

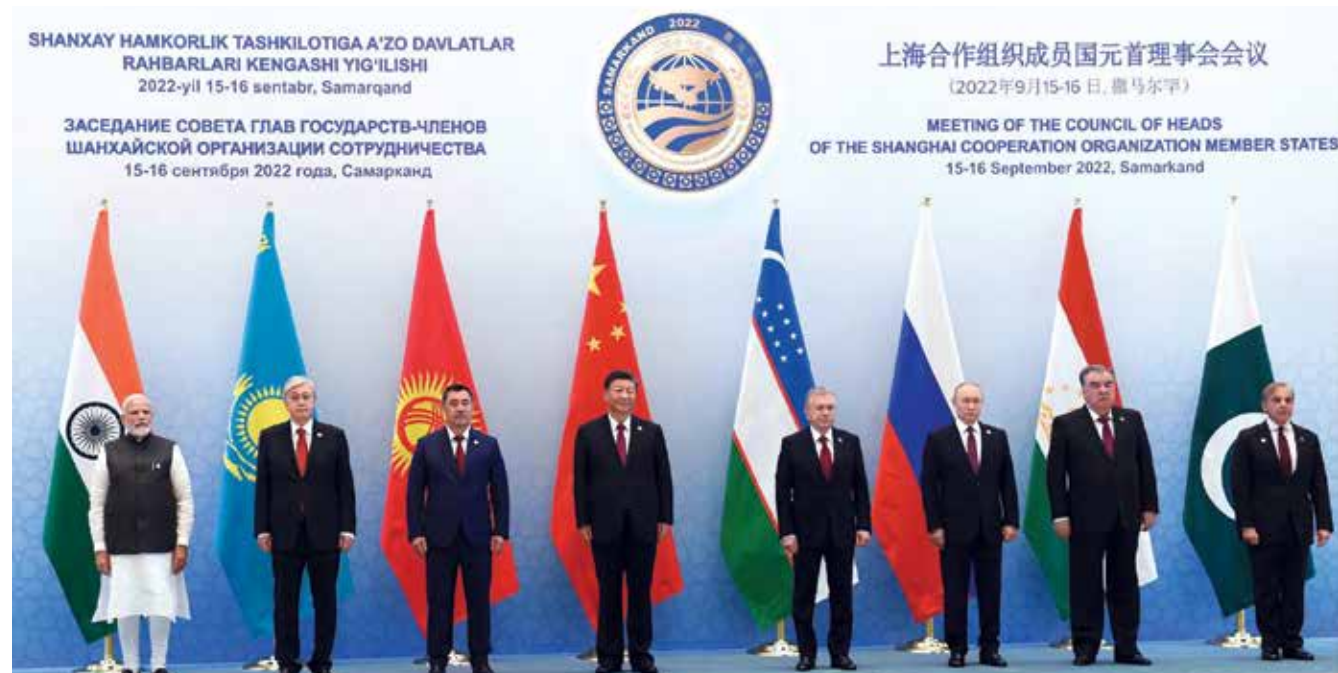
SCO Samarkand Summit Demonstrates New Center of Power for Development

by Marcia Merry Baker and William C. Jones

Sept. 18—This year’s Summit of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Sept. 15–16, marked a watershed moment for a world now engulfed in great crisis. With the U.S., UK and Global NATO moving from using Ukraine as a proxy, to openly proclaimed war against Russia, and attempts in the Asia–Pacific for a NATO-like formation against China, the meeting of the heads of state and delegations from 19 nations—the 8 SCO member states

Russia. And Iran has just been accepted as a member. Observer nations in Samarkand were Afghanistan, Belarus, and Mongolia. Dialogue partners in attendance were Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Turkey. Guest attendees included Turkmenistan, as well as senior representatives from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and the United Nations.

The plenary on Sept. 16, and many side meetings



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The eight heads of state participating in the Summit of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), in Uzbekistan on Sept. 15-16, 2022.

plus the newly joined Iran, and 9 other nations with varied statuses of association—has given powerful momentum for development and beneficial foreign relations, as a pathway out of world crisis.

With the Republic of Uzbekistan as this year’s host, the summit was held in beautiful Samarkand, one of the treasures of the ancient Silk Road. Next year, India will host the summit in New Delhi.

