

PAKISTAN'S INTER-GOVERNMENTALIST APPROACH TOWARDS SCO IN CONTEMPORARY REGIONAL SCENARIO AND CHALLENGES IN PAK-SCO COOPERATION

Uzma Gul*

International Relations, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad
uzmagul@numl.edu.pk

Sana Zainab

Media and Communication Studies, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad
sanazainab@numl.edu.pk

Maryam Mansoor

Media and Communication Studies, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad
maryam.mansoor@numl.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

In 2016, Pakistan signed a Memorandum of Obligations for membership of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. It had approached the SCO in the wake of ongoing political and economic transformations taking place at regional and international levels. Asia marks the start of a "New Age," and Pakistan has already become part of this process by acquiring full membership of the SCO. In this backdrop, the proposed study seeks to explore the challenges and opportunities emanating from Pakistan's membership of the SCO. Using the theoretical framework of Inter-Governmentalism, it analyses that how Pakistan would be able to pursue an active foreign policy to promote its national interests in future in compatibility with SCO goals. With the combined application of research methodology (qualitative data analysis) and theoretical framework (Inter-governmentalism), the study attempts to critically assess the challenges and prospects of SCO membership for the country. The study concludes the Inter-governmentalist approach as a rather balanced approach for the country in order to pursue national interests effectively and recommends some strategies to cope with the emanating challenges in the wake of its membership.

Keywords: SCO, Pak-SCO. Inter-governmentalism, International cooperation

INTRODUCTION

On 24 June 2016, Pakistan signed the Memorandum of Obligations for SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) membership, hence acquiring full membership of the organization along with India. Before attaining the status of "full member" of the organization, Pakistan participated in SCO as an "observer" state, which was granted in 2005. Since then, Pakistan began to make serious efforts to meet SCO standards, to acquire full-membership. By 2010, Pakistan became the first state to apply for full membership among other observer states.

Besides SCO membership, Pakistan is an active member of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) and ECO (Economic Cooperation Organization). Pakistan was part of the SEATO (South East Asian Treaty Organization), CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) and RCD (Regional Cooperation Organization) during the Cold War era. However, most of the previous associations could not succeed in meeting Pakistan's expectations and eventually Pakistan either withdrew or became a passive member of them. The post-Soviet era witnessed a transformation phase of political engagements at regional and international level. During the changing political scenarios, Pakistan opted to look for renewal of regional engagements i.e. preferring the neighboring countries. Meanwhile, the creation of SCO on 15th July, 2001 brought broad prospects for fulfilling Pakistan's regional cooperation interests and hence Pakistan joined the organization in 2005 as an "observatory" member.

* Corresponding Author

This study aims to understand the process of Pakistan's membership of SCO through "Intergovernmentalism". Pakistan's inclusion in SCO is a deviation from the traditional concept of regional associations where factors such as a sense of "commonness", "good neighborliness" and historical ties often form a basis of regionalism. The case of Pakistan's membership in SCO, on the other hand, concerns essentially the compatibility of goals and, simultaneously, the inter-governmental nature of the organization. In the case of Pakistan's membership of SCO, the motivational element is the coincidence of interests with the organization's goals, i.e. progress, prosperity and security of the member states and ultimately, stability of the region.

Research Questions

The study will seek to answer the following questions:

1. Why does Pakistan's Inter-governmentalist approach towards SCO seem to be a balanced and appropriate approach in changing regional and international political scenarios?
2. What are the mounting challenges at domestic and international levels which create hurdles in the way of Pakistan's association with a Eurasian organization?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Pakistan's membership in SCO is relatively a new advancement in regionalism. Therefore, availability of literature is limited at present. However, the subject has indeed attracted some scholarly attention from different perspectives. Some scholars, such as Zeb (2006) in his article "Pakistan and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization", consider Pakistan's inclusion in the SCO as a challenge to Western interests in Central Asia. Qadir and Rehman (2016) argue that the inclusion of India and Pakistan as two nuclear powers have strengthened the SCO and this development is mutually beneficial. Other authors have focused on the role of geo-economic interdependence in diminishing conflicts while increasing the probability of peace and prosperity. For example, Jaspal (2015), in his article titled "SCO membership: potentials for Pakistan," states that SCO membership will enhance Pakistan's positive image in the international arena while providing tangible political, security and economic dividends. Some other scholars consider Pakistan's SCO membership as a game changer that holds a great potential for peace and stability in the region (Khan et al, 2016). An IPRI review meeting concluded that SCO membership expansion to include Pakistan and India would be advantageous for the region as, besides increasing the area of influence, it would discourage the activities of extra regional actors in the region (Rafi, 2016).

