



RESEARCH PAPER

Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Opportunities for Pakistan

¹Mehran Khan and ²Ferdos Jamal*

1. MS Scholar, Department of Politics & IR, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan
2. MS Scholar, International Trade, School of economics and management, Nanjing University of science and technology, Nanjing, China

***Corresponding Author** ferdosjamal@njjust.edu.cn

ABSTRACT

This research paper explores Pakistan's potential advantages within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). It focuses on three main areas: energy sector collaboration, economic cooperation, and joint military exercises. The paper uses qualitative research methodology to provide a comprehensive overview of the opportunities the SCO presents for Pakistan. It suggests that Pakistan can harness economic, security, and diplomatic benefits through increased trade, infrastructure development, and regional cooperation, provided it engages proactively and aligns with SCO objectives. The paper also highlights the strategic implications of joint military exercises between Pakistan and SCO member states, addressing shared security concerns. The paper offers valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders interested in promoting regional cooperation. By recommendations, Pakistan can further leverage its membership in the SCO to realize the full spectrum of opportunities for socioeconomic growth and regional cooperation, contributing to a more integrated and prosperous Eurasian region

KEYWORDS Economic Collaboration, Pakistan, Regional Cooperation, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Strategic Alliances

Introduction

The SCO provides Pakistan with an opportunity to expand trade relations, particularly with Central Asian member states, fostering economic growth for both Pakistan and the CARs. As a key player in South Asia, Pakistan serves as a crucial link for landlocked Central Asian Republics to access the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, and global markets. The Karakoram Highway facilitates connectivity between Afghanistan, Tajikistan, China, and Pakistan. Additionally, with access to the port of Gwadar, Pakistan offers a land route to the Central Asian Republics via Tajikistan, with the shortest trade route passing through the ports of Karachi, Pasni, and Gwadar at a distance of approximately 1600 km. This has the potential to boost bilateral trade in manufactured goods and raw materials. Recognizing the importance of cultural and economic ties, Pakistan aims to establish strategic advantages over India's influence in South Asia (Adnan & Fatima, 2015). Efforts to enhance trade relations are evident in the Commerce Minister Pervaiz Malik's statement, emphasizing the need to address non-tariff obstacles, streamline visa procedures, and strengthen direct flights and financial ties. The goal is to expand bilateral investment and trade with Central Asian nations, recognizing the untapped potential in current trade volumes (Tribune, 2018). Pakistan's interest in bolstering bilateral trade relations with the CARs aligns with its economic growth objectives, and the SCO provides a favourable platform for achieving this. Leveraging Central Asia's abundant energy and industrial raw materials, particularly from countries like Turkmenistan, can significantly benefit South Asia, including Pakistan. Recent agreements with Uzbekistan in areas such as information technology, agriculture, textiles, and defence underscore the commitment to diverse collaboration. However,

Pakistan faces economic challenges, seeking support from international institutions like the IMF, World Bank, and friendly nations to stabilize its economy in times of crisis (Rubab, Ali & Rana, 2022). Despite economic constraints, the drive to deepen ties with Central Asian nations remains strong, reflecting a strategic focus on regional connectivity and collaboration within the SCO framework.

Literature Review

Pakistan's population growth and economic expansion have led to a need for alternative energy sources, prompting the TAPI pipeline project. The pipeline aims to transport natural gas from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and India via Afghanistan. The project, which spans 1815 kilometers, is expected to cost \$9.9 billion and take 30 years to complete. The Dualatabad natural gas reserve in Turkmenistan has a capacity to supply 33 billion cubic meters. Afghanistan will receive 16% of the total supply, and Afghanistan is expected to receive an annual transit revenue of US\$400 million (Warikoo, 2016).

