

## **Discuss Pakistan's historic role in Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) under the framework of counter terrorism. What are the future prospects of SCO for Pakistan amid rising threat of terrorism in the region?**

### **CSS – 2025 Current Affairs**

#### **Introduction**

Pakistan's engagement with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has increasingly centered on combating terrorism, separatism, and extremism – the so-called “three evils” that the SCO was formed to address. After serving as an SCO observer since 2005, Pakistan became a full member in June 2017 during the Astana summit, marking the bloc's first expansion. Since then, Islamabad has viewed SCO membership as an opportunity to enhance regional security cooperation. Pakistani leaders emphasized that Pakistan could act as a bridge between South and Central Asia and contribute to the SCO's counter-terrorism framework, especially through the SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS). What follows is an analysis of Pakistan's key initiatives in the SCO's counter-terrorism efforts since 2017, an assessment of its current role in regional security cooperation (as of 2025), and the future prospects for Pakistan within the SCO given the rising terrorism threats in South and Central Asia.

#### **Pakistan's Counter-Terrorism Contributions since Joining the SCO**

Upon attaining membership, Pakistan actively sought to “learn from and contribute to” SCO counter-terrorism mechanisms. Key initiatives and contributions since 2017 include:

- **Participation in Joint Anti-Terror Exercises:** Pakistan has regularly contributed troops and expertise to SCO's multinational counter-terrorism drills. Notably, it took part in the “**Peace Mission**” exercises, which are large biennial SCO war games focused on counter-terrorism tactics. In August 2018, for the first time ever, Pakistani and Indian military contingents jointly participated in *Peace Mission 2018* – a six-day exercise in Chelyabinsk, Russia, under SCO auspices. Pakistan sent 110 soldiers as

part of the 3,000-strong multinational force, which included units from China, Russia, and Central Asian states. The drill, organized via SCO-RATS, practiced tactical operations like urban counter-insurgency and hostage rescue, aiming to improve interoperability against terrorism. This was a significant confidence-building measure, marking the first joint military exercise between Pakistan and India since their independence. Pakistan continued its participation in subsequent SCO exercises – for example, *Peace Mission 2021* was hosted by Russia in the Orenburg region (Sept 11–25, 2021) with forces from all SCO members including Pakistan, and *Peace Mission 2023* was planned in Russia's Urals (Chelyabinsk) with Pakistani delegation involvement in its preparations. Through these drills, Pakistan has shared its counter-insurgency experience and benefited from joint training, even being regarded as one of the “more experienced partners” whose combat expertise China and others sought to learn from.

*SCO special forces units during the 2021 Joint Anti-Terrorism Exercise at Pakistan's National Counter Terrorism Centre in Pabbi.* Pakistan has not only participated in SCO drills abroad but also hosted joint exercises on its soil. In September–October 2021, Pakistan's National Counter Terrorism Centre in Pabbi was the venue for a major SCO counter-terrorism exercise called “**Pabbi–Antiterror–2021.**” All SCO member states took part in this two-stage exercise amid the volatile security situation following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan. In the first stage, each country's forces conducted simulated terrorist intel gathering and sharing from home bases; in the second stage, foreign contingents (including China's) joined Pakistani forces for live drills in Pakistan focusing on urban counter-terrorism tactics such as close-quarters battle, room clearance, sniper operations, and hostage rescue. This marked the first time that China's anti-terror law enforcement personnel participated in a live-fire exercise outside China under the SCO framework. Pakistan's successful hosting of Pabbi-2021 demonstrated its commitment to SCO's counter-terror agenda and helped enhance interoperability among SCO members' special forces and law enforcement agencies in tackling terrorism.