Apart from native scholars and analysts, this new development in SCO has been analyzed by some foreign scholars. For instance, Ibragimova (2016) and Roy (2011) in their respective articles discuss the implications and aftermaths of SCO expansion towards South Asia and granting membership to two rival nuclear powers of the region. Taking ahead the idea of SCO expansion, Stuenkel (2015) focused on the possible benefits for the region, specifically for China and Russia. Along with the above discussed scholars, we have another group of people who have driven our attention to the concerns, insecurities and doubts associated with the expansion of SCO towards South Asia. For example, Fedorov (2016) and an article "SCO entry: Concerns raised on India Pakistan's Nuclear membership and hostility" (Indian Express, 2016) have discussed the negative aspects of the SCO development.

The proposed study would use the theoretical framework of "Intergovernmentalism," to understand the regional cooperation trends of Pakistan specifically in the context of SCO membership. Going to the origins of the theory, we see that the idea of regional cooperation was first observed among European states post the Second World War. That's why earlier concepts of regionalism were Euro-centric and were based on European experiences. For an easy understanding of theoretical frameworks, regionalism debates can be classified as old and new ones. Old or early debates relate to the concepts which prevailed during the 1950's and 1960's. During this time period, scholars succeeded to develop three main theories; Federalism (Dosenrode, 2010), Functionalism (Revolv, 2017) and Neo-functionalism (Gehring, 1996). Federalism was rather a political process that inspired the pioneers of European Integration to aspire to a supranational institution. Contrary to Federalism, Functionalism fulfills the standards of a theory and has been attributed to the scholar David Mitrany. Neo-functionalism, which was a relatively new advancement, combined the process of federalism with the ultimate purpose of Federalism. The theory was proposed by Earnst Hass in 1958. Neo-functionalism differentiated from Functionalism as it eliminated the separation between politics and economy by

introducing the notion of the 'spill-over' effect. It was the theory of Intergovernmentalism by Stanly Hoffmann which challenged Neo-Functionalism and it could explain the stagnation in the European Integration process (Söderbaum, 2015). Today, there exist some notable regional organizations and associations in the region, for instance ASEAN, SAARC and SCO. Referring to the case of Pakistan regarding the politics of regional cooperation, it can be seen that it has always welcomed such opportunities, which is more evident from its recent membership in the SCO organization.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Researchers would use the qualitative data analysis method to conduct the research work. This method involves all the processes and procedures whereby we can generate meaningful and symbolic content from the data, i.e. qualitative data collected by the researcher. It would be deductive research as the hypothesis would be justified by using the theoretical framework of Intergovernmentalism.

This study will use both primary and secondary sources of research. Primary sources, i.e. official documents provided by the Pakistani Government and SCO Forum, will be analyzed to draw conclusions. Secondary sources will include books, articles from journals and newspapers, online data and recorded interviews concerning the research subject.

SCO Membership: Prospects for Pakistan

Understanding the politics of the contemporary era, Pakistan acknowledges the importance of "connectivity" with other states of the region and it has always advocated regional cooperation among regional members. A Pakistani diplomat, Maleeha Lodhi, has termed regional cooperation as the "top priority" of Pakistan (Khan, 2016).

Pakistan enjoys a distinguished location on the world map, as it is located on the cross-road of three important regions of the world; the Middle East, Central Asia and South Asia (as shown on the map). On the basis of its important strategic location, Pakistan holds the potential to become a hub of regional trade, economic dealings and transportation. As the politics of regional cooperation requires states to maintain good neighborhood at initial levels, Pakistan's keen interest in this dimension is definitely a sign of hope for further strengthening of ties.

An Intergovernmentalist approach can be observed in this realm, as Pakistan opted for membership in the wake of its own national interests. As mentioned before, the SCO convention attempts to combat three major evils: Terrorism, Extremism and Separatism in the region. Pakistan is a state that's been dealing with all of these vicious trends for a long time. Regional cooperation and economic integration can be a tool to eradicate these issues, as said by a Pakistani diplomat (The Diplomat, 2017). Pakistan's officials believe that a Western tilt towards India and leaving Pakistan in isolation is a high time for Pakistan to seek SCO membership and alignment with regional powers, i.e. China and Russia. Mr. Sartaj Aziz (adviser to the prime minister) termed SCO membership a foreign policy success as it tends to promote national interests in changing geo-political regional scenarios.

Geo-Political Prospects of Membership

Indo-Pak Transforming Relations

The strained and fragile relations between Pakistan and India is a potential security threat that is not specifically confined to South Asia, but the nearby regional countries are equally vulnerable, including the member states of SCO. In these circumstances, where SCO primarily aims at the peace and stability of the region and holds the potential to play a meaningful role in the regional affairs, Pakistan has the opportunity to use SCO platform for developing closer ties with India and resolve the core issues. Afghanistan and Iran in the wake of the projects such as the Silk Route, oil and gas pipelines etc., which is only possible via Pakistan. In order to make the regional projects successful, SCO understands the importance of peace and cooperation between both states.