Pakistan is exploring the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline initiative, which aims to link the Iranian South Pars gas field to Karachi. Initially estimated to cost \$3 billion, the pipeline stretches 2,670 kilometers and is expected to carry \$3.2 billion worth of gas. The project could establish economic interdependence among Iran, Pakistan, and India, fostering regional cooperation and promoting social and economic development. It could also reduce petrol prices and generate substantial transit fees, estimated to range between \$600 million and \$700 million annually (Perkovich & Prasad, 2005).

Conversely, Pakistan is exploring options with Russia for cost-effective gas imports. Russia, renowned as one of the largest global producers and exporters of natural gas, presents an opportunity for Pakistan to import gas at a more economical rate. This prospect could serve as a viable alternative to the liquefied natural gas (LNG) currently imported by Pakistan from Qatar. Ongoing discussions between the two nations have been productive, and in January, an independent Russian oil refiner, Fortinvest, successfully negotiated a deal to export gasoline to Pakistan through land routes (Reuters, 2023).

Importing Russian gas could be cost-effective compared to Qatar's current gas imports, potentially reducing Pakistan's electricity production costs and improving its economy. Pakistan has initiated its first order for Russian oil, demonstrating a coordinated approach between Washington and Islamabad. However, challenges include the construction of a pipeline, geopolitical tensions between Pakistan and Russia, and concerns about the long-term sustainability of fossil fuels, such as natural gas (VoA, 2023).

Pakistan's economic collaboration with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is based on mutual benefit, equality, and non-discrimination. Strategically located at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, Pakistan offers expedited access to Western China, Central Asia, and the Arabian Sea (Rana, 2021).

Pakistan and China have a strong friendship, with China holding a high priority in Pakistan's foreign policy. In 2015, China and Pakistan signed the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which aims to stabilize Pakistan's economy, improve relations with neighboring countries, and transform Gwadar into a regional commerce hub. The CPEC includes plans for Special Economic Zones across Punjab, Gilgit-Baltistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Baluchistan, and Sindh (Butt & Butt, 2015).

Pakistan plans and actively engages in Military-Military Exchanges (MMEs) to achieve key strategic objectives, including peace restoration in Afghanistan,

counterterrorism efforts, and deterring India threats. It also aims to strengthen diplomatic ties, operationalize the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, and ensure maritime security in the Indian Ocean region. The military's involvement during peacetime is crucial for achieving these goals (Bashir & Gul, 2021).

This research paper explores potential collaborations between Pakistan and the SCO nations. It focuses on three segments: "Investigating the Prospects for Energy Collaboration between Pakistan and the SCO," which examines energy solutions like TAPI, IPI, and Russian gas imports, while also addressing geopolitical and sustainability concerns. The second segment, "Investigating Economic Collaboration between Pakistan and the SCO Nations," aims to understand economic ties, identify barriers to integration, and enhance collaboration. The third segment, "Examining the Prospects of Collaborative Military Drills between Pakistan and the SCO," examines military engagements, emphasizing the need for historical contexts, joint drill effectiveness, and geopolitical factors. The research calls for a more integrated and cross-disciplinary approach, evaluating policies and their implementation to understand the intersections between energy, economics, and military collaborations.

Material and Methods

This study relies on qualitative research, which involves the collection and analysis of non-numerical data to gain a deeper understanding of ideas, opinions, or experiences. Qualitative research is employed to unveil intricate details about a situation and stimulate the development of new study concepts. Data has been collected through primary and secondary sources.

Investigating the Prospects for Energy Collaboration between Pakistan and the SCO

One of the foremost priorities is the examination of the current status of energy trade. Central Asia, with the world's second-largest energy reserves, stands out as a region abundant in metals. Notably, 99 out of the 110 elements on the periodic table, including gold, magnesium, silver, uranium, tungsten, zinc, bohrium, lead, copper, chromite, molybdenum, and fluorides, are found in this region, particularly in Kazakhstan. In addition to its rich natural resources, Central Asia presents opportunities for trade and foreign direct investment (FDI). Between 2000 and 2009, there was a nine fold increase in foreign direct investment inflow into the Central Asian Republics (CARs), coupled with an annual GDP growth rate of 8.2%. However, the power vacuum created by the collapse of the USSR initiated commercial and political competition over the abundant natural gas and oil reserves in the Central Asian States, shaping the region's role in regional and international power politics, a scenario less favourable to Pakistan (Khan & Elahi, 2016).