- **Intelligence Sharing and RATS Cooperation:** Pakistan actively engages with the **SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)**, based in Tashkent, which is the SCO's permanent body for counter-terrorism coordination. Through RATS, member states share intelligence, maintain databases of terrorist organizations and suspects, and coordinate efforts to dismantle extremist networks. Since 2017, Pakistani officials and security agencies have participated in RATS council meetings and joint counter-terrorism planning. The RATS maintains a consolidated database of thousands of extremist individuals and groups, which member states (now including Pakistan) both contribute to and draw from for their counter-terror efforts. Gaining access to this intelligence repository and the SCO's cooperative legal frameworks has bolstered Pakistan's ability to track transnational militants. For instance, Pakistan can feed information on anti-Pakistan militant outfits like Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) or Baloch separatist groups into RATS, and in turn obtain intelligence on threats like the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) or Islamic State affiliates that concern other SCO members. Regular participation in RATS activities – including joint exercises (such as a cyber-terrorism drill in Xiamen in late 2017) and counter-terror workshops – has allowed Pakistan to refine its strategies. This multilateral intelligence-sharing and law-enforcement cooperation has introduced new levels of information exchange that enhance Pakistan's and the region's capacity to preempt terrorist plots.
- **Diplomatic Initiatives within SCO:** Pakistan has leveraged SCO forums to push collective action against terrorism and to highlight its own counter-terror contributions. After joining, Pakistan lost no time in integrating into SCO decision-making on security. For example, at the November 2017 SCO Council of Heads of Government meeting (its first after membership), Pakistan's then Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi stressed Islamabad's pivotal role in regional peace and its intent to align with SCO security objectives. Over the years, Pakistan has co-sponsored SCO resolutions and documents on terrorism. It has consistently supported the SCO's **"Shanghai Convention"** and other agreements that commit

members to cooperate against the “three evils.” Pakistani diplomats and security experts frequently attend SCO-RATS seminars on topics like terrorist financing, narco-terror links, and de-radicalization. Furthermore, Pakistan has been part of joint SCO statements condemning major terror attacks in the region and calling for united responses. These diplomatic engagements underscore Pakistan’s narrative of being a frontline state in the war on terror and its willingness to work with regional powers under SCO’s umbrella to address shared threats.

In sum, since joining the SCO, Pakistan has been an active contributor to its counter-terrorism framework – from boots on the ground in joint exercises, to intelligence-sharing through RATS, to shaping discourse on terrorism at SCO meetings. These efforts have both showcased Pakistan’s capabilities (for instance, its battle-hardened counter-insurgency experience shared during exercises) and allowed Pakistan to benefit from the collective resources and political support of a Eurasian security bloc.

### **Pakistan’s Current Role in the SCO’s Security and Counter-Terrorism Framework (2025)**

As of 2025, Pakistan plays a proactive and multi-faceted role in the SCO’s security cooperation initiatives, with a particular focus on counter-terrorism and regional stability. Pakistani leadership views the SCO as a critical forum that brings together all its immediate neighbors, major powers, and regional stakeholders to address security challenges. Several aspects define Pakistan’s current engagement:

- **Advocacy for Collective Security:** Pakistan today is one of the most vocal SCO members on issues of terrorism and regional militancy. At recent SCO summits and ministerial meetings, Islamabad has consistently emphasized the need for joint action against terrorist networks. For instance, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, at the 2024 SCO Summit in Astana, described terrorism as a “major concern” for all member states and urged *collective efforts* to combat militancy. His speech underscored the urgency Pakistan attaches to this issue, given its own struggle with groups like the TTP that have waged an insurgency against the state. Sharif used the SCO platform – unique in that it includes Pakistan’s allies *and* rivals – to rally regional

support: he implicitly accused India of sponsoring terrorism against Pakistan (alluding to “state-sponsored” assassinations), and he pressed Afghanistan’s Taliban regime (which has observer status in SCO) to prevent Afghan soil from being used by terrorists against neighbors. Such frank articulations of Pakistan’s security concerns at SCO meetings reflect Islamabad’s current approach: using SCO’s multilateral setting to seek understanding and support from key powers (China, Russia, Central Asians, even Iran as a new member) in dealing with terrorism emanating from across its borders. Pakistan’s diplomats frequently engage counterparts on the sidelines of SCO forums to discuss intelligence cooperation and to address grievances, making the SCO an important venue for security diplomacy. Notably, despite tensions with India bilaterally, Pakistan values the SCO as one of the only forums where both countries sit at the same table, allowing at least minimal engagement on security issues under a multilateral cover.

