



Shanghai Cooperation Summit

Background Guide

University of Colorado Boulder
Model United Nations High School Conference
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Strengthen mutual confidence and good-neighbourly relations among the member countries

Promote effective cooperation in politics, trade and economy, science and technology, culture and other fields

Make joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region

Move towards the establishment of a new, democratic, just and rational political and economic international order



Letter from the Chair:

Welcome to CU Boulder's Model United Nations Fall High School Conference! We are excited to have you join us as delegates in the Shanghai Cooperation Summit. This committee offers a unique opportunity to step into the roles of leaders from across Eurasia and to think critically about the balance between cooperation and competition in today's interconnected world. The primary goal of this committee is to explore how the SCO can strengthen its position as a key regional organization while addressing pressing issues such as counterterrorism cooperation in Central Asia and balancing its role alongside other regional blocs. These topics were chosen to be both accessible and thought-provoking, encouraging you to think about how diplomacy works when diverse interests, rivalries, and alliances are at play. While this committee is designed with beginner to intermediate delegates in mind, we want to make sure everyone feels welcome and challenged, regardless of skill level. If you have any questions about procedure, the topics, or the workings of the SCO, please do not hesitate to approach the dais. Our goal is to help you succeed and enjoy your time at this conference. The SCO provides a fascinating lens through which to consider international cooperation. As delegates, you will grapple with the challenges of reconciling different national priorities while still working toward collective security, stability, and development. The experience is designed to help you not only improve your skills in negotiation and public speaking, but also to leave you with a deeper understanding of how regional organizations shape global politics. At the end of this conference, we hope you come away with a stronger appreciation for the complexity of multilateral diplomacy and new ideas on how to address some of the world's most pressing regional challenges. Most of all, we want you to have fun, engage fully with the debates, and bring your creativity and passion to this committee. We cannot wait to see the solutions you develop and the energy you bring to the Shanghai Cooperation Summit this year!

Introduction and History of the committee:

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is a multilateral political, economic, and security alliance founded in 2001, building on earlier regional cooperation between China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Today, the SCO has grown to include India, Pakistan, and Iran as full members, with several states across Eurasia participating as observers or dialogue partners. With a membership that collectively represents almost half of the world's population and spans much of the Eurasian landmass, the SCO has become one of the most significant regional organizations in global affairs.

The SCO was initially established to promote trust, security, and stability along the borders of its founding members. Its early focus was combating what leaders termed the “three evils” of terrorism, separatism, and extremism. However, the organization has since broadened its agenda to encompass economic cooperation, energy development, infrastructure projects, environmental issues, and cultural exchange. Its importance lies not only in its sheer size and scope, but also in its ability to convene countries with diverse political systems, histories, and interests, requiring members to engage in pragmatic diplomacy.

The Shanghai Cooperation Summit, its highest decision-making body, brings together heads of state and government to deliberate on pressing questions of regional and global importance. These include security concerns such as Afghanistan and Central Asia's stability, economic initiatives like regional trade and infrastructure development, as well as broader issues such as energy cooperation and climate resilience. Unlike Western-led organizations, the SCO emphasizes principles of sovereignty, non-interference, and multipolarity, making it a forum that reflects alternative visions of global governance.

At this conference, delegates will step into the role of leaders navigating this complex environment. The SCO challenges its members to balance great power competition, between states like China, Russia, and India, with the shared interests of smaller Central Asian countries seeking development, stability, and protection of their sovereignty. Every decision at the summit requires careful compromise: smaller states must protect their agency without alienating larger powers, while larger states must pursue their ambitions without fracturing the organization's unity. This delicate balancing act is what makes the SCO such a unique and challenging forum for multilateral diplomacy.

The work of the SCO is rooted in collaboration, but not without tension. On issues of counterterrorism and security, members must align intelligence and resources despite differing geopolitical goals. On economic cooperation, wealthier or more technologically advanced states must weigh how much they are willing to invest in the development of their neighbors. And on global issues, such as climate change, energy security, and supply chains, the SCO must prove that a diverse regional bloc can produce meaningful and actionable results for its citizens.

The diversity within the SCO is also its greatest strength. By bridging the interests of major global players and developing states, it offers the potential to create innovative approaches to regional and global challenges. Yet this diversity also magnifies the difficulty of reaching consensus. Just as in the real Shanghai Cooperation Summit, success in this committee requires balancing national interests with regional solidarity, standing firm on one's priorities while also showing the flexibility needed to secure enough support to move forward.

Ultimately, the SCO embodies the complexity of 21st century diplomacy. It is a forum where global powers and emerging economies must cooperate in spite of rivalry, where shared challenges, terrorism, economic growth, energy security, and climate risks demand collective

solutions, and where compromise is both the greatest necessity and the greatest challenge. As delegates in this committee, you are tasked with shaping the future of Eurasian cooperation, and by extension, contributing to how an increasingly multipolar world addresses the most pressing issues of our time.

