



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Encourages Pakistan to Focus on Regional Security and Potential Development

Shahid Jan Afridi<sup>1</sup>, Qaisar Ali<sup>2</sup>, Xu Chang<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University) Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, Pakistan

<sup>3</sup>Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University) Department of Humanities and Social Sciences & Songyuan Vocational and Technical College, China

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## ABSTRACT

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The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is dedicated to thwarting security threats and serves as a bridge for advancing regional security. Promoting peace, stability, and security in the region is the first fundamental goal. Member states have the chance to establish direct security relations inside the area through the SCO. This analysis begins by charting the SCO's historical evolution. After that, it evaluates its significant contribution to successfully advancing regional security and demonstrates how Pakistan, a crucial member state, actively participates in it. The report also seeks to ascertain how SCO member nations are bolstering their regional and internal counterterrorism cooperation. The study claims that Pakistan supports the SCO's regional cooperation efforts to combat terrorism, drug trafficking, and prepared crime. The study concludes that a key tool for the SCO's future development is regional security. A brief examination of economic projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and how changing global policies are fostering regional security, particularly in Pakistan.

**\*Corresponding Author:**

1042235364@pfur.ru

## INTRODUCTION

International organizations play an important role in today's world. Since the 19th century, international communication has required the creation of a new partnership. The development of international relations progressed with the creation of the first universal international institutions: the Universal Telegraph Union in 1865 and the Universal Postal Union in 1874. Today, there are over four thousand international organizations with various legal statuses. International organizations are unions of two or more countries, created on the basis of an international agreement granting them rights and obligations in certain areas of international partnership. It should be noted that the concept of "international organizations" can be used for both interstate (intergovernmental) and non-governmental organizations. International organizations and law. New trends in international legal regulation. International intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) are unions of countries whose goal is to solve common problems and act in the common interest of member countries, while respecting their sovereignty (Екатеринбург, 2018). Political aspects of energy integration within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Today, nowhere else in the world are conflict factors related to the exploitation of natural resources as numerous as in Central Asia. Therefore, the region's security can only be ensured through the joint development of transnational resources of international importance. In this context, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) plays a special role as an example of strategic partnership and integration in Eurasia, capable of becoming an international coordination mechanism for the mutually beneficial use of the resources of the Caspian Sea and Central Asian countries in the future (Семенова, 2011). The collapse of the old system of interstate relations in Central Asia, triggered by the collapse of the Soviet Union, provided the countries of this region with an opportunity to strengthen their role in interregional security by establishing the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The SCO's implementation of a strategy aimed at ensuring interregional and international security, not only in Central Asia but also on the

international scene, seems entirely relevant and appropriate (Хакимджонович, 2022). The activity of China and Russia, which pursues its national interests in the region, conditioned by its historically close ties with the CA countries, has every chance of significantly increasing its influence within the SCO (Максим, 2011). Russia's efforts to unify the region through the Eurasian Economic Union, SCO and discussions of a Greater Eurasia have long been exposed as pretexts for unilateral gains that bring little real benefit to the region (Blank, 2021). By the early 1990s, Moscow and Beijing had developed cordial relations as they understood that the need for teamwork would be the solution to regional tensions. China used cooperative means (trade) and brought other states under its influence peacefully. Before the 1990s, the two regional giants, China and the Soviet Union, had hostile relations; however, the gradual understanding of regional complexities brought the two nations closer together. After the collapse of the USSR and the formation of new sovereign states in close proximity to the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, it became necessary to transform the once bilateral dialogue between the USSR and the PRC into a multilateral format of cooperation between the new states of the post-Soviet space and the countries representing the Central Asian region. The corresponding mechanism was formed and legally formalized by signing the "Agreement between the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan and the People's Republic of China on strengthening confidence in the military sphere in the border area" on April 26, 1996 in Shanghai (И.Рыжов, 2024). The two states, along with the leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, signed the Treaty "On Strengthening Military Confidence in the Border Regions" in 1996 and balanced situations emerged in the region. Thus, in 1996, the Shanghai Five provided an ideal vehicle to achieve the goal of regional stability that later gave birth to the SCO. In April 1997, these states signed the Treaty on the Reduction of "Military Forces in the Border Regions," and subsequently, annual summits of the "Shanghai Five" were held in the capitals of Kazakhstan (1998), Kyrgyzstan (1999), and Tajikistan (2000). The SCO is important not only to explore the possibilities of political and security alliances between the decision-making communities of this region, but also to help forge new imaginations and solidarities between the member countries and the peoples of these regions (Behera, 2019). The SCO is an organization with a solid internal structure. Its commitment to its programs in the region, particularly China's support, contributes to its dynamism and consolidation. Its objective is to maintain peace, eradicate security threats such as terrorism and other scourges, promote regional economic cooperation, establish a peaceful and free environment for trade and business, develop infrastructure, advance science and technology, manage political affairs, and carry out various other areas, some of which are all the more important as global dynamics evolve and power struggles multiply. Currently, the SCO is focusing more on security issues by analyzing regional dynamics and contexts. Beijing aims to establish peace, harmony, and stability in the region in order to create an environment conducive to trade, political, social, economic, and structural exchanges among the states in the region. The organization's structure is essential for resolving conflicts within its territory. Pakistan, for its part, faces multiple challenges, particularly security-related, which create numerous difficulties in other areas, including economic and social issues, and in peaceful coexistence with its neighbors, particularly India. China desires a peaceful and favorable trade environment in the region; the time has come for Pakistan to take advantage of this. Moreover, the two countries maintain long-standing and proven cordial relations. Moreover, SCO member states are cooperating to establish a peaceful trade environment and strengthen regional stability (Rubina Ali, June, 2019).

