



GEOPOLITICAL SHIFTS AT THE CSO: INDIA, RUSSIA, AND CHINA RESPOND TO TRUMP'S AGENDA

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Abstract

The global order is undergoing significant transformation, with the China–Shanghai Organization (CSO) summit emerging as a crucial stage for new alignments. India, Russia, and China, three of the most influential powers in Eurasia, are increasingly finding convergence in their strategic interests in response to the disruptive policies pursued by former U.S. President Donald Trump. His emphasis on unilateralism, trade protectionism, and a transactional approach to alliances has generated uncertainty across international institutions and traditional partnerships. Against this backdrop, the CSO has become a platform for India, Russia, and China to recalibrate their strategies, assert autonomy in global governance, and build alternatives to U.S.-centric structures. While Russia seeks to counterbalance Western sanctions through closer Asian ties, China positions itself as a leader of multilateralism, and India carefully navigates between safeguarding its sovereignty and expanding its influence. This paper examines the geopolitical shifts at the CSO, focusing on how these three states are responding to Trump's agenda by strengthening strategic cooperation, diversifying partnerships, and redefining the contours of regional integration. The study argues that these developments mark a gradual reorientation of the global order toward multipolarity, with the CSO playing a central role in shaping post-Trump geopolitical narratives.

Keywords: Geopolitical Shifts, U.S. Foreign Policy, Trump's Agenda, Strategic Partnerships, Eurasian Geopolitics, Security Cooperation.

Introduction

The global geopolitical landscape has undergone profound shifts in the past decade, shaped largely by the policies and rhetoric of major powers. Among these, the United States under the leadership of Donald Trump (2017–2021) adopted a markedly transactional and nationalist approach to international relations, encapsulated in the slogan “America First.” This agenda disrupted long-standing alliances, redefined trade relations, and challenged the multilateral frameworks that had underpinned global cooperation since the end of the Cold War. The ripple effects of Trump’s policies were not confined to the transatlantic sphere but also extended deeply into Asia, where emerging powers such as India, Russia, and China reassessed their positions in the shifting order.

Within this context, the Central Security Organization (CSO) — a strategic platform for regional dialogue and cooperation — became a critical arena for recalibrating responses to Trump’s agenda. For Russia and China, Trump’s unpredictability and confrontational stance accelerated their alignment, particularly in counterbalancing U.S. influence in global politics and economics. For India, the situation was more complex: while the U.S. remained a vital partner, New Delhi had to navigate carefully between strengthening ties with Washington and preserving strategic autonomy by engaging with Russia and China through multilateral forums.

The convergence of these three powers at the CSO highlights how Trump’s policies inadvertently fostered new forms of cooperation and competition in Eurasia. This introduction sets the stage for analyzing the ways in which India, Russia, and China have interpreted and responded to the shifting geopolitical currents, balancing national interests with regional stability in an era of U.S. unpredictability.

India’s agenda

CSO (Conference/Summit of Shanghai Cooperation Organization – assuming that’s what you mean by CSO), especially in the context of geopolitical shifts under Trump’s agenda, can be understood through several layered priorities. India’s position was shaped by balancing relations with the U.S., Russia, and China while protecting its own strategic autonomy.

Here's a breakdown of India's agenda:

1. Strategic Autonomy

- India aimed to maintain an independent foreign policy rather than aligning fully with either the U.S. or the Russia–China bloc.
- It sought to use the SCO as a platform to avoid isolation in Eurasia, where Russia and China have dominant influence.

2. Countering Trump's Unilateralism

- Trump's "America First" policies, including trade wars and questioning multilateralism, pushed India to strengthen ties with Russia and China on some issues (climate change, WTO reforms).
- India also opposed protectionism, advocating for free and fair global trade.

3. Balancing China

- Despite tensions with China (border disputes, Belt and Road Initiative opposition), India wanted to engage China at the SCO to prevent its dominance.
- India consistently opposed the BRI within the SCO framework, citing sovereignty issues (because of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor).

4. Partnership with Russia

- India's agenda was to deepen energy, defense, and strategic ties with Russia, especially as Trump's sanctions created complications for arms deals (e.g., S-400 missile system).
- The SCO offered India a space to work with Russia in Eurasia and balance China's growing role.

5. Security and Counterterrorism

- India emphasized counterterrorism, particularly pointing to Pakistan-based groups, and sought SCO cooperation on tackling cross-border terrorism.
- This was also a counter to Trump's shifting Afghanistan policy, which sometimes sidelined India.

6. Connectivity without Hegemony

- India promoted connectivity projects that respect sovereignty, as an alternative to China's BRI.

- Chabahar port (Iran) and International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) were highlighted as Indian-led initiatives for Eurasian integration.

7. Energy and Multipolarity

- India aimed for greater access to Eurasian energy resources (oil and gas from Russia, Central Asia).
- Supported a multipolar world order, reducing dependence on any one superpower, especially given Trump's unpredictable stance on alliances.

It looks like you want to frame India, Russia, and China as acting together in response to Trump's agenda at the CSO (probably you mean the SCO – Shanghai Cooperation Organization, not CSO, since SCO is the security and economic forum where India, Russia, and China are members).

1. Context of Trump's Agenda

- Donald Trump's foreign policy (2017–2021) emphasized "America First", protectionism, and unilateralism.
- He reduced U.S. commitment to multilateral institutions (Paris Agreement exit, criticism of WTO, NATO disputes).
- Pressured allies and rivals alike with trade wars, sanctions, and tariffs, especially targeting China and Russia.
- In Asia, his agenda pushed for Quad strengthening (India, Japan, U.S., Australia) to balance China.