- **Active Participation in SCO Security Exercises:** Pakistan continues to participate robustly in SCO’s counter-terror drills and military exercises, underscoring its role as a security contributor. Pakistani contingents joined the *Peace Mission 2021* exercise in Russia, which notably was conducted just weeks after the Taliban takeover of Kabul and was *explicitly oriented toward the threat of instability from Afghanistan*. Similarly, Pakistan planned involvement in *Peace Mission 2023* in Russia, with its military delegation attending planning conferences in late 2022 for the joint anti-terror command exercise scheduled in August 2023. By regularly joining these exercises, Pakistan not only hones its forces’ interoperability with regional militaries but also signals its commitment to collective security. In addition, Pakistan’s security forces take part in other SCO-RATS activities such as joint anti-drug operations and border management workshops, since terrorism in the region is often linked with narcotics and arms trafficking. Islamabad’s ongoing contributions in these exercises reinforce its image as a cooperative SCO member devoted to regional counter-terrorism preparedness. Pakistani officials have reiterated at SCO meetings the importance of

such drills – advocating enhanced intelligence-sharing and more frequent joint exercises to build trust and capacity.

- **Intelligence and Law-Enforcement Cooperation:** In the SCO's intelligence-sharing framework, Pakistan is an increasingly important player given its location and counter-terror experience. Pakistani agencies actively share information on terror suspects via RATS and bilateral channels with SCO partners. A recent example of Pakistan's cooperative role is its work with neighbors regarding the threat of the Islamic State's "Khorasan" branch (ISIL-K) and other extremist groups in Afghanistan. Pakistan has been providing intelligence on the activities of TTP militants sheltered in Afghanistan to SCO partners, while also receiving information on groups that could threaten Pakistan (such as ETIM or the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan). In 2024, Pakistan co-sponsored efforts within SCO to strengthen border security coordination – an acknowledgment that terrorist infiltration is a transnational issue requiring multilateral oversight. Furthermore, Pakistani police and Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) officers have been participating in SCO training programs aimed at improving law-enforcement responses to terrorism and exchanging best practices in areas like deradicalization and cyber security. Pakistan's current role thus includes being a **beneficiary and provider** of intelligence through the SCO framework: it taps into RATS's databases and regional warnings, and in return, it feeds its own on-the-ground insights from the Afghan border and internal anti-terror operations into the collective knowledge pool.
- **Regional Security Initiatives and Afghan Stability Efforts:** Pakistan is uniquely positioned in the SCO as the country sharing a long border with Afghanistan, and it has taken on a central role in SCO deliberations on Afghan security. SCO members broadly agree that a stable Afghanistan is crucial to containing terrorism in the region. Pakistan has used SCO platforms to urge a coordinated approach to Afghanistan – reviving the **SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group** and engaging with Afghan authorities. Although the Taliban government is not formally recognized, Pakistan, along with other SCO members, has been pushing for Taliban cooperation against terrorist

groups. In September 2024, Pakistan participated in a quadrilateral meeting with China, Russia, and Iran (all SCO members or incoming members) to discuss Afghanistan's security. The joint statement from that meeting expressed *deep concern* over terrorist organizations operating out of Afghanistan – listing ISIL, Al-Qaeda, ETIM (which threatens China), TTP and BLA (which threaten Pakistan), among others, as serious regional threats. This reflects Pakistan's current diplomatic drive within SCO circles to build consensus that groups targeting Pakistan (like TTP and Baloch insurgents) are a shared menace. By highlighting these threats in SCO forums, Islamabad seeks to legitimize its counter-terror measures and garner political support from neighbors. Pakistan's engagement has contributed to SCO's collective stance of pressuring the Afghan interim regime to act against terror sanctuaries. However, it remains a challenge – as Pakistan's officials candidly note, the Taliban have so far been reluctant to openly cooperate on countering groups like TTP, often insisting such issues be handled bilaterally. Nonetheless, Pakistan's role in the SCO involves continuously raising these concerns and keeping Afghanistan on the SCO agenda so that the region maintains a united front.