## LITERATURE

The SCO was officially recognized in June 2001 and initially conceived as a regional security organization. It emerged as the "Shanghai Five" in 1996, with the objective of cooperating and facilitating bilateral military exercises among its member states. These member states included Russia, China, and the four major Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. The SCO also aimed to resolve common border issues among its member states, with an emphasis on regional integration and security. The SCO is a leading regional organization working for maximum security in Central Asia. It strives for multidisciplinary regional cooperation, ensuring stability, security, and peace throughout the region. The SCO's primary mission is to create an environment conducive to economic partnerships and foster economic development in the region. Through bilateral and multilateral cooperation, member states are increasingly committed to

expanding trade and mutual investment, expanding industrial cooperation, and strengthening economic partnerships. More recently, the development of transport and energy relations has been a key focus of the SCO. Currently, economic cooperation within the organization is unfairly underserved by cooperation among member states in combating drug trafficking, extremism, separatism, and terrorism (Giustozzi, September, 2008).

The established of the Regional Counter-Terrorism Structure is a unique and enduring executive body based on cooperation among member states in the areas of counterterrorism and security. Funded and managed in accordance with the SCO Decision on Countering Extremism, Terrorism, and Separatism, this regional structure was created to address security challenges in the region. The SCO platform can serve as a bridge between resolving long-standing conflicts between two neighboring countries, Pakistan and India, which have led to increased regional stability and growth. It will also address the problem of terrorism in their respective territories, which is a major obstacle to peace and development within both nations. The changing global situation and developments in all spheres of life around the world require underdeveloped or unstable states, for many reasons, to make rational decisions to change the destiny of their nations (Behera, 2019).

The main fundamental Aims of the SCO are:

- Improving overall security and promoting regional economic cooperation, accelerating the free flow of goods, services, technology, and capital.
- Creating an environment conducive to regional economic development.
- Maintaining peace and strengthening good-neighborly relations among member states in the region.
- Developing effective measures to minimize extremist threats, combating separatist and terrorist organizations, and countering illegal immigration and arms trafficking.
- Developing mechanisms for integrating into the global economy without losing the sovereignty of commodity currencies and providing joint assistance to mitigate and prevent natural and man-made disasters.
- Developing cooperation in all fields such as health, science and technology, culture, education, and tourism, and deepening economic ties and cultural exchanges.
- Efficiently utilizing transport and communications infrastructure and developing energy systems.
- To guarantee the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens of the member states of the organization, in accordance with the legislation in force and national traditions (Rana, 2019)

### **Executive Structure of the SCO**

In accordance with the SCO Charter, there are supranational institutions at several levels. These are:

- The Council of Heads of State
- The Council of Prime Ministers
- The Council of Foreign Ministers
- The Meetings of Heads of Ministers
- The Council of National Coordinators

In addition to these supranational institutions, the SCO has two permanent bodies: the Regional Counter-Terrorism Structure and a Secretariat. The Council of Heads of State, the SCO's highest decision-making body, meets annually. The purpose of this meeting is to set priorities and promote the organization's important activities. Countries chair the organization in rotation each year, and their terms end at the summit. The heads of state establish the SCO budget and review and address major economic concerns in areas where there is significant interaction within the organization. Foreign ministers review the organization's ongoing activities and, during their meetings, also highlight internal issues. If necessary, the Council can issue a statement and make immediate decisions, while meetings of heads of ministries or departments are scheduled to address specific critical issues on the ground and develop collaboration to resolve the problem within the SCO. Since June 15, 2001, the SCO's permanent body has been the Regional Structure for Combating Terrorism, which addresses issues of terrorism, separatism, and extremism within the framework of the Shanghai Convention (Olga Porshneva, 2022).

## Function and Working of SCO

The Shanghai Trade Cooperation Council was established on June 14, 2006, in Shanghai. SCO member countries collaborated with the highest authorities in the business world. The main objective was to expand economic cooperation programs and projects among member states and to develop dialogue and direct ties between the financial and business communities of the member states. Identifying appropriate documentation for such a study in the context of regional security within the SCO is a challenge. The areas the SCO intends to focus on are politics, economics, defense, law enforcement organizations, environmental protection, cultural and scientific exchanges, and education. However, it has a major advantage, which emphasizes "a new dogma of global security (Akiner, 2010). In its relations with member states, the SCO represents nearly a quarter of the world's population; thus, it maintains its status as a major regional organization. Moreover, its structure allows for non-violent sanctions against any misconduct by member states and offers a solution to conflicts and insurgencies in China and Central Asia. The essential study of the SCO framework focuses not only on security issues, but also on the political coherence and economic growth of member states (Shambaugh, 2004). Similarly, President Hu Jintao emphasized in an interview in June 2012 that "thanks to the validation of the Multilateral Economic and Trade Cooperation Program, SCO members have made considerable progress in the fields of communications, energy, and transportation." He also emphasized the innovative concept of the SCO, which aims to increase progress related to the regulation of economic globalization. He also emphasized the development of regional economic growth, the creation of common advantages by improving the profits of member states through strategic development, and the creation of conditions conducive to the progress of member states. President Hu Jintao also suggested "merging the social foundations of growth with the SCO (Mariani, Oct, 2013). He also advocated the idea that, based on a "harmonious society," development and security are closely linked. Bernardo Mariani also conducted a survey on trade progress in Central Asia and China. The third part of the article broadly praised the current security vulnerability of the entire region and the essential role of the SCO in combating threatening situations through collaboration and cooperation. In the scientific literature, the "regional security complex theory" offers conceptual avenues for recognizing this approach (Wæver, 2003). The SCO is a regional foundation that evolves around socioeconomic and military concerns. Pakistan's objectives of reducing extremism, territorial integrity, and border security align with the SCO agreement (Swanström, 2010). Pakistan commits to contributing to future cooperation in intelligence sharing and counterterrorism exercises. Central Asian states could also form a similar regional security complex. The SCO forum offers member states the opportunity to protect, stabilize, and secure the region against terrorist threats. Consequently, the SCO security agenda has expanded to focus on transnational issues, which could not be effectively addressed by member states alone. The SCO thus offers a new avenue of engagement for member states, encouraging them to collaborate to address security threats (Lanteigne, 2007).

