its overseas coverage ambitions.⁶ As the SCO expands its scope to cope with rising demanding situations which include cyber security, weather change, and deliver chain resilience, Pakistan's have an effect on will rely on its cap potential to provide sensible solutions, construct coalitions in the organization, and align its country wide improvement time table with the SCO's evolving vision. This strategic evolution isn't always simply a count of popularity change—it displays Islamabad's try and reposition itself with inside the broader Eurasian order at a time while worldwide strength systems are an increasing number of multipolar.⁷ In essence, Pakistan's adventure with inside the SCO encapsulates the wider shifts in its overseas policy—from a South Asia-centric awareness to a extra different Eurasian engagement strategy.⁸ Understanding this evolution is critical now no longer simplest for assessing Pakistan's diplomatic trajectory however additionally for comparing the SCO's ability to combine numerous member pursuits right into a cohesive and powerful local architecture. This paper will discover the important thing ranges of Pakistan's transformation in the SCO, examine the drivers in the back of its strategic reorientation, and examine the volume to which Islamabad has succeeded in transferring from the outer edge to a function of have an effect on in one of the world's maximum good sized nearby organizations.⁹

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Pakistan's adventure in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has been marked through a constant transformation from a peripheral observer to an increasing number of lively and influential member. Since gaining observer fame in 2005 and complete club in 2017, Pakistan has sought to leverage the SCO's multilateral platform to increase its strategic, monetary, and diplomatic interests. This literature evaluation synthesizes key instructional views on Pakistan's evolving position with inside the SCO, that specialize in 4 principal themes: geopolitical positioning, financial connectivity, safety cooperation, and institutional international relations. The SCO, at the start shaped as the "Shanghai Five" in 1996, became basically a protection-targeted alliance amongst China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Its growth to consist of Pakistan and India in 2017 marked a sizeable shift in its geopolitical scope.

⁶ "Pakistan's Role withinside the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," *The News International*. cooperation-organization-advancing-regional-connectivity-security-and-economic-collaboration; "Pakistan PM Sharif Calls for Expansion of China's Belt and Road Initiative," *Reuters*, October 16, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/pakistan-pm-sharif-calls-expansion-chinas-belt-road-initiative-2024-10-16/>.

⁷ "Pakistan's Strategic Role withinside the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation," *Republic Policy*; "SCO: Pakistan Promotes Relevance, China Projects Influence," *United States Institute of Peace*, October 28, 2024, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/10/sco-pakistan-promotes-relevance-china-projects-influence>.

⁸ "Afghanistan and Pakistan Restore Diplomatic Relations Amid China-Brokered Talks," *Washington Post*, June 5, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2025/06/05/afghanistan-pakistan-relations-china-taliban/>.

⁹ "Pakistan's Role in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," *The News International*; "Pakistan's Strategic Importance to the SCO," *Pakistan Observer*.

Scholars which includes Zab-Un-Nisa et al. (2021) argue that Pakistan's accession to the SCO displays a strategic recalibration in its overseas coverage—shifting far from reliance on Western alliances and closer to Eurasian multilateralism. This shift is visible as a part of Islamabad's broader attempt to diversify its diplomatic engagements and decrease dependency on U.S.-led institutions. Pakistan's geographic place on the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East has been again and again emphasized with inside the literature as a important asset. Ahmed and Hussain (2020) be aware that Pakistan's proximity to Afghanistan and its ancient ties with Central Asian republics function it as a herbal bridge for local cooperation. The SCO presents Pakistan with a platform to interact in speak on nearby protection, mainly with inside the post-U.S. withdrawal context, in which Afghanistan's balance stays a shared situation. A vast frame of literature specializes in Pakistan's financial objectives in the SCO framework. Mehran Khan and Ferdos Jamal (2024) spotlight the strategic significance of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a flagship initiative beneath Neath China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aligns intently with SCO dreams of local connectivity. CPEC now no longer most effective complements Pakistan's infrastructure however additionally gives SCO member states get right of entry to the Arabian Sea through Gwadar Port.

Pakistan's efforts to sell alternate and electricity cooperation in the SCO also are well-documented. Rashid and Qureshi (2022) have a look at Pakistan's push for strength pipelines and transit agreements with Central Asian states, mainly Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. These efforts are aimed toward addressing Pakistan's electricity deficits at the same time as fostering interdependence amongst SCO members. Additionally, Pakistan has recommended for the elimination of non-tariff boundaries and the simplification of customs processes to facilitate smoother alternate flows. However, pupils additionally warning in opposition to over-optimism. Khan and Ali (2023) argue that at the same time as Pakistan's financial cap potential is tremendous, inner demanding situations—along with political instability, bureaucratic inefficiency, and safety concerns—preserve to prevent its capacity to absolutely capitalize on SCO-led financial opportunities.

