

SIGNIFICANCE OF SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION – PAKISTAN’S PERSPECTIVE

Dr. Muhammad Saif ur Rehman

Abstract

Evolution of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) from Shanghai Five in 2001 was a noticeable development at the arena of contemporary global politics. Organizations world over viewed SCO as a challenging forum to the player(s), posing threat to their mutually agreed agenda. On the other hand, the regional stakeholders conceived SCO as a window of opportunity to combat security threats and consolidate peace and sustainable development. Pakistan, being a key player in South Asia, geopolitically positioned ideally, perceived the organization as a big opening to encase its geostrategic interests and pursue her legitimate agenda towards peace and security for the long term economic prosperity of the region. Dividends to Pakistan under the aegis of SCO are immense and quite significant in the wake of foreseeable North – South trade and energy corridor. Pakistan’s entry into the organization, as an observer, is the first step in right direction. Nevertheless, grant of admission as a member is fraught with multiple challenges, linking with complexed geopolitical environment. This paper evaluates Pakistan’s perspective towards SCO, coupled with cost-benefit analysis for all stakeholders.

Introduction

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) formally Shanghai Five appeared in the arena of world politics in June 2001. Evolution of SCO from Shanghai Five, which was established in 1996, was solely an initiative of China. China implicitly intended to have some check on the emerging great powers’ row in the region over the strategic cum economic gains. Also, to exercise influence over the growing radicalized elements as a result of the improvised financial condition, poverty and unstable politico-economic condition. This

grouping provided an opportunity to resource rich the neighbouring states of Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Russia to chalk out mutually beneficial policies.

Long outstanding Sino-Russia border dispute became a multilateral issue with the disintegration of former Soviet Union and emergence of Central Asian Republics (CARs) in 1991. Russia, China and its three bordering states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, initially framed an agreement and later in 1996 signed the Shanghai Agreement on confidence building in the military field focusing the border area.¹

With the declaration of organization as SCO in 2001, formulation of new goals set a new dimension for the organization. Nevertheless, China took lead role by devising mechanism to combat three viz evils separatism, extremism and terrorism waged by the radicalized elements, while promoting economic ties.² This development gave a new dimension to the organization towards multilateralism; meant for tackling security issues especially in Xingjian. This arrangement also addressed the concerns of CARs regarding territorial integrity and committed concerted efforts against perceived common threats from the extremist forces especially to curb nationalist sentiments among Turkish speaking Uyghur's.³ The sole motive behind this move was to negate establishment of East Turkistan.⁴

SCO provided China an opportunity to make ingress in Central Asian region to meet her ever growing energy needs and to dominate Central Asian markets through extensive commercial activities. Russia, on the other hand, conceived SCO as an opportunity for preserving its strategic interests in CARs and to maintain her traditional influence over 'near abroad'. Over the passage of time, China and Russia realized convergence of their priorities to complement each other's national interests. Regular conduct of joint military exercises under the aegis of SCO is the manifestation of their mutual concerns to combat security related issues on perpetual basis.

So far Central Asians are concerned, being a victim of seventy four years long iron curtain and aspirant to improve domestic economies, welcomed this grouping for seeking foreign direct investments (FDIs). Security vulnerability was their another area of concern, hence, the leadership of CARs felt strengthened by associating themselves with this organization. Though socio-economic issues do not fall directly under the preview of SCO, however, it is a viable forum to prevent interstate conflict among member states and to make Confidence Building Measures (CBMs).⁵ As per the SCO's charter adopted in 2002, its main objectives are to strengthen mutual trust, good neighbourliness, develop effective cooperation in political affairs, economy, trade, science and technology, transport and environmental protection, maintain regional peace, security and stability.⁶

Pakistan being at the crossroad of Central Asia, South West Asia and South Asia very keenly monitored the emerging regional grouping and conceived it as an opportunity to play a responsible, constructive and positive role. Since Pakistan, in the aftermath of 9/11, badly suffered on account of terrorism and extremism, she decided to join the SCO in any capacity considering the converging interests. With this premise, this paper will be developed on hypothesis; that is, "notwithstanding the multiple regional issues, Pakistan and SCO have the potential to play a tangible role in bringing peace and stability in the wake of Post 2014 Scenario". In order to develop this paper, yet there is a need to address certain queries like; evaluation of SCO's potential and achievements; stakes of various regional and extra regional players; rationale for Pakistan to join SCO; on admitting Pakistan into SCO, what prospects and challenges are ahead for either side; will SCO succeed in Afghanistan; can SCO play a constructive role to mitigate Pak-Indian terrorism; and can SCO integrate economically and promote trade activities.

