

Research Article

Antagonistic States in Multilateral Forums: India and Pakistan in SAARC and SCO

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Abstract: This research paper examines India and Pakistan's divergent behavior displayed within two regional organizations, namely the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Despite their longstanding animosity, both countries actively participated in SCO summits while demonstrating reluctance to engage with each other within SAARC since 2019. By investigating the underlying reasons for this divergent behavior, we analyze the implications for SCO in the context of the Indo-Pak arch rivalry. Employing game theory, precisely the prisoner's dilemma, we examine the dynamics of cooperation and conflict. Through this analysis, we uncover the distinctive functioning of multilateralism within SAARC and SCO, providing insights into the influence of India-Pakistan relations on these regional institutions. The findings of this study enhance our comprehension of the complexities surrounding multilateral cooperation and the significant role arch rivalry plays in shaping regional dynamics.

Keywords: antagonistic, SAARC, SCO, India, Pakistan.

Çok Taraflı Forumlarda Düşman Devletler: SAARC ve ŞİÖ'de Hindistan ve Pakistan

Öz: Bu araştırma makalesi Hindistan ve Pakistan'ın Güney Asya Bölgesel İşbirliği Birliği (SAARC) ve Şanghay İşbirliği Örgütü (ŞİÖ) gibi iki bölgesel örgüt içerisinde sergiledikleri farklı davranışları incelemektedir. Uzun süredir devam eden düşmanlıklarına rağmen, her iki ülke de ŞİÖ zirvelerine aktif olarak katılırken, 2019'dan bu yana SAARC içinde birbirleriyle etkileşime girme konusunda isteksizlik göstermektedir. Bu farklı davranışın altında yatan nedenleri araştırarak, ŞİÖ'nün Hint-Pak rekabeti bağlamındaki etkilerini analiz ediyoruz. Oyun teorisini, özellikle de mahkûm ikilemini kullanarak, işbirliği ve çatışma dinamiklerini inceliyoruz. Bu analiz sayesinde SAARC ve ŞİÖ içindeki çok taraflılığın kendine özgü işleyişini ortaya çıkararak Hindistan-Pakistan ilişkilerinin bu bölgesel kurumlar üzerindeki etkisine dair içgörü sağlıyoruz. Bu çalışmanın bulguları, çok taraflı işbirliğini çevreleyen karmaşıklıkları ve rekabetin bölgesel dinamikleri şekillendirmede oynadığı önemli rolü daha iyi anlamamızı sağlamaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: antagonistik, SAARC, ŞİÖ, Hindistan, Pakistan

Introduction

In the annals of history, the emergence of India and Pakistan in 1947 as sovereign nations was a watershed moment for South Asia. Steeped in the shared legacy of colonial subjugation, these post-colonial states, India and Pakistan, have been characterized by a complex and antagonistic nature since their partition and independence from British colonial rule (Svensson 2022). The partition itself resulted in violence and mass migration, leading to deep communal tensions. The ongoing dispute over the region of Kashmir, claimed by both countries, has been a significant source of contention and has led to multiple conflicts and wars (Schofield 2003). Cross-border conflicts, proxy wars, and allegations of supporting militant groups have further strained the relationship (Fair 2014). The possession of nuclear weapons by both nations has added a dimension of strategic instability (Tellis 2001). Despite various attempts at reconciliation, such as diplomatic dialogues and peace processes, deep-rooted mistrust, unresolved conflicts, and territorial disputes continue to hinder the establishment of a lasting

peace. Water-sharing disputes and disagreements over the Indus River system have also contributed to tensions between the two nations.

Against this backdrop, it wasn't easy to imagine that the two states would be working within a common regional framework, and scholars of international relations were closely watching how multilateralism would work in South Asia without these arch-rivals.

India and Pakistan have been the founding members of SAARC and SCO member states since 2017. The SAARC has yet to conduct any summits since 2019, and there have been many instances when SAARC summits have been postponed. While as in SCO, there has yet to be an account of the cancellation of the Summit since its formation. Despite longstanding hostilities between the two nuclear-armed South Asian nations [India and Pakistan], they have represented themselves at all the SCO summits. In the case of SAARC, both states have been reluctant to share the table since 2019. This prompts us to ask a few questions in this paper: What makes India and Pakistan share the table in SCO summits, which has not been possible in SAARC since 2019? How is the antagonistic behavior of India and Pakistan in SAARC comparatively different from SCO? What are the prospects of SCO in the shade of Indo-Pak arch rivalry?

