

Strategic Alliance between Russia and China: Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) on the Rise

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As the stand-off between Russia and the West continues, one organisation seems to be completely off the radar, and yet has managed to make great [strides](#) in its development and growth. This organisation is the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), an intergovernmental group of Central Asian countries aiming to promote cooperation between its six member states: Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The SCO's main goal has been to serve as a forum to ease tensions in the region. In the organisation's 2002 charter "confidence-building measures" were set as the alliance's first priority. A key aspect of this [strategy](#) is the fight against the so-called "three evils:" terrorism, extremism and separatism.

Western media rarely reports on this organisation, however, during its annual summit which took place between 11 to 12 September in Tajikistan, SCO suggested and enacted some note-worthy proposals. The two-day forum was [attended](#) by regional leaders, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, and his Chinese and Iranian counterparts, Xi Jinping and Hassan Rouhani. In a major step forward in expanding its regional clout, the SCO [finalised](#) procedures for taking in new members, with India, Pakistan, and Iran first on the list. Indeed expanding the SCO is a major priority for the organisation. Teng Jianqun of the China Institute of International Studies said recently that "*enlargement has become absolutely necessary*" for the SCO.



SCO summit meeting in Dushanbe, September 11, 2014

The reasoning behind the need for [expansion](#) is obvious. If the SCO is to have real weight on the international arena and become a truly prestigious organisation that is able to [rival](#) NATO, it requires additional members. If India, Pakistan, Iran and Mongolia were all to become permanent members, which looks likely, the group would then control 20 percent of the world's oil and half of all global gas reserves. On top of that, the bloc would represent about half of the world's population. This would fortify SCO's reputation as a dominant organisation. Additionally, Turkey could become a member as well. Its leadership has long been seeking to join and Turkish-speaking governments are likely to support their petition.

Though terrorism and regional security (especially in Afghanistan) remains top of SCO's [agenda](#), events occurring in Ukraine are certainly having an influence on the SCO members. The aggressive nature of Western actions towards Russia has certainly united the

SCO members. What links them all – whether members or observers – is the rejection of Western-dominated institutions, such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, which are all US-based. The SCO, like the BRICS with the [establishment](#) of their Development Bank, sees itself as a forum against the Western dominated global order.

Before the summit, Chinese President Xi Jinping [met](#) with President Vladimir Putin for bilateral talks. Putin stated that Russia “attaches importance to and appreciates China’s stances and proposals on the Ukraine issue.” He said that Russia was willing to continue to communicate with China over the situation in Ukraine. Putin also [suggested](#) that China and Russia should “enhance coordination on international and regional affairs.” Promoting the SCO fits China and Russia’s shared goal of *creating an Asian security architecture independent of the United States and its allies*.

While the main emphasis was on security concerns, the SCO summit also [encouraged](#) further economic cooperation among its members. Economic integration has become an increasingly large part of the SCO agenda, especially as China promotes its idea for a Silk Road Economic Belt that would include the SCO members and observer states. China has already [confirmed](#) that it will allocate \$5 billion worth of credit for the SCO member countries to implement joint projects. The two dominant players of the group, China and Russia also put the final touches to a new energy partnership. Recently, *Russia began constructing its section of the East Route of the China-Russia natural gas pipeline*. Both leaders want the SCO to become a stronger organisation, able to guarantee the stability and development of all its members.

Russia will act as the SCO’s President until the next summit in 2015. The country has already outlined [plans](#) for this period to make broader use of national currencies in settlements. Prospects are good for launching *large multilateral projects in transport, energy, innovative research and technology, agriculture, and the peaceful use of outer space*. The SCO Business Council, Interbank Consortium, and Energy Club are at the forefront of expanding practical cooperation among member states. Steps will also be taken to [establish](#) relations with the Eurasian Economic Union, which currently consists of Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus, with Armenia and Tajikistan likely to join in the near future.

Overall, the future of the SCO looks promising. A combination of new members and a determination to make the organisation a genuine important and influential bloc is likely to ensure that the SCO will continue to develop and expand. The ambition to create a truly dominant organisation free of any Western influence may become a reality in the near future.

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