The SCO charter demands member states to comply with the principles of peaceful co-existence and mutual respect. Thus, Pakistan and India are compelled to move in the right direction (Rehman, 2014). On the SCO platform, both states need to sideline their contentious issues and focus on the areas of mutual interests, i.e. playing rationally, for instance, Indian economic interests in CARS compel it to reap dividends of Indo- Pak relations and access Central Asia via road link, i.e. Lahore-Kabul and ultimately to become part of the Silk-Route project (Hughes, 2014). SCO frameworks for resolution of mutual issues can be used by both states. For work to facilitate discussions at multiple levels, for instance the Shanghai Five procedures for the resolution of Sir Creek issue. The sideline meetings of

the leaders of the states at SCO Forum would be a favorable development to avoid uncertainties and misunderstanding.

Reconfigure Relations with Russia

SCO membership gives Pakistan an opportunity to reconfigure its relations with regional states. In this regard, the improvement of relations with Russia is the priority of Pakistan's foreign policy. The platform of SCO can be used to aim for new goals and get rid of the bitterness of the Cold War times. For a long time, both states had witnessed ups and downs in their relations due to the Afghanistan and India factor. However, post 9/11, both states were able to converge on the US-led "War on Terrorism". Since then, both states have been keen to foster their political affairs. Pakistan's support for Russia's observer status in the organization of the Islamic Conference in 2005 and, conversely, Russian support for Pakistan for attaining observer status in SCO clearly exhibits the idea that both states urge to reconfigure their relations and move towards more cooperation (Azad, 2016).

SCO membership allows Pakistan to have the opportunity to potentially expand its political and strategic relations with Russia, which once remained fragile and strained due to the India factor (Siddiq, 2016). Strengthening of defense ties with Russia can considerably reduce Pakistan's dependence on the Western zone, most notably the US, as Pakistan finds an opportunity to use Russian experience in space technology and armament, thereby advancing its own defense industries.

Advancement in Pak-China Relations

Pakistan continues to keep the Pak-China relationship the utmost preference in terms of regional cooperation. China also reciprocates in the same way. That's why it is hard to find a parallel in Pak-China friendship in recent times. China's tacit support for Pakistan while attaining permanent membership in SCO cannot be denied. Along with the authorities, the people of Pakistan too share the consensus to solidify mutually benefitting relations with China that warrants the transformation of political and economic cooperation into strategic partnership. The relations between both states are historical and are prospectively evolving. For instance, both states made their first ever trade agreement in 1953, which initially stood at \$10 million and reached \$20 billion according to 2015 statistics and is expected to increase rapidly in coming years in the wake of signing free trade agreements (Global Edge, 2017). Pakistan's membership in the China-Russia-led SCO has further strengthened its relations with China. Currently, the geo-political situation of the region is continuously changing specifically in terms of Indo-Pak relations that requires. In this context, SCO membership would already make Pakistan a part of the coming age. Similarly, China can be a significant "third party" between Pak and India for peaceful resolution of their issues and can be a "balancer" for Pakistan on SCO platforms via-a-viz.

The Kashgar-Gwadar Trade Corridor, commonly termed as CPEC, the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st century maritime Silk Road has increased the prospects of economic cooperation to a great extent. Apart from political and economic ties, both states acknowledge the significance of socio-cultural cooperation between them, for which there have been various developments. For instance, China has established the Chinese Confucius Institute at NUML university in Pakistan to promote exchange programs regarding education, cultural festivals and media etc. (Siddiq, 2014).

Meaningful Cooperation with CARS

Central Asian states hold a significant position in the region on the basis of their geo-strategic proximity and hydrocarbon reserves (Laal, 2006). Pakistan shares deep and historical ties with CARS due to religious and cultural affinities. The relations between them were somewhat stagnant during the USSR control over these states. However, after the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, when Pakistan recognized the Russian Federation, it also recognized other states resulting from the dissolution, along with CARS.ECO, which initially consisted of Pakistan, Turkey and Iran, was expanded to include these nascent states along with Afghanistan in 1992 (Nadkarni, 2011).

After its membership, Pakistan can approach Central Asian republics in a better way. Though Pakistan has political interactions with CARS, there is a need to transform the relations into meaningful cooperation. In order to develop closer ties, both states need to work on a road rail link as it can serve as the most appropriate means of connection while approaching the land-locked states of Central Asia. Establishment of road rail links between both sides would open new dimensions for the commercial activities which would be beneficial for the rest of the SCO members as well. Among the six states of CARS, Tajikistan is the closest to Pakistan geographically. A road rail link can be implemented between both states at very low costs, and for instance, both states need to construct a road of 36 km only at the

location of Wakhan strip. Once these two states get connected through road links, it would become much easier for Pakistan to approach the rest of the CARS.