Multilateralism can be viewed as collaborating national policies in groups of three or more states through spontaneous arrangements or institutionalized frameworks. In academic discourse, scholars have used multilateralism to refer to various activities. This has resulted in the concept's ambiguity (Keohane 1992). Therefore, before engaging with the research problem, it is essential to limit the concept to bring precision and objectivity to the research. The author limits the concept of multilateralism to what Keohane terms, an arrangement in which three or more states are involved with a prescribed set of consistent rules prescribing states with specific responsibilities and restrictions and shaping their expectations (Keohane 1992).

The fundamental element of multilateral institutions is the states, which are the creators of these very institutions. They create, maintain, and abide by these institutions only when they further their exogenously identified goals (Martin 1999). In international relations, states often face the prisoner's dilemma, which lets all states play rationally at their level, thus yielding low fruits for everyone. Therefore, the cooperation of the states becomes necessary to come out of this situation. This instigates the creation of multilateral institutions. In this context, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was formed by South Asian states in 1985. Similarly, in 2001, the Shanghai Cooperation

Organization (SCO) was formed by China, Russia, and other Central Asian Republics.

The paper will be divided into three sections. The first section will briefly discuss the emergence of SCO and SAARC. In the next section, an inquiry into the behavior of India and Pakistan within SAARC compared to SCO will be made to analyze why the antagonistic behavior of India and Pakistan is relegated to SCO compared to SAARC. The last section will cover the prospects of SCO in the shade of Indo-Pak rivalry, with a special focus on the recent Summit of the Council of Foreign Ministers of SCO in Goa, India.

Experiments with Multilateralism in South Asia: SAARC and SCO

Emergence of SAARC

The first tangible moves towards regional cooperation in South Asia were initiated in 1977 by the President of Bangladesh, Zia-ur-Rahman, which led to the foundation of SAARC in 1985. The President of Bangladesh, Zia-ur-Rahman, on visits to Nepal, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka in 1977–80, deliberated about the potential of forming a regional cooperation framework in South Asia. He then issued letters to the heads of government of Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, urging a summit conference to look into the possibilities of developing institutional frameworks for regional cooperation (Inayat 2007).

However, India and Pakistan were initially skeptical about the initiative. India was concerned that its neighbors might band together against it about regional and bilateral disputes by using SAARC. Pakistan was concerned that India might use the SAARC in the region to impose a hegemonic design. It resulted in dropping all security-related matters and adopting only non-controversial and non-political subjects of cooperation. As can be inferred, such a divergence between the region's two biggest nations will inevitably negatively affect SAARC's development and functioning (Pattanaik 2004). Chaudhury (2021) asserts, "Against this backdrop, the SAARC started its journey on a bumpy road."

Hussain (1996) asserts that the development of SAARC occurred in three major periods. The initial phase consisted of discussions between the foreign secretaries of the original seven member nations to agree on a fundamental

framework for regional cooperation. The inaugural conference took place in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in April 1981 and was quickly followed by a series of follow-up sessions that continued until March 1983. The second phase of SAARC's growth lifted the process from the bureaucratic to the political level by establishing foreign ministerial meetings, the first of which was held in New Delhi in August 1983. During the second phase, participating nations formed an Integrated Program of Action (IPA) via the South Asian Regional Cooperation (SAARC) declaration. The third phase of SAARC's growth saw the political levels raised and the meetings consolidated into summits. The inaugural Summit in Dhaka in December 1985 brought together the heads of state and government of the founding member nation-states, who decided to form the SAARC.

