The Role of Shanghai Cooperation Organization in the Resolution of Indo-Pak Conflicts: Future Prospects and Recommendations

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ABSTRACT

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is one of the most significant regional organizations in the world. The international political order is changing with the convergence of interests of rising China and resurgent Russia due to which the role of SCO in Asia has increased manifold. Both these states are focused on regional integration that would realign the global and regional political environment focused towards East. These two global players can play a productive role via the SCO platform to create readiness for both India and Pakistan in the regional diplomacy for the resolution of conflicts. SCO and its primary members have extensive experience in the resolution of territorial disputes and building confidence, as the initial Shanghai-Five was established to solve border and territory disputes among members. Confidence Building Measures and conflict resolution among India and Pakistan can be achieved by utilizing various diplomatic channels of SCO. these channels will lead to track one and two diplomacies. SCO can be constructive in achieving sustainable peace between India and Pakistan, which would, in turn, lead to a prosperous region. With the inclusion of India and Pakistan as permanent members in SCO, the future looks promising and the Asian Century is on the cards. This article is an attempt to highlight the significance of SCO as a platform for India and Pakistan to attain sustainable peace and perpetual cooperation.

Keywords: Pakistan India Relations, Territorial Disputes, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Problem-Solving, Dispute Resolution, A new Approach.

Introduction

The independent nations of Pakistan and India, ever since their inception, both are living as the world's bitterest neighbors. And on top of that both are nuclear powers. Pakistan and India have fought three wars based on a root conflict of Kashmir. In addition to that, both have had numerous conflicts between them since 1947. To resolve these conflicts, they have extensively used the platforms of International Organizations and their good offices. A couple of glaring examples; the United Nations and its subsidiary bodies such as the United Nations Security Council and its resolutions on the Kashmir issue, though unsuccessful as of today.

On the contrary, the Indus Water Treaty brokered by World Bank in 1960, was a successful conflict resolution with the help of an international financial institution. But conflict resolution between India and Pakistan through Western-backed International Organizations was not successful; the United Nations Security Council completely failed in the application of its resolutions and thus a futile attempt in resolving the Kashmir dispute. And due to this lingering conflict, violence flares often in the shape of terrorist attacks, cross-fire on the line of control and espionage warfare to destabilize each other.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is an emerging regional alliance that has enormous potential and capacity to integrate the whole of Asian region. It consists of China, Russia, and the Central Asian Republics (CARs) (Richard, 2006). It also has observer states among which Pakistan and India have now been granted the full membership. The inclusion of India and Pakistan is a step taken by the SCO that manifests its expansionist design encompassing the region of South Asia. Its expansion shows that its main objective is to integrate the region of Asia on the aspects of security, economic cooperation, conflict resolution among state, peaceful coexistence and shared progress. It is an all-inclusive platform for exercising independent diplomacy, shared economic goals, address shared security concerns and a platform to strengthen regional alliances.

The inclusion of Pakistan and India in the SCO has given an opportunity to the region of South Asia to revert to its glory days; by getting out of the acrimony due to the strained relationship between India and Pakistan. The age-old bitter rivalry and disharmony caused by India and Pakistan have caused instability which consequently impeded the true potential of this region. This rivalry and disharmonious nature also have another significant aspect that is both countries have nuclear weapons. This nuclear aspect guarantees that instability and conflict are not only detrimental for the region but it is also a zero-sum game for India and Pakistan. The contemporary international political environment demands that Pakistan and India should resolve their disputes and end hostility on common grounds of peaceful co-existence and mutual progress which will prove to be a stepping stone towards the stability of the Asia region. This can be achieved with the help of the SCO and its efficient tools for exercising diplomatic and political maneuvering to resolve pending issues of both states.