Security Prospects for Pakistan

SCO member states are collectively concerned about regional and international security and the issue has been highlighted many times in the discussions and debates at the SCO forum. The systematic withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan has alarmed the stakeholders about the aftermath i.e. the law and order situation. The fragile security situation in Afghanistan is a mutual concern of the SCO members and hence we can adopt the security agenda of the "alliance". Pakistan has been the major "affected" of the War on terror and has long been fighting against terrorism. The fragile security situation in Afghanistan not only affects Pakistan but also the other SCO member states. To contain security threats, Pakistani security agencies can be provided with SCO security personnel expertise under the forum of RATS.

In the SCO summit of 2012, the member states opposed the idea of a Missile Defense System by a certain state as it could raise security threats to other states. For SCO members, the missile defense system is more offensive in nature rather than defensive, as the possessors have leverage over others, which ultimately causes a security dilemma. Though SCO members deny the military nature of the organization, certain security measures still tend to make the organization more like a grown security organization. For instance, SCO developments regarding combining military and political activities, military assistance to the member states, joint military ventures, military alliance between Russia and CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) and mechanisms to respond to security threats.

The permanent membership of the organization would allow Pakistan to become part of the joint military venture. The SCO platform provides new avenues for Pakistan regarding weapon and military equipment production and transfer of technology

The RATS

RATS is a permanent body of the SCO organization which aims to eradicate the menaces of terrorism, extremism and separatism from the region. It works in relation with the competent anti-terrorism bodies of the member states and international anti-terrorism structures. The RATS demands member states gather and analyze international data regarding terrorism in order to formulate better frameworks for combating it effectively. Furthermore, it asks member states to hold scientific seminars and workshops so that they can collectively form a system of effective response system while confronting global issues. Permanent membership would allow Pakistan to avail the services of RATS to combat terrorism in a systematic way, as it operates according to certain mechanisms, structures and demands member states to work collectively to eradicate the issue.

Economic Aspects of the Membership

SCO members aspire to transform the region into an economic hub on the basis of historical routes that open Pakistan and the neighboring states, thus opening many vistas of common interest for Pakistan and the other SCO members. To avail economic opportunities, the member states are required to materialize the trade and energy corridor as soon as possible and therefore, they are needed to accomplish the plans for gas and gas pipelines and a road-rail link up to Gwader (Rehman, 2013). Permanent membership of the organization would assist Pakistan to create new economic linkages with these states. SCO has some significant and influential economic forums i.e. SCO Business Council, Business Forum and the inter-bank consortium. To make its presence felt at these forums, Pakistan needs to join the projects of exploration of hydrocarbon reservoirs and joint use of water resources by the SCO member states. The China-Pakistan economic corridor that's in the implementation phase is expected to play the role of economic arteries in the region, as it would connect Pakistan not only to China but the rest of the SCO members as well. The CPEC project would open up new economic zones and transportation networks for Pakistan. SCO membership may facilitate Pakistan to diversify exports and provide new market places to it. SCO membership gives Pakistan leverage to strive efficiently for the materialization of CASA-1000 Project i.e. Central Asian and South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project and thus easing its energy issues. It's prospective that the SCO member states; Pakistan and Uzbekistan have been able to sign an extradition treaty and agree on the cooperation regarding infrastructure developments.

The project of Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan pipelines, commonly known as TAP, is significant for the partners and to accomplish the plan, high level visits by the officials have been made on a regular basis. In recent years, Kirghizstan and Tajikistan agreed to sign an electricity export

from Central Asia agreement with Pakistan to meet its electricity shortfalls. The Iran-Pakistan Gas pipeline project, which was commonly called IP Gas and was supposed to provide gas from Iran to Pakistan, soon attracted India to become part of the project and thus it was renamed as IPI, i.e. The Iran-Pakistan-India Gas project and commonly dubbed as the 'peace pipeline'. Once the project is implemented, Pakistan would be able to meet its energy requirements through a 2775km long pipeline service from Iran's South Pars Gas field to Khuzdar and then towards India (Baloch, 2012).

Four member states of the SCO; Pakistan, China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have developed the idea of a bus service between these states to facilitate track-II diplomacy along with trade elements. The TAPI pipeline project is another project that needs implementation. Involving three member states, Turkmenistan, Pakistan and India, and one observer state, Afghanistan, the project is pending. However, SCO membership is expected to pave the way for its completion. SCO member states have some indigenous plans for connecting them to the rest of the members, for instance "Belt and road" by China, Eurasian Economic Union by Russia and SAARC by South Asian states, most notably Pakistan and India. Recent developments in this sense, i.e. the new Silk Route is more advanced as it works to connect two continents; Asia and Europe. Once the project is implemented, it would connect the significant economic zones of South Asia, Central Asia, the Caucasus, Russia and, subsequently, Europe. Though Pakistan does not share a considerable trade proportions with SCO members along with its observer states, SCO membership has given an opportunity to Pakistan to increase the levels of economic relations with the other members. China is a tested friend of Pakistan and CARS shares historical terms with it. Now it is time for Pakistan to re-design its trade plans and set economic preferences in the region.