Emergence of SCO

From the Arctic to the Indian Ocean from North to South and Lianyungang in China to Kaliningrad in the Russian Federation from East to West, the SCO occupies one of the largest geographical areas of any international organization. Nearly 44 percent of the world's population lives in the area, holding 17.5 percent of the world's proven oil reserves and 47–50 percent of known natural gas reserves (Bailes 2007). The SCO, founded in 2001, comprises eight member states, namely the People's Republic of China, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Decades ago, the relations between China and its Western neighbors were characterized by mutual animosity, distrust, and fear. The heavily guarded Sino-Soviet frontier was dotted with contested land and hazy borders, resulting from a long history of disputes and "unfair treaties." In the early 1990s, when the Soviet Union collapsed, China embarked on a diplomatic alchemy quest to turn the negative baggage of the past into a productive asset for the future against this bleak backdrop (Akiner 2006). The collapse of the Soviet Union and the victory of the USA resulted in a unipolar world order that worried Moscow and Beijing. This pushed both nations to build cooperation and seek a new regional order (Karrar 2017). The Central Asian Republics, Russia, and China also sought to address their border disputes from the late 19th century, encouraging the normalization of relations (Fravel 2009).

China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan met in Shanghai in April 1996 to sign the groundbreaking Treaty on Deepening Military Confidence in Border Regions. They signed the Treaty on the Reduction of Military Forces in

Border Regions a year later (Mukherjee, 2006). These and other confidence-building documents paved the way for bilateral negotiations on the delimitation of China's western border, resulting in definitive bilateral agreements. At the same time, annual summit meetings among the presidents—called the "Shanghai Five"—were created (Fredholm & Schlyter, 2013).

The Shanghai Five reached several agreements between 1996 and 2001 to reinforce military confidence, reduce military powers in border regions, and establish China's borders with these nation-states. This was mentioned in the Agreement on Mutual Reduction of Military Forces in Border Areas in 1997 and the Agreement on Strengthening Mutual Trust in Military Fields in Border Areas in 1996. In the 1998 Almaty Declaration, the Shanghai Five agreed to expand their collaboration in combating ethnic separatism, religious extremism, international Terrorism, weapons smuggling, drug trafficking, and other transnational criminal activities. In 2000, Chinese President Jiang Zemin proposed that the Shanghai Five's ad hoc existence be turned into a formalized framework for multilateral cooperation (Chung 2004). With the addition of Uzbekistan in 2001, the Shanghai Five officially became the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). It was followed by the adoption of a charter in 2002, the creation of a secretariat, and the establishment of a regional anti-terrorism structure in 2004. On June 9, 2017, India and Pakistan were admitted as full members of the organization.

India and Pakistan in the SCO and SAARC

Since the admission of India and Pakistan as full members of SCO in 2017, it was presumed that their membership would pose significant challenges to the organization owing to their arch rivalry (Kupriyanov 2020). However, all these assumptions have been disproved. The Heads of State Council and the Heads of Government Council have conducted regular summits, and there has yet to be an account of the cancellation phenomenon in SCO. It has developed a robust institutional framework and established various institutions to function more effectively. The annual summits were held regularly without any impact of the arch rivalry between these two member states. While both nation-states are also members of SAARC, their arch-rivalry has significantly impacted the functioning of the regional institution. The annual summits have often been delayed, and no summit has occurred since 2019.

As an observer state, India initially hesitated to engage with the SCO. It used to be one of the Soviet Union's closest friends, but to expand its political,

economic, and military relations; it went close to the United States. India signed a historic and contentious agreement on nuclear cooperation with the US in July 2005 and a further Indo-US agreement on civilian nuclear energy in October 2008, critical to India's energy needs and perhaps the most significant development (Akiner 2006). Pursuing a relationship with the SCO may have been counterproductive, risking US disapproval while receiving nothing in return.

However, things were beginning to change. India's ties with Russia, which had deteriorated since the Soviet Union's demise, were thriving again, including nuclear cooperation. Relations with China were also improving. Central Asian nations were also gaining attention in India's foreign policy, especially regarding regional security and energy supply. Furthermore, there was a sense that China was overshadowing India, which had traditionally been one of Asia's major nations. All of these reasons led to a shift in the perception of India towards SCO. This was evident in 2009, when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh attended the SCO summit for the first time, marking India's first high-level participation.