Pakistan, experiencing population growth and an expanding economy, faces a substantial surge in energy demand. In response, the country has been actively seeking alternative energy sources, and one significant initiative is the TAPI pipeline, involving Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. Proposed as a gas pipeline project, TAPI aims to transport natural gas from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and India through Afghanistan. Discussions on the TAPI gas pipeline have been on-going since 2001, with continuous coordination facilitated by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The TAPI Pipeline Company Limited was established in November 2014, laying the groundwork for technical assistance during the preparatory phase. Turkmenistan took over as Consortium Leader in the 22nd TAPI steering committee meeting, with universal support, and the project's coordination office was established in Dubai (Khetran, 2020).

The construction of the TAPI pipeline holds considerable benefits for all four participating nations and is one of the largest projects in the region. Spanning a total distance of 1815 kilometres, including sections in Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, the project is estimated to cost \$9.9 billion and take 30 years to complete (Lee & Gill, 2015). With Dualatabad in Turkmenistan possessing the fourth-largest natural gas reserve globally, capable of supplying 33 billion cubic meters of gas to TAPI, the distribution is allocated with Pakistan and India each receiving 42%, while Afghanistan receives the remaining 16%. In addition to its gas share, Afghanistan is slated to receive US\$400 million annually from transit revenue (Warikoo, 2016). While Pakistan anticipates reliable natural gas supplies from the TAPI pipeline, aiding in addressing the nation's energy shortage, security issues and delays due to unrest in Afghanistan have posed challenges. Nevertheless, Pakistan remains committed to the TAPI project as a potential solution to its energy needs. The TAPI project holds significance for Pakistan on multiple fronts. The anticipated gas supply from the project could generate 6,000 megawatts of affordable electricity in Pakistan, surpassing the current capacity of the largest Pakistani dam, Tarbela. Furthermore, the project ensures a consistent flow of foreign currency through royalty payments from India. Additionally, the project's development and operation could lead to increased public and private investment, job creation, and heightened economic activity. Beyond tangible benefits, the TAPI project has the potential to foster improved relations between India and Pakistan, contributing to a regional peace process. All participating nations, including India, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan, stand to gain significantly from the TAPI project. India, addressing its growing energy needs, could access more affordable petrol supplies conveniently. Afghanistan, besides receiving royalties, could witness job creation and employment opportunities, which are currently scarce. Turkmenistan, in turn, has the opportunity to expand its energy market and forge strategic ties with regional clients (Ali, Ahmed, Sabir & Shah, 2021). The TAPI gas pipeline emerges as a transformative initiative for the member nations, promising economic strengthening, meeting energy requirements, and ultimately uplifting the standard of living for people in South and Central Asia (D'Souza, 2017).

Pakistan is grappling with a severe energy crisis, posing potential hindrances to its development, as noted by energy experts involved in various renewable energy projects (Rajpoot & Naeem, 2020). The 2014 World Bank report underscores the challenges in Pakistan's energy sector, attributing them to sluggish investments, and highlights the need for increased focus on the energy domain to support on-going developmental endeavours. The persistent energy crisis has worsened due to minimal investments, with Pakistan's power generation capacity stagnant since 2006, hovering within the 94–98 TWh range. Rectifying this situation necessitates a substantial infusion of investments into the energy sector (Amber & Ashraf, 2014).