Permanent membership of the SCO has enabled Pakistan to play an effective and important role in the region as it has resulted in a diversified and multi-lateral foreign policy. In current times when Pakistan lacks the trust of foreign investors due to extremism, a deteriorated law and order system, cooperation with neighboring states can ensure its physical and psychological security. Understanding the importance of cooperation, Pakistan has been actively pursuing various trade and transportation initiatives with SCO members. For instance, Pakistan is working on the Pakistan-China Economic Corridor, a Quadrilateral Transit Transport Agreement, CASA 1000 and TAPI Gas pipeline with different states which is strengthening its position in the region.

Pakistan's SCO Membership: Key Challenges

Continuously changing political, security and economic environment sets new opportunities as well as challenges for Pakistan's foreign policy. This evolving situation is challenging for policy makers as it's a test time for them to utilize all their expertise and potential energies to draw maximum benefits from it while dealing with the related challenges in an efficient way. Being bordered by states like Afghanistan, China, Iran and India, Pakistan's domestic policies are highly linked to its relations with neighboring states.

There are two types of constraints, which are identified as domestic and regional constraints in the context of regional cooperation in Asia. Domestic constraints to regional cooperation and integration involve internal challenges. For instance, fewer domestic facilities, geographical challenges, low private sector investments, inadequacy of human capital, high taxes, weak governance, political instability, security risks and inadequate financing etc. Regional level constraints for cooperation and integration include the non-aligned national policies of the involved states, lack of collaboration among leaders, lack of integrated master plans, insufficient investments by individual states, persistence of geo-political conflicts and incompatibility of national infrastructures to connect regionally (Llanto, 2011).

External Challenges

Foreign policy of every state is no doubt aimed at the fulfillment of its national interests. Among the national interests, the survival of the state, i.e. sovereignty and security rank, is the top position. The same is the case with Pakistan, whose foreign policy aims at the protection of the state's interests. However, state's interests cannot be attained in a smooth way, specifically in the case of a regional grouping where on one side there exist multilateral opportunities while, on the other side, there are some challenges as well. In the case of Pakistan, the following are the external challenges.

Balancing Relations between China and US

In the wake of its membership in SCO, Pakistan is facing the challenge of balancing strategic relations with China and the US. Evolving international and regional situations require Pakistan to become extra

vigilant in order to pursue its geo-political interests by engaging with SCO. Viewing the propagated ideas of the two world powers i.e. long war concept by US while Rising peacefully concept by China, it can be observed that these ideas combine the forces of 'conflict and peace' to draw a new discourse for contemporary world order. This situation is quite different from that of the Cold War, where the super powers had conflict - conflict concepts. Therefore, Pakistan would be facing the challenge of drawing out new pragmatic diplomatic strategies to keep a balance between a superpower and a rising super-power, which is, of course, a hard task for the policy makers of Pakistan.

Considering the current US administration under President Trump, it would be difficult for Pakistan to tackle the hard-liner president who explicitly opposes the Muslims and Muslim states. To carry out the War on Terror, Pakistan's foreign office would be facing the challenge of attracting the west, specifically the US, towards economic investments and financial assistance, after its clear inclination towards China and Russia. On the other hand, Pakistan would need to play tactfully with the rising world power i.e. China. Chinese General Xiong Guangkai has been recorded as saying; 'Pakistan is China's Israel' (Small, 2015). China recognizes Pakistan's central role in transforming China's status from a regional power to a global power and therefore includes Pakistan as a priority regarding its network plans of road-links, railways, ports and energy programs. China is progressing fast and, in the way it is developing networks in the region, it is being predicted that in the next two decades, it will be able to initiate its own doctrine of containment, very similar to that of the 'Monroe Doctrine' by the US President in 1823. This futuristic approach would not only limit the US area, of influence to Europe and Atlanta but it would also impact the region as well. Considering Pakistan's position, it can be anticipated that it would be bound by Chinese foreign policy to become a permanent bloc in the region.

Pakistan's membership in SCO demonstrates a clear shift in its foreign policy i.e. from US-centric to China-centric. However, this policy change should not disturb Pakistan's core interests in any manner, because Pakistan should continuously engage itself with both states by keeping the status of 'non-aligned state'.