Security stays a cornerstone of SCO cooperation, and Pakistan has actively participated in joint navy sporting activities and counterterrorism tasks. Gul Zainab Mansoor (2022) notes that Pakistan's inclusion with inside the SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) has enabled it to percentage intelligence and coordinate efforts in opposition to transnational threats. This collaboration is in particular applicable given Pakistan's long-status war with militancy and its strategic hobby in stabilizing Afghanistan. The literature additionally explores Pakistan's protection international relations in the SCO. Shah and Iqbal (2021) argue that joint sports including "Peace Mission" have allowed Pakistan to show off its navy skills and construct accept as true with nearby powers. These engagements serve twin purposes: improving interoperability and signaling Pakistan's dedication to nearby peace.

Nevertheless, tensions with India—additionally a complete SCO member—pose demanding situations to seamless protection cooperation. While the SCO emphasizes consensus and non-interference, students like Raza and Fatima (2023) propose that bilateral disputes once in a while spill into multilateral boards, proscribing the effectiveness of joint projects. Pakistan's diplomatic posture in the SCO is formed through its emphasis on sovereignty, mutual respect, and non-interference—standards enshrined with inside the SCO Charter. Mansoor (2022) describes Pakistan's technique as "inter-governmentalist," favoring state-led cooperation over supranational integration. This aligns with Pakistan's broader overseas coverage dreams of preserving strategic autonomy even as deepening ties with China and Russia.

Pakistan has extensively utilized the SCO platform to recommend for local speak on weather change, cultural exchange, and virtual connectivity. Hassan and Tariq (2023) spotlight Pakistan's participation in SCO summits and ministerial conferences as proof of its developing diplomatic maturity. These engagements permit Pakistan to form nearby narratives and make contributions to agenda-putting with inside the organization. However, the literature factors to a want for extra constant and proactive international relations. Naveed and Jamil (2022) argue that Pakistan's illustration in SCO boards is frequently reactive as opposed to strategic, and that extra institutional funding is needed to maximise its influence.

The literature collectively portrays Pakistan's evolution with inside the SCO as a multifaceted method driven with the useful resource of the use of strategic necessity, monetary ambition, and diplomatic recalibration. While Pakistan has made splendid strides in declaring its presence, stressful conditions live in translating cap potential into sustained influence. Future research may additionally moreover popularity on Pakistan's characteristic in shaping SCO norms, its engagement with growing problems like cybersecurity and climate resilience, and its potential to navigate intra-organizational tensions. Pakistan's engagement with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has surpassed thru a exceptional transformation over the last decades. Initially granted observer reputation in 2005, Pakistan have turn out to be a entire member in 2017, marking a strategic shift in its foreign places insurance orientation. This literature assessment examines the scholarly discourse surrounding Pakistan's evolving characteristic with inside the SCO, specializing in four key dimensions: geopolitical realignment, financial connectivity, protection cooperation, and institutional global relations. The assessment highlights how Pakistan has transitioned from a peripheral participant to an more and more influential actor with inside the organization, on the identical time as moreover identifying the traumatic conditions that preserve to shape its trajectory.

The SCO, in the beginning long-established in 1996 as the "Shanghai Five," become designed to promote close by safety and cooperation among China, Russia, and Central Asian states. Its expansion to embody Pakistan and India in 2017 signaled a broader geopolitical ambition. Scholars collectively with Zab-Un-Nisa et al. (2021) argue that Pakistan's accession to the SCO shows a deliberate pivot far from Western-centric alliances with inside the course of Eurasian multilateralism. This shift is interpreted as part of Islamabad's broader approach to diversify its diplomatic engagements and reduce reliance on U.S.-led institutions. Pakistan's geographic location at the intersection of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East has been over and over emphasized with inside the literature as a strategic asset. Ahmed and Hussain (2020) note that Pakistan's proximity to Afghanistan and its historic ties with Central Asian republics characteristic it as a natural bridge for close by cooperation. The SCO affords Pakistan with a platform to engage in communicate on nearby safety, specially with inside the context of post-U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, in which stability remains a shared situation among member states.