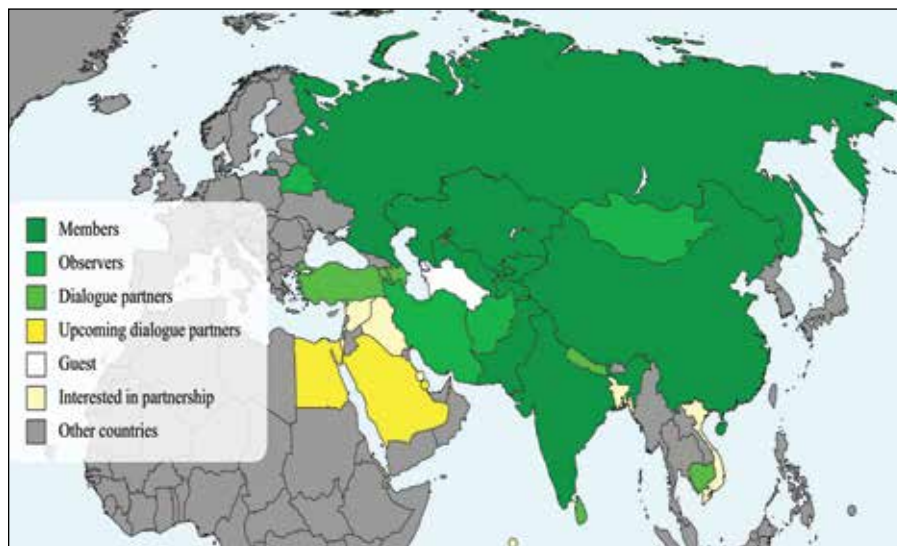
The SCO member nations are China, India, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and

starting the day before, were filled with critical discussions between Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and numerous others. However, Xi and Modi, who both participated in the plenary, did not meet for bilateral talks.

The Samarkand Declaration

The Samarkand Declaration, signed Sept. 16 by the SCO Heads of State Council, conveyed that the SCO member states committed themselves to work jointly

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)



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Country	Accession started	Member since
China	--	15 June 2001 ^[a]
Kazakhstan		
Kyrgyzstan		
Russia		
Tajikistan		
Uzbekistan	10 June 2015	9 June 2017
India		
Pakistan	17 September 2021	No earlier than April 2023
Iran	16 September 2022	TBA

Wikipedia

across many areas of concern, from security to economic development, but in no way committed themselves to function as a bloc against other nations or group of nations.

The declaration contains very important specifics, especially about measures to be taken against world economic turmoil:

- The SCO member nations “noted the acceptance of the Roadmap on gradually increasing the share of national currencies in mutual payments by concerned SCO member states, and declared for expansion of these practices.”

- The SCO members “stressed the necessity to ensure financial support of project activities for fully untapping the investment potential of the organization and in this respect continuing consultations on the issue of the creation of the SCO Development Bank and the SCO Development Fund.”

- The Declaration affirmed that Central Asia is considered to be the core of the SCO, and efforts will be made to ensure “prosperity and peace, sustainable development and the formation of a space of good neighborliness, trust and friendship.” Emphasis in the statement was put on resolving the situation in Afghanistan as soon as possible, to contribute crucially to “strengthening security in the SCO region.”

- The Declaration called for establishing Afghanistan as an “independent, neutral, united, democratic and peaceful state free from terrorism, war and drugs.”

Xi Jinping: The ‘Shanghai Spirit’

President Xi Jinping was visiting Central Asia as his first foreign trip since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis in January 2020. In addition to his full participation in Samarkand, with meetings, plenary presentation, and press briefings, he made two state visits, to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Important Chinese initiatives were announced for rail corridor projects between China and Central Asia, and specifically Afghanistan, timed with the SCO Summit.

In his speech to the SCO plenary, President Xi laid stress on the difficult situation facing the world today, calling on the SCO countries to be courageous in facing the present dangerous situation and defending the principles of the “Shanghai Spirit,” the principles on which the SCO was founded 20 years ago, namely, mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, consultation, respect for diverse civilizations, and seeking common development. He said,

We stand for harmonious coexistence and mutual learning between different countries, nations and cultures, dialogue between civilizations, and seeking common ground while shelving differences. We are ready to establish partnership and develop win-win cooperation with other countries and international organizations that share our vision.

Xi called on the members to enhance mutual support

and guard against “color revolutions,” but instead expand security cooperation, deepen practical cooperation, enhance people-to-people cultural exchanges, uphold multilateralism, and “reject the zero-sum” game of bloc politics. He also called on the members to safeguard the UN-centered international system and the international order based on international law.

Xi called for the—

implementation of the roadmap for SCO member states to expand shares of local currency settlement, better develop the system for cross-border payment and settlement in local currencies, work for the establishment of an SCO development bank, and thus speed up regional economic integration.

Prior to the summit, Xi traveled to Nur-Sultan (formerly Astana), the capital city of the Republic of Kazakhstan, for a state visit on Sept. 14. It was in Kazakhstan in 2013 that Xi had first announced the ground-breaking Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). He was received royally by Kazakhstan’s President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and awarded the Order of the Golden Eagle, Kazakhstan’s highest award, given to individuals in recognition of their significant contribution to Kazakhstan’s national development and friendly external relations. The two presidents renewed their commitment to cooperation and to working together on the BRI. They signed bilateral cooperation documents in trade and investment, connectivity, finance, water conservancy, and the media. They also decided to set up new consulates respectively in Xi’an in China and Aktobe in Kazakhstan.