In contrast to India, Pakistan has always been an ardent supporter of the SCO. Pakistan viewed it as a means of achieving various national and regional goals. One was the economic and political benefits of having a special relationship with China and Russia. Another was increased access to Central Asian nations and involvement in growing regional infrastructure projects. It offered a sympathetic cushion of moral, if not financial, comfort for Pakistan internationally. Pakistan and India submitted official applications to join the SCO as full members. However, they were respectfully denied, despite some support inside the organization (China sympathetic to Pakistan, India backed by Russia). They were all engaged in international conflicts, and it was believed that this would have a detrimental effect on the SCO's growth.

Furthermore, any decision to admit a new member would need consensus from all current members. As a result, more than gaining the backing of only one or two members was required to achieve acceptability. Further, there was an embargo on new member admissions until agreed-upon criteria and processes were established (Akiner 2006).

One of the most significant outcomes of the SCO meeting in Astana in June 2017 was India and Pakistan's admission as full SCO members. Both nations became unequivocal signatories to all SCO documents and pledged to contribute constructively to strengthening and development (Alimov 2018). While

addressing the Summit in Astana in 2017, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, said, "The SCO goals resonate with Pakistan's national ethos, and so do the core values of the Shanghai spirit and the SCO charter with our quest for a peaceful neighborhood." "As leaders, we should leave a legacy of peace and amity for future generations, not a toxic harvest of conflict and animosity. Instead of discussing counter-weights and containment, let us create shared spaces for all" (ZeeNews 2017).

While addressing the Summit, the Prime Minister of India, Narinder Modi, said, "Mutual trust and goodwill are the main pillars of our political and economic cooperation. There are many dimensions to our involvement with SCO countries. Its major drivers are energy, education, agriculture, security, minerals, capacity building, development partnerships, trade, and investment" (PMO India 2017).

While analyzing the statements of the Heads of Government of India and Pakistan issued at the very first Summit after their full membership, it is evident that both nations have shown intensity of their will to join the SCO without locking horns over one another.

Similarly, at the 19th Summit held in Bishkek in 2019, several documents about cooperation in digitization and information and telecommunication technologies, the Forum of Heads of Regions, the Development of Inter-regional Cooperation, etc., were signed. Prime Minister Imran Khan attended the 19th meeting of the Council of the Heads of State (SCO). Khan described the SCO as a "new avenue" for Pakistan to strengthen its ties with other nations, particularly India. "Our bilateral relationship with India is perhaps at its lowest point right now," he added. Khan said that Pakistan is ready for "any type of mediation" and wants peace with all of its neighbors, particularly India, claiming that the three "little wars" have harmed both nations, which are now suffering from the "highest amount of poverty" (The Week 2019).

In May 2023, the Council of Foreign Ministers meeting was held in Goa, India, and Pakistan's Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari attended the meeting. This was the first instance since 2011 that a high-level government official from Pakistan visited India.

Both the member nations of the SCO attend the summits regularly without any boycott of one another's presence, which has otherwise remained a recurring

tactic of these two members in SAARC. Here, it becomes relevant to identify what makes India and Pakistan display different behavior in SCO compared to SAARC. To examine their behaviors, it will be suitable to apply the prisoner's dilemma of game theory within the ambit of neoliberal perspective as used by Lipson (1984) and Stein (1982) in explaining the fundamental features of cooperation and conflict. Game-theoretic exercises can supplement and strengthen traditional analysis applied to India-Pakistan situations.

A Prisoner's Dilemma is a game of two persons whereby each player's behavior is driven by self-interest and seeks to maximize their gains. The players are given two options: to cooperate or to defect, and they have to decide once in a game about these options. Each player is unaware of the other choice in a given move. This results in suspicion between the players, and they cannot cooperate. If one cooperates and the other defects, the defecting player will get higher rewards than the cooperating one. If both defects are present, both will get the lower reward and if both cooperate, it will lead to Pareto optimality, which is a stage of equilibrium for both actors (Stewart & Plotkin 2012).

Another significant factor that pushes the states to cooperate rather than defect is reputation. As interactions become repetitive, importance in terms of reliability becomes essential. Defection in one game can lead to the loss of reputation in other games. Thus, playing various games simultaneously or repeatedly while playing the same game can lead to more cooperation than defection (Oye 1985).

