

# SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION

## AGENDA ITEM :

Radicalization and Community Security in Regions  
with Diverse Ethnic and Religious Populations

**UNDER SECRETARY GENERAL**

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## Table of Contents

- 1. Letters from the Secretary-General and Secretariat**
  - 1.1. Letter from the Secretary-General**
  - 1.2. Letter from the Under-Secretary General of SCO**
- 2. Introduction**
  - 2.1. Introduction to the Committee**
  - 2.2. Introduction to the Agenda Item**
- 3. Historical Background**
- 4. Major Parties Involved**
- 5. SCO Legal and Institutional Frameworks Relevant to the Agenda**
- 6. Regional and International Actions Taken**
- 7. Case Studies**
  - 7.1. Central Asia**
  - 7.2. South Asia**
  - 7.3. Middle East**
- 8. Challenges within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization**
- 9. Possible Solutions**
- 10. Questions to be Addressed**
- 11. Bibliography / References**
- 12. Useful Sources To Use For Personal Researches**



### 1.1. Letter of Secretary General

**Esteemed participants of MUNKFL'25,**

As the Secretary General of MUNKFL'25, I warmly welcome you all to the fourth edition of Model United Nations Kayseri Fen Lisesi. First of all, I am pleased to say that we are continuing our work successfully, knowing that we are the pioneers in the MUN culture in Kayseri. We are truly honored to be able to present this precious conference that we have worked on for months. My organizing team has worked tirelessly for this conference, and of course, they did well. Also, special thanks go to my academic team, who also worked tirelessly to make your committees exceptional and engaging. It is with this spirit of dedication and pioneering achievement that we turn our focus to the crucial global challenges facing us today.

The 21st Century has brought about tensions between nations, unprecedented dangers, changes, and challenges that continue to plague the world. However, the United Nations offers a promising path forward. As members of the Model United Nations community, we recognize the imperative of active global engagement and the pivotal role we play in shaping a better future. Therefore, MUNKFL will simulate United Nations committees, providing a platform for delegates to engage in collaborative, competitive, conciliatory, and compromising decision-making processes. Through these simulations, we aim to foster dialogue, diplomacy, and a prioritization of societal needs in addressing pressing global issues.

May this experience leave you more prepared to lead, more committed to dialogue, and more confident in the role you can play in shaping the world around you.

Sincerely,  
Taylan Emir Tav



## **1.2. Letter From Under-Secretary General Of Shanghai Cooperation Organization**

Dear Delegates,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization at MUNKFL'25! To be the Under-Secretary-General for this dynamic and forward-thinking committee is a great responsibility as well as an honour, and I am excited to watch delegates of varying experiences come together to investigate, debate and cooperate on the problems that set our global future.

You might not know yet whether you are capable for this kind of responsibilities but I can ensure you that there is somewhere out that filled with lots of people who need guidance of us people who aren't frightened to talk upon other, who are brilliant enough to make true decides, who are willing to help them out and I believe in all of your capabilities to become like one for them. Even though you can't, I know that you will find your style of english with us whether you are entertained by winning against each other or find solutions to problems, a team worker or the wolf who hunts alone...

I know that this committee isn't the kind you have been expecting but this will be different from the others, as the Under Secretary General I can assure you that we will work upon your needs, expectations and want loyalty alongside patience against each other followed by seriousness to keep debate alive.

Last of the last, don't forget that I believe in all of you to find yourself and place of english in your future followed by change to find your place in diplomatics, teamwork and getting the fun of the work you have done for others you don't know and will meet

**YOUR Under Secretary General**

**Mehmet Batuhan Köseoğlu**

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1. Introduction of Shanghai Cooperation Organization

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is a Eurasian political, economic, and security organization composed of the union of ten member states: China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India, Pakistan, Iran, and Belarus. This organization has the main goal of strengthening multilateral cooperation in the areas of regional security, counter-terrorism, economic development, and political dialogue.

The SCO is currently the largest regional organization in both Eurasia and the world in terms of both geographic scope and human population, covering nearly quarter of the world's land mass (approximately 65% of Eurasia) and actively representing about 42% of the world population. As of 2024, its combined nominal GDP accounts for more than 22% of the worldwide economy, while its GDP measured by Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) constitutes around 36% of the world total alone.

This organization was established and developed based on the “Shanghai Five,” which was founded in 1996 by China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan to establish order in matters of border security and mutual trust. After 2000, Uzbekistan joined and the group formally changed itself into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, expanding its objectives to include economic and political collaboration. The SCO further enlarged its membership with India and Pakistan, followed by Iran and Belarus' attendance between 2017-2024.

The SCO's supreme decision-making authority lies with the Heads of State Council (HSC), which meets annually. The HSC also assists the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), which is based in Tashkent, Uzbekistan and coordinates the sharing of intelligence and joint action against terrorism, separatism and extremism. The recent summit was in September 2025 Tianjin, China, by confirming the SCO's commitment to maintaining stability and cooperation across Eurasia as SCO.