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study is based primarily on qualitative research, initially focusing on the history and development of the SCO, as well as its organizational structure. This section uses a descriptive method, drawing primarily on official SCO documents such as joint statements, action plans, declarations, and agreements, as well as secondary publications related to regional security. It attempts to explain state behavior within the SCO by drawing on historical security trends and the deeper political nature of the concept of security. The following section addresses a secondary research question: to what extent does the SCO speak out on security issues, and what crucial role does Pakistan play in regional security? Similarly, the SCO is analyzed as a platform intended to fulfill various missions in the region. To this end, it will work coherently and cooperatively for peace in three areas: political, economic, and military. Special attention was also paid to assessing the capacity of development programs such as CPEC, the flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as well as the evolution of models aimed at promoting regional security and determining their impact on the security situation in Pakistan.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

As a member of the SCO, Pakistan is firmly committed to strengthening its differentiated approach and playing an active role in regional security and stability. Similarly, the expansion of the Gwadar

Port could make Islamabad an important trade and energy corridor for SCO member states. The main challenge, among other difficulties faced by SCO countries, is the fight against terrorism (Zeb, 2006). By using this regional platform, states can improve the security situation, while Pakistan, as a full member state, can effectively play its role in combating terrorism in the region. By combating terrorism and terrorist activities, states could ensure economic growth and create new markets, particularly in the energy sector. The role of the SCO has become a vital element of regional and international security, thus contributing greatly to peace and stability. Going forward, the SCO's priorities will remain regional security and stability. Today, the SCO is an organization expanding and strengthening its influence across the world. The SCO has established itself as a key Eurasian alliance. However, the SCO's ability to quickly become a counterweight to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO] is debated. Many security observers seem convinced that the SCO would gradually counterbalance NATO's regional expansion in Asia (KHAMRAEV, 2004). Relying on Russian and Iranian support, the SCO strives to limit US diplomatic influence in the region. Despite frequent renunciations of its aggressive nature and changes among its members regarding security and military cooperation, certain developments in the SCO reveal a gradual evolution toward an advanced security organization. This progression is linked, at the regional and geographical levels, to a combination of political and military measures. The rise of the SCO marked a clear progression in modern world politics in general and in regional politics in particular (Tavares, Dec, 2009). Regional contributors view the SCO as an organization striving to maintain peace and eliminate security threats. Pakistan, thanks to its preeminent geopolitical position, maintains its status as a key player in South Asia. Islamabad views the organization as a giant capable of leveraging its geostrategic assets and pursuing its true objectives: security and peace, as well as long-term economic prosperity in the region. The SCO primarily has two enduring coordinating bodies: the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) and an Administrative Support Secretariat that provides internal assistance to member states against terrorist activities. Moreover, the RATS was established in 2004 to maintain security and stability in the region. The SCO has already conducted joint military exercises against this monstrous phenomenon (Giustozzi, 2008). Moreover, the SCO has already implemented measures to combat illicit drug trafficking and large-scale drug trafficking trade in Afghanistan. In addition, the SCO has concluded an agreement in Afghanistan to promote the peace process and stability (Iqbal, 2024). Pakistan is playing an active role in establishing stability and launching the peace process in Afghanistan. The SCO is also contributing significantly to the development of Pakistan's counterterrorism capabilities, primarily through RATS. Pakistan has concluded bilateral counterterrorism cooperation agreements with other states. RATS could also help member states and Pakistan maintain and institutionalize counterterrorism cooperation to combat terrorist activities. Member states regularly conduct joint counterterrorism exercises through the RATS mechanism; they ensure information exchange and cooperate closely in the field of counterterrorism. Despite the growth of military cooperation among member states, the SCO does not function as a military alliance like NATO, as few member states have previously maintained a collective security posture within an organization such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Pakistan's unique geography provides it with close land ties and interconnectivity conducive to trade, mutually beneficial for all states in the region. However, the current state of energy trade will be a key priority (Rehman, 2016). Moreover, Pakistan plays a crucial role in developing North-South trade and offers an energy corridor that offers favorable opportunities to several member states via land links and pipelines to Gwadar and then to the Central Asian states. The China-Pakistan Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the launch of the Kashghar-Gwadar Road and railway is a positive development and a wise direction for all regional actors. The SCO offers Pakistan the opportunity to forge new ties within the global economy. After joining the organization, Pakistan has completed its procedures; it must also leverage its proven capabilities in hydrocarbon capital and the combined use of water resources. Islamabad should therefore actively engage in forums such as the SCO Business Council, the Business Forum, and the Interbank Association. CPEC is currently progressing satisfactorily, with most of its projects completed and operational. This massive project will open economic zones and develop transportation networks throughout Pakistan (Rafi, 2018).