Pakistan enjoys cordial relations with all members of SCO. Geographic contiguity, shared cultural and historical bond have added depth and dimension to the relations. Pakistan also shares the ideas of peace and progress as well as the

common values and aspirations. Pakistan supports the principles, purposes, objective and the activities of SCO. Pakistan has vital stake in the security, stability and well being of the region. It was, therefore, natural that Pakistan was amongst the first countries to seek an association with the SCO. Pakistan continued to attach high priority to expanding and strengthening the cooperation with the SCO. Pakistan enjoys a unique geo-strategic position with regard to relations with the SCO countries.

Significance of the SCO

The intergovernmental SCO, comprising six members Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, constitutes a huge mass of area almost 60% of Eurasia and a quarter of the world population.⁷ Pakistan, India and Iran as observer countries, while Sri Lanka, Belarus and Turkey as a contact group certainly multiply the profile of the organization. Therefore, SCO has become a very significant forum addressing multi-dimensional concerns including politico-security and economic etc. The SCO's charter is quite meaningful in making the region peaceful including respecting each other's independence and sovereignty, territorial integrity, non interference in internal affairs, not to use force against each other and settlement of issues through consultations.⁸ SCO, being endowed with massive fossil reserves, has rapidly grown by the rising global energy market. SCO combines China, the second largest energy consumer of the world, with the high profile energy producers of the world like Kazakhstan and unmatched hydal power producer Tajikistan.

Apart from China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan, India, EU countries and even US, all are inclined toward resource rich CARs for diplomatic overture. Over the passage of time, SCO has evolved into a powerful regional grouping and an effective stability factor across the vast Eurasian continent. Approaching of number of countries to SCO is the manifestation of its viability at global level in general and at regional level in particular. SCO has chalked out a tri-

dimension roadmap for regional economic cooperation focusing to channelize trade and investment to strengthen economic cooperation and materialize free flow of goods, capital, services alongwith a network of energy, transportation and communication.⁹

Achievements of the SCO

SCO has successfully devised a strategy to promote regional security and domestic stability. SCO's security paradigm rotate around supporting military cooperation and collaboration as countering inter regional and intra regional threats including drug trafficking, arms trafficking, organized crimes and terrorism.¹⁰ The alliance regularly undertakes joint ground, air and naval exercises to enhance efficacy while conducting operations against terrorism, separatism and extremism. These military drills are indication of cooperation among the member states to fight a common enemy collectively or individually. Since 2002 till 2012, so far ten joint military exercises have been held with different code names as given in the table:-¹¹

Table: The SCO's Joint Military Exercises

Code Name	Year	Participants	Number of Participants Armies Hundreds	Place	Organized by
"Collaboration-2001"	2002	China, Kyrgyzstan		Border regions of China and Kyrgyzstan	Defence Ministries
"Union-2003"	2003	China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan]	About 1,000	Kazakhstan	Defence Ministries
"Peace Mission-2003"	2005	China, Russia	10,000	Russia and	Defence Ministries
"Tianshan-1"	2006	China, Kazakhstan		China's Xinjiang	Enforcement Organs (Police)
"Collaboration-2006"	2006	China, Tajikistan	450	Tajikistan	Defence Ministries
"Peace Mission-2007"	2007	China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	4,000	Russia	Defence Ministries
"Peace Mission-2009"	2009	China, Russia	2,600	Russia, China	Defence Ministries
"Peace Mission-2010"	2010	China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan (no army sent)	5,000	Kazakhstan	Defence Ministries
"Tianshan-2"	2011	China, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan		China's Xinjiang	Enforcement Organs (Police)
Peace Mission-2012	2012	China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan	Personnel	Khujand, Tajikistan	Defence Ministries

Source: Asian Survey, Volume 53: Number 3, May/ June 2013, 443.