India and Pakistan, arch-rivals owing to various conflicts, are in a prisoner's dilemma, determining their behavior in these organizations. To understand their behavior in SAARC and SCO, let us know their relationship within the prism of a prisoner's dilemma. Both India and Pakistan have two options, either to cooperate or defect, which results in four scenarios:

Scenario 1: India and Pakistan both decide to cooperate. In this case, it will result in a Pareto optimal situation, a equilibrium stage for both actors.

Scenario 2: If Pakistan decides to cooperate and India defects, In this case, India will reap more fruits.

Scenario 3: India wants to cooperate, and Pakistan wants to defect. Similar to scenario 2, defectors will reap more fruits.

Scenario 4: Both India and Pakistan will defect. Again, it is a Pareto-optimal scenario.

In the case of SAARC, where India and Pakistan are the two major powers of the organization, both have adopted the defector role to stay in Pareto optimal.

The India-Pakistan rivalry is at the heart of inter-state conflicts in South Asia, with Kashmir in its bull's eye. Both countries have separate claims to Kashmir (Varshney 1991). Since the partition of British India in 1947, the relationship between these two nations, the region's leading actors, has been tumultuous, hostile, and mistrustful. Both protagonists are among the founding members of SAARC. In the wake of their existing hostilities, they have shown reluctance towards the only regional forum of South Asia, the SAARC.

Terrorism in South Asia is a complex reality that has engulfed all the region's nation-states in its menace. The SAARC established the SAARC Convention on Terrorism in 1987 to deal with this menace. However, the initiative has been useless due to its inability to be implemented due to Indo-Pak animosity. Although all the member states agreed to bring up UNSC Resolution 1373 as the guidepost to weed out Terrorism, during the Kathmandu Summit, Pakistan made it difficult to reach a consensus on the definition of Terrorism. Pakistan maintained a rational need to distinguish between Terrorism and the freedom movement (Pattanaik 2004). This signifies Pakistan's reluctance to make SAARC a vibrant organization for the region's welfare.

The Eleventh Summit, scheduled for November 1999 in Kathmandu, was postponed due to India's refusal to attend. India declined to "share" the event with Pervez Musharraf, the leader who "masterminded" the Kargil operation, believing that participation would "legitimize" Pakistan's military regime (Sridharan 2014). Pakistan has halted signing SAARC connectivity agreements, including the motor vehicle agreement, claiming it has not completed its "internal procedure." Similarly, India offered the South Asia Satellite Project at the Summit, but Pakistan declined. Before exiting the South Asian Satellite Project, Pakistan moved the goalposts several times.

In the case of SCO, both member states have cooperated and again played for Pareto optimal. In the eighteenth Summit in Qingdao, China, in 2018, 22 outcome documents were signed, including the Joint Communiqué and Appeal to Youth against Radicalization. Other documents are about the prevention of narcotics abuse, environmental protection, the fight against the threat of epidemics, trade facilitation, MSMEs, customs, and tourism. The Plan of Action for the SCO Treaty on Long-term Good Neighborliness, Friendship, and

Cooperation for 2018–2022 and the Protocol on the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group were also signed (SCO 2018).

The member nations' signatures on the Qingdao statement seemed to satisfy India and Pakistan's concerns in the battle against Terrorism. The statement was unambiguous in its condemnation of all kinds of Terrorism. Still, it was also said that meddling in the internal affairs of other countries under the guise of combating Terrorism and extremism was unacceptable. Similarly, at the 19th Summit held in Bishkek in 2019, several documents about cooperation in digitization and information and telecommunication technologies, the Forum of Heads of Regions, the Development of Inter-regional Cooperation, etc., were signed. Prime Minister Imran Khan attended the 19th meeting of the Council of the Heads of State (SCO). Khan described the SCO as a "new avenue" for Pakistan to strengthen its ties with other nations, particularly India. "Our bilateral relationship with India is perhaps at its lowest point right now," he added. Khan said that Pakistan is ready for "any type of mediation" and wants peace with all of its neighbors, particularly India, claiming that the three "little wars" have harmed both nations, which are now suffering from the "highest amount of poverty" (The Week 2019).