- **Challenges and Limitations:** While Pakistan is an active player in SCO security cooperation, there are ongoing challenges that temper its role. Foremost are the bilateral tensions – especially with India – that occasionally spill into SCO proceedings. In recent years, the India-Pakistan rivalry has limited direct collaboration (for example, the two avoid joint sub-group projects under SCO due to mutual distrust). Pakistan has accused India of politicizing counter-terrorism issues at SCO by equating them with bilateral disputes, whereas India has grievances about Pakistan's past record on harboring certain militants. Such mistrust means that much of the real counter-terror cooperation happens in *smaller groupings or bilaterally* (e.g. Pakistan-China intelligence sharing, Pakistan-Russia military exchanges) rather than collectively at the SCO level. Indeed, analysts observe that SCO-wide security cooperation tends to be general and declaratory, with concrete operations often occurring outside the SCO framework or in bilateral

formats [osw.waw.pl](https://osw.waw.pl). Additionally, Pakistan's internal political and economic struggles in recent times might affect its bandwidth in SCO activities – if domestic instability rises, it could constrain Pakistan's participation or leadership in regional initiatives. Despite these issues, Pakistan's current stance is to use the SCO to maximum effect: Islamabad continues to press for deeper SCO engagement on counter-terrorism, arguing that the recent surge in terrorism (detailed below) demands an even more robust and unified regional response.

It is important to note the backdrop against which Pakistan's role in the SCO has intensified: a deteriorating regional security climate. Since the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, Pakistan has witnessed a sharp spike in terrorist violence. Figures indicate that terror attacks in Pakistan increased by **73% in the first two years after the Taliban's return to power in Kabul**. The year 2024 was especially brutal – Pakistan suffered 444 terrorist attacks that year, and at least 685 security personnel were killed in the line of duty, making it the deadliest year for Pakistan's security forces in over a decade. Overall fatalities from terrorism in 2024 jumped by 66% compared to 2023. These grim statistics underscore why Pakistan is urgently leveraging platforms like the SCO for counter-terrorism support. The resurgence of groups like TTP (operating from Afghan sanctuaries) and Islamic State Khorasan, and an emboldened Baloch insurgency, pose an existential threat to Pakistan and serious concerns for the region. Pakistan's current role in the SCO, therefore, is very much defined by this urgency: it seeks to translate SCO declarations into concrete assistance – whether that be intelligence help, diplomatic backing, or even joint actions – to help Pakistan stabilize its security situation. In turn, Pakistan offers its frontline experience and cooperation to SCO states, cognizant that terrorism today is a shared threat from the steppes of Central Asia to the cities of South Asia.

### **Future Prospects and Strategic Opportunities for Pakistan in the SCO**

Looking ahead, Pakistan's strategic calculus sees the SCO as an increasingly vital platform to address the rising tide of terrorism in South and Central Asia. The coming years present



several opportunities for Pakistan to deepen its engagement and reap benefits within the SCO's counter-terror framework, especially as regional dynamics evolve post-2024:

