

4. Saudi Arabia set to become SCO member

Prelims Syllabus: International Relations

Mains Syllabus: GS-II International Relations | Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and agreements involving India



Why in News?

- Saudi Arabia's cabinet decided to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, as Riyadh builds a long-term partnership with China despite US security concerns.

What is SCO?

- The SCO is primarily a geopolitical and security organisation with limited infrastructures to pursue economic integration.
- The group accounts for about one-third of the world's land and exports trillions of dollars annually.
- It is governed by consensus, which limits the scope of major cooperation between its member states.
- It also functions more as a venue for discussion and engagement where high-level dignitaries from across the region can gather to confer, rather than an alliance like the EU, whose members have a common currency, or NATO.

Its establishment

- The SCO was founded in June 2001 by the leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Russia and China.

- The genesis of the grouping can be traced back to the post-soviet era in 1996 when these countries, termed ‘Shanghai Five’, came together
- Earlier, it focused on regional security to work on regional security, reduction of border troops, and terrorism.
- Its particular focus has been on “conflict resolution”, which provided early successes between China and Russia, and then within the Central Asian Republics.

Structure of SCO

- The organisation has two permanent bodies —
 - ✓ SCO Secretariat based in Beijing and
 - ✓ Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) based in Tashkent.
- The SCO Secretary-General and the Director of the Executive Committee of the SCO RATS are appointed by the Council of Heads of State for a term of three years.
- But the venue of the SCO council meetings shifts between the eight members (including India and Pakistan).

Members of SCO

- Apart from the above-mentioned countries— Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Russia and China.
- India and Pakistan are also members of this organisation, both included in 2017.
- The SCO also has four observer states — Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia — which may be inducted at a later date.
- And “Dialogue Partners” —Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Egypt, Qatar as well as Saudi Arabia.

Main goals

The main goals of the SCO, as adopted in its Charter in St. Petersburg in 2002, is:

- Strengthening mutual trust and neighbourliness among the member states;
- Promoting their effective cooperation in politics, trade, economy, research and technology and culture, as well as in education, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection, and other areas;
- Making joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region; and
- Moving towards the establishment of a democratic, fair and rational new international political and economic order.”

Why did Saudi Arabia join SCO?

- Saudi Arabia could benefit in several ways, such as increased trade and economic cooperation with member states, particularly with China and Russia.
- It could also gain a stronger voice in regional security issues and access to the SCO's anti-terrorism framework.
- Additionally, Saudi Arabia could help the organization expand its influence in the Middle East and increase its strategic weight in global affairs.
- This is definitely a result of straining its ties with Washington.