All the evidence above confirms the irregularities in the behavior of India and Pakistan when compared between SAARC and SCO. This disseminates the idea that institutions are not independent variables. The choice of the state to rely on the institutions depends only on how much an institution furthers the interests of the state. This forces us to test the cause and effect of institutions like SCO and SAARC by explaining what the interests of India and Pakistan are that determine their behaviors within these two organizations. Energy security interests primarily drive India's and Pakistan's motive to engage in central Asia. India depends upon seventy percent of its foreign oil reserves, and hence, to meet its energy demands, Central Asia is a key region (Lal 2006). Besides energy interests, India's objectives of "capacity building in the central Asian region, connectivity with the Eurasian region, counter-terrorism and anti-narcotics, and energy cooperation" (Muzalevsky 2015). As India strengthened its footprint in Afghanistan after 2001 its engagement with Central Asia became more important, and its essence has increased even more since the withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan. Pakistan's position in the energy corridor is strategically significant, as it acts as a natural gateway between South and Central Asia. Therefore, strong connectivity with Central Asia can enhance Pakistan's strategic and economic posture, and this SCO membership was no less than a golden

opportunity. Pakistan, a populous country, also requires energy resources to meet the needs of its people.

South Asia is a strange continent that has experienced interstate hostility, conflicts, and follies. Despite being the most powerful country in South Asia regarding land, population, economy, and military might, India strangely does not have a favorable position in the region. The reasons have been obvious for the foreign policy strategies adopted by India to its neighboring countries. Between the 1970s and 1980s, India's hard power strategy paved the way for deep mistrust among its neighbors. India prioritized security in relations with its neighbors, with secondary impetus on political and economic relations. Although India has started many soft power maneuvers to infuse faith in its neighbors constructively in the last two decades, India incapacitated the SAARC summit process in 2016 that was to be held in Pakistan. This was regarded as an apparent deviance from its course of regional peace, prosperity, and stability. Countries in South Asia may be using soft diplomacy. They need a positive and proactive attitude to avert future calamities (Raghav & Rai 2020).

The main thrust of Pakistan's decision to join SAARC was to use it as an opportunity for an anti-India stand. At the same time, Pakistan has remained actively involved in South Asia, particularly with India, thanks to SAARC and its many activities. This happened when the ties between the two nations were tense, and cooperation at the bilateral level was impossible without eliciting harsh condemnation from certain domestic sectors (Murthy 1999). Examining the SAARC Charter and its goals reveals that Pakistan has complied with them in practice, if not in spirit. Raising bilateral concerns is against the SAARC charter policy. Pakistan has never explicitly brought up bilateral concerns.

Here is another point that needs attention in academic discourse. The presence of Russia and China as two major powers in the SCO has a significant role in maintaining the organization. In the very early period of the formation, they have amicably resolved disputes about their borders and infused trust among smaller states of central Asian republics to take them at par in decision-making in SCO. While, as in SAARC, India and Pakistan are themselves major powers involved in conflicts, the consequences are that the voices of smaller South Asian states are least recognized within the forum.

SCO in the shade of Indo-Pak antagonism

India-Pakistan relations have gone to the lowest ebb after India repealed Article 370 of the Indian constitution, eliminating Jammu and Kashmir's special status, in August 2019 (Shah & Kriti 2020). Even after that strained relationship, the SCO summits were held regularly. Their officials have represented these member states at the organization's summits, including the one recently held in Goa, India. Although cooperating in the SCO, both member states have been engaged in a heated exchange of arguments concerning their key dispute, Kashmir. This is evident from the statements of Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Pakistan's Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari in the Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in Goa, India. Bilawal Bhutto stated, "Terrorism continues to threaten global security... Let's not get caught up in weaponizing Terrorism for diplomatic point scoring." He also blamed India for scrapping Article 370, which provided special status to Jammu and Kashmir (Adil 2023).