The TAPI pipeline emerges as a potential solution to Pakistan's energy deficiencies. This project holds significant promise in meeting Pakistan's escalating energy demands, which have outpaced the available supply, resulting in an energy crisis with detrimental effects on the country's economy, including frequent power outages and disruptions to industrial production. The TAPI pipeline, by providing a reliable natural gas source, stands poised to address this crisis effectively. Beyond alleviating the energy crisis, the TAPI pipeline promises additional advantages for Pakistan. Job creation and economic growth are anticipated during both the construction and operational phases of the project. Moreover, the pipeline offers an avenue for Pakistan to generate revenue by selling natural gas to other nations, including potential access to energy markets in China and India. The collaborative nature of the TAPI project

involving Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India is expected to enhance regional ties, promoting stability and integration. Such cooperation has the potential to contribute to regional peace, a crucial factor for Pakistan's security and prosperity. The strategic importance of the TAPI project cannot be overstated. Once completed, it has the potential to significantly impact regional economic integration, providing momentum to initiatives that have faced challenges thus far. The project's resilience against changes in government within partner countries, thanks to private agreements, underscores its stability. TAPI stands as a key tool for enhancing regional stability and elevating living standards in South and Central Asia. The provision of affordable petrol to Pakistan, India, and Turkmenistan, along with transit fees for Afghanistan and Pakistan, establishes a mutually beneficial market for energy, fostering economic growth across participating nations. Consumers stand to benefit from more affordable, cleaner energy, stimulating economic activity and reducing inflation rates. The project's revenues can be directed towards improving social sectors such as housing, health, education, and clean water (Rajpoot & Naeem, 2020). However, despite these potential benefits, the realization of the TAPI project faces significant challenges. The strained and often hostile bilateral relations between India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan represent a major obstacle to TAPI's success. The geopolitical, economic, and security challenges arising from these tense diplomatic relations underscore the underdeveloped capacity for cooperation and planning in the region. Additionally, the existing trade routes, underutilized and outdated, pose concerns for the project's viability (Khetran, 2020).

In addition to exploring the TAPI project, Pakistan is actively considering the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline project. The inception of this project dates back to the early 1990s, with Pakistan and Iran signing a preliminary agreement in 1995 to construct an onshore natural gas pipeline. This pipeline, stretching approximately 870 miles, aimed to connect the Iranian South Pars natural gas field in the Persian Gulf with Karachi, with an estimated cost of \$3 billion. Subsequently, Iran proposed expanding the project to include India, transforming it into the "Peace Pipeline" (Khan, 2012). Despite the slow progress and ambitious rhetoric since the project's revival in February 2004, the IPI gas pipeline holds significant potential, addressing Pakistan's energy needs amidst an on-going energy crisis (Rajpoot & Naeem, 2020). The IPI pipeline, spanning 2,670 km with a 48-inch diameter and an estimated value of \$3.2 billion, carries substantial importance for Pakistan. Beyond mitigating the energy crisis, the project could establish economic interdependence among Iran, Pakistan, and India, fostering regional cooperation and integration. The collaboration on the project has the potential to strengthen diplomatic ties and promote peace and stability in the region. Economic benefits, including increased trade and investment, could enhance Pakistan's economic prosperity. The construction of the pipeline is expected to bring economic development and job opportunities to provinces like Baluchistan and Sindh, which feel neglected by the federal government (Perkovich & Prasad, 2005). Furthermore, the project may contribute to generating 5,000 megawatts of electricity, crucial in alleviating power shortages and improving the quality of life (Khan, 2012). Despite its advantages, the IPI project has faced delays due to geopolitical tensions among the participating countries. The project has been put on hold since 1995, primarily due to debates over potential routes, means of shipment, tariffs, and the geopolitical complexities influencing the decision-making process. Tensions between Iran and the U.S. since 2004 have further hindered progress, making international donors reluctant to fund the project (Khan, 2012).