### 2.2. Introduction of the Agenda Item

Given this scenario, the issues of radicalization and security in this community have come to play a critical role in stabilization and peace-keeping in larger regions with ethnic and



religious diversity. Social fragmentation, inequality, and exclusion have been known to create a setting where ideologies can develop in a multi-ethnic society. The SCO faces a challenging situation in dealing with these issues, considering it is a Eurasian alliance involving a number of nations with cultural and religious diversity.

Radicalization refers to the process by which individuals or groups adopt extreme beliefs which might entail both violence and denial of coexistence. Although ideological, economic, and political reasons might be part of it, radicalization in other SCO member nations is considered related to grievances, minorities' marginalization, a lack of good governance, and international connections with extremist groups. All these elements work to threaten communities' security due to distrust and instability in regions with complex ethnic and religious makeup.

On one hand, community security is concerned with securing peoples' and communities' safety against both internal and external threats by ensuring social cohesion and confidence in membership. On the other hand, it embraces inclusive governance and resource equality, which is coupled with dialogue policies between different ethnic and religious communities. At the SCO, it is more than just anti-terrorist activities.

In this case, it is evident that it is up to the organizational framework, which is referred to by the acronym RATS, to coordinate activities aimed at joint operations and sharing information with the goal of fighting radicals. However, apart from security, it is important to note that addressing these causes is essential in dealing with issues related to radicalization.

In this respect, it is worth mentioning that SCO is trying to advance inclusive policy, education reform, digital literacy skills, and a variety of regional dialogue formats by enhancing cooperation between its members. The agenda "Radicalization and Community Security in Regions with Diverse Ethnic and Religious Populations" encourages all participants to shift towards comprehensive policies focusing on hard security and human development, ensuring this way a steady security environment in Eurasia based on mutual respect, parity, and harmony.

### 3. Historical Background

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) traces its roots back to what is known as the Shanghai Five mechanism, formed in 1996. During this first phase, it can be noted that retaining security confidence and addressing border issues was basically the aim of the original founding members, which include China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. But with emerging security threats in this Asian region, the SCO officially grew and changed names to Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2001 by adding another founding member, which is Uzbekistan.

The SCO's founding documents, and subsequent important ones, have emphasized its primary role in securing peace and stability in the region. At the heart of this is the struggle against what is referred to by this body as "Three Evils": Terrorism, Separatism, and Extremism. This



three-fold identification was developed specifically out of, and in response to, China's security concerns in regions such as Xinjiang (East Turkestan) and Russia's security concerns in regions such as the North Caucasus (Chechnya), and generally concerning infiltration by and out of regions such as Afghanistan in Central Asian republics.

In 2002, the SCO created the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), which is "the cornerstone of security collaboration between SCO member states. Located in Tashkent, it is charged with coordinating intelligence sharing for member nations about individuals and groups engaged in terror- related activities, extremism, and separatism. The founding of RATS "emphasizes the traditional SCO concern for 'state security' and 'regime security.'"

Throughout history, security collaboration in the SCO has been premised on several core tenets:

**Respect for Sovereignty and Non-Interference:** This has made sure that every member country regards their strategies for dealing with radicalization and extremism as a matter entirely within their jurisdiction, thus avoiding heavy supranational involvement.

**The Role of Afghanistan:** The danger that could erupt out of Afghanistan through radicalism and drug trafficking in Central Asia has been one of the founding motivations for security policy for the SCO.

**Expansion:** The membership of India and Pakistan in 2017 has resulted in the expansion of the SCO's geographical presence from Central Asia to South Asia. The membership of these nations has ensured that issues such as Kashmir, which have been part of bilateral tensions between these nations for a long time, are now part of the SCO agenda. Hence, it can be stated that the historical background on which SCO's fight against radicalization is generally built is that China and Russia have considered border security, sharing information on security, and radical ideas amongst their foremost threats to their national security. Most recently, however, RATS is now concerned with contemporary threats such as cyber security threats.

#### 4. Major Parties Involved

##### People's Republic of China

China is one of the founding and most influential powers within the SCO, playing a decisive role in shaping the organization's security, economic, and political frameworks. Its national doctrine identifies terrorism, separatism, and extremism as the Three Major Evils, a classification that underpins the SCOs regional counter terrorism agenda.

China's internal concerns, particularly regarding ethnic and religious diversity in Xinjiang, intensify its commitment to developing strong security cooperation mechanisms through the SCO. These concerns influence its support for intelligence sharing, border monitoring, and counter extremism initiatives. Beyond security, China advances large scale development projects across Eurasia, including the Belt and Road Initiative BRI, seeking to reduce the



socioeconomic factors that contribute to radicalization by improving connectivity, trade, and economic opportunity.

### **Russian Federation**

Russia is the second principal founding member of the SCO and plays a central role in directing its security orientation. With extensive experience confronting extremism in the North Caucasus, Russia brings significant operational capacity, intelligence capabilities, and strategic expertise to the organization. Its geopolitical interest in maintaining stability across Central Asia further motivates its leadership within SCO security structures.