The Significance of Regional Organizations in the Stability and Peaceful Resolution of Conflicts

In the contemporary era of hyper globalization and connectivity, states have realized that it is against rational thinking to stay in the isolation. It has become objectively important for states to integrate into a network that would bring winwin situations for all. This situation will develop an environment of peaceful coexistence and interdependence that would discourage harmful activities across borders. Regional Organizations are established on common grounds shared by all the states that they are in geographical proximity to each other. Thereby, they have

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common problems and because of this context, the problems can be addressed efficiently by establishing a platform governed by systematic rules and by working together rather than in isolation.

But there is a school of thought prevalent in contemporary time that is against the idea of the effectiveness of regional organizations. They are of the view that regional organizations are limited in nature and they can be easily manipulated by the powerful member states, depending upon their interests. The decision making and narrative building are backed by economic, political and strategic objectives in international organizations. Scholars are also of the view that these regional organizations have developed a systematic framework that allows them to play a pivotal role in the resolution of regional conflicts along with achieving socioeconomic goals serving shared agendas. Regional Organizations are taken as viable options for promoting peace, resolving conflicts, and maintaining stability. These regional organizations share the burden of the United Nations in promoting peace and stability in their respective regions by integrating states based on close geographical proximity, desire for the promotion of peace and stability in the region and economic development of the region (Connie, 1998).

Due to this reason, the significance of regional organizations grows manifold; the United Nations as the biggest international organization of the world has given the responsibility of stability of peace and resolution of local conflicts to the respective organizations. Therefore, the states have a moral obligation to be a part of these regional organizations to interact more effectively in a regional setting. There are very few examples of successful conflict resolutions on national and bilateral levels; conflicts are profound and reaching a national consensus is a herculean task. That is precisely why regional cooperation can play a role in creating diplomatic and political pressure to reach a consensus to resolve a conflict. Scholars have played a crucial part to highlight the importance of regional organizations follow to achieve sustainable peace and resolving conflicts among member states.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization Approach to Conflict Resolution

The SCO has a framework that has several steps and methodologies for cooperation in various aspects for its regional members. These areas of focus are as follows:

- Socio-cultural Cooperation
- Regional Security Cooperation
- Regional Military Cooperation
- Sustainable Economic Progress Cooperation
- Diplomatic Cooperation

In this paper, the main focus will be on the security and military aspects of cooperation for conflict resolution between India and Pakistan and how SCO was successful in these domains previously. The mechanisms of security and diplomacy can be utilized by the permanent members of the SCO to gain benefits by reducing tensions among them and resolving their disputes.

The SCO Approach to Defuse Regional Disputes Successfully

"The SCO's main goals are as follows: strengthening mutual trust and neighborliness among the member states; promoting their effective cooperation in politics, trade, the economy, research, technology and culture, as well as in education, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection, and other areas; making joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region; and moving towards the establishment of a democratic, fair and rational new international political and economic order" (Shanghai Cooperation Organization Secretariat, 2015-2020).

The SCO has a specific step by step model to address conflicts successfully. This model dates back to the time even before the nascent age of the organization. In the early years before the formation of the SCO, the founding members of this organization peacefully transformed their relationships and resolved their disputes gradually via a proper mechanism, that mechanism was developed over time. This model paved the way for conflict resolution in the region and in turn, regional stability and security assurance was made possible between Russia, Central Asian Republics and China. The border dispute between these countries was resolved peacefully by implementing a step by step mechanism. This border dispute resolution via step by step model paved way for the formation of the SCO, and this mechanism was then termed as the Shanghai Spirit. This term was used as a symbolic statement to honor the value, dedication and hard work put forth by the concerning states. The Shanghai Spirit is the core value of the SCO, it has played a pivotal role in the safeguard of the regional security and stability and promotion of mutual sustainable development. All the collaborative programs are backed and powered by this spirit in the region. Every new member of the SCO is also expected to honor this spirit and to abide by the norms, customs, and values with true dedication towards cooperation, peaceful co-existence and conflict resolution.