In addition to the IPI project, Pakistan is also exploring the possibility of importing cheap gas from Russia. Russia, a major global producer and exporter of

natural gas, could offer Pakistan a cost-effective alternative to its current liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports from Qatar. Talks between the two countries have shown promise, with an agreement for Russian gasoline exports to Pakistan already in place (Reuters, 2023). Importing gas from Russia holds economic advantages for Pakistan, potentially offering lower costs compared to the current Qatari imports. The North-South Gas Pipeline, connecting Karachi and Lahore, could facilitate the delivery of Russian gas to Pakistan. A signed agreement in 2018 outlines the pipeline project's details, with an anticipated cost of \$1.7 billion and a length of 1122 km (Tariq & Mustafa, 2022). Despite the potential benefits, there are challenges associated with importing Russian gas. The construction of the pipeline could incur significant expenses, impacting the overall cost of imported gas. Additionally, geopolitical tensions between Pakistan and Russia may pose obstacles to reaching a long-term agreement for gas imports. Furthermore, concerns about the long-term viability of fossil fuels, including natural gas, raise questions about whether this is the optimal solution for Pakistan's evolving energy needs.

While TAPI, IPI, and Russian gas import projects hold potential solutions to Pakistan's energy challenges, the country should carefully consider the geopolitical landscape and long-term sustainability in its pursuit of diversified energy sources.

Investigating Economic Collaboration between Pakistan and the SCO Nations

The foundation of economic cooperation between Pakistan and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is built on principles of mutual benefit, equality, and non-discrimination. Positioned strategically at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, Pakistan serves as an ideal gateway for regional economic integration. Recognizing the pivotal role of Pakistan's strategic location, the SCO has designated it as a key player in fostering collaborative regional economic efforts. Situated at the confluence of South Asia, West Asia, Central Asia, and Western China, Pakistan's strategic significance is paramount. Its geographic location facilitates swift access to Western China, Central Asia, and the Arabian Sea. Strengthening connectivity is identified as a crucial factor to optimize regional economic outcomes. Afghanistan, being strategically positioned in landlocked Central Asia and South Asia, adds to the region's strategic importance due to its proximity to Tajikistan and Turkmenistan in the south (Rana, 2021). Pakistan's unique geography establishes vital land links, fostering commercial and trade successes that are mutually beneficial for all regional states. The country plays a pivotal role in facilitating North-South Trade and offers a favourable energy corridor through land routes and pipeline connections, including those leading to Gwadar and onward to Central Asian states. The Pak-China Memorandum of Understanding on the Kashghar-Gwadar road and railways represents a positive step forward, with China investing significantly in a \$58 billion railway system linking Pakistan to western China as part of the Belt and Road Initiative, aiming to diversify trade routes (Fox, 2023).

As Pakistan engages with the SCO, there is an opportunity to cultivate new connections in the global economy. Active participation in forums like the Business Council of SCO, the Business Forum, and the Interbank Association will be crucial once formal membership procedures are completed. Leveraging its expertise in utilizing hydrocarbon resources and managing water resources, Pakistan can contribute significantly to the economic initiatives within the SCO framework (Ali, Ali & Ullah, 2019). Significant progress has been achieved in completing and operationalizing most projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This monumental effort is creating extensive transport networks across Pakistan and establishing economic

zones, marking substantial advancement in regional economic collaboration (Adnan & Fatima, 2015). Recent years have witnessed an enhancement of economic ties between the members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and Pakistan, particularly with its close ally and major trading partner, China. China's substantial investments in Pakistan's infrastructure development projects, through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) initiative, have spurred economic activity, generated employment, and effectively addressed Pakistan's energy crisis. The signing of free trade agreements further bolsters trade between China and Pakistan. China's rising influence on the global stage, characterized by its economic prowess, has been a focal point, with the country making significant investments in energy and transportation infrastructure in Central Asian nations. On-going and planned pipeline projects aim to enhance gas supply, complementing the existing gas pipelines connecting China to Central Asia. Beyond energy, China has contributed to infrastructure development in Central Asia, spanning roads, railways, bridges, and telecommunications systems (Khetran & Khalid, 2019).

