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Spirit of Friendship, Cooperation, and Pragmatism: Analysis of the Outcomes of the SCO Summit in Samarkand

Written by:

Nilufar Doniyorkhodjaeva, Head of a Department, Development Strategy
Center, Tashkent, Uzbekistan



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On September 15-16, Uzbekistan hosted the Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Samarkand. Uzbek soil welcomed around 20 leaders and high-level representatives of countries, and 10 heads of international and regional organisations, including heads of member-states – China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia and Tajikistan. The presidents of Belarus, Iran and Mongolia attended as observers, while those from Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Turkmenistan attended as invited partners. This was the 22nd regional summit of the organisation and the first in-person summit in two years.

"During our chairmanship, we sought to intensify practical cooperation within our organisation to increase its potential and international prestige. Along with security issues, priority was given to enhancing trade, economic, and humanitarian cooperation," Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev said in his remarks at a summit covered by more than 800 journalists from around the world.

SCO countries account for half of the world's population and at least 25% of the world's GDP. During the summit, leaders discussed trade, connectivity, food security and sustainable development, climate, recovering from the pandemic, people-to-people links, and other global challenges that require international cooperation.





In particular, the Uzbek and Chinese parties signed agreements worth 15 billion USD. Chairman of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping became the first foreign leader to get Uzbekistan's "Supreme Friendship" order. Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and China signed a historic tripartite agreement on a railway project feasibility study. President Mirziyoyev discussed the "Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Iran" transport corridor with his Iranian counterpart, signing 18 bilateral documents covering business, tourism, science, agriculture, oil and gas, and cargo transit through the "Chabahar" port. Logistics was also a topic of his discussion with the Pakistani Prime Minister. The parties noted the importance of speeding up the Trans-Afghan railway project. Tajik President Emomali Rahmon and Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, discussing energy cooperation, stated the work on the "Yavan" Hydro Power Plant.

Similarly, Uzbek and Kyrgyz leaders discussed the construction of the "Qambarota-1" HPP. During his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, the Uzbek leader received Russia's "Alexander Nevsky" order. The parties signed a declaration on a comprehensive strategic partnership between Uzbekistan and Russia, reportedly inking new investment agreements worth 4.6 billion USD.

Analysis of the summit's outcomes allows us to determine that the SCO is not a bloc. It is an organisation that promotes the concepts of multifaceted cooperation and does not pursue geopolitical goals or make specific agendas against any nation. These principles are clearly spelt out in its charter. In addition, this principled position was set out in the final document of the Summit – Samarkand Declaration.

"Member states reaffirm that the SCO is not directed against other states and international organisations and is open to broad cooperation with them following the



purposes and principles of the UN Charter, the SCO Charter, and international law, based on consideration of mutual interests and commonality of approaches to solving regional and global problems," the document read.

SCO has stated that they are against any interference in other nation's internal affairs under the declaration's pretence of anti-terrorism and anti-extremism measures.

The document specifically read that "Member states note the inadmissibility of interference in the internal affairs of states under the pretext of countering terrorism and extremism, as well as the unacceptability of using terrorist, extremist and radical groups for personal gain."

Additionally, the declaration entailed that "member states expressed deep concern over the threat to security posed by terrorism, separatism, and extremism in all its forms and manifestations, and strongly condemned terrorist acts worldwide. They stressed the importance of consistently implementing the Program of Cooperation of the SCO Member States in Countering Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism for 2022-2024 [signed in 2021]."

The SCO declaration agreed upon in Samarkand also noted that the organisation stands firmly against the militarisation of the IT sector. It dictated that "They support the development of universal rules, principles, and norms of responsible behaviour of states in this area, also welcome the launch of the development under the auspices of the UN of a comprehensive international convention on combating the use of ICT for criminal purposes."

As per the Samarkand declaration, SCO has called on its member countries to fully implement the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production,

Stockpiling, and Use of Chemical Weapons and Their Destruction (CWC) "as an effective instrument in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation."

The SCO declaration highlights the significance of playing a role in advocating for and supporting the formation of an inclusive, independent, neutral, united, democratic, and peaceful state in Afghanistan with the hopes that it will be free from terrorism, war, and drugs.

The summit has served as further confirmation of Uzbekistan's growing geopolitical and economic role. It was another demonstration of the viability of Tashkent's new foreign policy initiatives. Pragmatism, dynamism and



ambition, which have become Uzbekistan's calling card for diplomacy in recent years, were shown during the summit. The country's open and multifaceted foreign policy has made it possible to balance the interests of various states within the SCO's space. The forum was a significant milestone for Uzbekistan regarding its regional agenda, diversifying trade and logistics, and making clear its economic diplomacy and multi-vector foreign policy position. It was also an opportunity to demonstrate Shavkat Mirziyoyev's "New Uzbekistan" vision to a broader global audience.