Russia actively supports joint military exercises, intelligence cooperation, and counterterrorism operations. Its military infrastructure and technological capabilities strengthen the collective readiness of the SCO, making Russia a vital anchor for regional stability and long term counter extremism planning.

### **Central Asian Member States Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan**

The Central Asian members occupy the region most directly affected by the intersection of ethnic diversity, religious variation, socioeconomic fragility, and radicalization. Their security vulnerabilities make them essential pillars of SCO cooperation.

**Kazakhstan** With its multiethnic demographic and emphasis on civic unity, Kazakhstan prioritizes social cohesion and preventive security measures.

**Kyrgyzstan** Recurrent ethnic tensions, economic disparities, and high youth unemployment make Kyrgyzstan vulnerable to radical recruitment.

**Tajikistan** Post civil war instability, economic hardship, and shared borders with Afghanistan increase its exposure to extremist networks.

**Uzbekistan** Having previously faced strong extremist movements, Uzbekistan maintains a strict security posture while also pursuing reforms in religious education and community engagement.

Together, these states form the core operational environment of the SCOs Regional Anti Terrorist Structure RATS, especially regarding border management, intelligence exchange, and community centered prevention programs.

### **India and Pakistan**

India and Pakistan bring significant demographic weight, varied ethnic religious compositions, and extensive experience with radicalization into the SCO framework.

India addresses radicalization through secular governance, localized community programs, and digital monitoring systems.

Pakistan Faces internal and external pressures due to longstanding extremist networks, border insecurity, and political fragmentation.

Although bilateral tensions can hinder consensus building within the SCO, both states remain important contributors to regional security.

### **Islamic Republic of Iran**

Iran joined the SCO as a full member in 2023 and quickly became an influential actor within the organization. Its geopolitical position in West Asia, combined with experience managing



sectarian conflict and cross border extremism, allows it to contribute valuable strategic perspectives. Iran plays a growing role in promoting coordinated strategies across Eurasia.

### **Republic of Belarus**

Belarus became a full member in 2024. Although it faces fewer domestic radicalization challenges, Belarus contributes strategically to the organization's digital security, information protection, and anti disinformation agenda. Its role broadens SCO insights into radicalization in politically tense environments.

### **Regional Anti Terrorist Structure RATS**

RATS serves as the SCOs principal institutional mechanism for counterterrorism coordination. It facilitates intelligence sharing, unified threat assessments, joint operations, and capacity building programs. RATS plays a crucial role in monitoring extremist networks, preventing recruitment, and supporting member states community security strategies.

### **Observer States and Dialogue Partners**

Observer states including Afghanistan, Mongolia, and former observers such as Belarus, along with dialogue partners like Turkey, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Azerbaijan, contribute indirectly to the SCOs security environment.

Afghanistan is especially significant due to its deep ties with transnational extremist groups and its effect on cross border radicalization.

These partners widen the geographic scope of the organization and influence broader security dynamics across the region.

## **5.SCO Legal and Institutional Frameworks Relevant to the Agenda**

This agenda operates within a specific legal and institutional structure shaped by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's foundational documents, conventions, and security mechanisms. Understanding these frameworks is essential for analyzing how the SCO approaches radicalization, community security, and cross-border extremism among diverse ethnic and religious populations.

The core of the SCO's security mandate is rooted in the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism, signed in 2001. This document defines the three security threats that guide the organization's counterterrorism policies. The convention obligates member states to criminalize related activities, improve cross-border cooperation, pursue extradition when necessary, and deny safe havens to individuals or groups involved in these actions. It also establishes a shared understanding of extremist ideology, cross-border recruitment, radical propaganda, and community-level threats. This agreement forms the legal basis for most regional actions, including data exchange, joint operations, and early warning coordination.

The SCO Charter, adopted in 2002, outlines the institutional structure of the organization and reinforces the mutual commitment to maintain regional security, sovereignty, and territorial



integrity. For this agenda, the Charter is relevant because it emphasizes non-interference in internal affairs and respect for national legislation. This principle often affects the depth of cooperation in community security programs, monitoring of minority groups, and information transparency. The Charter also highlights the goal of building a democratic and equitable international order, which influences the organization's stance toward Western security frameworks and provides a philosophical foundation for its independent counter-extremism structures.

The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) in Tashkent is the institutional centerpiece of SCO counterterrorism activity. Established under the Shanghai Convention, RATS maintains a joint database of extremist organizations, wanted individuals, financial networks, and propaganda channels. It coordinates multilateral operations, produces annual threat assessment reports, and assists member states in drafting national strategies. RATS also facilitates secure communication channels between ministries of interior, intelligence services, and border agencies. Its mandate covers traditional terrorism, online radicalization, recruitment pipelines, cross-border movement of extremists, and the protection of vulnerable communities in multi-ethnic regions. However, member states differ in their willingness to share sensitive intelligence, creating uneven implementation.