Prior to the summit, Xi also conducted a state visit with the host country, Uzbekistan. He



Press Office of the President of the Russian Federation
Shavkat Mirziyoyev, President of Uzbekistan, the host country.

was greeted on the tarmac at the airport in Samarkand by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and a dazzling dance troupe. President Xi also reviewed a troop of Uzbek soldiers in the formal arrival ceremony.

Here also there were assurances of continued cooperation on the BRI, with the outlook of building a new China–Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan rail link as an addition to the trans-Eurasian transportation corridors. The two presidents also discussed security cooperation; Uzbekistan has had bouts of terrorist activity and there is some concern over the uncertain situation in Afghanistan. Both the Kazakh and

Uzbek leaders expressed strong support for China’s Global Development Initiative and Global Security Initiative.

At the summit, President Xi had bilateral talks with the leaders of Iran, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Mongolia.

China–Afghanistan Rail Corridor

Timed with Xi’s travels, there was a notable activation the same week, of the China–Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan rail corridor, with the inclusion of Afghanistan. On Sept. 11, a deal was signed involving Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, and the Chinese logistics company, Zhejiang Union of Railway



The Qamchiq Tunnel in Uzbekistan, along the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan rail corridor.

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International Logistics Co. Ltd., following which a trial run for a China–Afghan rail corridor was initiated.

On Sept. 13, two containers of cargo were trucked 300 km from Kashgar in China’s Xinjiang Province, to the city of Osh in Kyrgyzstan. Then the cargo proceeded by rail through Uzbekistan into Afghanistan, going through the Uzbek border town of Termez (1030 km) and on to Hairatan in Afghanistan (23 km), the first of what will be 10 containers for this round. This shipping route will cut the time from China to Afghanistan down from two months to two weeks.

Uzbek President Mirziyoyev, speaking Sept. 12 before the summit, emphasized the prospects for a “Trans-Afghan Corridor.” He identified “joint infrastructure projects such as the Termez–Mazar-i-Sharif–Kabul–Peshawar railroad” and concluded, “Together we can develop a new SCO agenda for a more peaceful, stable and prosperous Afghanistan.” This 530 km corridor would cut diagonally across Afghanistan through three river basins in which over 40% of the population resides.

Mongolia is the center of another infrastructure initiative. A trilateral meeting was held at the summit among the leaders of China, Russia, and Mongolia on the possibility of constructing a new oil and gas pipeline from Russia to China via Mongolia, to meet China’s expanded purchases as the flow of Russian oil and gas to Europe diminishes, a result of the sanctions and the Ukraine crisis.

Putin: ‘Emerging Centers of Power’

President Putin’s presentation to the SCO Heads of State Council made the point that the SCO is now the largest regional cooperation organization in the world, and it is not just “marking time,” but working for peace and stability “throughout the vast Eurasian space.” The SCO member states are home to half the world’s population, accounting for over 25% of global GDP. He stressed that new members are welcome, because—

[The SCO is a] non-bloc association.... We are open to working with the whole world.... [New] centers of power [are] emerging. [The interactions among SCO members and partners are not] based on some rules, which are being forced on them by external forces and which nobody has



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Presidents Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin at the SCO meeting, Sept. 16.

seen, but on the universally recognized principles of the rule of international law and the UN Charter, namely, equal and indivisible security and respect for each other’s sovereignty, national values and interests.

These statements of Putin paralleled the phrasing of President Xi, who spoke of each nation having the right and responsibility of “strategic independence.”

The two presidents met in person for the first time since their historic February 4, 2022 agreement, signed at the time of the Winter Olympics in Beijing. They had a prolonged discussion on Sept. 15, and then a joint press conference afterward. Putin told the media:

Russian–Chinese interstate cooperation can be considered a model. The foreign policy tandem between Moscow and Beijing plays a key role in ensuring global and regional stability.

India and Russia: an ‘Unbreakable Friendship’

India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi, among his many activities in Samarkand, met with President

Putin, including for a televised exchange. Their discussion over the prospects for settling the combat in Ukraine was played up by the Western media as a clash, but as the TV recording well documents, it was an exchange of how to achieve a settlement. Modi expressed concern over, “how we can move forward on the road of peace in the coming days,” and Putin replied,

We will do our best to make it [the fighting in Ukraine] stop as soon as possible. However, unfortunately ... the leadership of Ukraine announced that it was abandoning the negotiation process and declared that it wants to achieve its goals by military means, “on the battlefield,” as they say.