- **Spearheading Regional Counter-Terror Initiatives:** Pakistan can seize a leadership role in new SCO security initiatives. As terrorism surges in the region, there will be calls for more coordinated action – and Pakistan is well-positioned to lead given its experience. In fact, Pakistan is slated to **host an upcoming SCO-RATS Council meeting**[issi.org.pk](https://www.issi.org.pk), which provides an avenue to push forward intelligence-sharing and capacity-building proposals. By hosting and chairing such high-profile meetings, Pakistan can shape the agenda – for example, advocating for a unified protocol on intelligence exchange about Afghan-based terror groups or proposing joint operations against drug-trafficking networks that fund extremists. Moreover, Pakistan has an interest in **reviving the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group** (which has been inactive in recent years). Breathing new life into this group would allow Pakistan, along with other SCO members, to engage directly with Afghan authorities under SCO auspices. In the near future, Islamabad could lobby for the Contact Group to convene and develop a roadmap that ensures Afghanistan commits to counter-terror obligations – a move that could institutionalize regional expectations on the Taliban regime. Such proactive diplomacy would reinforce Pakistan's image as a **“responsible stakeholder”** taking initiative to bolster regional security through the SCO.
- **Enhanced Intelligence and Capacity Building:** One of the clearest strategic benefits Pakistan can derive from the SCO is the enhancement of its counter-terrorism capacity through collective efforts. Going forward, Pakistan will likely push for *greater intelligence integration* – perhaps a more advanced joint terrorism database or real-time intel-sharing arrangements among SCO states. With threats like ISIL-Khorasan attempting to infiltrate Central Asia and South Asia, Pakistan and its SCO partners have a mutual incentive to share surveillance and early warning signals. Pakistan can propose setting up an SCO-wide counter-terror **coordination center** or joint task force that specifically monitors terrorist movements between

Afghanistan and neighboring states. Additionally, Pakistan can benefit from **training programs** and joint exercises under SCO. Future *Peace Mission* drills and smaller joint anti-terror exercises could be hosted by Pakistan again, or Pakistan could send larger contingents to demonstrate leadership. By participating in combined special forces training, Pakistan's military and police can learn new tactics and technologies (e.g. drone surveillance, cyber intelligence) used by Russia or China, while also imparting its own counter-insurgency know-how. The SCO framework might also help Pakistan modernize its counter-terror equipment; for instance, China and Russia, through SCO cooperation, might be more inclined to supply advanced counter-terrorism gear or share best practices on border control. Pakistan's forthcoming campaign "Zarb-e-Istehkam" (announced in 2024 to crush militancy) could find regional support via SCO mechanisms – Pakistan can rally member states to choke off funding and havens for militants targeted in this campaign. In summary, deeper institutionalization of SCO counter-terror efforts – from RATS joint operations to cross-border hotlines – represents a strategic opportunity for Pakistan to amplify its domestic fight against terror with regional help.

- **Collective Pressure on Terror Havens (Afghanistan-focused):** As the threat of terrorism emanating from Afghanistan grows, Pakistan's future in SCO will involve coordinating a collective response to this challenge. All SCO members (particularly China, Russia, the Central Asian republics, and now Iran) have a stake in preventing Afghanistan from becoming a terrorist safe haven. This alignment creates a diplomatic opening for Pakistan: it can work within the SCO to forge a *united front* that engages the Taliban regime. Future SCO summits and ministerials may serve as venues where Pakistan and others set forth conditions or action plans for the Afghan authorities – for example, an SCO joint declaration demanding the Taliban take **"concrete measures"** against groups like TTP, ISKP, and ETIM (echoing the language Pakistan used in 2024). If the Taliban seek greater legitimacy or observer status in forums like the SCO, Pakistan could leverage that aspiration to extract counter-terror concessions, backed by China and Russia's influence on Kabul. There is also the

prospect of bringing Afghanistan into some SCO cooperative activities even before formal recognition – perhaps inviting Afghan security officials to attend RATS workshops or joint training as observers. This inclusion, coordinated by Pakistan and SCO peers, could gradually bind Afghanistan to regional counter-terror norms. In the long run, should Afghanistan stabilize and meet benchmarks, it might attain full SCO membership; Pakistan would stand to gain immensely from its volatile neighbor being locked into multilateral commitments on security. Thus, Pakistan's strategic opportunity is to use the SCO as the diplomatic conduit to **manage the Afghanistan problem** – turning a source of instability into a collaborative partner under gentle pressure from all SCO heavyweights.

