



India and Uzbekistan in SCO: Security Perspective

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DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17896979>

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Accepted: 17-11-2025

Published: 10-12-2025

Keywords:

South Asia, Connectivity, New Dynamic Vision, New Uzbekistan, Geostrategic, Geopolitics.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in the context of India and Uzbekistan in the changing of geopolitics in Asian security architecture which is dynamic and effective regional organization as an emerging the foreign policy of India in the 21st century. After the recognition of India's membership in SCO as a permanent of its continuous and a vibrant cooperation with the integration of region which is appropriate interests of New Delhi. India would be able to make potential platform in order to engage the economically and geostrategic engagements with the Central Asian region through a forum of SCO. At the same time, there are huge opportunities to continue interact with Afghanistan, Pakistan during SCO summit. Then, it can be opportunities to discuss with the energy issues, drug trafficking and to counter of terrorist activities in the region. Thus, New Delhi needs to build up a solid diplomatic effort with all SCO members to attain own national interests. It is the most important to examine that India has opportunities to develop regional connectivity in the transportation sector with the Central Asian Republics especially, Uzbekistan in the entire Asian continent. This is a great achievement of India in the year 2017 as the permanent membership in SCO may be create new models of integration in the field of security, science and technology and research and



development. Thus, this paper tries to attempt that how India and Uzbekistan are more reflect in the context of security engagements with SCO members? What are their consequences and ramifications of SCO in the region?

Introduction

From the historical perspective, there are age old links between India and Central Asia. Through ancient Silk Route, India has developed very close commercial and cultural relations with region from the 8th century to 19th century. The Silk Road was one of the most important routes for the trade and commerce from the region to India and vice versa. The Silk Road covered about 7000 miles distance that was connecting with China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Iran (formerly, Persia), and then Europe. It was a way to export and import goods in the vast areas between India and Central Asian region. The Silk Route was not only a single route for trade and commerce, but also served as a link to the cultural exchange between them. (Norling, & Swanstrom, 2007)

After the disintegration of the erstwhile Soviet Union in 1991, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan emerged as sovereign countries in the Central Asian region. It is a core region of the Asian continent. The geographical area of Central Asia is approximately 4.003 million sq.km and the total population has about 66 million in 2013-2014. Central Asia has been the interconnection between Europe and Asia. It means Central Asia is very important region in term of geopolitical, geostrategic and natural resource perspectives. From the geopolitical perspective, it is heartland of Asia because there is rich region in term of natural resources and energy. (Sachdeva, 2016) In this context, the United States of America has interested to develop the co-operation in strategic alliance with Central Asian countries. At the same time, China engages in the vast amount of natural gas and mineral resources. Russia has been growing relations with Central Asian countries in the field of trade, military as well as in the strategic sphere. From the geostrategic perspective, it located the between two great power, Russia and China. Both the great power trying to establish its own dominant over the natural resources in Central Asia because of China trying to influence more in the geographical connectivity through gas pipeline. Russia is traditional player with Central Asian countries. (Foshko, 2012) From the natural resource perspective, the Central Asia is rich in oil reserves 164 billion of barrels, gas reserves more than 225 billion and cotton 1 trillion cubic feet. Thus, Central Asia is the most important region in the Post-Cold War politics. (Sachdeva, 2016)



Though, Central Asia is so close and nevertheless far from India. The betterment of trade and commerce between India and the region would just not be in the arena of pure economics but would enter the domain of geo-economics. This is because Central Asia is strategically positioned as an access point between Europe and Asia and offers extensive potential for trade, investment, and growth. The region is richly endowed with commodities such as crude oil, natural gas, cotton, gold, copper, aluminum, and iron, the increasing importance of the region's oil and gas resources has generated new rivalries among external powers.

While Central Asia is a part of India's immediate neighborhood and therefore it doesn't share border with India, the issue of connectivity between the two regions becomes of paramount importance. For India to reach Central Asia, the shortest route goes via Pakistan, Afghanistan and from Iran. Since Pakistan's hostility with India and its cooperation with China against India are evident, overland connectivity with Central Asia remains problematic. Therefore, the great powers and regional powers are attracted towards this particular region. It is otherwise called as 'New Great Game' in the Central Asian region. On the other hand, India has its own geostrategic and political interests in the region. India also recognized all Central Asian countries in 1991 and established economic and diplomatic relations with them. However, India has very less commercial and trade relations (USD 2 Billion according to data of 2022) due to Afghanistan-Pakistan factor. Therefore, Minister of State for External Affairs, Mr. E. Ahmad announced "India's Connect Central Asia Policy" in June, 2012 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. It is based on pro-active political, economic and people-to-people engagement with Central Asian countries, both individually and collectively. The 'Connect Central Asia' policy is abroad-based approach, which includes political, economic and cultural connections between India and the Central Asian countries. (Pradhan, 2022) After this the consequences behind this background India increased its depth in geostrategic and political relations in the region. The study analyses the India's contemporary geostrategic and geo-economics interests and its role as a regional factor in the New Great Game. The proposed study would include the India's upcoming challenges and prospects in the Central Asian region under the New Great Game.

