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Point to the East: Iran joins the Shanghai Cooperation Organization



Sources: CLAE

Tehran joins the organization that represents a quarter of the world's GDP and brings together almost 44% of the population. How the map is designed in East and West.

Last Sunday, the Iranian parliament approved the bill defining its full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). With this move, the Islamic Republic takes the definitive step that Belarus longs to take soon, wets the ear of NATO and, particularly the United States, a country with which the conflict escalates in a sustained manner by force of economic "sanctions" – unilateral coercive measures, financial exclusions and blockades, but also military operations, such as the assassination of the Iranian military high command in Iraq, Qasem Soleimani, on behalf of the United States at the beginning of 2020.

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For its part, the SCO adds a new country, of four that it already has, with nuclear capacity, in addition to being an oil producer and having control of the Strait of Hormuz, one of the most strategically important maritime passages in the world. The canal connects Middle Eastern oil producers with key markets in Asia Pacific, Europe and North America. It is estimated that a fifth of the world's oil exports pass through there: between 17 and 19 million barrels per day, approximately.

The incorporation of Iran is a point for the East, in the framework of an energy, raw materials and food crisis that deepened from the conflict in Ukraine between Russia and NATO and that strains the acute contradiction that orders the conflict worldwide: two interwoven financial and commercial networks, which sometimes express themselves through institutional political systems that make up a kind of G2, China and the US, which are disputing the leadership of the new phase into which capitalism is entering: the digital age.

What does the SCO mean in the world?

The SCO is an intergovernmental organization founded on 15 June 2001 by the leaders of the People's Republic of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, countries which, with the exception of the latter, were members of the Shanghai Group of Five, the forerunner of the SCO, founded on 26 April 1996. Since its inception, the organization has expanded its membership to nine states (seven of them as observers or colleagues). The latest, Iran, applied for membership in 2008 but was hampered by U.S.-led sanctions. Finally, the SCO took a first step by admitting the Islamic Republic as an observer in 2015 and then as a full member in September of this year, a process that had begun in September 2021. In addition to those mentioned, India and Pakistan are also full members.

SCO member states account for about a quarter of global GDP and about 44% of the world's population. In geographical terms, they occupy 60% of Eurasia and 25.5% of the territorial extension of the world.

But the importance of cooperation is not only due to its magnitude in economic,

demographic or geographical terms, which are not negligible at all, but also because of its strategic orientation. While initially pursuing the objective of addressing regional security issues with intelligence sharing, combating regional terrorism, ethnic separatism and religious extremism, a framework agreement was established in 2003 to promote cooperation and religious extremism.economy between the SCO states. From then on, the SCO summits have kept in mind as part of their agenda the construction of trade agreements. Thus, to the initial object linked to defense, a key cooperation factor is added in this era in which the trade war is one more dimension of the confrontation between the two poles of power – strategic projects on a global scale – that make up the aforementioned G2.

In addition, the weight given by the Chinese government to this instance of cooperation is not less: the summit in September of this year was the first trip made by Xi Jinping outside his country since the beginning of the covid-19 pandemic. It was the first face-to-face meeting between the leaders of Russia and China since the beginning of the war in Ukraine. On that occasion, Putin made explicit Russian support for Beijing on the conflict over Taiwan in days of US visits to the island and Xi Jinping said that "China is willing to make efforts together with Russia to assume its responsibility as great powers, and take the role of guide to inject stability and positive energy into a chaotic world."

In line with what has been said and as a sign of their rapprochement in the face of Western tensions, fleets from both countries jointly patrolled in the Pacific Ocean to "strengthen their maritime cooperation."

After the September summit, Xi Jinping congratulated Iran on its future membership, saying he hoped to "work with Iran to uphold the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, as well as jointly defend the interests that developing countries have in common." In addition, he expressed that he will help the Persian country to "safeguard its legitimate rights and interests" and expressed his willingness to work to "consolidate and grow" the strategic partnership as part of "a choice of both parties" with "a long-term perspective." We are ready to increase our communication and coordination with Iran to achieve new progress in our bilateral relations," the Chinese president concluded.

For its part, the United States did not comment directly on the news. During the month of October, however, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg lashed out at Iran, accusing it of collaborating with Russia: "Everything indicates that Iran gives Russia its drones, and we call on all countries, including Iran, not to support Russia's illegal war against Ukraine," he said. In a threatening tone, he invited Iran "not to supply drones or missiles" and stressed that "any supply of missiles would also be a clear violation of the resolutions," referring to UN resolutions. Finally, he warned that NATO follows "very closely what Iran does in terms of providing aid to Russia."

At the same time as he issued the warnings to Iran, Stoltenberg stressed that NATO allies and their partners provided "an unprecedented level of aid to Ukraine" and promised to go further, without any fear of falling, into the usual American double standard, which, after collaborating with sumptuous budget items, weapons and even mercenary groups, accuses others of feeding the world. Conflict that they themselves escalated with the violation of the Minsk I and II agreements, among other actions.

The truth is that Iran has been a great nuisance for the United States in recent decades, through the Islamic revolution of '79, and constitutes one more player of regional weight in an alternative of power construction, to the one led by the North American country in the Middle East and -from cooperation schemes between non-aligned countries- in other regions. Symbol of this was the visit of Nicolás Maduro to Iran while he began this year's failed Summit of the Americas in the United States, in a clear message of solidarity between blockaded countries, but also of building an axis of geopolitical power.

As mentioned before, Iran's first inflows into the SCO were held back by 2006 UN Security Council sanctions linked to the uranium enrichment conflict. In addition, since 2012 the United States promoted the suspension of Iran in the SWIFT financial messaging system, sanctions that were resumed in 2018 and 2019, after Trump abandoned the nuclear agreement with Iran. Finally, at the point of maximum tension in recent years, the Pentagon said it had killed "by order of the president" Soleimani, Iran's most important military chief and strategist cadre.

In this context, becoming a full member of the SCO represents a new moment for the Islamic country, which after at least a decade of economic and financial exclusion, which

has hit the internal economy and the quality of life of the population, joins an organization of great economic and geopolitical weight that could allow it to emerge from a long situation of isolation generated by the blockades, while reinforcing and swelling the strategic plan commanded by Chinese financial and technological networks. From the heart of the East, you can smell Uncle Sam's concern.

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