Peaceful Relations with Afghanistan

Developing and normalizing relations with Afghanistan is another major challenge to be faced by Pakistan in the wake of its permanent membership. Pakistan's lazy and untimely response to Afghan President Dr. Ashraf Ghani's positive overtures smoothed the Indian path to clinch hands towards Afghanistan, thus occupying the heart of Kabul. Pakistan had not yet understood the true sense of the phrase; "one can change friends but not neighbors". However, Pakistan would have to get back Afghanistan as a friendly neighboring state, acknowledging the significance of the 2340km-long border.

Both states are inter-dependent regarding their peace and security situation and face the common enemy in the form of the Taliban. Despite the fact that both states share much in common, linked with each other historically and geographically, they have never been a smooth relationship with friendly relations. Various events and issues have, most of the time, deepened the grievances on both sides. For instance, the Durand Line, USSR invasion, arms trafficking, demand for Pashtunistan and Afghan migrants issue etc. This external challenge has also added to Pakistan's domestic challenge of internal stability. On one side, the issue disturbed the law and order situation, while on the other side, it introduced the ideology of the Taliban to the country (Grare, 2006).

Afghanistan's security situation is one of the biggest challenges to the Pak-China mega project, commonly termed as CPEC. Understanding the need of the hour, China has been striving to bring the Afghan Taliban to table talks, for which Pakistan's assistance is very important. However, China's efforts went in vain with the killing of Taliban leader Mullah Mansur on the soil of Pakistan. Since then, both states have seen worsening of relations over a passing day due to a series of different events. Now as the Taliban have refused to, peaceful talks, the chances for a peace settlement in Afghanistan have declined. Stability in Afghanistan possesses an important position on the security agenda of SCO, as it would be escalating the security issues of the neighboring states due to spill-over effects. Creating hurdles for the accomplishment of Mega projects i.e. CPEC, TAPI, CASA-1000 etc., The security situation in Afghanistan would be a challenge to Pakistan's economic prospects as a result of these projects (Borhr & Price, 2015). Adding to the prevailing insurgency issues in the provinces of Baluchistan and FATA, Afghan problems would hinder Pakistan's efforts for materialization of the Mega projects like CPEC.

Regarding the Afghanistan problem, SCO membership would require Pakistan to adopt a defensive policy rather than an offensive one. However, it would be more challenging for Pakistan as

the current situation between both states does not suggest reasonable peace talks in the near future, but in fact, it would give leverage to India to avail the full advantage of fragile and wobbly relations between the two neighboring states.

Diminishing Tensions with India

Pakistan foreign policy has been Indo-centric for most of the time, as the state has always perceived its next-door neighbour as the biggest challenge regarding its foreign policy, terming it an 'existential threat'. Unresolved Kashmir and Sir Creek issues and a nonstop blame game regarding insurgency are the biggest hurdles in the way of peace settlement between both states. Despite the perpetual hostilities coming from partition, no doubt in future both states could be potential trade partners in the wake of their membership in the SCO. India has progressed tremendously in economic realms and is likely to develop more. Recent developments from India's side, i.e. agreeing to grant transit fees to Pakistan and Afghanistan, along with finalizing the transit agreement for the project of TAPI, exhibits the idea that India realizes the changing regional scenario and acknowledges Pakistan's significant position in the region (Mehta, 2012). In this scenario, Pakistani foreign policy makers would find it challenging to formulate such national policies which would be in national interests and at the same time in line with the parameters set by the SCO Charter. However, a relatively strong position of India on regional and international fronts puts more responsibility on Pakistan to take the initial steps towards peaceful cooperation. Thus, Pakistan could face a challenging compromise situation in the wake of its membership.

Resetting Relations with Iran

Apart from India and Afghanistan, Pakistan has been unlucky enough that its relations with its third neighbour state have also been fluctuating, passing through ups and downs during different times. In recent times, the situation between both states is inclined more towards competition rather than cooperation. Gwadar port is viewed as a competitor to Iran's port of Chabahar in the South East region. On Pakistan's side, it's China who is actively assisting to build Gwadar port, while on Iran's side, it's India which is striving to build Chabahar port in order to approach land-locked Afghanistan and thereby exerting its diplomatic presence in the region specifically containing Pakistan's interests (Notezai, 2016).

Presently, Iran and Pakistan are facing an uncertain situation due to the issue of an Indian spy, Kalbhushan Yadav, as there were speculations that Iranian intelligence was aware of RAW intelligence operations which were being carried out from its soil against Pakistan. Ironically, instead of clarifying the misunderstanding, the Iranian government showed inclination towards India, which further increased the tensions between Pakistan and Iran. Now, when Iran still remains a strong candidate for becoming part of CPEC and is expected to attain permanent membership of SCO, it would be rather a compromise for Pakistan to strive for restoring bilateral cooperative relations. The situation is challenging for policy makers as Pakistan would need to draw up smart strategies to encourage Iran to develop better relations with Pakistan rather than sitting on Indian laps for the years to come.

