

Eurasia Takes Shape: How the SCO Just Flipped the World Order

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As a rudderless West watched on, the 20th anniversary meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was laser-focused on two key deliverables: shaping up Afghanistan and kicking off a full-spectrum Eurasian integration.

The two defining moments of the historic 20th anniversary Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Dushanbe, Tajikistan had to come from the keynote speeches of – who else – the leaders of the Russia-China strategic partnership.

Xi Jinping: “Today we will launch procedures to admit Iran as a full member of the SCO.”

Vladimir Putin: “I would like to highlight the Memorandum of Understanding that was signed today between the SCO Secretariat and the Eurasian Economic Commission. It is clearly designed to further Russia’s idea of establishing a Greater Eurasia Partnership covering the SCO, the EAEU (Eurasian Economic Union), ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and China’s Belt and Road initiative (BRI).”

In short, over the weekend, Iran was enshrined in its rightful, prime Eurasian role, and all Eurasian integration paths converged toward a new global geopolitical – and geoeconomic – paradigm, with a sonic boom bound to echo for the rest of the century.

That was the killer one-two punch immediately following the Atlantic alliance’s ignominious imperial retreat from Afghanistan. Right as the Taliban took control of Kabul on 15 August, the redoubtable Nikolai Patrushev, secretary of Russia’s Security Council, told his Iranian colleague Admiral Ali Shamkhani that “the Islamic Republic will become a full member of the SCO.”

Dushanbe revealed itself as the ultimate diplomatic crossover. President Xi firmly rejected any “condescending lecturing” and emphasized development paths and governance models compatible with national conditions. Just like Putin, he stressed the complementary focus of BRI and the EAEU, and in fact summarized a true multilateralist Manifesto for the Global

South.



Source: The Cradle

Right on point, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev of Kazakhstan noted that the SCO should advance “the development of a regional macro-economy.” This is reflected in the SCO’s drive to start using local currencies for trade, bypassing the US dollar.

Watch that quadrilateral

Dushanbe was not just a bed of roses. Tajikistan’s Emomali Rahmon, a staunch, secular Muslim and former member of the Communist Party of the USSR – in power for no less than 29 years, reelected for the 5th time in 2020 with 90 percent of the vote – right off the bat denounced the “medieval sharia” of Taliban 2.0 and said they had already “abandoned their previous promise to form an inclusive government.”

Rahmon, who has never been caught smiling on camera, was already in power when the Taliban conquered Kabul in 1996. He was bound to publicly support his Tajik cousins against the “expansion of extremist ideology” in Afghanistan – which in fact worries all SCO member-states when it comes to smashing dodgy jihadi outfits of the ISIS-K mold.

The meat of the matter in Dushanbe was in the bilaterals – and one quadrilateral.

Take the bilateral between Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Chinese FM Wang Yi. Jaishankar said that China should not view “its relations with India through the lens of a third country,” and took pains to stress that India “does not subscribe to any clash of civilizations theory.”

That was quite a tough sell considering that the first in-person Quad summit takes place this week in Washington, DC, hosted by that “third country” which is now knee deep in clash-of-civilizations mode against China.

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan was on a bilateral roll, meeting the presidents of Iran, Belarus, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. The official Pakistani diplomatic position is that Afghanistan should not be abandoned, but engaged.

That position added nuance to what Russian Special Presidential Envoy for SCO Affairs Bakhtiyar Khakimov had explained about Kabul's absence at the SCO table:

“At this stage, all member states have an understanding that there are no reasons for an invitation until there is a legitimate, generally recognized government in Afghanistan.”

And that, arguably, leads us to the key SCO meeting: a quadrilateral with the Foreign Ministers of Russia, China, Pakistan and Iran.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Qureshi affirmed: “We are monitoring whether all the groups are included in the government or not.” The heart of the matter is that, from now on, Islamabad coordinates the SCO strategy on Afghanistan, and will broker Taliban negotiations with senior Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara leaders. This will eventually lead the way towards an inclusive government regionally recognized by SCO member-nations.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi was warmly received by all – especially after his forceful keynote speech, an Axis of Resistance classic. His bilateral with Belarus president Aleksandr Lukashenko revolved around a discussion on “sanctions confrontation.” According to Lukashenko:

“If the sanctions did any harm to Belarus, Iran, other countries, it was only because we ourselves are to blame for this. We were not always negotiable, we did not always find the path we had to take under the pressure of sanctions.”

Considering Tehran is fully briefed on Islamabad's SCO role in terms of Afghanistan, there will be no need to deploy the Fatemiyoun brigade – informally known as the Afghan Hezbollah – to defend the Hazaras. Fatemiyoun was formed in 2012 and was instrumental in Syria in the fight against Daesh, especially in Palmyra. But if ISIS-K does not go away, that's a completely different story.