Beyond SCO-specific documents, member states are also guided by their national legislation on extremism, terrorism, digital surveillance, and community policing. These laws vary significantly. China employs a security-first framework with extensive digital monitoring and social management systems. Russia emphasizes state sovereignty and strong central control. Central Asian states maintain strict anti-extremism laws shaped by experiences of insurgency and ethnic conflict. India and Pakistan operate within broader constitutional constraints but differ in their enforcement practices. This diversity makes harmonization challenging but also provides a rich comparative background for the agenda.

Several international norms supplement the SCO's internal legal mechanisms. While the SCO is not directly bound by United Nations counterterrorism resolutions, its members implement relevant UNSC documents, including Resolution 1373 on terrorism financing, Resolution 2178 on foreign terrorist fighters, and Resolution 2396 on border security and passenger data systems. These global obligations influence SCO cooperation, data standards, and operational expectations. Regional agreements, such as the CIS Anti-Terrorism Convention and OSCE security guidelines, interact with the SCO framework, shaping national interpretations of extremism and community security.

Together, these legal and institutional structures form the environment in which member states develop policies, coordinate responses, and address radicalization in areas with ethnic and religious diversity. They determine how intelligence is shared, how community protection programs are implemented, and how states balance sovereignty with collective action. Understanding these frameworks provides essential context for evaluating the SCO's capabilities and limitations on this agenda.

## 6. Regional and International Actions Taken

### SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)

The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) stands as the SCO's central operational organ for coordinating counter-terrorism, counter-extremism, and counter-radicalization efforts. Established after 2004 and headquartered in Tashkent, RATS functions as an integrated intelligence and security platform for all member states. It maintains comprehensive databases of banned extremist organizations, suspected individuals, recruitment pathways, and digital propaganda networks. Through regular information exchange, RATS enables member states to track the movement of radicalized individuals across borders, monitor funding channels, and identify emerging extremist groups.



RATS conducts coordinated operations that target transnational networks, including surveillance missions, arrests, disruption of financial systems, and dismantling of cross-border cells. Its annual Summary Analytic Report on the Terrorist, Separatist and Extremist Situation provides updated assessments of regional vulnerabilities, enabling member states to adapt policies in response to evolving threats. This mechanism is especially significant in areas with deeply rooted ethnic and religious diversity, where structural inequalities may intensify susceptibility to radicalization. By standardizing intelligence practices, RATS has become one of the most institutionalized counter-terrorism platforms in Eurasia.

### SCO Joint Military and Counter-Terrorism Exercises

Joint military exercises most prominently the “Peace Mission” series represent a cornerstone of SCO's multilateral security cooperation. These exercises simulate scenarios involving extremist insurgencies, hostage crises, transnational terrorist infiltration, and hybrid warfare tactics. Through such operations, SCO forces refine their interoperability, communication protocols, urban combat readiness, and crisis-management capacity.



The exercises also serve as confidence building measures among member states whose bilateral relations may otherwise be strained. By training side-by-side, militaries develop shared doctrines for neutralizing violent extremist threats. The outcomes of these exercises are not merely symbolic; they directly contribute to reducing response times during real incidents, preventing the spread of armed radical movements, and strengthening border defenses across the Eurasian region. Their cumulative effect is a tangible improvement in the collective capacity to contain violence stemming from radicalization.

### **National Preventing-Countering Violent Extremism (PVE/CVE) Strategies**

Most SCO members have adopted national PVE/CVE strategies aligned with international norms promoted by the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). These strategies expand the focus beyond traditional security responses, emphasizing early detection, prevention, and community engagement.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan stand out for modernizing their legislative frameworks to address radicalization both within institutions such as schools, mosques, workplaces etc. and within broader society. Their reforms highlight the importance of multi sectoral collaboration between government agencies, psychologists, educators, and civil society actors.

### **The United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism**

The UN Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism provides a global blueprint that encourages states to identify and address the structural factors that nurture radicalization. It highlights socio-economic marginalization, political exclusion, lack of quality education, discrimination, and unequal resource distribution as key drivers.

SCO member states have used this action plan to harmonize their national frameworks with international human-rights principles. It has helped promote the integration of preventive policies such as promoting gender equality, strengthening community resilience, and expanding access to public services into national security agendas. The plan also encourages states to develop rehabilitation and reintegration programs that align with international standards.

### **OSCE Whole-of-Society Approach Programs**

The OSCE's engagement in Central Asia complements SCO objectives by promoting inclusive governance models and human rights sensitive security strategies. These programs emphasize early-warning systems that detect behavioral, social, and ideological signs of radicalization at the community level. Local referral mechanisms allow citizens, educators, and religious leaders to report high-risk individuals in a non-punitive, supportive manner.

Additionally, OSCE funded initiatives promote ethnic and religious dialogue platforms, especially in regions with histories of ethnic tension. These programs strengthen societal resilience by giving communities tools to mediate conflict, foster trust between minority groups and local authorities, and prevent extremist ideologies from exploiting social divides.