Domestic Constraints

In the contemporary era, there is very little space for conventional wars, but, rather low level conflicts are more likely to occur. These low-intensity conflicts are linked with the internal stability of a state. That's why, in recent times, nations have to consider more about internal threats confronted due to the national integration, sectarianism, systems, drug and arms trafficking, economic disparities and environmental hazards, etc. Internal issues have disturbed the country more than external threats by creating greater menace. For external threats, states have been successful in developing diplomatic strategies through various international institutions but they have not been able to cope with the internal challenges. In developing states like Pakistan, internal challenges remain a continuous source of tension keeping the state engaged internally. Regarding internal threats, Pakistan faces the following challenges:

Internal Instability

Pakistan played the role of front line state in the US-led war against terror and, ironically, its role made it become one of the biggest sufferers of terrorism. Despite its great sacrifices and compromise on national security, the international community has not accepted Pakistan's role. In fact, it has been perceived suspiciously worldwide. Its active role along with NATO forces consequently made it the target of militants and extremists. After one and a half decades have passed, Pakistan is still confronted with the internal security challenge with which it has conducted two military operations i.e. Operation

Rah-e-Rast and Operation Rah-e-Nijat, while another operation, Operation Zarb-e-Azb is in progress. In recent times, Pakistan's officials have agreed for a nation-wide operation to tackle the menace and bring back the lost peace.

The security situation in Baluchistan is a serious threat to the internal stability of Pakistan and would be a challenge for Pakistan in the context of its SCO membership too. For China, it's the CPEC that made it to invest \$46 billion, while for the other members of the SCO it's again the Gwadar port that makes them aspire to economic opportunities. However, the security situation in the related provinces i.e. Baluchistan, the sense of deprivation and very importantly, lack of infra-structure pose a challenge for Pakistan's authorities in order to make the area approachable for SCO members. To integrate the least integrated provinces, Pakistan's federal government would be required to adopt a sane policy in such a manner that it could create and flourish the sense of 'nationalism' among Balochs (Akbar, 2011). The long-existing insurgency in the province would be a hurdle to carrying out SCO economic projects smoothly, hence a challenge for Pakistan to secure the porous borders of Iran and India.

Ethnic complexity and sectarian heterogeneity in Pakistan are some other factors which pose a serious challenge to the country's peace and stability. Eruption of ethnic issues has been attributed to the political system of Pakistan, which has been used to breed repressive structures of governance. These structures could not accommodate the minorities and non-dominant groups and ultimately resulted in a sense of deprivation among certain ethnic groups, thus benefitting the external forces; for instance, the Baloch minority insurgency in 1973 (Siddiqi, 2012). Cultural and sectarian heterogeneity in the country are a reason for sectarian violence; an issue which has caused 2300 deaths in the four provinces, while 1500 in FATA from 2007 to 2013. Sectarian violence is more evident between the two major sects, i.e. Sunni Deobandi and Shia Muslims (Rafiq, 2014). Both ethnic and sectarian violence keep the federal government, provincial governments and security forces engaged internally. On the one side, this situation worsens a country's image abroad, while on the other side, it hinders developmental projects by deteriorating the security environment. Now, when Pakistan has finally attained SCO's permanent membership, the fragile security situation would be a challenge to accomplish those programs and projects which Pakistan aspires, in the wake of its membership in the organization.

Fragile Political Institutions

Unfortunately, Pakistan could not attain stable, proper and efficient political institutions from the time of independence till present due to a continuous switch between civil and military governments. Though, for the last ten years, there has been a democratic set up in the country, still the prevalence of weak institutions cannot allow it to yield fruits at grassroots level. Domestic failures, for instance, deteriorated law and order, socio-economic injustices, corruption etc. are a challenge for institutions in order to create a tolerant, moderate and developing society in the state.

Likewise, the political system's judiciary has also been a weak institution which has been used by governments, most notably by military governments, in order to fulfil their very own vested interests. The 'Doctrine of necessity', played an instrumental role in governments making unwise, undemocratic decisions at various times (Banuazizi & Weiner, 1988). This compromising and un-necessarily flexible nature of the judiciary, in turn, has blocked the way for democracy to flourish and ultimately resulted in numerous other internal problems. Today, when Pakistan has succeeded in establishing a democratic set up, the civilian government still lacks the proper and efficient mechanisms for political institutions. Deteriorated law and order systems due to weak institutions continuously keep policy makers engaged internally, hence diverting attention from foreign challenges and possible solutions to them.

