

# Navigating the Complex Terrain: The SCO's Engagement with Afghanistan and the Taliban's Quest for Legitimacy

written by Saddam Tahir | March 26, 2024



Afghanistan's place in the world's politics and economies is a big part of why the SCO is interested in the country. Afghanistan has a long history of working closely with and being connected to most SCO member states. This makes it a good choice for Afghanistan to join the organization. The country is an important part of the partnership because it borders some SCO members and does a lot of business with them. The SCO's goals of peace and security, economic ties, and connection are likely to be met better now that Afghanistan is a full member.

However, there are concerns and problems with the idea of Afghanistan becoming a full member of the SCO that need to be thought about, especially now that the Taliban are back in power. The main problems that need to be fixed are the acceptance of the Taliban government by the rest of the world and the economic situation in Afghanistan. Because of this, these things make it very hard for the SCO to negotiate with Afghanistan and reach its goals in the area as a whole. Also, SCO member states are adapting to new situations, and China in particular is having a hard time deciding how to deal with Afghanistan. China is a big part of the SCO and is trying to find a balance in its growing power in Eurasia. This is true even though China would rather stay out of Afghan politics. The SCO's method of deliberation shows the many sides of regional politics and the various goals of its member countries.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) consisting of China, Russia, India, Pakistan and four Central

Asian countries is to a large extent hindered in tackling the terrorism threat including the circumstances in Afghanistan. At a recent session, the member states pointed out that they had worries about the growing threat of terrorism from Afghanistan, which demonstrates the multitude and intricacies of the SCO's perspectives on this issue. Russia and Tajikistan, along with other countries in the region, worry that Afghanistan can become a facilitating ground for terror groups that exist in the region, including al-Qaida and Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Islamic Movement of Eastern Turkistan (IMET), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), TTP, and Jamaat Ansarullah, that can pose serious threats to The most vivid example is provided by Russia, which has been vociferous in its warnings about the heightened risks stating that the latter has strengthened the terrorist groups that are operating within Afghanistan. Another perspective in this regard is one of other Russian officials, and it is validated by incidents like the attack on the Russian Embassy in Kabul, claimed by the Islamic State group, which resulted in the closure of the Russian Diplomatic Mission in Afghanistan.



(AP Photo/Abdul Khaliq, file)

On the other hand, China's stand on the Taliban and the Afghanistan issue is quite different from the rest. China takes an active approach to the Taliban and strives to get the whole international community to cooperate to make Afghanistan shift from turmoil to order and reach stability and economic progress. The SCO's diverse positions toward terrorism and the Taliban are evidence of the intricacies of building a single stand about the terrorism issue and Afghanistan, which in turn mirrors wider geopolitical and strategic concerns. Distrust and political sensitivities cause disunity within the SCO, and this is coupled with differences in perceptions of threats, sovereignty concerns, and lack of real trust among the member states. Such lack of unity makes it hard for the SCO to successfully raid terrorism, as the majority of member countries will be engaging the Taliban bilaterally to ensure individual security and as per strategic interests. As a result, the SCO's function as a regional security platform resolving the threats originating

from Afghanistan is inefficient.

The SCO can navigate the complex linkage between regional cooperation and the individual national interests of the member states. Moreover, the problem of terrorism and instability in Afghanistan is likely to remain a pressing issue. However, the SCO is the most important forum for setting up joint discussions and responses to regional security threats. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the SCO is limited by the increasing disagreements and the different policies of its member states.