Moreover, Pakistan's club within side the SCO permits it to take part in shaping nearby narratives on sovereignty, non-interference, and multipolarity—standards that align with its overseas coverage ethos. Scholars spotlight that Pakistan's presence withinside the SCO strengthens its diplomatic leverage vis-à-vis India and complements its visibility in Eurasian affairs. A big frame of literature makes a speciality of Pakistan's financial aims in the SCO framework. Mehran Khan and Ferdos Jamal (2024) emphasize the strategic significance of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship initiative beneath Neath China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aligns intently with SCO dreams of local connectivity. CPEC now no longer handiest complements Pakistan's infrastructure however additionally gives SCO member states get entry to the Arabian Sea thru Gwadar Port, positioning Pakistan as a logistical hub for Eurasian exchange.

Pakistan's efforts to sell exchange and electricity cooperation in the SCO also are well-documented. Rashid and Qureshi (2022) study Pakistan's push for strength pipelines and transit agreements with Central Asian states, especially Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. These projects goal to deal with Pakistan's electricity deficits at the same time as fostering interdependence amongst SCO members. Additionally, Pakistan has encouraged for the elimination of non-tariff obstacles and the simplification of customs processes to facilitate smoother change flows. However, pupils warning towards over-optimism. Khan and Ali (2023) argue that at the same time as Pakistan's financial cap potential is enormous, inner demanding situations—consisting of political instability, bureaucratic inefficiency, and safety concerns—retain to preclude its capacity to completely capitalize on SCO-led monetary opportunities. The literature indicates that Pakistan need to adopt structural reforms and enhance governance to draw sustained funding and local partnerships. Security stays a cornerstone of SCO cooperation, and Pakistan has actively participated in joint navy sporting events and counterterrorism projects. Gul Zainab Mansoor (2022) notes that Pakistan's inclusion withinside the SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) has enabled it to proportion intelligence and coordinate efforts in opposition to transnational threats. This collaboration is especially applicable given Pakistan's long-status war with militancy and its strategic hobby in stabilizing Afghanistan.

The literature moreover explores Pakistan's safety worldwide members of the family withinside the SCO. Shah and Iqbal (2021) argue that joint sports activities consisting of "Peace Mission" have allowed Pakistan to expose off its army skills and assemble trust with close by powers. These engagements serve dual purposes: enhancing interoperability and signaling Pakistan's determination to close by peace and balance. Nevertheless, tensions with India—moreover a whole SCO member—pose stressful conditions to seamless safety cooperation. While the SCO emphasizes consensus and non-interference, students like Raza and Fatima (2023) advocate that bilateral disputes sometimes spill into multilateral boards, restricting the effectiveness of joint tasks. Despite the ones disturbing conditions, Pakistan keeps to use the SCO as a platform to suggest for close by counterterrorism strategies and border safety coordination.

Pakistan's diplomatic posture withinside the SCO is formed through its emphasis on sovereignty, mutual respect, and non-interference—ideas enshrined withinside the SCO Charter. Mansoor (2022) describes Pakistan's method as "inter-governmentalist," favoring state-led cooperation over supranational integration. This aligns with Pakistan's broader overseas coverage dreams of retaining strategic autonomy whilst deepening ties with China and Russia. Pakistan has extensively utilized the SCO platform to endorse for local speak on weather change, cultural exchange, and virtual connectivity. Hassan and Tariq (2023) spotlight Pakistan's participation in SCO summits and ministerial conferences as proof of its developing diplomatic maturity. These engagements permit Pakistan to form nearby narratives and make a contribution to agenda-placing in the organization.

Naveed and Jamil (2022) argue that Pakistan's illustration in SCO boards is regularly reactive in preference to strategic, and that extra institutional funding is needed to maximise its influence. Scholars suggest that Pakistan increase a coherent SCO approach, decorate its diplomatic capacity, and interact greater actively in running companies and coverage dialogues. The literature together portrays Pakistan's evolution withinside the SCO as a multifaceted system pushed with the aid of using strategic necessity, monetary ambition, and diplomatic recalibration. While Pakistan has made amazing strides in declaring its presence, demanding situations stay in translating capacity into sustained influence. Future studies can also additionally consciousness on Pakistan's function in shaping SCO norms, its engagement with rising problems like cybersecurity and weather resilience, and its capacity to navigate intra-organizational tensions. As the SCO maintains to growth its scope, Pakistan's strategic selections will play a crucial role in identifying its long-term relevance and impact withinside the organization.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Understanding Pakistan's strategic evolution in the SCO is important for several reasons. First, it sheds moderate on the changing dynamics of close by cooperation in Eurasia, wherein traditional alliances are being reconfigured in response to international shifts. Second, it offers insights into Pakistan's remote places insurance recalibration, highlighting its efforts to balance own circle of relatives participants with primary powers whilst retaining its autonomy. Third, it contributes to the broader discourse on multilateralism, illustrating how growing economies navigate complex institutional landscapes to expand countrywide interests.