Topic I: Balancing SCO Cooperation with Other Regional Blocs

Introduction of Topic I:

Since its founding, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has positioned itself as a central forum for political, security, and economic cooperation across Eurasia. However, the SCO does not operate in isolation. Its member states simultaneously belong to or engage with other regional and international organizations such as the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and even global bodies like the United Nations and the World Trade Organization. Balancing the SCO's priorities with those of other regional blocs has become a defining challenge. On one hand, overlapping memberships create opportunities for coordination, shared resources, and broader influence. On the other hand, they can generate competition, policy conflicts, and inefficiencies that hinder collective action. Ensuring that SCO cooperation complements, rather than undermines, other regional partnerships is a vital step in strengthening multilateralism and preventing fragmentation in global governance.

Background of Topic I:

The SCO was designed to promote stability and cooperation in Eurasia, but its membership overlaps with several other regional frameworks, each with distinct goals. For example, the Eurasian Economic Union, led primarily by Russia, emphasizes economic integration and customs coordination, while the SCO has a broader mandate covering security,

development, and cultural exchange. Similarly, India and Pakistan, both SCO members, are also active in SAARC, a bloc often hindered by political tensions. These overlapping commitments raise important questions: when member states' obligations to one bloc conflict with those of another, how should priorities be determined?

One major issue arises in the security sphere. Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan are members of both the SCO and the CSTO, a military alliance that sometimes duplicates or even contradicts SCO initiatives. While the SCO focuses on counterterrorism and joint exercises, the CSTO functions more as a collective defense pact. Balancing these two bodies requires careful negotiation to avoid redundancy and ensure clear chains of command in times of crisis. Similarly, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), while not a formal regional bloc, often intersects with SCO goals on infrastructure development. This has created opportunities for synergy, but also suspicions among other members that SCO cooperation might be used primarily to advance China's national interests.

Economic cooperation further illustrates the complexity of balancing blocs. While the SCO has discussed creating frameworks for freer trade and financial integration, these discussions often overlap with ongoing EAEU initiatives, or conflict with bilateral free trade agreements pursued by individual members. Smaller states, such as Kyrgyzstan or Uzbekistan, often worry that aligning too closely with one bloc risks alienating partners in another, leaving them politically or economically vulnerable. This challenge is heightened by external actors: for instance, Western-led organizations like NATO and the EU maintain relationships with certain SCO members, adding another layer of competing commitments.

Balancing SCO cooperation with other blocs requires more than simply dividing responsibilities, it demands active coordination. Mechanisms for information-sharing,

harmonization of policies, and transparent dialogue between overlapping organizations are necessary to prevent duplication and to maximize collective benefit. Without such measures, there is a risk of “bloc fatigue,” where member states spread resources too thinly and weaken the effectiveness of every organization they participate in.

Conclusion of Topic I:

The challenge of balancing SCO cooperation with other regional blocs is not just a matter of organizational efficiency, it is a test of the ability of Eurasian states to practice multilateralism in an increasingly interconnected world. The SCO's strength lies in its ability to unite diverse states with different geopolitical alignments, but this same diversity makes coordination with external blocs complicated. Addressing these tensions will require compromise, dialogue, and a willingness to prioritize collective stability over narrow national or organizational interests.

Delegates in this committee are encouraged to think critically about how the SCO can align its mission with those of neighboring organizations without duplicating or undermining their efforts. Should the SCO establish formal channels of cooperation with blocs like the CSTO, EAEU, or SAARC? Should it pursue distinct areas of focus that minimize overlap? Or should it position itself as a platform for bridging these different bodies together under shared goals? These questions go to the heart of the SCO's future relevance. By considering both the opportunities and challenges of overlapping memberships, delegates will grapple with one of the most pressing issues in Eurasian diplomacy: how to ensure that cooperation across organizations strengthens rather than fragments the international order.

Research guiding questions of Topic I:

- What mechanisms can the SCO develop to coordinate policies with other regional blocs such as the EAEU, CSTO, and SAARC?
- How can member states manage overlapping memberships without creating conflicting obligations or duplicating efforts?
- In what ways can the SCO complement, rather than compete with, initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative or the Eurasian Economic Union?
- How can smaller member states safeguard their sovereignty and economic independence when navigating multiple regional blocs?
- What role should great powers like China, Russia, and India play in ensuring that the SCO does not overshadow or undermine other regional organizations?
- How can the SCO enhance information-sharing and communication with other blocs to prevent misunderstandings or policy clashes?
- What strategies can be implemented to avoid “bloc fatigue” and ensure that resources are effectively allocated among different organizations?
- How can the SCO define a distinct role for itself that adds value to existing regional structures while avoiding redundancy?
- To what extent should the SCO engage with Western-led organizations such as NATO or the EU to align security and economic priorities?
- How can the SCO’s principles of sovereignty and non-interference guide its cooperation with other regional blocs?