Establishment of Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) initially in year 2002 at Bishkek, later on shifting its Headquarters to Tashkent in 2004,¹² is considered to be a milestone in history of SCO. RATS Headquarters is a nucleus of intelligence sharing regarding 'three evils' among the member states. It also serves as a data bank about the terrorist outfits organizing seminars on curbing terrorism, rendering specialized training and maintains contact with other international security organizations.¹³ Besides RATS, there is a collaboration among the institutions of judiciary and law enforcement agencies, Chief Procurators, Presidents of the Apex Court, Secretaries of the State Security Council, Defence Ministries, Interior Ministries and Chief of General Staff.¹⁴ SCO has equally marked its relevance at the arena of regional politics as well. China for having a lead role, got advantage to use SCO as a means of ingress into resource rich Central Asia thus securing not only economic interests rather security as well. Central Asians also took this development as a window of opportunity to safeguard their economic interests by gaining massive Chinese investment in multiple projects mainly energy and minerals. This development seems interesting as China-Russia have emerged as a collaborator to bridge the security lapses and vacuum in Central Asian region. Russian policy makers might express their reservations in case the SCO attempts to project a Sino-centric order by extending outreach to other organization like NATO and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

In the regional politics, Russia will never accept a status undermining its traditional power and standing in the region. Moscow may appear as a competitor, if felt apprehensive of dominating Chinese role in the regional as well as global politics. Therefore, Moscow and Beijing will be pacing at parallel footing considering their economic and military strengths.¹⁵ To pacify the Russian's apprehensions, Chinese seem to be quite accommodative and have no designs to bridge the security vacuum/vulnerabilities in Central Asia especially in the post 2014 scenario. So far military cooperation is concerned, SCO provides legitimacy to Chinese

overture to Central Asia in view of its multilateral and bilateral drill with CARs along with Russia.¹⁶

In the backdrop of SCO's potential, capacity and capability, it is envisaged to be a noticeable addition to the existing world multilateral organizations in the foreseeable future. While reviewing the 'Modern Great Game', the SCO is emerging significantly to contain US influence in Central Asian region. Therefore, US watchdog might be seriously monitoring the activities of the SCO.

SCO and Afghanistan

SCO states, like other countries of the world, are very much concerned about the upcoming developments as a result of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014. Afghanistan being a breeding ground of militancy, terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking, transnational crimes and weaponization; convergence of all these factors lead to the security fragility not only in Afghanistan but the neighbouring states including SCO are equally vulnerable to its fall out. In this regard, SCO has to develop two prong strategy, that is, to beef up security measures alongwith borders, particularly Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and China to strictly restrict the move of undesirable activities and elements to SCO countries.

Secondly, this alliance can support future Afghan government in the domain of security by training Afghan National Army & Police and also play a proactive role in the development of energy and communication infrastructure. This will be a meaningful support towards peace and stability for Afghanistan and equally for regional countries. Therefore, SCO states believe that the SCO – Afghan contact group can positively contribute to this motive. The creation of a legal framework for the formulation of a comprehensive security doctrine to combat threats emanating from the precarious socio-politico-economic environment is the group's main task.¹⁷

SCO countries, in line with the framework of international programme for providing assistance to Afghanistan, are already actively involved in the uplift of social sector, economic and humanitarian assistance as well as training of government personnel from the departments of law enforcement agencies.¹⁸

Pakistan's Rationale to Join SCO

Pakistan is an ideally positioned country on the globe being at the crossroad of Central Asia, South West Asia and South Asia. Pakistan's credentials are quite bright on account of geo-political, geo-strategic and geo-economic aspects. Pakistan is a natural link between SCO countries, especially land locked CARs, Afghanistan, Xinxiang Province of China towards South i.e. Arabian Sea and the Middle East. Therefore, Pakistan's unique geography offers critical over land routes for interconnectivity for mutually beneficial trade and commercial activities; intra regionally and inter regionally. Nevertheless, besides trade flow of energy will be the top priority area. Pakistan can play a pivotal role in materializing North – south trade and energy corridor with the promising opportunities of road-rail and pipelines link upto Gwadar. Recently concluded Pak-China MoU on establishing of Kashghar – Gwadar road-rail network is an encouraging development in the right direction for the advantage of all regional stakeholders. Pakistan being an energy deficit country, her energy demands is growing gradually. At the moment 'energy crisis' is one of the most serious issues of the country. By joining SCO, Pakistan intends to meet her energy deficiency on perpetual basis. In this connection, trans-afghan pipeline project generally known as TAP (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan) will act as a milestone.

