

# BISHKEK LESSONS

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: SCO and India

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Although the shadow of Pakistan followed him to the Bishkek summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation last week, Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) had bigger fish to fry at the forum that is constructing a new region, now widely described as Eurasia. The SCO brings together two of the world's great powers — China and Russia — and four central Asian nations — Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan — with India and Pakistan. Launched by China and Russia nearly two decades ago, the SCO has also been billed by some as the “Alliance of the East” and as a continental counter to the US and more broadly, the maritime West. For that very reason, it is seen as a major diplomatic challenge to Delhi that has moved steadily closer to the US in recent years and embraced the Indo-Pacific maritime construct.

India's navigation between the two competing worlds had become even more difficult as the US President Donald Trump ratchets up tensions with both China and Russia. His renewal of American confrontation with Iran and the threat to pull out of Afghanistan have thrown the region into fresh turmoil. Undaunted at Bishkek, Modi appeared to revel in India's emerging possibilities in the new dynamic. The big political mandate at home has raised PM's regional stature that he is happy to flaunt. Even as he demonstrated great personal warmth toward China's Xi Jinping, Modi stood his ground on opposing the Belt and Road Initiative and turning down China's advice to begin talks with Pakistan. With President Vladimir Putin of Russia, Modi sought to expand the strategic partnership with Russia to new areas of defence and energy. Modi, however, joined Xi and Putin in opposing the new threats to global trade from new American unilateralism under Trump. The need to manoeuvre between Moscow, Beijing and Washington is now a permanent condition for Indian diplomacy and will be put to test again at the G-20 summit later this month.

On the regional front, PM's bilateral engagement with the host nation Kyrgyzstan underlined the new political commitment to realise the full potential of India's relations with the Central Asian republics. Bishkek summit also revealed India's deepening challenges with Afghanistan and Pakistan. While India continues to emphasise an “Afghan-owned and Afghan-led” peace process, Kabul has become increasingly marginal as major powers negotiate with the Taliban. On a positive note, the forum strongly endorsed India's concerns on cross-border terrorism. Modi did exchange pleasantries with Prime Minister [Imran Khan](#), but is in no mood to revive talks without major steps from Pakistan on shutting down its terror factories. And, Imran's domestic standing is diminishing by the day as a series of political and economic crises envelop Pakistan. Modi, then, is willing to wait.

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