Military Confidence Building Measures between States

In 1996, Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (the key members) started diplomatic negotiations and talks on border issues, which resulted in the unanimous agreement of border demarcation and high level of security along the border. These states reached an agreement known as the 'Five-Power Agreement', this agreement governed the regulation of military activity in the areas surrounding the borders of these states. This agreement proved to be the first step towards strengthening mutual trust and confidence among the states and it resolved the

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very first issue of trust deficit, all the primary member states agreed to abide by the agreement in letter and spirit. This agreement towards peace building, confidence measure building, and regional security were first of its kind in the Asia Pacific region. It de-escalated the tension and conflict between the states and proved as the first step towards conflict resolution. This agreement stopped states from any military escalation and cross border jingoism and it also barred states from conducting military exercises against other states. Even if the military exercises were conducted, they were of small scale and in a restricted area, and additionally, the other states were informed prior to the training. Invitations to the observers of other states were extended invitations for the exercises and they were also informed before the execution of any operation. Moreover, there were efforts to initiate friendly relationships between the border security personnel as a part of CBMs. The leaders of these five countries took important decisions and reached an agreement in the Shanghai Summit for the improvement of military relations and further they agreed upon the high-level meeting on an annual basis. These yearly meetings proved fruitful in addressing small conflicts through dialogues that were previously sidelined. These meetings proved to be productive for all the member states in their integration and long-term contact building.

The Establishment of the Shanghai Five

The successful resolution of the border issues in a region where territorial and other conflicts were lingering for ages, was no less than a milestone for the primary member states. And this significant landmark was achieved via a mechanism known as the spirit of 'Shanghai Five'. The member states held meetings on an annual basis and inked various constructive agreements. These meetings were held in each of the five states, their leaders and other high-end officials. These agreements made it possible for the member countries to co-exist in a peaceful manner, which provided for sustainable economic growth. It also initiated an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect for sovereignty that is even portrayed today. This act of cooperation, conflict resolution, and transformation from bitter relationships toward a relationship based on trust and shared objectives, is an ideal example of success in any regional organization in international relations. These states collaborated on a number of issues such as counterterrorism, human trafficking, white-collar crime, economic programs, mitigating extremism and battling organized crime. The successful CBMs, military dialogues, resolution of border disputes, friendly relations on borders, minimization of arms and deterrence on shared borders led to the initiation of the third step; a transformation to a multilateral level.

Malik Waqar Aslam & Muhammad Musab Saeed Modification in the Conflict Resolution Mechanism

In 1997, a change in the mechanism took place when negotiations transformed from bilateral to multilateral among the primary members; the Shanghai Five states. At the start, the approach and format were limited to two-way talks; a bilateral approach, this was transformed and expanded into a multilateral level, which included all of the five-member states. This step paved the way for a pattern that introduced the new ideas and views on the economy, politics, social issues, diplomacy, and military & security cooperation in the border region of all the five adjoining states. This led to an environment where these states started to support each other and developed a mutual understanding of peaceful co-existence and started to cooperate with one another.

The Dimensions of Indo-Pak Conflict Resolution through the Lens of the SCO

Pakistan and India both are entangled in a plethora of conflicts that have hindered theirs as well as the region's full potential to develop and progress in all aspects. These conflicts are the result of the acrimonious relationship since the inception of both of these states. Besides bilateral conflicts, the region of South Asia is facing several problems such as war, terrorism, extremism, territorial disputes, water disputes, humanitarian crisis, poverty, socio-political problems, cross-border skirmishes, and unstable security situation. Over the past, so many years, the loss in terms of the human cost was manifold for both India and Pakistan (V., 2006). The national and regional political scenario is unstable due to the disharmonious nature of the relationship between both states. The underlying foundational reason behind the deteriorating relationship is the opposing view of the population of both states on the ideological grounds. And secondly, the creation of Pakistan and the division of united India was against the Hindu ideology, which caused the religious as well as the ideological rift between the two populations. And lastly, the bone of contention between the two states is neither religious nor ideological but territorial; it is the issue of Kashmir.