Topic II: Counterterrorism Cooperation in Central Asia

Introduction of Topic II:

From its inception, one of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's central missions has been the fight against the "three evils" of terrorism, separatism, and extremism. This priority reflects the shared challenges faced by Central Asian states, which sit at the crossroads of geopolitical rivalries, unstable borders, and complex ethnic and religious dynamics. Terrorist networks, radicalization, and the spillover of conflict from neighboring Afghanistan have all underscored the need for a coordinated regional response. Counterterrorism cooperation is therefore not only one of the SCO's founding principles, but also a central pillar of its continued legitimacy as a security-focused organization.

Background of Topic II:

Central Asia has long been vulnerable to terrorism and extremism due to a combination of historical, political, and socioeconomic factors. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the newly independent Central Asian republics faced fragile governance structures, porous borders, and economic instability. These conditions made the region susceptible to cross-border extremist groups, smuggling networks, and insurgent movements. The Taliban's resurgence in Afghanistan and the activities of groups like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) have heightened concerns, as instability in Afghanistan often spills across its northern borders.

The SCO has made counterterrorism one of its most visible areas of cooperation. The establishment of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) in Tashkent in 2004 formalized intelligence-sharing, joint exercises, and coordinated operations among member states.

Through RATS, SCO members maintain databases of terrorist organizations and individuals, and conduct annual counterterrorism drills. These exercises are intended not only to build military readiness, but also to foster trust among member states with differing strategic interests.

However, significant challenges remain. Divergent national priorities, such as China's focus on separatism in Xinjiang, Russia's emphasis on protecting its sphere of influence, and Central Asian states' concern about local radicalization, sometimes prevent unified strategies. India and Pakistan's inclusion in the SCO has further complicated consensus, as their rivalry often spills into broader debates about security cooperation. Additionally, questions have been raised about human rights: while some governments use counterterrorism measures to genuinely combat extremist threats, others have been accused of using the SCO framework to suppress political dissent under the guise of counterterrorism.

External dynamics add another layer of complexity. The withdrawal of Western forces from Afghanistan has placed greater pressure on the SCO to assume responsibility for regional security, while ongoing instability in Afghanistan continues to test the organization's effectiveness. At the same time, coordination with outside actors such as the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee or bilateral security arrangements can either strengthen or undermine SCO-led efforts. Ensuring that SCO counterterrorism measures respect sovereignty while maintaining regional stability is one of the most pressing dilemmas facing the organization today.

Conclusion of Topic II:

Counterterrorism cooperation in Central Asia remains a defining test of the SCO's ability to function as a regional security organization. While progress has been made through institutions like RATS and annual joint exercises, disagreements among members, overlapping

priorities, and concerns over human rights continue to complicate efforts. For the SCO to remain credible, it must prove that it can effectively address terrorism while balancing the diverse interests of its members and avoiding misuse of counterterrorism policies for political repression.

Delegates in this committee are tasked with addressing the core question: how can the SCO strengthen counterterrorism cooperation in Central Asia in a way that is both effective and legitimate? Potential paths forward include expanding intelligence-sharing networks, building trust through more transparent joint exercises, creating clearer definitions of terrorism to prevent political misuse, and enhancing cooperation with global partners. The future of Central Asian stability, and the SCO's reputation as a serious security forum, depends on whether it can rise to this challenge.

Research guiding questions of Topic I:

- What role should the SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) play in coordinating intelligence and counterterrorism operations across member states?
- How can the SCO improve trust and information-sharing among members with differing national priorities, such as China, Russia, India, and the Central Asian states?
- In what ways can the SCO strengthen border security and prevent the cross-border movement of terrorist groups, weapons, and financing?
- How can the organization balance effective counterterrorism measures with the protection of human rights and civil liberties?
- What strategies can be developed to address the root causes of radicalization in Central Asia, including poverty, unemployment, and lack of education?

- How should the SCO respond to instability in Afghanistan and its spillover effects on terrorism in the region?
- To what extent can the SCO cooperate with international organizations like the United Nations, or with non-member states, to enhance counterterrorism effectiveness?
- How can joint military exercises and training be improved to ensure preparedness against evolving terrorist threats?
- What safeguards can be put in place to prevent the misuse of counterterrorism policies by member states for political repression?
- How can smaller member states ensure their security needs are met without being overshadowed by the strategic goals of larger powers within the SCO?