Though, India's foreign policy with Uzbekistan has seen a fresh vigour and intensity that had not been seen in the previous 30 years. From this perspective, it calls for New Delhi to increase its qualitative as well as quantitative interaction with regional powers (Iran, Turkey and Pakistan) and extra-regional powers (The USA, Russia, and China). The goal of making India as a big player on the international scenario may be understood as the origin of this reinvention of foreign policy rhetoric. Given this, India



has been working to promote its interaction with the world to advance its domestic development, which in turn has been pinned to this progress to improve its place in the international community and system.

Realism, coexistence, collaboration, and partnership are four pillars of the civilizational ethos guiding India's strategic intent highlight a more complex strategy. The emphasis on reality shows a subtle ideological movement away from the principle's non-alignment while preserving its essential principles (Fumagalli, 2016). Similar to how peaceful cohabitation and cooperative behaviour among Central Asia which establish the convincing logic of geography in creating a stable community to foster deeper trade and economic ties. This suggests that fostering economic interdependence can help bring about peace and sustainable development in the region by insecurity threats. In this spirit, India's relationship with Uzbekistan has been the main focus of its foreign policy for encouraging cooperation.

While India's path of international engagement focuses on re-joining immediate and extended geographies through regional organization and community. India has been working to strengthen its ties with Central Asia especially, Uzbekistan, which is crucial to New Delhi's geopolitics and economy as well as its civilization. First time visit by Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi's simultaneous visits to the five Central Asian Republics (CARs) in July 2015 set the stage for a new relationship with the CARs. (Rakhimov, 2023). Notably, Prime Minister has underlined the logic of regional connectivity for peace, growth, and prosperity. India needs to overcome a number of geostrategic obstacles in the region of Eurasia. The old system is experiencing tremendous change, and its broad features incorporate rivalry and collaboration amongst partners.

The major players have been promoting their positions, new engagement, new alliances are still being created. As the dominating player, China has had a significant impact on this side. At the same time, China's trade with Central Asian countries has USD 100 billion in 2022. In this context, the nature and dynamics of the power struggle between global and regional powers are likewise evolving at the mainstream. A new accommodating climate of collaboration among Central Asian states have also anticipated to be created by the rise of new leadership in Uzbekistan and its new foreign policy approach, direction and new vision (Gu Ho, 2022). It assesses India's regional activities in the light of the changing geostrategic environment in Central Asia especially, with Uzbekistan. It contends that the region's recent geostrategic shifts present both possibilities and problems.



Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

SCO is an intergovernmental organisation, the creation of which was announced on 15th June 2001 by China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Charter was signed during the St. Petersburg SCO Heads of State meeting in June 2002, and entered into force on 19th September 2003. Now *India* became a full *membership* of the SCO since 2017. In this context, India's regional interests to ensure peace and security through development partnership, maintaining sovereignty, and preventing the threats from being a hub of terrorism and extremism which are main threats in the region. At the same time, India's interest is that Uzbekistan diffidently is rich in the field of natural resources and energy. Both India and Uzbekistan in SCO's platform is a significant role in developing a constructive engagement through the partnership and connectivity project in the coming years. In this context, there is various type of connectivity which are discussed below. (Roy, 2013)

1. Physical connectivity includes infrastructure in this regard that India has been trying to build up Chabahar port in Iran and INSTC.
2. Culture exchange of view and experience through tourism as well as people-to-people contact.
3. Trade and commerce connectivity focus on strong production networks, regional chain value and bilateral and multilateral trade agreements as well as MoU.
4. Digital connectivity- this is the main connectivity in the 21st century in which can exchange experience and access knowledge in the field of innovation and start up. For instance, telemedicine and tele-education and so on.