S. Jaishankar referred to Pakistan's Foreign Minister as a "spokesperson of a terrorism industry" and said, "Victims of terrorism do not sit together with its perpetrators to discuss terrorism" (Adil 2023).

These statements discerned a couched reference about the shadow of their antagonism it may cast on the organization's functioning, and it is yet time to watch. In order to be endorsed at the SCO summit later this year, India has proposed four joint statements on cooperation on de-radicalization tactics, promotion of millets, and sustainable lifestyles to address climate change and digital transformation. India is attempting to use the SCO platform in this way to further its interests. However, India will undoubtedly face a greater problem if the current trends continue. The Russia-China alliance will impact New Delhi's efforts to raise its profile in Central Asia, and the China-Pakistan axis will continue to restrict India's capacity to influence the SCO's agenda on Terrorism and extremism (Pant 2023).

India, having assumed the presidency of the G20 this year, recently hosted the 3rd Tourism Working Group Meeting (Sherpa Track) in Srinagar, Jammu, and Kashmir from May 22 to 24, 2023. However, China vehemently criticized India for organizing this meeting in the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir and chose to boycott the event. Given China's status as a founding member and significant power within the SCO, its close and amicable ties with Pakistan have the potential to significantly influence India's motives and objectives. Furthermore, as the China-Pakistan-Russia axis strengthens its bonds while India moves closer to the United States, India will likely encounter formidable

challenges. Pakistan can exploit this platform to impede India's ambitions of establishing a prominent presence in Central Asia, posing a significant obstacle for India.

Against this backdrop, the enduring antagonism between India and Pakistan is poised to exert a substantial influence on the prospects of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Notably, India faces formidable opposition from Pakistan and its ally, China, in advancing its interests within the SCO framework. However, the outcome of these dynamics remains speculative as India carefully navigates its strategic choices between Russia and the United States, as well as between the QUAD alliance and the SCO. A noteworthy remark by Russian Defense Minister Sergei K. Shoigu characterizes the QUAD as a "front" aimed at containing China, adding an intriguing dimension to India's pursuit of its Central Asian interests. This nuanced interplay between geopolitical actors presents an intricate landscape where the consequences of India's calculated moves hold the potential to shape its desired outcomes in the Central Asian region (Pandit, 2023).

Conclusion

The examination of India and Pakistan's behavior within the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) reveals a stark contrast in their levels of engagement and cooperation. While both countries participate actively in SCO summits, they exhibit reluctance to engage with each other within SAARC. This contrasting behavior can be attributed to the deep-rooted animosity and unresolved conflicts between India and Pakistan.

Using game theory, specifically the prisoner's dilemma, we can understand the dynamics of cooperation and conflict between the two countries. The prisoner's dilemma highlights the inherent tension between individual self-interest and cooperation. In the case of SAARC, India and Pakistan seem to prioritize their interests over regional cooperation, resulting in limited progress and stagnation within the organization.

In contrast, the SCO provides a platform where India and Pakistan can engage with other regional powers, such as China and Russia, without confrontation. The SCO's focus on broader security and economic cooperation allows India and Pakistan to set aside their bilateral disputes and work towards common goals, albeit indirectly.

The implications of India's and Pakistan's behavior within SAARC and SCO are significant for regional dynamics. SAARC's effectiveness is compromised due to the ongoing India-Pakistan conflict, hindering the organization's ability to address regional challenges effectively. On the other hand, the SCO benefits from the participation of both countries, leveraging their economic and strategic significance to promote regional stability and cooperation.

This study sheds light on the complexities of multilateralism and the influence of arch-rivalries on regional organizations. It emphasizes the need for a conducive environment and a willingness to overcome bilateral disputes for successful regional cooperation. Efforts should be made to create trust-building measures and diplomatic channels between India and Pakistan within SAARC, allowing the organization to fulfill its potential as a regional collaboration and development platform.

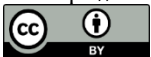
Overall, the divergent behavior of India and Pakistan within SAARC and SCO underscores the delicate balance between self-interest and collective action in multilateral settings. Addressing the India-Pakistan arch rivalry and fostering an environment of trust and cooperation is essential for regional organizations to effectively address shared challenges and promote South Asian stability.

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