

SCO Foreign and Defence Ministers Meeting are going to be held in Beijing (China) on 23-24 April 2018. The SCO (2001) has come into existence with the objectives of regional cooperation for the elimination of terrorism, fundamentalism, and secessionism. In due course of time, some other areas like education, culture, connectivity, energy etc., have been identified to be in the scope of SCO. The Indian Foreign Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and Defence Minister Nirmala Sitaraman are expected to attend the meeting. On the other hand, their counterparts from Pakistan are also attending the same meeting. But the irony of the meeting is that where it is meant for the meeting of the member countries' foreign and defence ministers to ruminate over the issues haunting by the region such as regional security, stability, and peace, there is unmeeting between India and Pakistan. It seems like a missed opportunity for both the countries and the SCO will go in a SAARC way, is a major question haunting the common people.

The SCO is the second regional organization after the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), wherein both India and Pakistan as permanent members have been getting opportunities to meet and discuss the terrorism and regional security issues at the bilateral and regional level. Some of the scholars have suggested that the SCO will provide an opportunity to eliminate the menace of terrorism, which has not only affected the peace and stability of the individual country rather of the entire region at large. Moreover, it has been argued that since SCO has a mechanism like the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), to deal with such issues, thus, it could provide an opportunity for both India and Pakistan to address these critical issues.

According to its Charter, the SCO has been guided by its well-defined objectives. The main objectives are included like strengthening of the mutual trust and good relations among the neighbouring countries. Secondly, the developing political and economic cooperation focusing on economy and trade. Thirdly, education, culture, energy and environmental protection have been identified as core areas of regional cooperation. Lastly, the most important areas of cooperation for the member countries are to work together to maintain regional security, stability, peace, along with the creation of a new international political and economic order.

After joining India and Pakistan as permanent members, the SCO Ministerial Meeting (Foreign and Defence Ministers) is going to be held in Beijing (China) on 23-24 April 2018. The main agenda of the meeting is security and regional cooperation. After the failure of SAARC, now the SCO is only left as a platform for the Indo-Pak leadership to meet at the various level of diplomacy. Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, has already

been reached in Beijing to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Ministerial Meeting which is being held on 23-24 April 2018. Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will reach in Beijing on 23 April 2018. On the other hand, Pakistan Foreign Minister Mohammad Asif and Defence Minister Khurram Dastgir will represent Pakistan in the meeting.

EAM [@SushmaSwaraj](#) at the [#SCO](#) FMs Meeting: SCO is a major platform for convergence in our world views on sustainable development, clean and healthy living, multilateral trading system, Doha Development Agenda, disarmament & non-proliferation. Speech at <https://t.co/mormC4OLiapic.twitter.com/ttIka3oCri>

— Raveesh Kumar (@MEAIndia) [April 24, 2018](#)

The Sino-India bilateral relations have become very tense in the backdrop of Doklam Standoff wherein, both the countries have remained at loggerhead for 73 days. Several dialogues, meeting have been organized to pacify the tense situation through various levels of diplomacy. Recently a meeting between the National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and his Chinese counterpart Yang Jiechi took place in Shanghai. The 11th Joint Economic Group Meeting and the 5th Strategic Economic Dialogue (SED) have taken place. India and China have also organized working mechanism meetings on border affairs and cross-border rivers. Both sides have also organized a dialogue over the issue of disarmament and non-proliferation, wherein, India's entry into NSG was discussed.

Conveying our desire to strengthen our bilateral relationship, EAM [@SushmaSwaraj](#) called on President of People's Republic of China Xi Jinping at the Great Hall of People in Beijing. [#EAMatSCO pic.twitter.com/1lo8tAy9aM](#)

— Raveesh Kumar (@MEAIndia) [April 23, 2018](#)

Now, under the banner of SCO Foreign Ministers Meeting, the Indian FM Swaraj would have a one-to-one meeting with her Chinese counterpart Wang Yi. Although, it is a preparatory meeting of the SCO Summit for finalizing the agenda of the PM Narendra Modi's meeting with Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping, but at the same time there is possibility

of discussion over the several pesky issues existing between both the countries, are likely to figure in the one-to-one meeting like Doklam, South China Sea, NSG membership, CPEC, OBOR etc.

Indian Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman would also be attending the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's (SCO) Annual Defence Ministerial Meeting for the first time. Stobdon (April 16, 2018) has argued that the main agenda of the meeting likely to remain focused to reconnoitre the global and regional security matters. It is also expected that the member countries clear their respective stands on the haunting issues like Russia on the Syrian crisis, its diplomatic spat with the West, and China's stand on the South China Sea and its BRI projects and likely to seek the support of member countries.