- **Building Bilateral Synergies under the SCO Umbrella:** Another future prospect lies in Pakistan leveraging the SCO to strengthen critical bilateral relationships in the fight against terror. With Iran's admission as a full SCO member (2023-24) and Saudi Arabia, Turkey, etc. as dialogue partners, Pakistan can utilize the SCO context to address specific threats. For instance, Pakistan and Iran both confront Sunni extremist groups (Jaish ul-Adl on the Iran-Pakistan border, Baloch insurgents, etc.), and the SCO can facilitate greater Pakistan-Iran coordination and trust-building on border security. In 2024, as noted, Iran and Pakistan jointly expressed concern about groups like BLA and Jaish ul-Adl based in Afghanistan [mfa.gov.cn](https://mfa.gov.cn) – moving forward, the SCO gives them a multilateral forum to continue aligning efforts (potentially leading to joint border patrols or intel sharing agreements brokered under SCO's political cover). Similarly, Pakistan's all-weather alliance with China gains an added dimension in SCO: both countries are invested in protecting Belt and Road projects like CPEC from terrorist attacks. Through SCO channels, Pakistan can secure Chinese technical assistance for counter-terrorism (surveillance systems, training in counter-IED tactics, etc.) to protect infrastructure and personnel. Joint China-Pakistan exercises under SCO (such as the bilateral JATE drills) will likely grow, enhancing preparedness against threats to their interests. Even with Russia, Pakistan's security ties – historically limited – could deepen due to SCO cooperation;

Moscow has shown openness to counter-terror exchanges with Pakistan in recent years, and the SCO framework may lead to more arms deals or training programs that benefit Pakistan's counter-terror capabilities. In essence, the multilateral setting of the SCO can be a launching pad for Pakistan to bolster key bilateral partnerships that multiply its resources against terrorism.

- **Economic and Development Linkages to Security:** While primarily a security forum, the SCO also offers economic initiatives that indirectly support counter-terrorism by addressing underlying instability. Pakistan's future role could involve championing development projects in conflict-prone regions under the SCO banner. For example, Pakistan might advocate SCO-backed investments in Afghanistan's economy or in Pakistan's own tribal border areas, with the logic that economic opportunity will help drain the swamps of extremism. Synergies between China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and SCO connectivity projects, which Pakistan is keen on [issi.org.pk](https://www.issi.org.pk), can have security dividends – improved infrastructure and trade create stakes in peace and can facilitate quicker military logistics when needed. Additionally, Pakistan has suggested the idea of a **regional development fund** within SCO to rebuild post-conflict societies and thus remove grievances that fuel terrorism. Another strategic area is engaging the SCO on soft-power measures against radicalization: Pakistan can push for cultural and educational exchanges (for instance, SCO scholarships or youth forums) targeting populations vulnerable to extremist propaganda. Over 2024–2025, issues like these (including even climate change-induced crises, which Pakistan has linked to security concerns) [issi.org.pk](https://www.issi.org.pk) have gained more attention, and Pakistan can broaden the SCO's approach to fighting terrorism by including socio-economic resilience in its strategy. By taking this comprehensive approach, Pakistan stands to not only curb militancy but also enhance its stature as a forward-thinking SCO member addressing root causes of instability.

In light of the **rising terrorist threats across South and Central Asia**, the SCO's relevance for Pakistan is set to grow. The region faces a confluence of dangers: the resilience of ISIS-K

and Al-Qaeda factions in the Afghan-Pakistan region, the revival of Central Asian militant groups, and cross-border insurgencies. These challenges are transnational, and no single country can tackle them alone. This reality offers Pakistan a *strategic opening* to further entrench itself in SCO-led solutions. If Pakistan can demonstrate leadership – by implementing a successful new counter-terror campaign at home (e.g. *Zarb-e-Istehkam* in 2024–25) and sharing those successes with SCO peers – it can make a strong case for collaborative action. Conversely, Pakistan is aware that to rally support, it must also address any skepticism among neighbors about its own commitment. Observers note that some regional partners will expect Pakistan to show a united domestic front against all terror groups and avoid distinctions between “good and bad” militants. The future of Pakistan in the SCO will thus also hinge on Islamabad’s internal political will to decisively combat extremism – which, if demonstrated, will enhance Pakistan’s credibility and its ability to extract meaningful cooperation from the SCO framework.