2. India, Russia, China's Shared Concerns

While India has closer ties with the U.S. than Russia or China, at SCO summits these three countries often find common ground against unilateral U.S. dominance:

- **Against Protectionism:** All three promoted multilateral trade and opposed U.S. tariff wars.
- **Security & Sovereignty:** They resisted U.S. interference in domestic politics and sanctions regimes.
- **Regional Stability:** Trump's withdrawal from Afghanistan and Iran deal created insecurity; India, Russia, and China pushed for regional cooperation.

3. *India's Balancing Role*

- India did not fully “side against America,” but at SCO it highlighted the need for a multipolar world order.
- India pushed for counter-terrorism, connectivity, and energy cooperation, areas where U.S. engagement was limited.
- India's presence in SCO gives it strategic autonomy—cooperating with Russia & China while also engaging the U.S. in Quad.

4. *Russia & China's Alignment*

- Russia and China were more openly critical of Trump's policies (trade wars, sanctions, NATO pressure).
- Both pushed for Eurasian integration through SCO, Belt and Road Initiative, and alternative financial institutions (like AIIB, BRICS Bank).

5. *United Stance at SCO*

At SCO summits during Trump's presidency, India, Russia, and China (though with differences) broadly:

- Promoted multipolarity over U.S. unipolar dominance.
- Backed free trade and globalization vs. Trump's protectionism.
- Opposed unilateral sanctions (like those on Iran and Russia).
- Strengthened Eurasian security without U.S. participation.

While India was cautious not to appear *anti-American*, at the SCO, India, Russia, and China collectively projected themselves as advocates of a multipolar, rules-based world order—implicitly pushing back against Trump's unilateral America First agenda.

India, Russia, and China CSO Summit in China: A Success for India

The recent **CSO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) summit in China** marked an important moment in India's regional diplomacy. For India, the summit proved successful on multiple fronts:

1. **Strategic Balance** – India effectively positioned itself as a bridge between Russia and China, while also safeguarding its independent stance vis-à-vis the West, especially in the context of U.S. policies under Trump.

2. **Economic Engagement** – The summit opened opportunities for India to push for greater trade, investment, and connectivity within Eurasia. India advocated for projects that enhance its access to Central Asian energy markets and promote economic corridors.
3. **Counterterrorism Cooperation** – India highlighted the need for stronger collective action against terrorism, gaining support for its long-standing demand to address cross-border terrorism within SCO frameworks.
4. **Energy and Security Dialogue** – With Russia backing India's participation and China showing openness to dialogue, the summit provided New Delhi a chance to reinforce energy partnerships and engage on security issues without compromising its sovereignty.
5. **Diplomatic Visibility** – India demonstrated its growing influence as a regional power, not merely aligning with Russia and China but also articulating its own agenda for multipolarity, connectivity, and security.

The summit in China was successful for India because it consolidated its role as a key player in Eurasian geopolitics, balanced relations with major powers, and advanced its strategic, security, and economic interests.

Challenges for India at the China-hosted CSO (SCO) Summit with Russia and China:

1. Strategic Alignment Pressures

- China and Russia are trying to strengthen their bloc against Western influence, particularly the U.S.
- India has strategic partnerships with the U.S. and the West (Quad, trade, defense). Balancing these while staying in SCO is difficult.

2. Border Disputes with China

- The ongoing border tensions in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh create mistrust.
- Sitting at the same table with China while facing aggressive posturing along the LAC weakens India's negotiation position.

3. Russia's Growing Dependence on China

- With Western sanctions, Russia is leaning more on China.

- This reduces India's leverage with Russia, a traditional ally, especially in defense and energy.

4. Pakistan Factor

- Pakistan is also an SCO member, often aligning with China against India.
- Terrorism-related discussions risk being diluted by Pakistan's counter-accusations against India.

5. Economic and Trade Concerns

- China dominates SCO's economic initiatives.
- India risks being sidelined in connectivity projects like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which it officially opposes.

6. Geopolitical Signaling

- The summit is often seen as a stage for China and Russia to showcase "multipolarity."
- India must ensure its participation doesn't appear as anti-West, which could affect relations with the U.S., EU, and Indo-Pacific partners.

7. Energy and Security Dilemmas

- India imports heavily from Russia (oil, defense) but faces Western scrutiny.
- Coordinating energy security within the SCO framework without alienating other partners is a tightrope walk.

The biggest challenge for India is to balance its strategic autonomy—maintaining ties with Russia and China within the SCO while deepening partnerships with the U.S. and allies.

Conclusion

The CSO summit underscored the evolving dynamics of global power politics in the wake of Trump's assertive foreign policy. While Russia and China consolidated their strategic partnership, India positioned itself as a pragmatic player that balances its independent stance with shared regional concerns. India's favorable outcome from the summit lies in its ability to reinforce multipolarity, secure support for economic cooperation, and promote regional stability without being drawn into direct confrontation with the United States. By aligning selectively with Russia and China while maintaining its broader global engagements,

India demonstrated diplomatic agility that strengthens its strategic autonomy. In this sense, the summit marked not only a geopolitical shift but also an opportunity for India to emerge as a constructive and balancing force in Eurasian politics.

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