

Why is SCO becoming an important platform for its members states?
How has Pakistan's membership in the SCO impacted its relation with China?

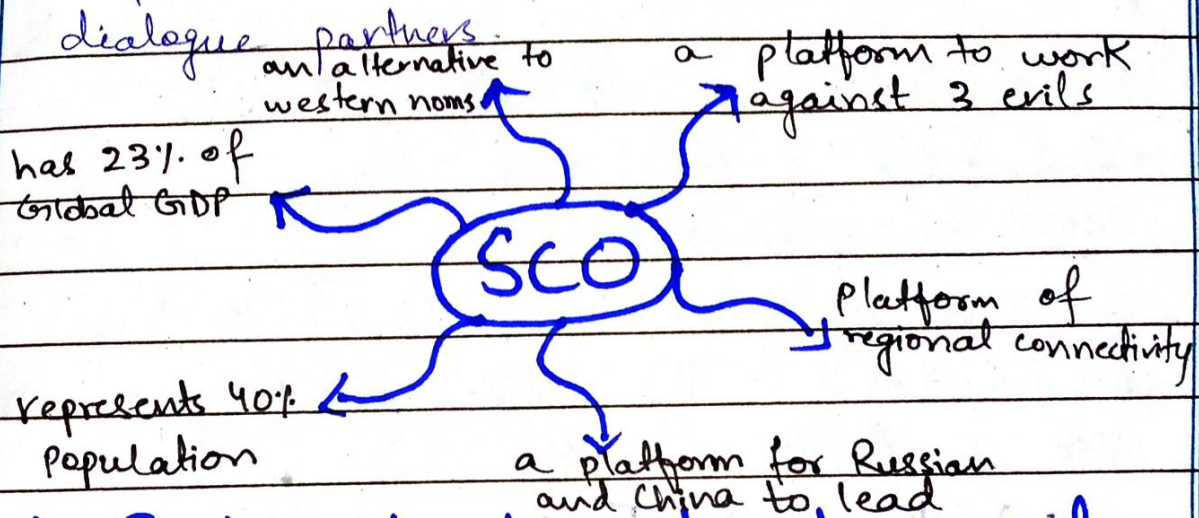
1) Introduction:-

Just as the author Z. Brzezinski had theorized in his book "Grand Chessboard", Eurasian continent is becoming the ground zero for global power. This evident in the increasing importance of regional organizations like SCO. SCO, which originally started as a regional security mechanism among Central Asian countries, is rapidly gaining traction among Asian and Eastern European nations. For the member states, SCO is becoming a platform of economic cooperation, security and defense cooperation and sustainable development. It offers an alternative to the West-dominated world order. Since getting a membership of SCO, Pakistan ~~and China~~ has re-affirmed its long-standing ties with China. Both countries have initiated new phase of CPEC. Pakistan's economic and ~~technical~~ security ties with China

have also seen enhancement. In short, SCO is yet another avenue for Pakistan and China to strengthen their relations.

2) Increasing Importance of SCO.

The importance of SCO is rising and this is evident from its geopolitical importance amongst the members and dialogue partners.



3) Factors Leading to Increased Importance of SCO :-

A number of factors have collectively raised the importance of SCO for its members.

i) Trump's Recent Policies

The volatility and unpredictability of Trump's policies have made the members realize that they cannot rely completely on USA economically and militarily. US led world order is fraught with contradictions and SCO is a reliable option.

ii) Failure of Western - Led World Order to Cater to Demands

of the South:-

After investing so much time and effort in the west-led world order, the Global South has come to realize that the system is pitted against them and they need an alternative.

iii) Sanctions on Russia and Iran

Russian attack on Ukraine dealt a massive blow Russia's standing globally. It was condemned, sanctioned and blacked out of many international platforms. The same happened to Iran when Trump ended nuclear deal with Iran. In this backdrop, both Russia and Iran have found some relief in SCO by collaborating with its member states.

iv) America's Trade War with China

According to the data, China currently exports 14.3% of its commodities to USA. The intensifying trade war has highlighted the fragility of this supply chain and China is diversifying its exports now.

v) Excessively High Tariffs on India

The recent imposition of above 100% tariffs on India by USA, as a punishment for buying oil from Russia has pushed India closer to China and Russia and SCO is a vital platform for these three economic giants to collaborate.

vi) Weak American Policy for Central Asian States:

During Biden Administration, there were talks of project/initiatives like Build Back Better World; however, there has been no clear policy for Central Asia from USA.

vii) Pakistan's Policy to Diversify Relations beyond EU and USA:

Pakistan has intensified its efforts to diversify its foreign policy for over a decade now. Becoming a member of SCO is part of this effort.

4) Impact of Pakistan's Membership on Its Relations With China:-

Pakistan already had strong ties with China; however, membership of SCO offers even more chances for cooperation on issues of mutual interest.

a) Reaffirmation of Friendship

In a recent SCO heads of government council, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif reiterated that Pakistan China friendship is all weather-tested and is getting more stronger by the day.

b) An Impetus for CPEC Completion

While there were some uncertainty and security threats looming over CPEC, the membership of SCO has provided

both countries with the impetus for its completion.

c) A mechanism to cooperate on issue of 3-exils

Control over extremism, terrorism and insurgency within Pakistan are in the common interest of Both China and Pakistan. This is especially important to protect Chinese investments in South-East Asia. SCO's Regional Anti-terrorism Structure provides a mechanism for cooperation on this issue.

d) Increased Cooperation for Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) for Afghanistan:-

A recent issue of convergence for China and Pakistan is peace building and establishment of stable government in Afghanistan. For this purpose China has constituted QCG which offers the three countries to collaborate over this issue.

e) Increased Cooperation on Technology Transfer

SCO is a platform for Pakistan to benefit from Chinese technology. Recently, China has offered member states of SCO to connect to Chinese

BeiDou Navigation Satellite as an alternative to GPS. Pakistan can benefit from it.

f) Pakistan can benefit from Chinese funds and SCO Development Fund.

SCO aims to develop a development fund which can be an alternative for Pakistan for its lending requirements. China has also pledged a loan facility of 10 bn yuan for SCO member states. This is also a huge opportunity for Pakistan.

5) Conclusion:-

In the contradictory world of western-led order, Global South is finding nothing but ignorance and chaos. This is leading multilateral organisations like SCO to emerge as a beacon of hope for the Global South. Membership of SCO offers a huge opportunity for Pakistan to collaborate with its biggest ally and supporter, China. However, Pakistan needs to tread the path carefully to ensure that this partnership serves the interests of both states equally.