Provincial Disharmony and Political Discontent

Provincial disharmony is another big challenge posed to the internal stability of the state. Provincial disparities subsequently resulted in the idea of regionalism among the masses while distinguishing the sense of 'Nationalism' outside of them. The situation is threatening national integrity and sovereignty as provincialism is weakening the nation's binding force while inculcating the ideas of Punjabi, Balochi, Pathan and Sindhi etc.

Political discontent and controversies are a challenge to overcoming the smooth functioning of developmental projects. For instance, there is continuous discontent among political authorities regarding the route, dividends and allocation of finance for the accomplishment of the CPEC project.

Current political discontent can be attributed to the state's historical political economy where political parties always politicized economic projects for their political interests. Smaller provinces have felt grievances of discrimination from the federal government side while allocating the annual budget (Ali, 2016). While the problem has been a hindrance to the state's progress for a long time, it would be more challenging in the context of SCO membership regional and international decisions formerly accepted.

Energy Scarcity and lack of Infra-structure

Scarcity of energy and water resources is a setback to our country. Due to continuous electricity problems, a lot of industries and businesses were compelled to be shut down. Energy scarcity has disturbed every sector of life and it's like the daytime for the masses to get an uninterrupted electricity supply. Mismanagement of water by an agrarian state, despite five notable rivers, is a threat to economic stability. The government's ignorant behavior regarding dams' development has not let them build new dams or renovate the existing ones, i.e. Tarbela, Mangla affected by sedimentation (Rehman, 2017).

Among the biggest challenges to internal stability is crippling and, consequently, lack of infra-structure has an important place. Pakistan's economy heavily relies on foreign financial aid, specifically from the US. Addiction to foreign assistance and aid never let the country get rid of the debt crisis (Mohey-ud-din, 2005). However, in recent times, the state has adopted a replacement for the previous strategies i.e. Striving for foreign trade, rather, aid in the wake of its membership in SCO, it would be a challenge for the policy makers to adjust economic strategies according to the standards and requirements of the organization, i.e. a stable and sustained GDP.

Social Evils

Illiteracy is another core challenge confronted by internal stability. Almost 50% of Pakistani children cannot afford to complete their primary education, which makes their future uncertain. On one hand, where education paves the way for a state prosperity, illiteracy closes the doors to economic development and prosperity. In fact, illiteracy is a gateway to other social issues like poverty, unemployment, violence, crimes etc., creating an uncertain environment for the state to move in a globalized world. The situation would be challenging for Pakistan regarding its aspirations of the SCO, as to get full advantage from the organization, there must be an educated and skilled labor group which Pakistan lacks currently.

Eradicating corruption is another national challenge that threatens the internal stability of Pakistan. Unfortunately, the problem has spread to a high extent that each and every institution of government is facing it. It has its roots in low level staff to high level officers varying the level of corruption. The issue is weakening the already weak system of the state and poses a threat to its survival (Hussain, 2001). Viewing this, one can predict the strong chances for corruption in future projects under SCO, thus hindering the economic progress of the state and deteriorating its image on regional platforms.

CONCLUSION

Regionalism is a relatively new field that developed and flourished in the 20th C. However, scholars have not been successful in developing an agreed definition for it due to the multi-dimensions of "region". Regionalism initiated in Europe in the aftermath of the World Wars. Therefore, earlier theories and approaches of regionalism are based on European experiences. Focusing on the regionalism in Asia, it can be observed that integration in the region is rather different from that of Europe. The process of integration is pragmatic and flexible in nature and it is more governed by the markets rather than governments.

Pakistan has welcomed and availed opportunities which are in line with regional cooperation. In accordance to its regional cooperation interests, Pakistan has been part of certain alliances and organizations at different times since its independence in 1947. Permanent membership of the SCO has enabled Pakistan to play an effective and important role in the region as it has resulted in a diversified and multi-lateral foreign policy. Regarding diplomatic ranking in the region, one can see and observe that membership has raised and enhanced Pakistan's stature in the world.

In current times when Pakistan lacks the trust of foreign investors due to extremism, a deteriorated law and order system, cooperation with neighboring states can ensure its physical and psychological security. A peaceful environment in return will ensure safe circumstances for the investors and tourists, thus increasing economic activities of the state. SCO aspires to certain prospects

in the wake of Pakistan's full membership which are political, strategic and economic in nature. Pakistan's geographic location has been an important factor behind acquiring full member status.

In order to meet the new opportunities and challenges in the wake of SCO membership, Pakistan needs to adopt a pro-active role in the framework of the organization. To counter the challenges of political relations, security and the economy, Pakistan needs to adopt a pragmatic and factual foreign policy that can address current interests of the state. Though internal challenges have no direct link to Pakistan's membership in the organization, their indirect links and impact on development cannot be ignored and therefore, the government must pay attention to them. SCO membership can only yield positive outcomes for Pakistan, when the country would be in a stable position to deal with its internal and external challenges.

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