Due to these issues, the conflicts between the two states persists and lingers on, consequently, the whole region is suffering, the ripple effects of the conflicts between India and Pakistan can be felt throughout the region in the form of underdevelopment, instability, and insecurity. There are other regional organizations working in the region such as ASEAN, SAARC, and ECO, these organizations have the potential as well as capacity to create a peaceful environment and regional integration in the region but they have failed to do so and could not achieve regional integration, stability and security. One of the main reasons for their failure to achieve desired goals is that they lacked a certain balance of power and effective cooperation among the member states. This balance of power and balance of relationships is an important factor in the implementation of decisions and initiating strategies transparently. This is further evident in the case of SAARC; India, as being the most powerful politically, economically, militarily and globally, maintains an assertive position towards other member states. It takes decisions and makes other weaker members take the same decision that serves its interests (Mirza, 2009). Due to India's aggressive position, smaller states in the region are reluctant to work with India on the same platform, furthermore, they also fear India's domination, they are of the view that entering into cooperation with India results in admitting its domination (Muni, 1996).

So, for economic development, regional stability and security of South Asia, an objective, comprehensive and balanced regional organization is suitable. This organization must have power symmetry, a unanimous agreement among member states and will to cooperate. These sorts of capabilities is included in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, an all-inclusive, comprehensive, expanding regional security and economic alliance of the Asian region with two of the world's most powerful players in the global arena; Russia and the Republic of China as its permanent members. Both these states are key players in international politics and economy, and both can play a strong role in the integration of the Asia region and can also play their part in the conflict resolution of member states as facilitators. Both the superpowers; China as being the economic superpower and Russia as being the leader in the global political spectrum are supportive of the inclusion of both India and Pakistan in the organization and also favors the idea both India and Pakistan should resolve their disputes for the greater good of the region in terms of mitigating terrorism, attaining regional security and stability and paving a way for sustainable economic growth by countering economic underdevelopment of the region (Dawn News, 2017).

China's response on the inclusion of India and Pakistan in the SCO was commendable, Chinese President Xi Jinping, at the 18th Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization expressed his views, "We need to actively implement the 2019-2021 program of cooperation for combating 'three evil forces of terrorism, separatism, and extremism;' continue to conduct the 'Peace Mission' and other joint counter-terrorism exercises...We need to give full play to the role of SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group to facilitate peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan" (The Diplomat, 2019).

In addition to that, Russian President Putin welcomed the accession of India and Pakistan to the SCO. He emphasized that "countering terrorism remains the priority for cooperation within the SCO," stressing on the agenda adopted in the 18th Summit, "envisions holding joint drills and counter-terror operations, streamlining a closer exchange of experience and operational information." He also encouraged the SCO Youth Council to "actively participate in our work on preventing the recruitment of young people to participate in terrorist activities." (The Diplomat, 2019). Therefore, Pakistan and India both should join hands to

oust the menace of terrorism, poverty, instability, and insecurity from South Asia (The Times of India, 2017).

The Application of Readiness Theory Among Major States of South Asia

William Zartman gave ripeness/readiness theory in the study of international conflict and it is one of the most significant theories that propagate about motivation in conflict resolution. In his theory, Zartman explains the different dynamics of this theory, according to him, conflicting parties or states are made to sit on the negotiation table by creating an artificial or natural environment that motivates states to talk and redress their grievances and disagreements (Duestch, 1983). A peace process is initiated and is supervised by the mediators and diplomats. This peace process is achieved through dedicated diplomatic pressure and the conflicting states feel optimistic about the result of talks and negotiations. Readiness and Ripeness theory explains successful conflict resolution through the help of mediation and facilitation (Cantekin, 2016). Mediation is more beneficial in nature as compared to bilateral agreements because it is less prone to infringement as can be seen in the historical contextualization of India and Pakistan where bilateral agreements were not honored. Russia and China both can exert positive diplomatic pressure on both India and Pakistan in contemporary regional political settings. An artificial environment can be created by both superpowers to make Pakistan and India address their age-old lingering disputes and conflicts to move together towards a better and brighter future in terms of economic development, political and security stability that will be beneficial for the whole region let alone Pakistan and India. In present-day international relations scenario, Pakistan is in a favorable position as both Russia and China are more inclined towards Pakistan. Both these powerful international players have consented to support Pakistan against any sanctions imposed by the US in the United Nations Security Council and will be vetoed right away. On the other hand, Turkey, a brotherly state, also extends its support to Pakistan in various projects in Afghanistan to promote sustainable regional peace. Keeping in view this progressive cooperation among states, Kong Xuoanyouin, China's Assistant Foreign Minister, at the inclusion of Pakistan and India in the SCO, said, 'With the admission of Pakistan and India in the SCO, the bilateral channels have expanded and transformed, and now this platform can provide an opportunity for both states to solve their long-standing conflicts.'