For many years, the diplomatic relations between Pakistan and China have been characterized by a strong and enduring friendship, with China consistently holding a high priority in Pakistan's foreign policy. The establishment of diplomatic ties laid the foundation for the evolving relationship, which reached a significant milestone in 2015 when Chinese President Xi Jinping and Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif signed the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) agreement during President Xi's state visit to Pakistan. This transformative project holds the potential to be a game-changer for Pakistan, providing a crucial opportunity to stabilize its economy, strengthen regional ties, and position the Gwadar Port as a hub for commerce and economic activities in the region. The CPEC, a substantial infrastructure and economic development initiative, forms part of China's broader Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and aims to establish a comprehensive link between China's western regions and the Gwadar Port in southwest Pakistan. The project encompasses the development of industrial parks, construction of new railways and highways, expansion of existing ports, and the establishment of new power plants. Initially budgeted at \$46 billion, the investment was later increased to \$51.5 billion and currently stands at \$62 billion, reflecting the project's significance and expansive scope (Siddiqui, 2017). This colossal endeavour is poised to bring about transformative changes in Pakistan's economy and infrastructure. The creation of numerous Special Economic Zones across provinces, including Punjab, Gilgit-Baltistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Baluchistan, and Sindh, is envisioned to attract foreign investment, foster prosperity, and accelerate economic growth (Butt & Butt, 2015). A key aspect of the CPEC is its potential to link Pakistan to Central Asia, addressing the economic needs of landlocked Central Asian Republics (CARs). These nations, abundant in natural resources but hindered by landlocked status, can benefit from the corridor, which offers them a new trade route to the sea and reduces dependence on traditional routes through Russia and Iran. By connecting Gwadar Port to Iran's Chabahar port, the project enhances the CARs' connectivity to global markets, allowing them to diversify their economies and decrease reliance on natural resources (Naseem & Yunas, 2016).

The CPEC not only serves as a catalyst for economic growth but also opens avenues for investment and collaboration. The creation of industrial parks under the project facilitates technology transfer and foreign investment, addressing energy crises in the CARs through the construction of new power plants. This ambitious initiative has garnered interest from approximately 52 states, including Russia, Central Asian nations, and Eastern European countries, showcasing its potential impact on global economic development (Saud, 2018). The four key investment areas—energy, trade facilitation, trade policy, and communication—underscore the comprehensive nature of the CPEC

project. It not only bolsters trade opportunities among member states but also uplifts living standards. With a focus on Central Asia's hydrocarbons and energy reserves, particularly in Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, Pakistan aims to strengthen longstanding ties based on cultural, business, and energy connections. China's broader efforts in South and Central Asia, including Afghanistan, to develop physical infrastructure align with its goal of securing a seamless supply of hydrocarbons and exporting goods. The strategic significance of the CPEC as a transformative economic paradigm in the region is highlighted, with the potential to foster regional cooperation and development in the years to come (Khetran & Khalid, 2019).

Examining the Prospects of Collaborative Military Drills between Pakistan and the SCO

The responsibilities of any established regional organization can be categorized into four main areas: preventing, defusing, or containing armed conflicts; fostering positive military cooperation among member states; advancing the defence sector, democracy, or good governance; and fending off unconventional security threats. From a conflict avoidance perspective, both the SCO and its precursor, the "Shanghai Five," have successfully reduced the likelihood of open conflicts among member nations by facilitating extensive interaction in the security sector through cooperative procedures. While changes in power dynamics may have influenced the security situation in the region, the institutionalized SCO has introduced a new channel for addressing these challenges (Qadir & Rehman, 2016). Its primary responsibilities involve maintaining communication with member state institutions capable of addressing issues related to combating terrorism, separatism, and extremism, as well as collaborating with international organizations addressing these concerns. The SCO supports member state interaction in planning and organizing military drills, as well as conducting search operations and other activities related to combating terrorism, separatism, and extremism (Siddiqi, 2016).

