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Q9

'Virus of Conflict' is affecting the functioning of the SCO'. In the light of the above statement point out the role of India in mitigating problems.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · GS II · 10 marks · Bilateral and Regional Groupings

Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Core demand of the question

- The statement is that a 'Virus of Conflict' is affecting the functioning of the SCO
- Point out the role of India in mitigating those problems

Revision summary

The SCO is consensus-based, so India-China LAC tension and India-Pakistan terror disputes stall it.

Russia-Ukraine and expansion add further strain among members.

India mitigates by keeping channels, chairing practical 2023 cooperation, and putting counter-terrorism on the agenda.

It will not treat Jammu and Kashmir as an SCO bilateral dispute.

Full political settlement of LAC or Pakistan issues will not come from the SCO itself.

Introduction

The **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation** is a Eurasian security and connectivity forum whose members include India, China, Russia, Pakistan, and the Central Asian States. Bilateral conflict among members, especially on the **Line of Actual Control** and on India-Pakistan terror and Kashmir, has slowed consensus, which is the working method of the SCO.

Body**How conflict has affected the SCO**

- The SCO runs on consensus; a clash between two members on the agenda can freeze joint statements, military exercises, or connectivity text.
- India-China relations after the 2020 Galwan clash and the continuing LAC standoff reduced trust inside a body that China helped to found.
- India-Pakistan disputes over cross-border terrorism, and India's refusal to discuss Jammu and Kashmir as a bilateral SCO item, block the security-conversation the charter advertises.
- Russia's war in Ukraine after 2022 split extra-regional partners and made energy and payment talk harder even when the SCO itself is not a party to that war.
- Expansion, including Iran's membership track, adds more unresolved neighbourhoods to the same consensus table.

India's role in mitigation

- India uses the SCO to keep a working channel with China and Russia without accepting a China-led security order, which is damage-limitation rather than full political settlement.
- As SCO Chair in 2022-23 India hosted the Council of Heads of State (the virtual 2023 summit) and pushed practical files: connectivity, start-ups, traditional medicine, and counter-narcotics, instead of a single security narrative.
- India has consistently placed United Nations-listed terrorist groups and the need for action against safe havens on the SCO agenda, which is mitigation by naming the security problem rather than by pretending harmony.
- India skipped some China-hosted SCO military events after 2020 when LAC conditions did not allow business as usual, showing that mitigation is not silence.
- India also balances the SCO with the Quad, I2U2, and bilateral Central Asian summits, so Eurasian engagement does not depend on one blocked forum.

Limits of that role

- India cannot adjudicate the LAC or Pakistan-sponsored terrorism inside an SCO statement that China or Pakistan will not sign.
- Mitigation is therefore issue-based cooperation, chair-year agenda-setting, and refusal to let the forum be used against Indian territorial integrity.

Flow diagram

Member conflicts LAC and terror -> SCO consensus freeze
 India -> 2023 chair practical agenda
 India -> Counter-terror naming
 India -> Other minilaterals
 2023 chair practical agenda -> Mitigation not full settlement
 Counter-terror naming -> Mitigation not full settlement

Conclusion

Conflict among members has slowed the SCO because the organisation needs consensus. India's role is to keep the table open, to chair practical cooperation as it did in 2023, and to insist on counter-terrorism language, not to dissolve the LAC or India-Pakistan disputes inside the SCO.

Facts & figures

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

Eurasian grouping whose members include China, Russia, India, Pakistan and Central Asian States; decisions are by consensus.

Galwan, 2020

Clash on the **Line of Actual Control** that sharply worsened India-China relations inside regional forums including the SCO.

Indian SCO Chair, 2022-23

India held the rotating chair and hosted the 2023 Heads of State meeting in virtual format.

SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)

Tashkent-based mechanism for information on terrorism, separatism and extremism; India's use of it is limited by political disagreement on lists.

Consensus rule

SCO documents and operations require member agreement, so one bilateral conflict can block text.

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