Modi stated to the media,

The relationship between India and Russia has deepened manifold. We also value this relationship because we have been such friends who have been with each other every moment for the last several decades, and the whole world also knows how Russia’s relationship with India has been, and how India’s relationship with Russia has been; and therefore, the world also knows that it is an unbreakable friendship.

Modi’s remarks in Samarkand frequently focussed on the world food, fertilizer, and energy crises. Putin reiterated Russia’s commitment to making these necessities available. He said:

The volume of fertilizers delivered from Russia to India increased by more than eight times.... I hope that this will help Indian farmers to manage the difficult challenge of providing food for the country’s population.

Modi told the summit,

The SCO must make efforts to develop reliable, resilient and diversified supply chains in our region. This will require better connectivity, as well as it will be important that we all give each other full right to transit.

During the summit, Modi held separate bilateral meetings with Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Iran’s President Ebrahim Raisi, and the host, President Mirziyoyev, as well as with President Putin. It is unfortunate that a meeting with President Xi did not occur, but not unexpected, given the extreme pressure on India from the Western anti-China, anti-Russia Global NATO bloc.

SCO Follow-On

The impact of the “Shanghai Spirit” of the Samarkand SCO summit can be expected to gather



India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi meeting with the President of Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin.

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force in the coming days, expressed in more meetings of like-minded nations and concrete projects.

In New York City, for example, on the sidelines of the current UN General Assembly session, will be a meeting of the Group of Friends of the Global Development Initiative, whose 40 member nations include many SCO member states. In November, the Group of 20 heads of state will meet in summit in Bali, Indonesia, where the SCO will be strongly represented.

In the meantime, there were concrete initiatives pledged during the Samarkand meeting. China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi spoke of these to the media right after the summit:

Through concerted efforts of President Xi Jinping and other participating leaders, the Summit adopted over 40 outcome documents covering

economy, finance, technology, culture, institution-building, external exchanges and so on ... [China] is ready to establish a China–SCO base for training counter-terrorism personnel, host a forum on industrial and supply chains, set up a China–SCO Big Data Cooperation Center, and provide developing countries in need with emergency humanitarian assistance of grain and other supplies worth 1.5 billion yuan [\$214 million].

Russia made announcements about the availability of fertilizer and other essential commodities. The new Central Asian rail announcements are also part of the picture of concrete initiatives.

All of this stands in dramatic contrast to the multi-nation meetings hosted in the past couple years by Washington and Brussels, of pre-selected guest nations, talking about “democracy” and “human rights,” but focusing only on gender, skin color, and such features, and not addressing how to ensure the basic means for life: food, water, health, productivity and a future.

The Biden Administration’s view of the SCO meeting was expressed Sept. 15 in pathetic comments

by John Kirby, spokesman for the National Security Council. He chastised China for not condemning Russia over Ukraine:

Our message to China has been consistent: this is not the time for any kind of business as usual with Putin ... China can’t be neutral. Washington wants China to pick its side on Ukraine.

That same day, *China Daily*, the semi-official English-language newspaper, owned by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, issued an editorial on the role of the SCO in the world. The newspaper reported that the SCO represents about 80% of Eurasia’s landmass and 24% of global GDP, and is a “partnership characterized by non-alignment, dialogue and non-confrontation, and a practical vehicle for exploring the building of a new type of international relations and a community with a shared future for mankind.”

There is no getting around it: “The SCO is also assuming the role of being a practical driver of development....”

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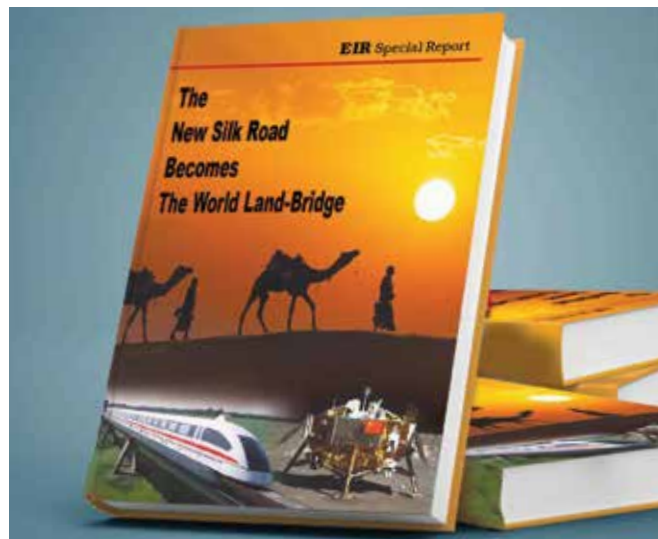
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