### **Cross-Border Security and Information-Sharing Agreements**

Cross-border cooperation is indispensable for SCO states, where extremist groups frequently attempt to exploit porous borders, remote mountain areas, and unregulated trade routes.

Member states have formalized several agreements enabling joint patrols, synchronized border checkpoints, real-time data sharing, and coordinated responses to suspicious cross-border movement.

These agreements also facilitate the detection of illicit financial flows, weapons trafficking, and human smuggling all of which can sustain radical networks. In regions where ethnic and religious minorities live across multiple states, such as Central Asia, coordinated border management significantly reduces opportunities for extremist recruiters to operate transnationally.

### **Initiatives to Counter Digital Extremism**

Online radicalization has become an increasingly prominent challenge within the SCO region. China, Russia, India, and other member states have expanded cyber-monitoring capabilities to identify extremist content, disrupt online recruitment processes, and block digital propaganda dissemination. Governments have strengthened cooperation through shared cyber databases, joint cyber-drills, and legal frameworks regulating online extremist material.

Debates continue within the SCO on achieving a balance between effective digital regulation and protection of fundamental rights such as freedom of expression and privacy.

Nevertheless, digital counter-extremism remains one of the most rapidly evolving areas of regional collaboration.

### **Community-Level Dialogue and Rehabilitation Programs**

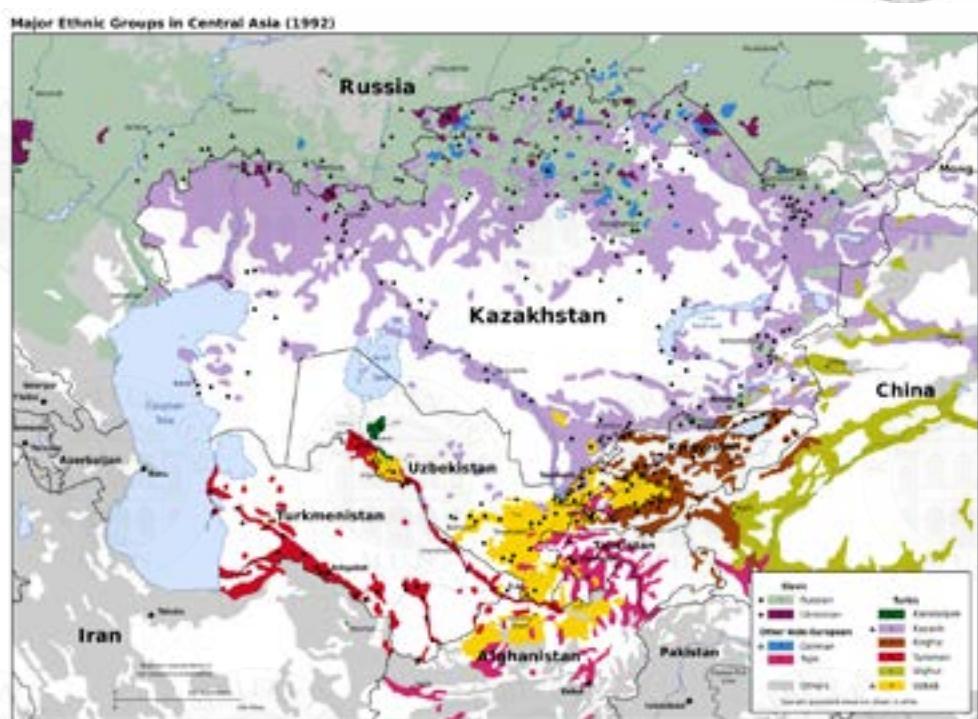
Several SCO member states have adopted innovative rehabilitation and reintegration programs aimed at individuals influenced by extremist ideologies. These programs often combine psychological counseling, religious re-education, social reintegration support, and vocational training. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, in particular, have been recognized for large-scale repatriation initiatives involving citizens returning from conflict zones.

Local leaders such as religious scholars, educators, elders, and sociologists play a central role in these efforts. Their involvement ensures cultural sensitivity and enhances credibility among communities that might otherwise distrust state-led security measures. By empowering families and communities to recognize early signs of radicalization, such programs create sustainable, long-term resilience against extremist recruitment.

## **7. Case Studies**

### **7.1. Central Asia**

Central Asia presents one of the most significant regional contexts where radicalization, ethnic diversity, and community security intersect. The region includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, each with unique demographic structures, governance challenges, and historical tensions. The Fergana Valley shared among Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan is particularly notable due to its dense population, ethnically mixed settlements, high unemployment rates, and porous borders. These conditions have historically provided opportunities for extremist groups to exploit local grievances, recruit vulnerable youth, and strengthen underground networks.