Additionally, the CPEC will serve as an economic corridor through an infrastructure revolution across the country. A better trade and investment structure provides an opportunity not only for China but also for SCO member states to boost their economies through collaboration and cooperation. Currently, for multiple reasons, Pakistan's global trade with SCO member states is unlikely to reach

the desired level, but even the country can benefit from the SCO by implementing sound policies. Pakistan maintains rather harmonious relations with member countries; therefore, it is time to show interest in SCO countries by strengthening its trade and economic ties. Active participation in trade, security, and other areas could serve Pakistan's national interests in the days to come, while seeking ties and an alliance with the United States, which often remain strained. In this regard, Islamabad needs stable and reliable partnerships, which can be established through active relations with SCO member states, including China. Pakistan, as an important regional player, and China, as an emerging giant, both share a historical association with their Central Asian counterparts (Ashfaq U. Rehman, August 2018). Moreover, CPEC combines short-, medium-, and long-term projects, as well as the creation and development of roads connecting the Pakistani city of Gwadar to the Chinese city of Kashgar. The connection and development of power lines under this project will help the Pakistani and Chinese populations mitigate the threat of the energy crisis. This project aims to strengthen ties between the two countries, promote bilateral relations, improve the agricultural system, and reduce poverty. Pakistani President Mamnoon Hussain then visited China in February 2014 to discuss the CPEC project in Pakistan. In this regard, for the launch and continuation of the project in 2014, China announced an investment of \$65 billion for the development of energy and infrastructure projects in Pakistan (Ashfaq, 2016). By putting aside their bilateral disagreements for the benefit of all, the SCO hopes to establish regional stability that unites its member nations and fortifies their policies. During the leaders' meeting, this forum allows the hostile neighbours to get together and work out their differences. The development of bilateral relations with India, which has been unfriendly since their independence, is Pakistan's top political priority. Because of their bad relationships, both nations have suffered greatly. Under these conditions, the SCO could act as a link between Delhi and Islamabad by helping to change Indian policies regionally in order to address the long-standing problems with Pakistan. A positive climate where both nations enjoy a regular market in economic activity would result from doing this, and it would foster goodwill among other member states as regional colleagues. This setting gives India the chance to establish a connection with the new Silk Road initiative and eventually gain entry to Central Asia through Kabul and Lahore. Islamabad has demonstrated its supportive stance in this regard by saying that the Kartarpur corridor would be open to the Hindu Sikh community without the need for a visa, which could aid in normalizing relations between both Pakistan and India (Fallon, July, 2015). In the regional and global context, Pakistan's full membership in the SCO is crucial. Pakistan might potentially serve as a hub to boost energy and trade by providing a delicate connection between South Asia and the SCO states. Additionally, the SCO, working with Pakistan, may be a promising component of Afghanistan's rehabilitation and reforms. Because Kabul and all parties involved in the region benefit from a stable and peaceful Afghanistan. Every year, the SCO gathers together the official heads of state to talk about interregional cooperation mechanisms for developing attractive areas and regional security challenges that may be controlled promptly. In the regional and global context, Pakistan's full membership in the SCO is crucial. Pakistan might potentially serve as a hub to boost energy and trade by providing a delicate connection between South Asia and the SCO states. Additionally, the SCO, working with Pakistan, may be a promising component of Afghanistan's rehabilitation and reforms. Because Kabul and all parties involved in the region benefit from a stable and peaceful Afghanistan. Every year, the SCO gathers together the official heads of state to talk about interregional cooperation mechanisms for developing attractive areas and regional security challenges that may be controlled promptly (Ashfaq U. Rehman, August 2018). As the relationships between civilizations should be based on equal principles in order to increase each other's power and foster regional growth, the testimony also asserts that differences in civilizations should be respected. In this sense, the SCO favorably gives its member states and other affiliated states the chance to combat regional and international terrorist networks and other dangers to global security. The SCO provides a forum for member states to voice their sincere worries about a range of issues that, in their opinion, could jeopardize regional and international strategic peace. In a June 2012 meeting, for instance, state officials stated their hope that a country or group of countries establishing a missile defense system, regardless of other regional and global complexities, could result in a security dilemma in the regional and global strategic environment. While its member states denounce the US activities and reject NATO strategy in the East, the SCO works to promote regional security and progress in Afghanistan. SCO's agreements, however, refute the claim that this would be a military alliance that

would enable US dominance to control global politics and maintain global political equilibrium with the aid of NATO and strategic partnerships (Kriendler, 2013).