Pakistan's strategic objectives in planning and participating in Multinational Military Exercises (MMEs) focus on restoring peace in Afghanistan, combating terrorism, dissuading India, strengthening connections with friendly nations, operationalizing CPEC, and ensuring naval safety in the Indian Ocean area (IOR). The complex Pakistan-U.S. relationship, the increasing terrorism threat in Afghanistan, regional terrorist challenges, India's aspirations for regional hegemony, and destabilization attempts impact Pakistan's strategic environment post-September 11, 2001. Pakistan's defence and foreign policy align with countering terrorism threats to its citizens and the broader region. In this context, the military's involvement during peacetime becomes crucial in achieving Pakistan's foreign policy objectives and reducing strategic ambiguity in its surroundings (Bashir & Gul, 2021). SCO membership holds particular significance for Pakistan given its history of terrorism and extremism. Through the organization, Pakistan can share knowledge and collaborate with other SCO members to eliminate terrorism in the region. Unfortunately, agreements between Islamabad and SCO members in recent years have faced challenges due to a lack of institutional collaboration. The Regional Counter-Terrorism Structure (RATS) of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) could prove beneficial for Pakistan in enhancing institutional collaboration. Additionally, SCO membership provides Pakistan with opportunities to deepen connections and expand trade with European nations, previously considered a distant prospect (Khetran, 2019).

Economic Opportunities

Pakistan stands to benefit from increased economic cooperation within the SCO, particularly through trade facilitation, investment opportunities, and infrastructure development projects under initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Enhanced connectivity within the SCO region can open up new markets for Pakistan's goods and services, potentially boosting its economic growth.

Security Cooperation

Pakistan can leverage the SCO platform to enhance its security cooperation with member states, particularly in combating terrorism, extremism, and organized crime. Joint military exercises, intelligence-sharing mechanisms, and counter-terrorism initiatives within the SCO framework could strengthen Pakistan's security apparatus and contribute to regional stability.

Diplomatic Engagement

Membership in the SCO provides Pakistan with a platform for increased diplomatic engagement with key regional players, including China, Russia, and Central Asian states. This engagement can help Pakistan advance its strategic interests, foster regional dialogue and cooperation, and potentially mediate conflicts in the region.

Energy Cooperation

Pakistan, as an energy-deficient country, can benefit from enhanced energy cooperation within the SCO, including access to energy resources and infrastructure development projects. Collaboration in areas such as oil and gas exploration, renewable energy, and energy transit can help address Pakistan's energy needs and promote sustainable development.

Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges

Participation in SCO cultural and educational initiatives can promote greater people-to-people exchanges between Pakistan and other member states. This can foster mutual understanding, cultural appreciation, and academic cooperation, contributing to stronger societal ties and regional harmony.

Overall, the SCO presents Pakistan with a range of opportunities across economic, security, diplomatic, energy, and cultural domains. However, realizing these opportunities would require proactive engagement, effective diplomacy, and alignment of national interests with the broader objectives of the SCO.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Pakistan's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) serves as a pivotal catalyst for its multifaceted growth, both in socioeconomic and geopolitical dimensions. The SCO provides a promising avenue for Pakistan to deepen its regional connections and foster robust commercial relationships. By actively participating in joint initiatives and projects, Pakistan stands to benefit from increased trade, investment, and cultural exchanges, leveraging the collective strength of the organization. The socioeconomic potential is underscored by the organization's

emphasis on economic cooperation and development, offering Pakistan a platform to address common challenges and create an environment conducive to sustained growth.

