



Missed Opportunity: India and the SCO's Stance on Terrorism

The recent Qingdao meeting of Defence Ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) ended without a joint communiqué, revealing tensions within the 10-nation grouping. This presentation examines India's challenges and opportunities within the SCO framework, particularly regarding terrorism concerns.



by OJAANK IAS

The Qingdao Meeting Controversy

What Happened?

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh withdrew from the joint declaration as it contained no reference to terrorism at Pakistan's behest.

This occurred just weeks after the Pahalgam attack and Operation Sindoor, which intensified India's resolve against terrorism.



Surprising Developments



Omission of Terrorism

The draft resolution failed to mention terrorism despite it being a core concern for India.



Balochistan Reference

Member-states including China and Russia reportedly considered referring to "disturbances in Balochistan" at Pakistan's request.



Ignoring Indian Concerns

Mentions of the Pahalgam attack and cross-border terrorism requested by India were left out.





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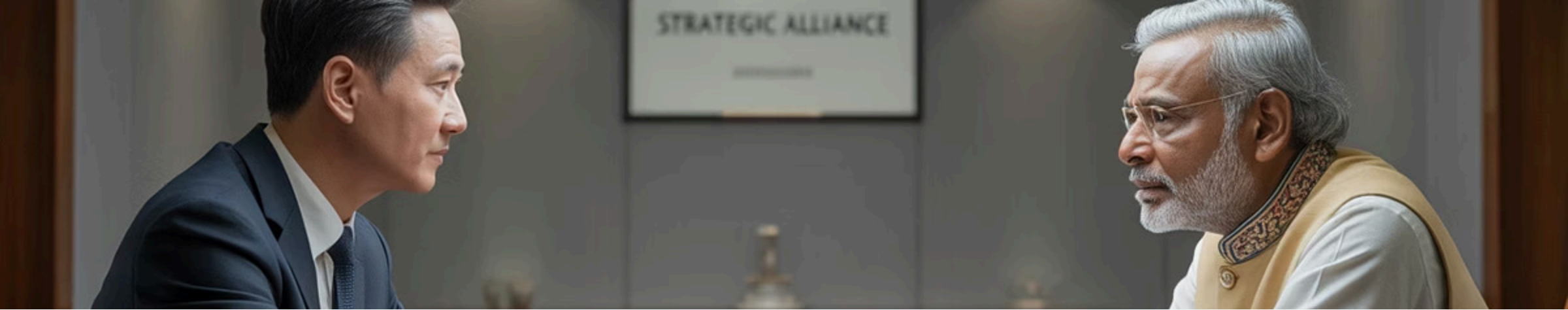
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Contradiction with SCO's Founding Principles

This stance contradicts the SCO's founding Charter of 2002, which focused on building "mutual intraregional efforts to curb terrorism, separatism and extremism."

Even more surprising given that the Director of SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure was present at the meeting.





China's Role as Chair

Unhelpful Position

China's unhelpful role as Chair on the terrorism issue is disquieting, especially considering the recent thaw in India-China relations.

Vague Statements

Statements by the SCO Secretariat and Chinese Foreign Ministry used anodyne phrases like "cooperation on modern security challenges and threats."

India's Potential Missteps

Missed Diplomatic Opportunities

- No parliamentary delegations sent to SCO member countries post-Operation Sindoor
- India skipped hosting an in-person SCO Summit during its 2023 chairmanship, opting for a virtual format instead
- Disassociated from statement on Israel's attack on SCO member Iran
- Limited bilateral engagement with Central Asian SCO members to address shared security concerns
- Insufficient leveraging of SCO platform to build regional consensus on cross-border terrorism

Strategic Implications

- Reduced influence within the SCO framework to shape counter-terrorism agenda
- Allowed Pakistan and China to control the terrorism narrative within the organization
- Missed chance to strengthen ties with neutral SCO members like Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan



Domestic Political Considerations

- Election-focused prioritization may have diverted attention from SCO engagement
- Internal debates on the value of SCO membership versus other multilateral forums
- Hesitation to commit resources to an organization increasingly dominated by China

Media and Public Perception

India's cautious approach to SCO has created a perception gap – appearing non-committal to regional initiatives while simultaneously criticizing the organization's stance on terrorism.

These missteps reflect a broader strategic dilemma for India: how to meaningfully engage with a China-led regional body while protecting core national security interests related to cross-border terrorism and territorial sovereignty.



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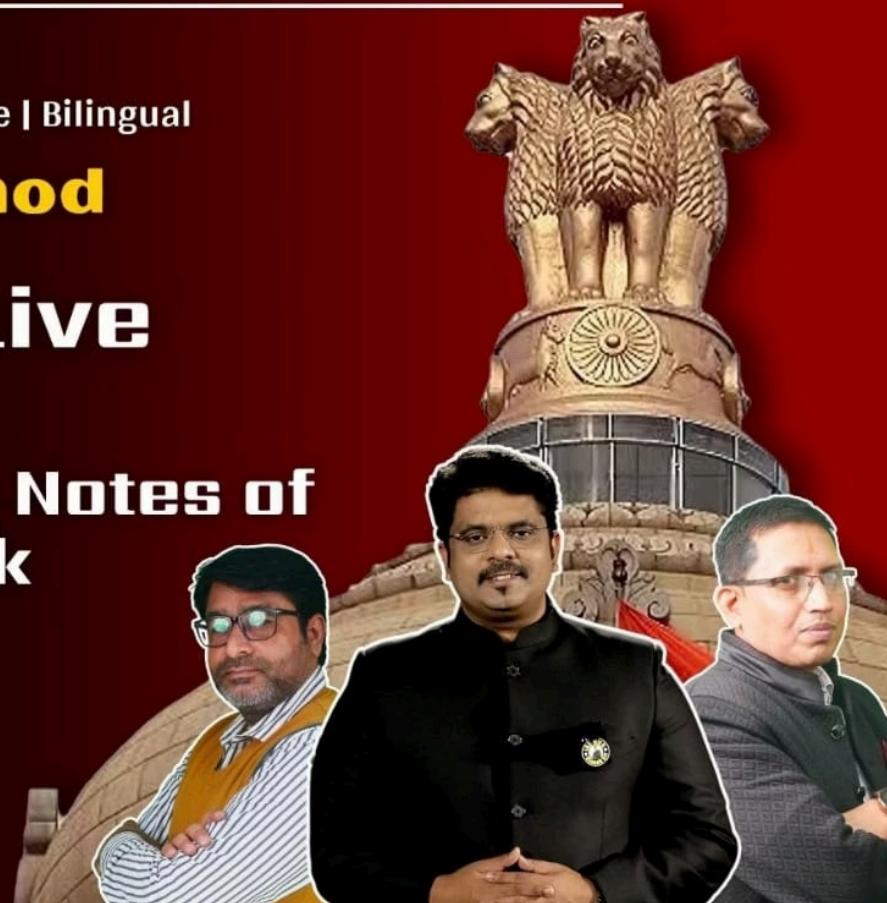
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Future Considerations



Upcoming Meetings

All eyes on the SCO Foreign Ministers' July meet and the SCO Summit in August–September



Diplomatic Strategy

India must study whether there are shortcomings in delivering its message on the "new normal" announced after Operation Sindoor



Regional Engagement

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar chaired a meeting of the India–Central Asia forum in June



The Way Forward

Strategic Approach Needed

Breaking with the SCO, an important regional forum, will simply leave an open platform for Pakistan.

Instead of crying foul, the Indian government must convince SCO members that their interests lie in strengthening cross-regional support against terrorism.





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