"Our shared neighbourhood faces range of issues such as cross-border terrorism, extremism, cyber security & narcotics trafficking. These issues require solutions based on cooperative frameworks that involve all countries & stakeholders."

-Smt [@nsitharaman](#) at SCO Meet in Beijing pic.twitter.com/TEkcy7YhCB

— Raksha Mantri (@DefenceMinIndia) [April 24, 2018](#)

Indian Defence Minister is going to meet her counterparts from the eight member countries along with the SCO's Secretary-General and the Head of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS). It is expected that the meeting would provide a good opportunity for the two countries in resuming military exchanges, which had been put in cold storage in the backdrop of Doklam stand-off. Defence Minister Nirmal Siataramana is also going to meet the Head of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS). The RATS Article 6 tasked the member countries to deal with the terrorism, fundamentalism, and secessionism. Of course, it is also urged the member countries to share the intelligence on the extremist groups and individuals. The RATS is also tasked to collect the information on terrorist financing and their networks including the spread of ideology and propaganda. In addition to this, it includes the sharing of information regarding the cross-border organized crime and money laundering. Stobdon (April 16, 2018) has argued in his commentary that the RATS has its credit to curb over 500 terrorist crimes along with the elimination of over 440 training bases. It has also helped in catching about 1050 international terrorists.

India become the member of SCO member along with Pakistan on June 9, 2017. Both

countries have accepted SCO as an opportunity and platform for regional cooperation. For India, SCO could provide the sea of opportunities as it would bring India closer to Eurasian countries in general and Central Asian countries in particular, where it could tap their energy and market. Moreover, it could seek regional cooperation in dealing with the non-traditional threats like terrorism, fundamentalism, radicalization, drug and human trafficking etc. Moreover, the significance of SCO for India and Pakistan could be understood by a statement made by the Indian FM in her speech during the Ministerial Meeting of SCO (01 December 2017), wherein she said, "My congratulations to Pakistan for becoming the full member of SCO. This meeting has a special significance for India because it is the first meeting of the Council after India became the full member of the SCO." On the other hand, Zeb (18 February 2018) has argued that Pakistan sees SCO as an opportunity to improve and fortify its relations with the member countries by facilitating trade and address worsening energy crisis, through its the Gwadar port. It can extend cooperation to the RATS for terror activities as well as the regional solution of the Afghanistan issue. On the other hand, its importance can be understood by the former PM Sharif's statement, "Pakistan provides the natural link between the SCO states to connect the Eurasian heartland with the Arabian Sea and South Asia"

Missed Opportunities

Both India and Pakistan see SCO as an opportunity, but how it could be, is a major question. Both India and Pakistan are being represented in the SCO Ministerial Meeting on 23-24 April 2018. Even if one goes by the Charter of SCO's mandate, not to raise bilateral issues in the SCO meeting, but on the sidelines, there is no bar for a one-to-one meeting between the ministers of both the countries. Indo-Pak relations have been passing through the thick and thin. The confidence-building measure has been put in cold storage. The international border has become highly volatile. Given the war of words, the tension has been multiplied many folds. There is a line that talk and terror cannot go side by side on both sides. The electronic and print media have been suggesting that there will be no meeting between the Indian and Pakistani counterparts. In this backdrop, the dialogues and diplomacy are the best way to sort out the bilateral issues. SCO Meeting would be an opportunity, had it been used!!

Conclusion

Now, India and Pakistan have become permanent members of the SCO. SCO is an organization, which has opened a sea of opportunities for the member countries in terms of political, economic, security, education, energy, and connectivity. However, on the other hand, the whole region is highly infested by terrorism, fundamentalism and fissiparous

tendencies and the same areas are the main mandates of the SCO Charter. Therefore, SCO does need regional cooperation, otherwise, such lofty and ideal objectives of the organization likely to remain just a wish list. India and Pakistan relations have become highly turbulent. Moreover, both the countries are haunted by these challenges. At an individual level, these challenges are difficult to overcome. Therefore, it becomes a dire need of the time to extend cooperation and get rid of these challenges. Therefore, it is suggested that SCO has provided an opportunity to meet and extend cooperation in respect of these challenges. Dialogue and diplomacy are the only way to overcome such bilateral challenges.

[Read: The US Trade War: How China Should React](#)



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