Kyrgyzstan has experienced repeated ethnic clashes, most notably the 2010 Osh violence between Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities, which exposed long-standing social divisions. Such conflicts have created an environment where radical narratives can spread, particularly in regions with weak governance and limited economic opportunity. Similarly, Tajikistan's post-civil war political landscape, coupled with persistent poverty and proximity to Afghanistan, has made it a significant entry point for extremist infiltration. Extremist organizations have at times attempted to exploit former conflict networks and marginalized groups.

Uzbekistan, once a focal point for transnational extremist groups, has undergone substantial policy reform since 2016. Initiatives emphasizing religious education reform, reintegration of returnees from conflict zones, and socio-economic development have reduced radicalization risks. Kazakhstan, characterized by a large multiethnic population and a stable socio-economic profile, has prioritized interethnic harmony, community policing, and prevention-oriented approaches to counter extremism.

Across the region, SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) has reinforced information exchange, joint operations, and monitoring of cross-border extremist movement. This cooperation is essential for addressing the shared vulnerabilities of Central Asian states and maintaining regional security.



## 7.2. South Asia

South Asia showcases some of the most complex radicalization dynamics in the SCO due to its dense populations, deep ethnic and religious diversity, and long-standing political disputes. The two SCO members in the region India and Pakistan face distinct yet interconnected challenges.

Pakistan struggles with extremist groups operating in tribal and peripheral areas, especially along its western border. Structural factors such as weak governance, socio-economic deprivation, and long-standing militant presence contribute to sustained radicalization risks. While Pakistan has made progress through military operations, the mainstreaming of tribal regions, and community-based deradicalization initiatives, vulnerabilities remain in remote areas where state capacity is limited.

India, with its vast and diverse population, experiences radicalization in multiple forms, including religious extremism, separatist movements, and rapidly expanding digital propaganda networks. Economic inequality, identity politics, and localized tensions can create conditions where extremist narratives gain traction, particularly among marginalized groups. India's counter-radicalization efforts involve a combination of community policing, cyber monitoring, counter-narrative programs, and youth engagement initiatives aimed at preventing online recruitment.

The bilateral tension between India and Pakistan presents a unique challenge within the SCO. While both countries recognize the shared threat of extremism, political disputes can limit the depth of intelligence sharing and trust-based cooperation. Despite these limitations, both states participate in SCO-led military exercises, cybersecurity workshops, and counter-terrorism dialogues, reflecting an understanding that radicalization is a cross-border issue requiring multilateral coordination.

South Asia's case demonstrates how ethnic and religious pluralism, combined with political and socio-economic fractures, can shape diverse radicalization pathways. It also highlights the importance of balancing national security interests with regional cooperation under the SCO framework.

## 7.3. Middle East

The Middle East plays an indirect yet critical role in shaping the SCO's security environment due to its proximity, its complex ethno-religious landscape, and its history of extremist movements. Although not all Middle Eastern states are SCO members, regional development particularly in Iran and Afghanistan deeply affects Eurasian security dynamics.

Iran, which joined the SCO as a full member in 2023, faces ongoing challenges linked to ethnic minorities such as Kurds, Baluch, and Arabs. These groups often inhabit underdeveloped regions where state presence is uneven, creating conditions that extremist organizations can exploit. Additionally, Iran's geopolitical involvement across the Middle East means that shifts in regional extremism, especially in Iraq and Syria, directly impact its



internal and external security calculations. Iran's experience confronting sectarian radicalization provides valuable insights for SCO-level cooperation.

Afghanistan, while not a full SCO member, is the most influential external variable affecting SCO security. The country's prolonged instability, fragmented governance, and concentration of extremist networks have long posed a threat to neighboring states. Radical groups operating in Afghanistan often attempt to infiltrate Central Asian borders, making Afghanistan an essential focus of SCO security dialogues. Changes in Afghan governance and territorial control have immediate implications for radicalization patterns across the region.

Moreover, Middle Eastern conflicts have contributed to global extremist movements by enabling the movement of foreign fighters, transnational financing networks, and ideological propaganda. These dynamics influence online radicalization, underground recruitment, and cross-border extremist mobility throughout Eurasia.

The Middle East case underscores the need for SCO members to not only address local drivers of radicalization but also monitor and respond to external pressures particularly those arising from sectarian conflict, regional instability, and transnational extremist networks.

## **8. Challenges within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization**

The SCO's capacity to address radicalization and community security is shaped by a wide range of political, structural, operational, and geopolitical challenges. One of the most fundamental obstacles comes from the diversity of political systems and national security doctrines among its member states. China and Russia advocate heavily centralized security structures with strong state intervention, while India and Pakistan operate within broader democratic and legal frameworks that emphasize civilian oversight and judicial accountability. These differences create friction when attempting to harmonize counter extremism approaches and can slow the implementation of collective measures.

Bilateral conflicts pose another significant challenge. India and Pakistan's rivalry affects the speed and depth of intelligence sharing, reduces transparency, and creates hesitation in adopting joint security protocols. Likewise, strategic competition between major powers in the SCO can influence how far member states are willing to support unified actions, especially when national interests collide with regional priorities.

