



In search of identity

The 12th summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was held in Beijing. During the summit, the SCO members – Russia, China, and Central Asian states discussed the issue of setting up a special fund and ways to have a significant role in stabilizing Afghanistan after the withdrawal of US led troops at the end of 2014. The summit was more significant as the organization had crossed the threshold of the second decade of its existence. It was founded on 15 June 2001 in Shanghai by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan on the basis of the Shanghai Five active since 1996. Iran, India, Mongolia, Pakistan and now Afghanistan are the observer states. Belarus and Sri Lanka became SCO dialogue partners in 2010. The participation of officials representing the United Nations, the CIS, the Eurasian Economic Community and the Collective Security Treaty Organization gave the event a new dimension converting it into an international forum of global scale and importance.

Agenda of the summit: The most significant outcome of the summit was the unanimous rejection of military intervention by any country as a way to resolve international hotspot issues, including Syria and Iran's nuclear issue.

- The Syrian crisis topped the agenda of the summit. The leaders discussed about the 2011-12 Syrian uprising and criticism by the Western world of Russia and China's approach towards sanctioning the government of Syria.
- The SCO envisioned supporting a new security concept for its member states by giving them full control over maintaining their own interests.
- The summit aimed to discuss the rules for admission of new member states. But the summit leaders decided that observers were unlikely to be given full membership at the moment as there were expectations for more preparatory work.
- Other issues suggested for discussion were a bigger role for SCO after NATO withdraws its forces following the War in Afghanistan.
- Iran's nuclear programme also figured prominently during the discussions.
- The leaders also discussed the issue of signing an inter-governmental agreement on road transport, along with the continuation of discussions on the establishment of financing safeguard mechanism and a regional development bank.

Declaration: The member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) adopted in Beijing the Declaration on Building a Region with Lasting Peace and Common Prosperity. The heads of state noted the ongoing complex changes in the international system since the beginning of the 21st century, featuring an increasingly multi-polar landscape, stronger regional coordination, deepening globalization, closer interdependence between countries and a larger role for information technologies. In these circumstances it is imperative for the international community to meet global challenges through effective and concerted actions.

Highlights:

- The member states called on the international community to work for the peaceful co-existence and dialogue between civilizations, seek consensus, promote coordinated and sustainable development and build closer state-to-state relations on the basis of universally recognized rules and principles of the international law.
- The declaration highlighted the fact that it is important to promote a new security concept featuring mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination in international relations, and build an indivisible security space in the world where the interests of all countries are respected.
- The declaration supported the idea of building a world free of nuclear weapons and in strict compliance with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.
- The member states reaffirmed their commitment to ensure outer space security, peaceful use of outer space and prevention of outer space weaponisation.
- The SCO declaration envisioned that all the member states will respect the sovereignty of each other and will not interfere in the internal matters of other nations.
- The declaration wanted all the nations to step up their bilateral and multilateral

cooperation to jointly combat terrorism, separatism, and extremism.

- The declaration supported Afghanistan's effort to build an independent, neutral, peaceful, prosperous country free of terrorism and drug related crimes. The SCO is of the view that the national reconciliation process in Afghanistan should be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned.

Shifting towards East: One of the visible outcomes of the SCO summit, 2012 is the expansion of the number of SCO's observers. Afghanistan has now joined Mongolia, India, Pakistan and Iran in this status. Turkey has now been granted the status of SCO's dialogue partner. Earlier, this status was granted to Belarus and Sri Lanka. The growing number of SCO's partners has a geopolitical significance. The SCO's expansion is one of the signs of the fact that the focus of the multi-polar world is shifting to the east.

Chinese stand on SCO: China described the SCO's mission as a quest for a new model of partnership for regional organisation and therefore did not indicate that the SCO would ever evolve into a military and political bloc.

Why SCO is important for India?

1. Considering the vast gas resources, India can get better opportunity to fulfill its energy requirement. The SCO brings together some of the most important energy-producing and energy-consuming countries.
2. It is a security organisation that focuses on regional stability. Fighting terrorism, religious extremism and political separatism forms the core of the SCO's agenda. In this sphere, India has shared concerns with the SCO member countries.
3. The SCO supplements India's Look East policy of engaging the South-East Asian region. The SCO is also entering into institutional linkages with the ASEAN.
4. SCO is not intrusive; it works on the basis of consensus; it respects national sovereignty. In fact, it attributes primacy to national sovereignty, firmly rejecting interventionism of any kind or pretext.
5. The SCO offers vast scope for economic cooperation. It is gearing up for regional projects in infrastructure development, energy and communications. In the not-too-distant future, it is bound to develop a common market.
6. SCO is more rational than NATO as it attends to political and economic matters. As for the military component, it is not properly a military, but an antiterrorist component.

Indian Stand: (1) Some Central Asian countries are keen on making India a full SCO member

but New Delhi is seeking a clearer definition of its role and functions as an observer. At 12th summit, India renewed its pitch for full membership of the six-nation Shanghai Cooperation Organization and backed the grouping's role in stabilizing Afghanistan.(2) As an observer, India wants to be a hands-on participant, especially in improving trade, economic and cultural linkages. (3) It is especially interested in being a participant in banking, economic and similar trade and development-related forum set by the SCO. (4) India has stressed that given the geographical contiguity of all SCO states with Afghanistan and their collective efforts to counter terrorism, the SCO could be an effective regional platform to stabilize Afghanistan in the run-up to the withdrawal of the US-led international coalition troops from that country.

The SCO summit, 2012 made substantial achievement in expanding its geopolitical influence to a larger area through cooperation and dialogue with these countries. After the successful expansion of SCO, it can be hoped that SCO can play a larger role in international financial and economic affairs since its member nations are talking about cooperation expansion from security to banking areas. The establishment of the SCO development bank and special account to advance regional economic development was an important part of economic agenda of the 2012 summit. Gradual transition to national currencies settlements and financing joint projects is a great step forward on the way to gradual economic integration. The member states have agreed to enhance cooperation in transportation, energy, telecommunications and agriculture.

They also believe it is necessary to promote cultural and educational exchanges and expand people-to-people contacts and social interaction. Another important area where the SCO member nations showed commitment was to strengthen joint security policy. Finally, it can be concluded that the SCO is in for some serious changes. The crises in the Middle East triggered by the Arab Spring, the withdrawal of ISAF from Afghanistan, the growing number of hotbeds in different regions - it all calls for the intensification of the SCO efforts to strengthen regional security. The summit confirmed the intention to jointly counter the challenges.