The likely extension of this pipeline to India, will further enhance the viability and importance of the project. That is why Pakistan proactively supports SCO's 'energy club'. Pakistan being cognizant of its security imperatives, is always mindful of maintaining strategic balance vis-à-vis India. SCO

will be an appropriate forum to initiate security dialogue with India. By being admitted to SCO, Pakistan would get an opportunity to improve Russia-Pakistan relations. Pakistan intends to play a constructive role in Afghanistan in the wake of US/NATO troops' withdrawal in December 2014. SCO will provide an opportunity to Pakistan to play a meaningful role towards peace, stability, security and rehabilitation under the platform of SCO while focusing on communication infrastructure, social sector (health & education) as well as training of personnel from public sector organizations.

Lastly, terrorism is a common enemy for all and challenging the security environment of the region. While joining hands with SCO, Pakistan will be able to strengthen its security apparatus with renewed vigour.

Opportunities for the SCO

By extending membership to Pakistan, there are numerous opportunities for the SCO as well to benefit from Pakistan. Pakistan being a very prominent regional player, can offer her expertise in certain areas albeit supporting SCO agenda. SCO can benefit from Pakistan in the following areas:-

- Pakistan in the aftermath of 9/11, has been constantly and effectively contributing her role to curb the menace of terrorism and extremism. Pakistan's achievements are noteworthy especially for successful launching of counter insurgency operations in Swat and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). SCO countries are also vulnerable to security issues particularly Russia facing Chechens, Chinese are apprehensive about the rise of Uyghur's in Xinxiang province and the CARs concerned about the upsurge of extremist elements in Farghana Valley of Central Asia. SCO can immensely benefit from the achievements made by Pakistan.
- Pakistan has had unique expertise at her credit to handle disasters and natural calamities like earthquake and floods etc. SCO members can enhance their

efficacy in this regard through the expertise and capabilities of Pakistan.

- Pakistan provides shortest route to SCO countries especially CARs for an access to covertly desired approach to Arabian Sea (warm waters), Persian Gulf and Middle East. Gwadar Port and proposed Kashghar – Gwadar road rail link in this regard will play a pivotal role.
- Growing Indo-US Strategic Partnership and emerging US Pivot Asia Strategy is a matter of concern for the SCO countries. This region is exposed to strategic imbalances. Additionally, US clear tilt towards India and Indian geo-political ambitions can be counter balanced with the support of Pakistan.
- Pakistan, being an active member of ECO, can play a facilitator role in promoting a link between the two organizations to boost up economic activities. Both the organizations represent a sizable geostrategic community for having many common members. Their economic collaboration will and definitely has a favourable impact on the overall security environment of the region. Therefore, collaboration of both organizations can help improve world peace and security and prosperity of over half of the humanity living in both the ECO and SCO regions.
- Pakistan has signed free trade agreements with ECO, SAARC and later China. Pakistan being a potential candidate of SCO, would serve as a trade multiplier factor particularly via Silk Route.

Opportunities for Pakistan

Pakistan's stakes and interests in SCO are equally important. Opportunities for Pakistan vis-à-vis SCO are outlined in the succeeding paragraphs.

Strategic Imperatives and Security

In the wake of withdrawal of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) from Afghanistan by December 2014,

the emerging regional security environment warrant immediate attention of all the stake holders. Keeping the principal security agenda of the alliance, that is, avoiding conflict through mutual confidence building and countering the menace of terrorism; Pakistan can gain advantage from both goals of the organization for following strategic gains.

- Pakistan is the major affectee being part of war against terrorism, and as a result of fragile security environment in Afghanistan, SCO countries are vulnerable to the threats of extremism and terrorism from neighbouring Afghanistan. In order to contain this phenomena, tactical expertise gained by SCO security personnel under the forum of RATS, can be extended to Pakistani security agencies. Pakistan can benefit from the diversified operational training to further beef up security measures.
- At the moment, SCO military personnel are experiencing all types of military operations. Likely participation of Pakistan in such type of joint operations can augment its joint services planning capabilities.
- Weapons and equipment at the inventory of Pakistan armed forces are mostly manufactured in the West, which are quite scare and costly as well. Under SCO framework, Pakistan will have an opportunity to look for other avenues for transfer of technology and expand defence collaboration with SCO alliance particularly Russia. Pakistan's Ex Chief of Army Staff, General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani's visit to Moscow in October 2012 is an explicit indication of this possibility.¹⁹
- The world's largest share of drugs are driven from Afghanistan and transited to different parts of the world mainly via Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. SCO's joint anti drug trafficking drills can help Pakistan not only through training of personnel (Anti Narcotics Task Force), but also intelligence sharing can help to expose the network of drugs barrens.