Regional Cooperation of Uzbekistan in Central Asia: Impact on India

Uzbekistan in the Central Asian region has joined a number of multilateral regional groupings like Collective Security Treaty of 1992 that provided them with a security umbrella. In 2001, Shanghai Five emerged as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization which aimed to develop the security and economic cooperation. (Qinhua, 2008) From the strategic perspective, SCO has established the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), to face especially terrorism, extremism and radicalism in the region. The main objective of RATS face as a coordinating Centre for the exchange of intelligence information. India is permanent member in SCO since 2017 which can participate in diverse area like economic, strategic



cooperation and so on. Another regional security organization is the Collective Security Treaty Organization, led by Russian initiative which aimed the primary focus on the defence cooperation among members. Other organization is that India and Uzbekistan are permanent member of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measure in Asia (CICA). (Qinhua, 2008) The main objective is to promote the strategic cooperation at the broadening level among members in Central Asian countries and outside countries. Furthermore, the existing regional groupings in Central Asian countries and Uzbekistan as a partner India's efforts to strengthen its engagement. In the South Asian region, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has not developed as an effective grouping with respect to security matters, it has however, started some people-oriented programs in such areas as the reducing of poverty, transport connectivity, education, and health care. (Singh, 2021) This could be an advantageous and positive development. India should work to promote with Uzbekistan in the field of institutional, infrastructure development and counter-terrorism.

India and Uzbekistan in SCO

The basic concern of any regional arrangement lies in the mutual interest of its member states, which provides a platform to address and resolve the emerging concerns. Common as well as individual interests motivate the member states to devise a strategy for such regional understanding. As far as the mutual interests are concerned, they range from the joint security network; threats both from within and outside surroundings, to the sphere of economic development. Apart from the common interests, the diversity of member states enables them to design policies and concerns, which can be best resolved with the help of the collective effort of the member states. (Kumar, 2013) Thus, this diversity, instead of creating hindrance, can facilitate the member states to come to terms on a common agenda, simultaneously providing a space for their specific interests. The best optimistic account would be to visualize these ethnic, linguistic and geographical features creating a mosaic like dynamic regional arrangement.

Two of the original members, China and Russia, share a commonality of being nuclear powers, as well as occupying the status of being permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. Besides these common features, both countries have committed to build their regional relations for peace and harmony, shedding away decades of fear and suspicion for each other. One of the reasons for their committing to regional relations is the Chinese pecuniary dissemination into Russia's Far Eastern Federal District, which in future is expected to make the local population dependent on them. These speculations further supplemented China's growing economic progress, which has effectively challenged the US as well as



the EU. However, Russia's undefined world status and its limitations make its position less significant in the new World Order. According to an assessment, "the smooth and complementary network of defensive elements in Russian motives with ambitions for 'soft' that is, economic and cultural hegemony on the Chinese side is the central secret of the SCO's success and the key to its hopes of survival." (Luzyanin, 2009). Apart from the suspicion and differences, these two neighbors share some common and individual interests for being in this regional arrangement.

As far as the common interest of both countries are concerned, first, through this forum, they strive to maintain their borders without tension. Second, both partners believe in designing a mechanism for synchronicity in Central Asia. Third, both powers struggle to shape a network for regional security, which could in the long run prove to be an international bloc, with a capacity to operate independently from Western influence. Apart from these shared objectives, both countries also have their individual agendas in the SCO. First, for Russia, the SCO plays a constructive role in developing its cordial relationship with China and members of the Central Asian states, which were not long ago a part of the Soviet Union. Second, by being a part of this regional cooperation, Russia aims to demonstrate its capability to resist US dominance in this region, by providing a platform for political discourse, as an alternate to the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

In the recent SCO summit held in Tianjin, China from 31st August to 1st September 2025 which saw more than 20 world leaders, including representatives from India and Uzbekistan key moves underscored shifts in regional diplomacy. The summit strengthened the SCO's increasing influence in Eurasia and increased international engagement in commerce, security, and development for Uzbekistan, one of its main Central Asian members. The adoption of several cooperation agreements in the areas of security, the economy, connectivity, and counterterrorism, as well as a roadmap for energy and infrastructure collaboration, were among the more general summit outcomes. All things considered, the Tianjin summit was a watershed, giving Central Asian nations like Uzbekistan new impetus to strengthen cooperation across a wide Eurasian platform and giving India a diplomatic reset with China while exercising strategic caution.