Law enforcement authorities would be better equipped to dismantle terrorist organizations as SCO grew. India and Pakistan, two regional actors, have the potential to become significant nations in the SCO structure in the future and effectively support both South Asia's regional security and economic stability. India and Pakistan require a number of initiatives for economic growth and advancement, some of which continue to be of utmost importance. Furthermore, Islamabad and Delhi have been struggling to achieve cooperation in energy security, develop collaboration in the transport connectivity among Asia and Europe to increase trade and assistance to deal with the growing problems of terrorism and drug trafficking (Muhammad Idrees, 2017). As the most important organization in Eurasia, SCO will expand its sphere of influence and perspectives in South Asian political, economic, and security matters. The body thereafter becomes one of the most significant regional organizations in the world after admitting India and Pakistan as full members. The SCO is the only body that consists of the four nuclear-weapon states of China, India, Pakistan, and Russia. The balance of power in the region is maintained by the SCO's four nuclear-weapon states. Additionally, the member states view it as a platform for the advancement of regional political, social, and economic stability. Similarly, by accelerating regional union and cooperation, Pakistan and India's permanent participation in the SCO may make it a strategic and important rival to NATO (Bhadrakumar, 2007). Through CPEC, China, a significant and important SCO power, has been making significant investments in Pakistan. By investing less and building speedier lines than before, it gives China a means of transit to the Central Asian nations, enabling it to swiftly meet its energy and economic demands. In this sense, China hopes to stabilize the area through the BRI's infrastructural revolution, just as America did with other European institutions to reconstruct Europe following the devastation of World War II. However, the US's policies demonstrate its reluctance to support regional stability, particularly when it comes to constructive steps that can help China. As a result, it is believed that the US has changed its relations with the nations in the region to suit its own interests rather than promoting regional peace, stability, and development. These are the situations where China and Pakistan's interests align to establish stability in the region, even though China prioritizes working with regional states to establish stability in neighboring countries in order to generate a market for its goods and to get involved in other trade, business, and cultural relations (Muhammad Muzaffar, June 2017).

## CONCLUSION

SCO is a dynamic means of promoting regional security and is firmly committed to resisting security threats among its member nations. In addition, SCO facilitates the opportunity for member states to forge direct security ties. China and Pakistan are rapidly creating joint counterterrorism strategies that significantly enhance regional security while also enhancing Pakistan's security situation. The SCO platform could be useful in balancing the various interests inside the organization that have a big influence on regional safety. The SCO platform, according to Pakistan, seems to be one of the most significant platforms for the upcoming years and will efficiently disperse regional security in the future. As a result, SCO provides its member states with a new avenue for commitment, which has brought them together to confront and defeat security threats. By their regional platform, the SCO member nations are actively engaged in counterterrorism efforts. Similarly, the SCO forum provides member states with the opportunity to secure, stabilize, and protect the region against terrorist threats. Lastly, the security agenda of the SCO has been extended to primarily address transnational challenges, all member countries must work together and participate in order to successfully handle this issue. When it comes to solving issues in their own regions, regional groups like NATO and SCO have proven to be more effective and efficient. Organizations outside of the region's governments might not be as involved as those in their immediate and surrounding regions. European states have considerable influence within NATO because they were among its founding members. The regional states of NATO successfully advance peace and stability in the region. However, American and NATO soldiers' engagement in other locations, such as Afghanistan and the Middle Eastern countries, is thought to have had little effect on bringing about peace, stability, and advancement in these areas. Such entities outside of the region may collapse for a variety of reasons. However, despite being a long-time member of the American group, Pakistan does not receive enough recognition from them and has not been effective in completely eliminating terrorism, security concerns, or economic

problems. As a regional organization and because of the longstanding Chinese relationship with Pakistan, the SCO could help Islamabad in many ways and steer it in the direction of future peace and development.

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