Institutional limitations also impede progress. The SCO lacks a deeply integrated security infrastructure capable of maintaining seamless real time information flow across borders. While the Regional Anti Terrorist Structure RATS provides a foundation, some member states have limited technical or administrative capacity, making cooperation uneven. After action follow through varies significantly between countries, leading to inconsistent enforcement of shared agreements.

Border vulnerabilities form another critical area of concern. Central Asian countries face porous frontiers, particularly along the Afghanistan region, where illicit movements,



radicalized individuals, and extremist ideology can spread rapidly. Disparities in border technology, patrol training, and surveillance systems weaken regional defenses and create asymmetrical security risks.

Digital radicalization presents emerging challenges. Member states have different concepts of acceptable cyber governance, digital rights, and online surveillance, making it difficult to establish a coordinated SCO wide approach. Extremist groups increasingly exploit encrypted platforms, gaming communities, and social media ecosystems, which surpass the monitoring capabilities of some states.

Additionally, the SCO operates in a highly dynamic geopolitical context. Instability in Afghanistan continues to shape the security outlook of all member states, particularly in Central Asia. Changes in local power structures, militant regrouping, and socio economic deterioration can quickly spill into neighboring territories. The organization must constantly adapt its strategy to shifting security realities, but decision making processes remain slow, requiring broad consensus that is not always easy to achieve.

Finally, the absence of unified standards for community based prevention programs, deradicalization structures, and post conflict reintegration continues to hinder sustainable long term solutions. While many SCO members have developed national programs, the lack of shared benchmarks and evaluation tools leads to fragmented outcomes that limit regional effectiveness.

## **9. Geopolitical Context of Radicalization in the SCO Region**

The geopolitical landscape of the SCO region plays a decisive role in shaping patterns of radicalization and community security. The organization spans a vast area that includes nuclear powers, conflict-prone borders, energy corridors, ethnic crossroads, and regions historically affected by ideological and separatist movements. These geopolitical dynamics produce a complex security environment where radicalization is influenced not only by local social factors but also by regional rivalries, power vacuums, and transnational networks.

A central factor is Afghanistan, which constitutes one of the most significant external variables affecting SCO security. Its long history of conflict, weak governance, economic collapse, and the presence of various armed groups create conditions for radicalization that extend beyond its borders. Several SCO states share land borders or strategic proximity with Afghanistan, including Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Pakistan, China, and indirectly the wider Central Asian region. Cross-border ethnic groups, such as Pashtuns, Tajiks, and Uzbeks, facilitate ideological and logistical spillover. The withdrawal of Western forces, the reemergence of the Taliban, and the presence of extremist factions raise persistent concerns about foreign fighters, trafficking networks, and destabilizing flows of people and ideology into neighboring regions.



China and Russia serve as the two dominant geopolitical anchors of the SCO, and their strategic ambitions shape how the organization approaches radicalization. China's priorities include stability in Xinjiang and protection of the Belt and Road Initiative, which runs through politically sensitive and ethnically diverse zones. Uyghur separatism, cross-border movements, and online radical narratives increase Beijing's pressure on the SCO to adopt strong security-first measures. Russia, on the other hand, seeks stability in the post-Soviet space, particularly the North Caucasus and Central Asia. Its historical influence, military presence, and security partnerships drive the SCO toward frameworks emphasizing state sovereignty, counterterrorism, and strict control over political or religious mobilization. Although China and Russia cooperate deeply, their geopolitical interests are not identical, creating an underlying competition that shapes the institutional balance of the SCO.

The rivalry between India and Pakistan adds further complexity. Their longstanding conflict over Kashmir—and their broader geopolitical contest—affect cooperation under the SCO. Tensions limit intelligence sharing, reduce trust, and sometimes prevent consensus on security-related language or operations. However, both countries face domestic radicalization challenges that make cooperation strategically necessary. India's concerns involve separatist movements, communal polarization, and emerging digital radicalization, while Pakistan deals with militant networks, border insecurity, and shifting alliances in neighboring Afghanistan. Their geopolitical competition does not eliminate the shared need to address extremist networks, but it constrains the SCO's ability to act uniformly.

Iran's geographic and strategic position introduces another dimension. As a major regional actor in West Asia and a bridge between the Middle East and Central Asia, Iran faces sectarian tensions, economic pressure, and ideological competition that directly influence extremism in the region. Its border with Afghanistan, its involvement in proxy dynamics across the Middle East, and its relations with neighboring powers make Iran a crucial contributor to regional security discourse. Iran's full membership expands the SCO's geographic scope into areas historically affected by ideological and sectarian radicalization.

Central Asian states themselves represent geopolitical crossroads for various cultural, economic, and ideological currents. Their internal vulnerabilities—porous borders, multiethnic populations, limited economic diversification, and legacies of civil conflict—create opportunities for radicalization. External actors, including Turkey, Gulf countries, and Western institutions, also influence the ideological landscape through education programs, information channels, and religious networks. These interactions create a mosaic of ideological influences that shape how communities respond to pressure or instability. Russia's security presence, China's economic footprint, and the internal politics of each state combine to form a highly interconnected but uneven regional security environment.

