



## Mains Practice Question

**Q.** Analyze India's strategic objectives in joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). How has its membership impacted regional geopolitics? **(150 words)**

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### Approach

- Introduce the answer by highlighting India's membership in SCO.
- Delve into India's objectives in joining SCO along with its implications on Regional Geopolitics
- Conclude suitably.

### Introduction

India's membership in the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)**, achieved in **2017**, is a strategic move reflecting its broader objectives to bolster regional connectivity and enhance security cooperation.

- The SCO, primarily driven by **China and Russia**, provides a platform for India to pursue its goals in a multipolar framework and **assert influence within Central Asia's political and economic landscape**.

### Body

#### India's Strategic Objective in SCO and its Impact on Regional Geopolitics:

- **Counterterrorism and Security Cooperation**
  - **Objective:** To collaborate on security initiatives to address regional threats such as **terrorism, radicalization, and drug trafficking**.
  - **Impact:** Given the direct impact of terrorism on India's national security, particularly from **Pakistan**, India utilises the **SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) for intelligence sharing** and counterterrorism coordination.
    - The **Karachi Airport Explosion** ahead of the **SCO Summit 2024** highlights the need for stronger SCO cooperation against terrorism, a key priority for regional security and India's interests.
    - India participates in the **SCO's "Peace Missions"** joint anti-terrorism exercise, demonstrating its commitment to practical security cooperation.
- **Energy Security and Economic Integration**
  - **Objective:** India seeks to secure energy supplies from **resource-rich Central Asian nations and diversify its energy imports**.
    - The SCO offers a framework for negotiating energy agreements and participating in infrastructure projects like the **TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) pipeline**
  - **Impact:** India's SCO membership has improved its access to energy resources and regional infrastructure.
    - Despite geopolitical challenges delaying initiatives like **TAPI**, India's participation in SCO meetings has facilitated discussions on alternative routes.

- Recent engagements, such as **expanding the Chabahar Port** and connecting it with the **International North-South Transport Corridor**, demonstrate the SCO's role in enhancing India's energy and trade security.

- **Balancing Influence with China and Russia**

- **Objective:** India aims to maintain a **strategic balance with China and Russia in the SCO**, especially considering China's strong presence in Central Asia through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- **Impact:** India has leveraged the SCO platform to advocate for territorial integrity and **refrained from engaging in BRI-related projects within the SCO**, reflecting its efforts to navigate competing pressures while reinforcing its regional strategic interests.

- **Leveraging Diplomatic Engagement with Afghanistan and Regional Stability**

- **Objective:** In light of **regional instability related to Afghanistan**, India views the SCO as a key platform for promoting dialogue and stability following the Taliban's return.
  - India advocates for a stable, inclusive Afghan government to mitigate terrorism, drug trafficking, and refugee flows that threaten neighbouring regions.
- **Impact:** Its active participation in the **SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group** underscores India's commitment to advocating for **regional stability and cooperation**.

- **Economic Partnerships and Trade Expansion**

- **Objective:** India seeks to enhance trade relationships with **Central Asian economies and explore investment opportunities**.
- **Impact:** India's involvement in the SCO has enabled trade discussions, although it still lags behind China in economic presence in Central Asia.
  - Nonetheless, India has leveraged the SCO to formalise agreements on education, healthcare, and IT with Central Asian nations.
  - **Recent MoUs with Uzbekistan in IT and healthcare** exemplify how the SCO serves as a diplomatic channel for bolstering economic collaboration and goodwill through development projects.

## Conclusion

India's SCO membership aligns with its **strategic goals of combating terrorism**, securing energy resources, balancing regional power dynamics, and enhancing connectivity with Central Asia. Through the SCO, India effectively positions itself as a **key player in Central Asia's geopolitical and economic landscape**, promoting its interests within a collaborative framework.