Economic Opportunities

Pakistan's admission to SCO can open many vistas of mutually beneficial economic cooperation between two sides. Economic opportunities will aim at earliest possible materialization of trade & energy corridor in the form of laying oil & gas pipelines (TAP) and road-rail link upto Gwadar. Trade and commerce, science and technology will be other potential areas of cooperation.

Political Imperatives

- The foremost political imperative is the improvement of bilateral relations with India. By admitting to SCO, Pakistan can use the leverage through SCO platform to resolve long outstanding disputes with India including the core issue of Jammu & Kashmir. It is hoped that SCO will play a vital role to convince both sides ending 'blame game' and channelizing energies for resolution of issues amicably. Correspondingly, India will also reap the dividends of Pak-India's bilateral relations in the form of her access to Central Asia via Lahore – Kabul and ultimately can linkup with the New Silk road project.
- The SCO forum can provide Pakistan an opportunity to further solidify its relations with China and improvement of bilateral relations with CARs. Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) will provide an edge to Pakistan in this regard.
- Pakistan's entrance into SCO grouping would lead to opening of new dimensions of cooperation with other countries of the region. It would also result in enhancing diplomatic activities and dignified place in the comity of nations.

Challenges for Pakistan

- The major challenge for Pakistan is to maintain strategic balance in her relations with US and China. Pakistan needs to be extra vigilant to pursue

geopolitical interests focusing economic development proactively engaging SCO countries. The concepts of 'Long War vis-à-vis Rising Peacefully' propagated by US and China respectively, combines the forces of 'conflict and peace' finding a new discourse in the world order contrary to the era of cold war.²⁰ Therefore, Pakistan has to chalk out a pragmatic diplomatic course, which is the real challenge.

- Pakistan has a very special role in the prevailing regional as well as global environment. Finding a rightful place in the emerging world order, indeed, is a challenge for Pakistan's foreign policy. The decade plus period of time after the tragic incident of 9/11, has been very distressful for Pakistan at internal and external front. Therefore, Pakistan has an urge for a rightful place in the comity of nations where its sacrifices against war on terrorism need to be acknowledged.
- Pakistan, despite playing a leading role in global war against terrorism, yet is the one of the biggest sufferer of terrorism and perceived abroad with suspicions. By actively joining forces against terrorism, Pakistan itself has become the target of terrorism, extremism and militancy. The initiatives taken by Pakistan to confront such tendencies required to be projected in true letter and spirit for improving image abroad. To meet these challenges, Pakistan's resolve needs appropriate projection.
- The political institutions could not attain maturity so far to function properly and to yield the fruits of democracy at gross root level. Governance, law and order, socio-economic justice is the utmost requirement to overcome the domestic failures and weaknesses. Also, there is a need to promote its image as a moderate, tolerant and progressive society.
- The statutes of SCO are not well elaborative for expansion of organization. Two leading members China and Russia do not seem to be in a hurry for its expansion. SCO's Secretary General has also argued that its expansion might affect the interverification of the cooperation.²¹ It is apprehended that Pakistan's

membership to SCO is subject to admission of India into the organization. Nonetheless, in view of Indo-US strategic partnership, India does not seem to be keen to join SCO.²² Twice absence of Indian Primer from SCO's summit is the clear reflection of Indian's non-seriousness towards organization. Considering these aspects, Pakistan's membership to SCO appears to be uncertain. It is the test of the diplomacy how to address such a paradoxical situation.

Recommendations

Considering the vitality and futuristic politico-economic outreach of the organization, a few recommendations from Pakistan's point of view are proffered.

Pakistan must reconfigure its priority area and improve relations with Russia, setting new goals and leaving behind the mistrust of the cold war era. Russian support to Pakistan for grant of observer status in SCO and conversely Pakistan's backup for Russia's bid for observer status in organization of Islamic Conference in 2005 is an explicit manifestation of urge of both sides for more cooperation. The potential bilateral areas in this regard are and Pak – Russia need to enhance political cooperation to develop strategic partnership while strengthening the regional cum international security order in preview of being SCO member status. There is a heavy potential to improve economic cooperation by boosting bilateral track and commercial activities especially energy, heavy industry, automobiles, aircraft industry, textile and agriculture etc. Russian expertise in energy export and pipeline projects can be exploited to promote regional economic integration of the region. Russian petroleum giant gas promotion has shown interest in laying of Iran – Pakistan and TAP pipeline projects.