Furthermore, China believes that the adverse relationship between Pakistan and India will improve rather than aggravate after the inclusion of both states in the SCO. It is evident in the charter of the SCO, keeping in account the clause, he said, "In the charter of the SCO there is a clause that the hostility between the bilateral relations should not be brought to the organization. I believe both the countries will abide by the charter of the organization." (Siddiqui, 2018). He also added that the SCO has its own set of rules and regulations which all other

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members' states have to follow. This is a pre-requisite set by the founding members of the SCO, all the members, whether new or old, have to honor and adhere to the principles and values of 'Shanghai Spirit.' India and Pakistan will not be an exception; both states will set aside their differences and begin with a new start based on mutual respect, trust, and cooperation (The Times of India, 2017). Both China and Russia are dedicated to inculcating sustainable peace in the region and this is manifested by their diplomatic maneuvering, pressure, and collaboration with both the conflicting states. China and Russia are extensively collaborating with both India and Pakistan on various aspects such as regional security, economy projects, science, higher education, and infrastructural developments. The new government in Pakistan is enjoying good diplomatic relations and close collaboration with Eurasian states; Turkey, Russia, China, and Iran. This cordial start is projecting a promising future for Pakistan and South Asia region. Academicians and scholars are of the view that a new bloc is on the cards consisting of these states, which would play a role in the defense of Pakistan from the aggression of western-backed powers in the future. And the biggest diplomatic gain Pakistan has achieved in recent years is the support of two veto-wielding superpowers, these states have pledged that if there are any proposal of economic sanctions on Pakistan at the UNSC, it won't get approved and will be vetoed instantly (First Post, 2017). Pakistan can carry this support and diplomatic momentum in SCO as both these superpowers are mediators and facilitators and will play a crucial role in resolving disputes among conflicting states in the region. As of now, India and Pakistan lock horns on a periodical basis and fierce crossborder skirmishes in front of the international community. India, in this regard, manifests its assertive and dominating nature in the region due to which the regional peace gets disturbed; this Indian hegemony idea can irk its close ally; Russia as well as the SCO. This will result in a severe setback to India's foreign policy and its claim of playing a positive role in regional peace promotion. Moreover, the assertive nature of Trump administration against Pakistan has resulted in the tilt of Pakistan's foreign policy towards Russia, this tilt is now based on close relations and all the more needed support from Russia, China and Turkey on Afghanistan issue (Polina, 2017). Additionally, Russia and China have shared objectives for the region and common interests with Pakistan on the Afghanistan issue.

Counter-Terrorism Measures in SCO via Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)

The nuisance of terrorism has plagued the region of South Asia, especially Pakistan and to some extent India. India has always complained about terrorism and blamed Pakistan for aiding and granting haven to terrorists. In this regard, SCO RATS can aptly address the problem of terrorism for both Pakistan and India. SCO RATS was established with an objective to combat terrorism, extremism, and

separatism in the Asia region (RATS SCO, 2013). Higher authorities of RATS have conducted multilateral state meetings for cooperation in the domain of security. These meetings are conducted for strengthening the anti-terrorist apparatus of SCO and to mitigate the menace of terrorism in the region. In 2018, Legal experts of SCO RATS met their counter-parts in Islamabad and discussed the matter of regional cooperation on security and countering terrorism. Legal experts from all the member states attended the meeting along with the SCO RATS executive committee (Radio Pakistan, 2018).

