

SCO summit and power of India's growing influence

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As India assumes the Presidency of the G20 Summit in 2023, it has also obtained the presidency of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization this year. The SCO final Summit will be taking place in India in September 2023. 2023 is going to be a very critical year for India in terms of foreign relations as both important groupings of the nation's summits will be taking place in India. This SCO Summit showcases India's growing influence on the world stage. As a president of the SCO, India sends an invitation to all the member states to attend the meeting including Pakistan. The first round of the Foreign Minister Meet will schedule to take place on 5th May 2023. This nine-member group of Nations including China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan is meeting after the one-year completion of the Russia-Ukraine war. This is a platform to discuss multilateral cooperation amid rising tensions between the West and Russia. Both G20 and SCO Summit operate as a platform for showcasing India's growing interest in world affairs as India is a major economic and military power trying to engage with all the nations with more focused issues of economics and geopolitics.

In this light, there are arises certain questions regarding the purpose of the SCO as a grouping, the issue of the deteriorating relationship between India and its neighbours China and Pakistan who are integral members of SCO and finally the significance of SCO for India going forward

Historically, the SCO was created in the first years of the post-Cold War era to resolve China's volatile border issues with the former Soviet republic. With the passage of time, China has successfully used the SCO as a platform to create a favourable atmosphere for itself. Especially in the last 15 or 20 years, its relations with Central Asian states have transformed phenomenally. Generally, the SCO is seen as an organization that criticises colonialism and imperialism and the negation of Western or any domination of this region that has united the member states and created a sense of common belonging amongst themselves.

However, the SCO has also been described as a political and military block led by anti-Western Russia and China against the US and Western interests with an aim to develop an inclusive 'SCO region' and an SCO identity formation. As a multilateral group, the SCO must widen its ambit to include economic and social issues within its fold that will require common norms i.e. expectations of behaviour, common practices and obligations, a common trajectory i.e a shared path that will help overcome past experiences, common problems and help in achieving future goals

For India, the SCO assumed significance in 2005 when it was admitted as an observer and in only in 2017 it was admitted as a full member that was viewed as an opportunity to increase its political, economic and security stakes in Eurasia and has been linked to India's approach of seeking a fairly flexible multilateralism in its extended neighbourhood that was of great significance as both China and Pakistan are important members of SCO. China being the most important negotiator of the group plays a key role in SCO. We are all

aware, India has not had the best relations with these countries. In spite of all the downs of Indo-Pak relationships, the hosting country extended its invitation to Pakistan. It is all likely that, the External Affairs Minister of Pakistan Mr Bilawal Bhutto might attend the meeting on 5th May 2023. The invitation of Bhutto catches Indian media when he made some derogatory comments about the Prime Minister of India comparing him with Osama Bin Laden the most notorious terrorist till date. Many media houses highlighted such irresponsible comments of Mr Bhutto. Following the traditions, India did not pay attention to such irresponsible comments and extended an invitation to Pakistan's Foreign Minister for the event. Similarly, India and China is going through very tough diplomatic relations since the Indo-Sino war of 1962. The SCO meet can be a platform where both countries to revisit their differences and lead the Asian countries to prosperity. The land dispute between these two powerful nations has created a lot of imbalance in South Asia. Both states are part of decision-making in international engagements and their view plays an important role in international relations. Thus, India extended an invitation to the Chinese Foreign Minister to attend the SCO Summit on 5th May. Therefore, this Summit can be a platform to revisit the economic/strategic/geopolitics need for the nine countries, especially for India towards its relationship with Pakistan and China.

Going forward, from India's perspective, Central Asia forms a critical and significant strategic component in its policy, both due to its deteriorating relationship with Pakistan and because of China's growing influence and a the same time increase its influence in the Eurasia region . Thus, India could use the platform in obtaining consensus in curbing Pakistan-sponsored terrorism as one of the key principles of the SCO Charter is to jointly counteract terrorism, separatism, and extremism in all their manifestations. Additionally, India could leverage its membership towards resolving the India and the China-Russia-US triangle. As China and Russia both have had strained relationships with the United States, India is in the process of building a closer relationship with the United States. Thus, by being part of both the SCO and the Quad, the claim of India's permanent membership of the UN Security Council may see some traction but its journey in the SCO would depend mostly on how India and China weigh ties on security and economic calculations.

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