Particular important for SCO members Iran and India will be the future of Chabahar port. That remains India's crypto-Silk Road gambit to connect it to Afghanistan and Central Asia. The geoeconomic success of Chabahar more than ever depends on a stable Afghanistan – and this is where Tehran's interests fully converge with Russia-China's SCO drive.

What the 2021 SCO [Dushanbe Declaration](#) spelled out about Afghanistan is quite revealing:

1. Afghanistan should be an independent, neutral, united, democratic and peaceful state, free of terrorism, war and drugs.
2. It is critical to have an inclusive government in Afghanistan, with representatives from all ethnic, religious and political groups of Afghan society.
3. SCO member states, emphasizing the significance of the many years of hospitality and effective assistance provided by regional and neighboring countries to Afghan refugees, consider it important for the international community to make active efforts to facilitate their dignified, safe and sustainable return to their homeland.

As much as it may sound like an impossible dream, this is the unified message of Russia, China, Iran, India, Pakistan and the Central Asian 'stans.' One hopes that Pakistani PM Imran Khan is up to the task and ready for his SCO close-up.

That troubled Western peninsula

The New Silk Roads were officially launched eight years ago by Xi Jinping, first in Astana – now Nur-Sultan – and then in Jakarta.

This is [how I reported it](#) at the time.

The announcement came close to a SCO summit – then in Bishkek. The SCO, widely dismissed in Washington and Brussels as a mere talk shop, was already surpassing its original mandate of fighting the ‘three evil forces’ – terrorism, separatism and extremism – and encompassing politics and geoeconomics.

In 2013, there was a Xi-Putin-Rouhani trilateral. Beijing expressed full support for Iran’s peaceful nuclear program (remember, this was two years before the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, also known as the JCPOA).

Despite many experts dismissing it at the time, there was indeed a common China-Russia-Iran front on Syria (Axis of Resistance in action). Xinjiang was being promoted as the key hub for the Eurasian Land Bridge. Pipelineistan was at the heart of the Chinese strategy – from Kazakhstan oil to Turkmenistan gas. Some people may even remember when Hillary Clinton, as Secretary of State, was waxing lyrical about an American-propelled New Silk Road.

Now compare it to Xi’s Multilateralism Manifesto in Dushanbe eight years later, reminiscing on how the SCO “has proved to be an excellent example of multilateralism in the 21st century,” and “has played an important role in enhancing the voice of developing countries.”

The strategic importance of this SCO summit taking place right after the Eastern Economic Forum (EEF) in Vladivostok cannot be overstated enough. The EEF focuses, of course, on the Russian Far East – and essentially advances interconnectivity between Russia and Asia. It is an absolutely key hub of Russia’s Greater Eurasian Partnership.

A cornucopia of deals is on the horizon – expanding from the Far East to the Arctic and the development of the Northern Sea Route, and involving everything from precious metals and green energy to digital sovereignty flowing through logistics corridors between Asia and Europe via Russia.

As Putin hinted in his keynote speech, this is what the Greater Eurasia Partnership is all about: the Eurasia Economic Union (EAEU), BRI, India’s initiative, ASEAN, and now the SCO, developing in a harmonized network, crucially operated by “sovereign decision-making centers.”

So if the BRI proposes a very Taoist “community of shared future for human kind,” the Russian project, conceptually, proposes a dialogue of civilizations (already evoked by the Khatami years in Iran) and sovereign economic-political projects. They are, indeed, complementary.

Glenn Diesen, Professor at the University of South-Eastern Norway and an editor at the Russia in Global Affairs journal, is among the very few top scholars who are analyzing this process in depth. His latest book remarkably tells the whole story in its title: [Europe as the Western Peninsula of Greater Eurasia: Geoeconomic Regions in a Multipolar World](#). It’s not

clear whether Eurocrats in Brussels – slaves of Atlanticism and incapable of grasping the potential of Greater Eurasia – will end up exercising real strategic autonomy.

Diesen evokes in detail the parallels between the Russian and the Chinese strategies. He notes how China “is pursuing a three-pillared geoeconomic initiative by developing technological leadership via its China 2025 plan, new transportation corridors via its trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative, and establishing new financial instruments such as banks, payment systems and the internationalization of the yuan. Russia is similarly pursuing technological sovereignty, both in the digital sphere and beyond, as well as new transportation corridors such as the Northern Sea Route through the Arctic, and, primarily, new financial instruments.”

The whole Global South, stunned by the accelerated collapse of the western Empire and its unilateral rules-based order, now seems to be ready to embrace the new groove, fully displayed in Dushanbe: a multipolar Greater Eurasia of sovereign equals.

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