The Resolution of Kashmir Dispute via SCO

The member states of SCO can discuss their issues at multiple levels. Not only are the disputes negotiated in high-level official meetings, but also on the sidelines, during break or after the meeting. These side meetings are conducting by conflicting members as well as other primary members. The issue of Kashmir between India and Pakistan is as old as time. The platform of SCO and its mechanism of conflict resolution is most suitable for territorial disputes because of its extensive experience and successful resolutions of territorial and border disputes. The primary members of SCO, with the help of a step-by-step pattern and approach, solved their border issues. In this regard, SCO can play a productive role in the resolution of the Kashmir issue with the help of track one and track two diplomacies (Zaybb, 2006). China and Russia both can create a favorable environment for negotiations between both states. Furthermore, other channels such as RATS can address the issue of terrorism in the region that will answer the worries of India. Pakistan and India should work in close collaboration, intention, and dedication towards the resolution of the deep-rooted issue of Kashmir. Both states should prioritize the will and determination of the Kashmiri people to attain a sustainable peace in the region. The platform of SCO with the help of China and Russia can devise a solution that would be acceptable for Pakistan, India and the people of Kashmir.

Recommendations for Pakistan to Secure its Interests in SCO

First and foremost, Pakistan needs to secure its economic interests by maximizing the utilization of the platform of SCO. And it should further strengthen partnership with its all-weather friend, China.

Second, Pakistan can pave a way for strengthening SCO with the help of the CPEC corridor. The CPEC can open doors for development and progress for the whole region.

Third, the China-Russia sphere can bring Pakistan and India closer to each other and can create normalization between them. China and Russia are playing a crucial role in bringing India out of the Western sphere and engaging it in cooperation for sustainable peace, though this step can take a lot of time.

Future Prospects and Recommendations

All the member states of SCO are unanimously committed to supporting the BRI project except India which was manifested in Qingdao Declaration (Chaudhary, 2018). SCO should bring India on board for the greater good of the region.

Pakistan is an experienced state in countering terrorism and Pakistan should share its expertise with RATS and other members of the SCO. Moreover, Pakistan should persuade SCO members to play their part in the restoration of peace in the war-ridden Afghanistan region.

Pakistan's neighbor Iran is interested in being part of CPEC projects and it has also extended its full support to the BRI project as well. Iran also seeks permanent membership in SCO and Pakistan should support the bid of Iran's membership. In this way, Iran and Pakistan can join hands in the collaborative use of Gwadar and Chabahar ports and consequently, this will achieve SCO's goal of development and progress of the region.

Pakistan should work closely with Russia and create an atmosphere of trust and friendship on the common grounds of attaining stability and peace in Afghanistan.

Pakistan should import oil and gas resources from Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan to fulfill its energy needs. Furthermore, Pakistan should also build cordial relations with the Central Asian States and should work on creating more higher education opportunities for local students in these states.

Conclusion

Pakistan and India have deep-rooted issues and conflicts which can be resolved on the platform of SCO. SCO was successful in the amelioration of cross-border tensions, settlement of disputes and creating confidence-building measures among the member states. The factors behind the undisputed success of SCO: transparent working and its framework. These attributes enabled long-term cooperation, sustainable peace, mutual trust and understanding among the Shanghai-Five. SCO also has to capability to instill readiness among India and Pakistan via assertive diplomacy and regional unanimity. Thus, SCO has appeared to be one of a kind regional organization that has the potential to normalize the relations between India and Pakistan. The process of conflict resolution can be made more efficient by the initiation of cooperation among India and Pakistan on different forums of SCO such as economy, security, social and culture. This step will create a conducive atmosphere for the transformation of the conflict from bilateral to multilateral and eventually to a negotiation table for conflict resolution.

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