Energy corridors and trade routes also shape security considerations. Infrastructure associated with the Belt and Road Initiative, including pipelines, railways, and economic corridors, often crosses fragile regions where socio-economic tensions can contribute to radicalization. Attacks on such infrastructure or the exploitation of local grievances by extremist groups

create additional security risks. This also motivates China and Central Asian governments to increase surveillance, policing, and security coordination within the SCO framework.

Digital geopolitical competition compounds these challenges. States like China, Russia, and India maintain extensive cyber operations capacities and divergent philosophies regarding digital governance. Extremist groups exploit differing regulatory environments to move propaganda, coordinate activities, and recruit across borders. Disparate cyber laws and data-sharing restrictions create blind spots that transnational networks can use to their advantage. This digital fragmentation parallels geopolitical fragmentation and reinforces existing security asymmetries.

Overall, the geopolitical environment of the SCO region is characterized by overlapping conflicts, rivalries, and spheres of influence. Radicalization does not emerge in a vacuum; it is shaped by power dynamics, border vulnerabilities, digital ecosystems, economic inequalities, and ideological competition. Understanding this context is essential for evaluating the challenges the SCO faces in addressing radicalization and strengthening community security across diverse ethnic and religious landscapes.

## 10. Possible Solutions

To effectively address radicalization and enhance community security, the SCO could pursue a multidimensional approach that strengthens both institutional capacity and grassroots resilience. One core policy direction involves developing a standardized, secure, and technologically advanced intelligence sharing system. Establishing a unified early warning mechanism capable of monitoring cross border extremist networks, digital recruitment campaigns, and regional threat shifts would substantially strengthen preventive action.

Expanding RATS into a more operationally autonomous entity could also improve effectiveness. This may include increasing analytical resources, creating on site training academies, and enabling direct coordination with national counter terrorism agencies. Harmonizing counter extremism legislation across member states would support this goal by reducing discrepancies in legal definitions, procedural approaches, and prosecution strategies.

Second, strengthening community based prevention frameworks is essential for reducing vulnerability in ethnically and religiously diverse regions. The SCO could encourage member states to adopt locally rooted programs involving teachers, religious leaders, psychologists, and civil society actors. Youth engagement initiatives such as vocational training, sports programs, and civic inclusion activities can lower susceptibility to extremist narratives. Promoting interethnic dialogue platforms and public education initiatives may also reduce polarization and strengthen social cohesion.

Third, economic development must be integrated into the security agenda. Radikalleşme çoğu zaman sosyal eşitsizlik, işsizlik, marjinalleşme ve devlet hizmetlerine erişimin zayıf olmasıyla beslenir. The SCO could expand infrastructure investment, create cross border



employment corridors, and target underserved communities with education and digital literacy projects. These efforts would address the structural roots of radicalization rather than merely its symptoms.

Coordinated cyber governance is another critical area. The SCO could pursue a regional digital security framework balancing cyber monitoring, counter narrative development, and protection of user rights. Member states could benefit from shared artificial intelligence tools to detect extremist content, coordinated cyber task forces, and unified reporting systems for digital threats.

Diplomatic engagement in Afghanistan will remain a long term necessity. The SCO may intensify dialogue efforts, expand humanitarian outreach, and support stabilization initiatives aimed at reducing cross border extremist spillover. Strengthening border infrastructure, deploying joint rapid response teams, and enhancing surveillance technology around vulnerable frontiers could significantly strengthen collective resilience.

Finally, developing shared evaluation tools, research networks, and best practice databases would help member states continuously refine their approaches. A regional center for extremism studies could support data driven policymaking, enabling the SCO to respond more systematically to evolving threats.

## **11. Questions to be Addressed**

1. To what extent do differing political systems within the SCO hinder the development of a unified counter extremism strategy, and how can these differences be bridged
2. How can trust be strengthened between member states such as India and Pakistan in order to improve intelligence cooperation
3. What specific regional mechanisms can be created to monitor the spread of radicalization across ethnically diverse and socioeconomically vulnerable communities
4. How should the SCO manage the increasing influence of digital recruitment tactics used by extremist groups, and what role should cyber regulation play
5. What responsibilities should the SCO assume in stabilizing Afghanistan, and how can member states coordinate efforts without deepening geopolitical tensions
6. How can community based prevention programs be designed to respect cultural and religious diversity while remaining effective and evidence based

7. Which economic development strategies are most likely to reduce long term susceptibility to radicalization in Central Asia and South Asia
8. What reforms or expansions are necessary to strengthen RATS and ensure consistent implementation of its recommendations across all member states
9. How can border vulnerabilities particularly along the Afghanistan region be addressed in a way that balances security with humanitarian considerations
10. What indicators should be used to measure whether SCO policies are effectively reducing radicalization over time

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