Pakistan's presently heavy dependence on the US/West for her defence weapons & equipment can considerably be reduced by promoting defence ties with Russia. Russian's advancement in science & technology would enable initiation

of long term projects of mutual benefit. Russian expertise in space and armament could help Pakistan to further develop its defence industries. Continuation of Pak – China relationship based on the principles of mutuality of interests and shared perception is the utmost requirement. China's tacit support to Pakistan for her admission to SCO is of great significance. Pak – China ties serve as bedrock for its foreign policy agenda and pursuing solidification of relations with China in the consensus of the people of Pakistan across the board. These will orchestrate/frame foundations of relations warrant to transform into strategic partnership through. The fast changing geo-political environment in the region, proposed US drawdown from Afghanistan, rapidly growing security threats amid Indo-Pak continued row, demands further cementing strategic cooperation among both the countries. Interaction at senior level civil-military leadership can enhance cooperation and coordination at both globally and regionally and leading to deeping strategic cooperation between both the nations. The first ever trade agreement for mutual benefit and cooperation between both countries in 1953, Sino-Pak trade, which initially stood at 10 million dollars is now likely to increase upto 15 billion dollars.²³ The existing trade volume is likely to multiply manifolds with the materialization of Kashghar-Gwadar trade corridor. Five year development programme on trade and economic cooperation coupled with urge for enhanced energy resource development, information technology, infrastructural development will boost the existing economic cooperation between both the nations. Establishment of Chinese Confucius Institute at National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad and Pak-China Friendship Centre, Islamabad have led to enhance socio-cultural and educational exchanges. Exchange of youth festival, cultural troupe, tourism, sports and media have given a new direction to Pak-China ties. Promotion of tourism and playing of movies/dramas with subtitling in languages of respective countries will further boost closer understanding at people to people level. Pakistan is the major beneficiary as a result of defence cooperation between the two countries. There is a further need to consolidate the existing defence ties by promoting joint ventures especially towards production of

weapons and equipment including avionics, main battle tank, naval frigates to attain the goal of self reliance in defence production. Central Asia is of great importance to Pakistan due to its prime geostrategic proximity and hydrocarbon potential. Pakistan being the closest approach for CARs towards South, Persian Gulf, Middle East and rest of the World, would be better served on the SCO platform. In order to transform the existing interaction of political leadership of both sides into a meaningful cooperation, establishment of road rail link is the most appropriate way to end the land locked position of CARs. This will bring a new dimension to trade and commercial activities not only between both the nations but with the rest of SCO nations as well. Since security situation in Afghanistan is likely to remain fragile even after the withdrawal of ISAF troops, so the alternative options are required to be considered. In this connection, the construction of only 36 km long road connecting Pak-Tajik border via Wakhan strip seems to be a feasible direct link with Central Asian region.²⁴After the up-gradation of Karakoram Highway, Pakistan will be linked up with CARs, however, connecting Central Asia through road-rail link even via Iran needs to be evaluated. Nevertheless, it is hoped that multiple road-rail links via Afghanistan will remain the most desirable options subject to peace and security in Afghanistan. Few steps will facilitate further enhancing relations between both the side like; enhanced cultural exchanges, tourism, media managers and experts in trade & commerce, monetary and financial institutions and agriculturists, scientists, educationists and students; facilitating visa and travel restrictions for both sides; Closed cooperation in security issues to curb the menace of terrorism, extremism and radicalization; extending defence cooperation by offering more vacancies to CARs Defence Forces Personnel in Pakistan training academies; and offering training to CARs' young diplomats, also helping CARs to establish financial institutions to pace with the practices of market economy.

The continued sensitivity, fragility and strained relations between Pakistan and India amid unresolved multiple issues posing a potential security threat not only to South Asia but

rest of the regional countries are likely to be affected with no exception to SCO bloc. SCO can play a meaningful role to bring both countries closer to each other under its ambit. A few suggested measures in this regard are indeed trade is the engine of growth and prosperity in the era of geo-economics. Indian urge to linkup with Central Asia, through Afghanistan/silk route, extension of proposed oil & gas pipelines from Central Asia and Iran are only possible via Pakistan. For this, SCO can pursue India to settle the long outstanding issues with Pakistan including the core issue of Kashmir. India being the biggest supporter of promoting trade & commercial activities at all levels, needs to seriously ponder upon resolving issues with Pakistan for sustainable peace and stability in the region.