Changing Security

Apart from the mentioned combined vision of these two powers, the individualistic interests of China in the SCO remain in the significance of the Central Asian region. The reason being that this region has been 'opened up by the end of the cold war after generations of Soviet seclusion; an intriguing market for



both goods and technologies; and a source of much needed energy that China can afford to pay for but would like to reserve to itself under long-term agreements based on material interdependence.’ (Roy, 2013) Therefore, with a great potential of economic development, China finds this regional arrangement serves to its fiscal interests. The second most important interest of China in the SCO is the apprehension that some of the fellow member states harbour Chinese dissidents, thus becoming a security hazard to reflect in the mainstream of the Central Asia. The SCO charter provides a provision to discourage such dissenting elements, as Article 2 reaffirms that “the member States of the SCO shall adhere to the mutual respect of sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity of States and inviolability of State borders, nonaggression, non-interference in internal affairs, non-use of force or threat of its use in international relations, seeking no unilateral military superiority in adjacent areas.” (Sachdeva, 2016).

Though, the landlocked region of Central Asia has links with the outside world. Even within the regional context they are diversified. The oil and gas reserves of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan distinguish these countries from the rest. Another diversity is landmass, which sets these two apart from the relatively ‘small’ Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Collectively, the Central Asian member states of the SCO face a challenge of trying to protect their solidarity while upholding their individual concerns, in a region characterized by weak political structures, shaky economic arrangements and fragile social structures. Apart from the mentioned diversity and multiplicity of problems, the SCO member states have made a pledge in the Charter and in various summits to coordinate their interests in a regional context. For these Central Asian member states, the biggest challenge is to find their place in a region where a dominant Russia and an economically developed China are also located. In the above described situation, the SCO on the one hand provides a platform for the India and Uzbekistan for understanding the diversity and multiplicity of interests, while on the other enables them to interact with the regional powers on various fields. (Roy, 2013) Another important contribution of the SCO is that it can provide for India and Uzbekistan in the field of security ties, particularly when all of them face serious extremist threats, internally as well as inter-state, particularly after 2002, stemming from the Afghan situation, as acknowledged by the Deputy Director of the SCO Research Centre at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS), Hu Jian. Mr. Jian states that, “terrorism and extremism are key factors in the region and Afghanistan has been a cradle for terrorism and0 extremism since the US invasion.” Apart from the security concerns, there is an encouraging prospect of closer economic ties within the regional context. Article 3 of the SCO Charter, under the heading of “Areas of Cooperation”, mentions that the member states will support and promote regional economic cooperation in various forms, fostering a favorable environment for trade and investments with a view to gradually achieving free flow of goods, capital,



services and technologies.” (Rousseau, 2012). An example of this is the Chinese investment to support other members’ power infrastructures, including “the development of the hydroelectric power sector and electricity networks that are important for their own energy needs; and major road and rail transport projects that could mitigate the geographical isolation of in particular Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, while offering profits from the growing transit trade between India and Uzbekistan in terms of the oil and gas reserves.

Changing Geopolitical Dynamics

Last two decades, the geopolitics has been changing very fast because new player, new strategy, new project, new initiative, new concerns have been coming in Central and South Asian region. A very complex situation began to emerge due to changing of geopolitics in region particular in the perspective of regional security connectivity. Because the impact of instability in Afghanistan since August 2021, Rising of China as a geopolitical power through One Road and One Belt Initiative, more influence of major power in Central Asia and so on. In this regard, India and Uzbekistan are important player in the transformation of regional environment. Of course, India has emerged a major power in Central Asia particular, with the cooperation of Uzbekistan in the field of security, defence, regional connectivity, trade and so on. (Pradhan, 2022).

While some initiatives and strategy for promoting regional connectivity are significant for India and Uzbekistan, for instance, political and diplomatic level, infrastructure, new institutional structure and multilateral cooperation, financial incentives, coordination and cooperation with extra-regional players. Because India is one of the most significant and reliable partners of Uzbekistan in the 21st century. Relations between both countries have been progressing in the spirit of strategic partnership in 2011. (Roy, 2013) The advancement of successful interaction contributes to an effective political dialogue at the highest level.

In 2022, Ukraine and Russian conflict reflect on the development of geopolitics in terms of the humanitarian crisis, strategic autonomy concerns, high price of oil, refugee issue in Europe, as tragedy and calamity of the Russian economy, through sanctions of Western countries. (Rousseau, 2012, p. 1). This is a turning point in the history of global geopolitics between Russia vs Ukraine as well as Ukraine’s in NATO (as the security protector) for the formal membership which appears to have begun a changing New Great Game on account of geopolitical interest. As of now, Russian President Vladimir Putin (2022) announced a ‘special military operation’ for the invasion of Ukraine which has taken a hardline stance



towards NATO forces but Central Asian Republics looks at this crisis as a neutral and balance approach because of there are various type of factors in which depend these Republics on Russia, for instance, Russian legacy in Central Asia, security architecture of Central Asian countries depends on Russia, people to people contact, Remittances from Russia especially, Tajikistan. As rightly Mao Tse-tun said, 'Politics is war without blood, while war is politics with blood'. (Ratcliffe, 2017)

While Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy is more relevant in three principles in the context of Russia and Ukraine crisis to understand present situation and what happened during dynamic personality Mahatma Gandhi in the 20th century. First aspect is about truth, second aspect, non- violence and finally aspect Internationalization view of Gandhi which is the most important to understand and should be as practical engagement in the context of inclusive development of international society, especially, developing world. But some dominant power has been running through the approach of power politics and balance of power in the 21st century. On the other hand, Buddhism also consider war about to begin peace from mind and, implement in the society, but Mahatma Gandhi focuses peace through trust, non- violence and development each and every aspect of society, especially, rural areas. Gandhi's philosophy emphases towards very dynamic and peaceful cooperative society. Hence, changing geopolitics of global politics, India and Central Asian Republics relationship are the most important in bilateral and multilateral engagement in the 21st century (Rousseau, 2012). India and Uzbekistan relationship is based on the mutual cooperation and understanding.

The current conflict between Russia and Ukraine in the context of India and Central Asia because India is traditional and strategic partnership with Russia in 1971. Even India's military equipment approximately 60 percent imports from Russia. Therefore, India has neutral role and balance approach with Russia and Western countries particular, USA. At the same time, Central Asian Republics (CARs) have legacy with historical and cultural, ethnic relations with Russia and India which also are close relations with all Central Asian countries in the field of economic, political and security. Especially, Russia maintains relations with CARs through multilateral organization such as CSTO, EEU and CIS. Thus, India and Central Asian countries have neutral role on the crisis of Russia and Ukraine at the present time (Luzyanin, 2009). From this changing environment, this tries to attempt a comprehensive analysis and geopolitical outline in the perspective of changing security architecture in the Asian continent. There are many available factors including political divisions, economic differences and geopolitics divergences and geostrategic factors and so on. In this context, India and Uzbekistan cooperation are very much significant relations in the coming year. The most significant question here about how Uzbekistan could



serve as a strategic interests and partner in changing geopolitical scenario. In this context, Tashkent makes an effort to maintain a balance between its ties to Russia and the United States. It has abstained from the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a military alliance that includes its neighbors Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan in addition to Belarus, Armenia, and Russia. It is a participant in NATO's Partnership for Peace Program. However, it is one of the founding members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which is meant to challenge Western hegemony. India and Uzbekistan have always been friends, but they now need to strengthen their bilateral ties and increase investment. Uzbekistan welcomes Indians and provides both tourists and business travelers with an easy-to-use e-visa. (Kamalakaran, 2023) Tashkent's standing both regionally and globally has been improved by Uzbekistan's proactive and transparent diplomacy. Uzbekistan is acknowledged as an important player in international affairs because of its advantageous location at the crossroads of important commerce and transportation lines. Because of its location, the nation is well-suited for trade, economic integration, and regional and international collaboration. (Tanbaev, 2023)

Conclusion

As the concluding points, India's cooperative geopolitical approach to regional connectivity is the most important component to counter the geopolitical factors through new strategy, new methods, and new policy. Hence, India and Uzbekistan have been emerging as major player to shape through the regional dynamics and connectivity. From this perspective, the changing geopolitical environment and new ways are undergoing diversion in the regional engagement in the last one decade. These radical transformations in the geopolitical front of the region have been taking place largely due to the interplay of both global and regional challenges and their subsequent impact on regional connectivity and regional interest. However, India and Uzbekistan have a milestone and remarkable relationship in the 21st century, which is based on mutual cooperation. The emergence and steady rise of the SCO marks an historic inflection point in world politics. At the same time, the SCO has been making historic strides by adding India and Pakistan. In fact, in December 2017, China and Russia concluded anti-ballistic missile defence computer-simulated military exercises in Beijing to strengthen their coordination in anti-missile and air defence operations. Both Russia and China stated the exercises reflect their 'comprehensive strategic partnership', not any intention to build a formal military alliance. The emergence of the SCO does not mean its members cannot also maintain constructive relations with the West: Europe, which is dependent on Russian gas, may yet repair its ties with Moscow; India is still deepening its defence ties with the US and Japan. The rise of the SCO is great platform of deepening underlying trend in which Asian regional



powers are increasingly asserting ever greater economic and political control over the Asian mainland by establishing new international organisations that bypass the major Western led organisations that have dominated international politics since the mid- 20th Century. From India and Uzbekistan perspective, their deepening economic integration and their stepped-up military cooperation are important that tectonic shifts are underway in Central Asian geopolitics in the coming year.

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