

## **THE XXI SHANGHAI SUMMIT**

**Rosendo Fraga**  
**Director of CARI's Foreign Relations and Armed Forces Committee**

On September 17, the XXI Shanghai Group Summit was held in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan. The purpose of this entity is to establish policies among its members. It was founded 20 years ago by China and Russia, plus four Central Asian countries: Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, which this year holds the pro-tempore Presidency and that is why it hosted the annual summit.

This group seeks to coordinate actions of Asian countries, especially in the field of security. India and Pakistan joined in 2017, increasing the membership to eight nations. From that moment on, the four Asian nuclear powers became part of the Shanghai Group. The President of China attended virtually, as did his Russian colleague and the Prime Minister of India. The Heads of Government of Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Armenia, Belarus and Iran attended in person.

The Chinese President highlighted the "vigorous growth" of the SCO (the Group's name) and the "fruitful and mutually beneficial cooperation between its member states over the past two decades". He stated that the search for common development must be carried out while respecting the diversity of civilizations. He argued that the goals at the global level are to promote peace, human progress, explore new grounds and build a new type of international relationship. He added that the member countries have succeeded in promoting mutual political trust and guaranteeing regional security and stability. To facilitate the region's economic recovery from the pandemic, the Chinese President stated that he will strive to reach \$ 2.3 trillion in cumulative trade with SCO countries over the next five years.

The Chinese President also stressed the importance of giving "stability" to Afghanistan, which is a member of the SCO as an observer. He argued that the country faces many difficulties and challenges, stating that it is urgent for the Afghan people to restore normal order as soon as possible and achieve "a soft landing of the situation", on which both the international community and the countries of the region must pay close attention. He recalled that the member

countries are all close neighbors of the latter country. He also stated that this process must "be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned." He presented three proposals to guide the country: 1) promote a prompt and stable transition of the country's situation, removing the root causes that can be used by terrorist forces. Specifically, he maintained as a priority to combat terrorism, separatism and extremism, including the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM); 2) establish contact and dialogue with Afghanistan, interacting with all parties to the conflict; 3) provide timely humanitarian and anti-pandemic support to assist the Afghan people. He also said that the Chinese government will send a batch of materials as soon as possible as emergency assistance, and that it will continue to do so "within its reach."

The incorporation of Iran as a full partner was perhaps the most important strategic resolution. This country acquired SCO observer status in June 2005, but it took 16 years to become a full member. Russia played an important role for Tehran to reach this goal. Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi maintained that his country's foreign policy is based "on the opposition to unilateralism" and expressed his hope that the SCO would become "a driving force for global multilateralism." Coinciding with Xi, he argued the need to confront terrorism, extremism and separatism. Raisi was expected to meet Putin at the Summit, but the latter was unable to do it due to the start of quarantine. The Iranian president thanked the member countries for the support given to his country to join the Eurasian political, economic and security alliance. The Group also has the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). It should be remembered that in the first months of the year, China announced investments and loans to Iran for 400 billion dollars, thus establishing a solid economic alliance between Beijing and Tehran. At the XXI SCO Summit, the process began to incorporate as "dialogue partners" two monarchies from the Gulf, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and the most important country in Saharan Africa -Egypt.

The Shanghai Group is China's most important tool to establish and consolidate its hegemony in the Asian continent. The full members have grown to nine, with the inclusion of Iran. There are three observers: Afghanistan, Belarus and Mongolia, to be joined by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Egypt, which already had the category of "interested" nations. In the category of "dialogue partners" are Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey and Sri Lanka. As "interested countries", Bangladesh, Syria, Palestine and Serbia. As "guests", this Summit

was attended by three international structures: the CEI, organized around Russia; the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Union. Also in this category is Turkmenistan, the only country in central Asia that is not a full member. The Shanghai Group Summit took place simultaneously with the convergence of three conflict situations around the Asian continent. The first was the announcement of the AUKUS Alliance (Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States), the contract signed between Canberra and Washington for the purchase of 8 nuclear submarines and the suspension of the contract with France for the acquisition of 12 conventional submarines. The second conflict was the launching of ballistic missiles from North and South Korea. The third, the French reaction against the United States for the submarines sold to Australia, which materialized in the rapprochement of the French President, Emmanuel Macron, with the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi. The Shanghai Group is integrated at different levels by nine full members who are Asian countries, three observers also from the same continent (to which three others are now joining), a guest and four interested countries. This gives a total of 20 countries with different levels of membership, including among them the four nuclear powers of the region. Of the relevant countries, there are those that are in conflict with China for sovereignty in the South Sea of the Asian power: Vietnam, the Philippines, Singapore and Indonesia. Outside the Asian continent are only Egypt and Serbia, which are perhaps anticipating the expansion of the Chinese influence in Saharan Africa and the Balkans.

In conclusion: the Shanghai Group has completed twenty years with the XXI Summit held in the capital of Tajikistan. In his presentation, the Chinese President gave priority to the situation in Afghanistan, whose six bordering countries make up the Group as full members. The incorporation of Iran as the ninth full member is the inclusion of a key regional power between the Near and Middle East and very opposed to the United States. Finally, the SCO is the most effective tool that China has to achieve its continental hegemony.