Conclusion

Consolidation of SCO in the wake of a unipolar world is a blessing in disguise for regional countries in general and Pakistan in particular. SCO has provided a meaningful opportunity to develop confidence among the member states as well as regional countries for the promotion of peace, security and stability by addressing the irritants among intra regional and inter regional states. Now, it is imperative for SCO to positively engage the world media to project its policies and objectives and achievements ever since its evaluation to the present day. The organization must realize the world especially the West that despite possessing a strategic power potential, the alliance has no design to emerge as a 'NATO of the East or a Club of Authoritarians'.

Pakistan's admission to SCO as a full member will be significant both in regional and global context. Pakistan could serve as a hub for promotion of trade and energy corridor, hence possesses capability to make a yielding contribution to SCO and provide a feasible link between SCO states and South Asia. Nevertheless, Pakistan's membership to SCO is fraught with number of challenges and foremost is its relations with India. Ironically, India does not seem to be keen in joining SCO after conducting strategic partnership with USA. Now the

choice is with Indian policy makers either to settle the issues with Pakistan for access to Central Asia to materialize its ambition of 'North-South Trade Corridor' or go for status quo. Pakistan needs to keep pursuing consistently its policy towards Russia for promotion of politico-strategic interests in the region. Also, focus should remain on Afghanistan in the post 2014 scenario. SCO with the collaboration and support of Pakistan can tangibly play a crucial role in reconstruction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan. A secured, stable and peaceful Afghanistan will be in the interest of all stake holders including regional and extra regional players and ultimately leading to a peaceful world.

Notes

¹Liselotte Odgaard, “SCO’ Multilateralism in Central Asia”, Peter Dahl Thruelsen (ed.) *International Organizations: The Role in Conflict Management*, (Copenhagen: Royal Danish Defence College, 2009), 182.

² Ibid.

³Shulong, 2003, 187.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Sznajder, 2006, 99.

⁶Nivedita Das Kundu, “SCO, BRIC and RIC: Bringing together Two Asian Economic Powers India and China”. Sudhir Kumar Singh (ed.). *Sino-Indian Relations: Challenges and Opportunities for 21st Century*. (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2011), 142.

⁷Mehmoodul Hassan Khan, “Dynamics of SCO and Diversified Opportunities for Pakistan”, *Defence Journal*, July 2006, 60.

⁸Navinda, 2011, 142.

⁹Mehmoodul Hassan Khan, “Dynamics of SCO and Diversified Opportunities for Pakistan”, *Defence Journal*, July 2006, 60.

¹⁰Peter, 2009, 191.

¹¹ Zhao Husaheng, “China’s View and Expectation from the SCO”, *Asian Survey*, Vol: 53, No: 3 (May-June 2013), 443.

¹²Zhao, 2013, 440.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵Peter, 2009, 189.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷BalbaevaGulkaiyr, “SCO’s Role in Peace Building in Afghanistan”, (ed.), Maqsudul Hasan Nuri, Muhammad Munir, Aftab Hussain, *Stabilizing Afghanistan: Regional Perspective and Prospects*, Islamabad Policy Research Institute, 2011, 145-146.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Sergei Strokan, Kommersant, “Pakistan and Russia move closer toward military cooperation,” *Russia Beyond The Headlines*, October 10 2012, http://rbth.ru/articles/2012/10/10/pakistan_and_russia_move_closer_toward_military_cooperation_18965.html (accessed November 6, 2013).

²⁰ Shamshad Ahmed Khan, “SCO and Prospects for Peace”, *National Development and Security*, Vol XIV: No. 1 (Autumn 2005), 15.

²¹ Shamshad, 2005,17.

²² Shamshad, 2005,18.

²³ Potential of Pak-China trade not being exploited, *The Express Tribune, with The International New York Times*, December 24, 2010, at <http://tribune.com.pk/story/93721/potential-of-pak-china-trade-not-being-exploited/> (Accessed November 4, 2013).

²⁴ The point highlighted by Prof DrKamoludinAbdullaev, Independent Hisotiran/Academic Researcher on Central Asian/Afghan Security Issues: Self Employed, Tajikistan Center for Citizenship Education, Tajik Scholar during his talk at a seminar titled *The Heart of Asia* held at National Defence University, Islamabad on 17 September 2013.