## Conclusion

Pakistan’s trajectory within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization underscores its **commitment to regional security and collective counter-terrorism**. Historically, Pakistan has contributed to SCO’s counter-terror framework through active participation in joint exercises, intelligence sharing, and diplomatic initiatives – aligning itself with the SCO’s core mission against terrorism, separatism, and extremism. In the present day, Pakistan’s role has become even more pivotal as the region grapples with a post-2021 wave of militancy. Islamabad uses the SCO as a platform to voice security concerns, engage both friends and rivals, and pursue collaborative responses to threats like the TTP and ISIS-K that jeopardize regional stability. Despite enduring challenges (including geopolitical rivalries and the complexities of Afghanistan), Pakistan remains proactive, seeing the SCO as an indispensable mechanism to augment its own counter-terror efforts.

Looking ahead, the evolving security landscape offers Pakistan both **opportunities and responsibilities** in equal measure. By leveraging the SCO – hosting its meetings, shaping its agenda, and partaking in its initiatives – Pakistan can further bolster regional consensus on

fighting terror and secure assistance to address its domestic security challenges. The prospects of deeper intelligence cooperation, coordinated pressure on terror sanctuaries, and integrated regional strategies against extremism could significantly enhance Pakistan's security environment. In turn, Pakistan's active involvement and leadership can strengthen the SCO's effectiveness as a regional security bloc. Indeed, as South and Central Asia confront the interlinked threats of terrorism, Pakistan's stake in the SCO will be to ensure that this multilateral forum rises to the challenge. Through sustained diplomatic engagement, strategic initiatives, and demonstrated resolve at home, Pakistan can reinforce its role as a **constructive and influential SCO member** – one that not only benefits from but also significantly contributes to the shared goal of regional peace and security in the face of terrorism.

## Main Points

### Pakistan's Historical Role in SCO Counter-Terrorism

- Became full SCO member in 2017 (Astana Summit).
  - Participated in SCO-RATS intelligence sharing and policy coordination.
  - Actively joined SCO joint military drills like *Peace Mission 2018, 2021, and 2023*.
  - Hosted Pabbi-Antiterror 2021 in Pakistan – first such live exercise on its soil.
  - Contributed counter-insurgency expertise from its own war on terror.
  - Engaged diplomatically in SCO forums to push anti-terror resolutions and discourse.
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### Pakistan's Current Role in SCO (as of 2025)

- Emphasizes collective security at SCO summits (e.g., PM Shehbaz Sharif's 2024 speech).
  - Highlights cross-border terrorism and urges joint action on Afghanistan.
  - Participates in intelligence sharing via SCO-RATS on groups like TTP, ISKP, BLA, and ETIM.
  - Maintains active military participation in SCO drills and law enforcement programs.
  - Uses SCO as a rare forum to engage India diplomatically despite tensions.
  - Faces limitations due to regional rivalries and internal political/economic constraints.
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### **Future Prospects for Pakistan in SCO**

- **Plans to lead SCO-RATS meetings and shape the anti-terror agenda.**
  - **Opportunity to revive the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group.**
  - **Could propose joint SCO anti-terrorism task forces or surveillance systems.**
  - **Can deepen bilateral counter-terror ties with China, Iran, and Russia under SCO umbrella.**
  - **Likely to benefit from training, joint operations, and equipment sharing.**
  - **May push for SCO-backed development in tribal areas and Afghanistan to curb extremism.**
  - **Needs internal political will to decisively act against all terror groups for credibility.**
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### **Contextual Background (2024–2025)**

- **Terrorism in Pakistan surged 73% post-Afghanistan withdrawal.**
- **2024 marked Pakistan's deadliest year for security personnel (685 killed).**
- **Rising threats from TTP, ISKP, BLA, and other groups necessitate urgent SCO engagement.**



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