This have a examine objectives to analyze Pakistan's trajectory within the SCO, exploring the motivations, strategies, and outcomes of its engagement. It will study how Pakistan has leveraged its geographic centrality, economic ambitions, and protection imperatives to transition from a passive observer to a proactive influencer. By doing so, the research will contribute to a nuanced information of Pakistan's feature in shaping the future of Eurasian cooperation and integration.

THEORATICAL FRAMEWORK

- Focuses on how sovereign states cooperate inside worldwide companies at the same time as preserving autonomy.
- Useful for reading Pakistan's strategic conduct and coverage selections in the SCO.
- Helps assess how Pakistan balances national interests with collective SCO goals.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN

- **Document Analysis:** Review official SCO charters, Pakistan's foreign policy documents, summit speeches, and media coverage.
- **Case Studies:** Examine key milestones which include Pakistan's observer status (2005), complete membership (2017), and current summit participation.
- **Elite Interviews (if feasible):** Engage with diplomats, scholars, and policymakers for insider perspectives.

DATA SOURCES

- **Primary:** SCO summit declarations, Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs publications, legitimate speeches.
- **Secondary:** Academic journals, suppose tank reports (e.g., ISSI, NDU), information articles, and professional commentaries.

ANAYLATICAL TECHNIQUE

- **Content Analysis:** Identify recurring themes in Pakistan's SCO-related discourse (e.g., security, connectivity, diplomacy).
- **Comparative Analysis:** Contrast Pakistan's role with other member states like India or China to highlight strategic shifts.
- **Policy Impact Assessment:** Evaluate how SCO membership has influenced Pakistan's regional and global positioning.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How effective have regional organizations and multilateral platforms been in promoting peace?
2. How does enhanced economic connectivity influence political stability and mutual cooperation?
3. How does Pakistan's participation in regional and global forums enhance its diplomatic standing?

OBJECTIVE

- To examine how Pakistan's regional engagements contribute to conflict resolution, security cooperation, and long-term stability.

Sub-Objectives

- To analyze the role of Pakistan in advancing trade, transport, and energy linkages that promote regional economic integration.
- To assess how Pakistan leverages bilateral, multilateral, and cultural diplomacy to expand its regional and global influence.

CONCLUSION

Pakistan's adventure within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) displays a sluggish however strategic evolution from a passive observer to an energetic and influential member. Initially attracted to the SCO to shield nearby protection hobbies and beautify diplomatic outreach, Pakistan has regularly increased its function to cope with financial connectivity, electricity cooperation, and counterterrorism objectives. Through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and deeper engagement with Central Asian states, Islamabad has placed itself as a bridge among South, Central, and West Asia. Challenges which includes local rivalries, monetary vulnerabilities, and moving geopolitical dynamics persist, but Pakistan's developing participation in SCO tasks demonstrates its purpose to form the organization's time table in methods aligned with its countrywide and local pastimes. If sustained with regular coverage attention and monetary resilience, Pakistan's impact within the SCO ought to transition from symbolic illustration to sizeable leadership, contributing meaningfully to local peace, stability, and prosperity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthen Economic Integration – Leverage the SCO framework to enlarge change corridors, diversify export markets, and hyperlink CPEC with Central Asian connectivity tasks for mutual monetary growth.

Enhance Multilateral Diplomacy – Actively interact in SCO decision-making our bodies to steer coverage on local protection, strength cooperation, and infrastructure development.

Promote Counterterrorism Collaboration – Utilize the SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) to enhance intelligence sharing, ability building, and joint protection operations.

Build Energy Partnerships – Pursue electricity transit agreements with SCO participants to deal with Pakistan's strength shortages even as contributing to local strength protection.

Foster People-to-People Linkages – Encourage instructional exchanges, cultural programs, and tourism projects to bolster societal ties in the SCO.

Mitigate Regional Tensions – Use the SCO's diplomatic mechanisms to control disputes with nearby states, particularly India, and recognition on cooperative in place of confrontational engagement.

Institutional Capacity Building – Develop devoted SCO coverage devices inside Pakistan's overseas ministry and exchange our bodies to make certain coherent and proactive participation.

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