Commercially, the SCO opens doors for Pakistan to explore diverse trade opportunities, particularly as it strategically positions itself as a bridge between Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. The organization's commitment to enhancing economic ties is evident in the rising trade volumes among member states, presenting Pakistan with the chance to diversify its economic portfolio and contribute to the overall prosperity of the region. Furthermore, diplomatic interactions within the SCO provide Pakistan with a unique space to engage on geopolitical issues. The organization's principles of mutual respect and non-interference align with Pakistan's diplomatic ethos, allowing it to shape regional discourse and contribute to diplomatic goodwill.

A critical aspect of Pakistan's engagement in the SCO is its commitment to counterterrorism efforts, addressing regional security concerns and fostering stability. By collaborating with other member states on intelligence sharing, joint military exercises, and counterterrorism initiatives, Pakistan plays a pivotal role in ensuring the safety of the broader region. The organization's focus on cultural exchanges further strengthens Pakistan's soft power and facilitates people-to-people connections. Leveraging its rich cultural heritage, Pakistan can actively contribute to the cultural landscape within the SCO, fostering lasting friendships and mutual understanding.

Looking forward, the strategic positioning of Pakistan within the SCO holds immense potential. The organization's continued emphasis on infrastructure development, connectivity, and economic integration aligns seamlessly with Pakistan's strategic interests, notably exemplified by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). As Pakistan actively engages in collaborative initiatives such as technology transfer, research and development, and educational partnerships, it not only secures its own interests but also contributes to shaping the evolving role of the SCO in the global landscape.

In essence, Pakistan's journey within the SCO is not confined to mere membership; it embodies active participation, collaboration, and a commitment to a collective vision for a more integrated and prosperous future. The data-supported insights presented highlight the tangible benefits that Pakistan stands to gain through its involvement in the SCO. As the nation navigates this transformative path, it emerges not only as a beneficiary but also as a key player in shaping the broader Eurasian region's future – one that is interconnected, secure, and flourishing. In seizing the opportunities provided by the SCO framework, Pakistan not only elevates its own standing but also contributes meaningfully to a shared destiny of progress and collaboration.

Recommendations

Pakistan should prioritize efforts to address non-tariff barriers, streamline visa procedures, and enhance transportation infrastructure to facilitate smoother trade with Central Asian member states. Continued dialogue and cooperation within the SCO framework can help identify and resolve trade-related challenges effectively.

Pakistan should actively seek to diversify its economic partnerships within the SCO, particularly by leveraging the abundant energy and industrial raw materials available in Central Asian countries like Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. This could involve further exploration of collaboration opportunities in sectors such as information technology, agriculture, textiles, and defense.

Pakistan should capitalize on the diplomatic space provided by the SCO to shape regional discourse on geopolitical issues of mutual concern. By adhering to the principles of mutual respect and non-interference, Pakistan can foster diplomatic goodwill and contribute positively to regional stability and cooperation.

Pakistan should continue its active participation in SCO initiatives aimed at countering terrorism, extremism, and organized crime. This could involve strengthening intelligence-sharing mechanisms, participating in joint military exercises, and implementing robust counterterrorism measures to ensure the safety and security of the broader region.

Pakistan should actively engage in cultural exchanges within the SCO to promote mutual understanding and people-to-people connections. By showcasing its rich cultural heritage and facilitating cultural interactions, Pakistan can strengthen its soft power and contribute to building lasting friendships within the SCO community.

Pakistan should strategically align its domestic development projects, such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), with the broader infrastructure development initiatives promoted within the SCO. This could further enhance connectivity, trade, and economic integration within the region, positioning Pakistan as a key beneficiary of SCO-led infrastructure development efforts.

Pakistan should continue to engage with international institutions like the IMF, World Bank, and friendly nations to address its economic challenges and stabilize its economy. This may involve seeking financial assistance, technical expertise, and policy advice to bolster Pakistan's economic resilience and sustainability.

By implementing these recommendations, Pakistan can further leverage its membership in the SCO to realize the full spectrum of opportunities for socioeconomic growth and regional cooperation, contributing to a more integrated and prosperous Eurasian region.

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