



## **CHINA TALKIES: READING THE SIGNALS**

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# **India Opting Out of SCO Joint Defence Statement**

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### **The Event in Brief**

On 25 June 2025, the 22nd Defence Ministers' Meeting of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Member States was held in Qingdao under China's rotating chairmanship. Mainland Chinese media emphasised that 'Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh made an unexpected decision at the final stages of the meeting', though both China's Defence Ministry and state-owned English media outlet Global Times played down the incident.

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*Reading Beijing's Reactions from Official, Expert, and Popular Channels*

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On 25 June 2025, the 22nd *Defence Ministers' Meeting of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Member States* was [held](#) in Qingdao under China's rotating chairmanship. Mainland Chinese media [emphasised](#) that '*Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh made an unexpected decision at the final stages of the meeting*', though both [China's Defence Ministry](#) and state-owned English media outlet [Global Times](#) played down the incident.

**Why India Withheld Consent:** India's refusal to sign the joint statement prevented a final communiqué due to a lack of consensus, mainly over the terrorism wording. India objected because the draft omitted the 22 April Pahalgam terror attack, which killed 26 Indian tourists, and failed to explicitly condemn cross-border terrorism. Instead, it replaced the Pahalgam mention with references to incidents in Balochistan, fuelling Indian concerns about double standards. India's Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal [said](#) "one particular country" (widely seen as Pakistan, backed by China) opposed India's counter-terror language. Earlier, on June 24, during the 20th *Meeting of Secretaries of Security Councils (MSSC) of SCO Member States* in Beijing, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval [urged](#) members to "shun double standards" on terrorism. That meeting reportedly reached a consensus.

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## China's Reactions – Layer by Layer

### Zhongnanhai's Signals

- **Ministry of National Defense (MND) (June 26):**

When enquired about India decision, Senior Colonel Zhang Xiaogang, MND spokesperson, responded vaguely. The (Mandarin to [Translated Text](#)) transcript states:

**Reporter:** "There are reports that India has refused to sign the joint statement of the SCO Defence Ministers' Meeting due to differences between the two sides on issues related to terrorism. In addition, can you provide some information about the meeting between the Indian and Chinese defence ministers?"

**Zhang Xiaogang:** "As far as I know, thanks to the joint efforts of all parties, the SCO Defence Ministers' Meeting was a complete success. We will release information on the meeting between the two defence ministers in a timely manner".

- **China's State-owned English Language Coverage:**

*Global Times* published three articles on the SCO Defence Ministers' meeting. Only one [addressed](#) the missing joint statement, downplaying it in line with China's defence spokesperson, arguing that bilateral issues (e.g., India–Pakistan) should be resolved separately.

The other two articles avoided the controversy—one [highlighting](#) the “appeal of ‘non-aligned SCO’”, the other [emphasising](#) China’s reaffirmation of the SCO’s “Shanghai Spirit” and the need to “strengthen communication, [and] promote cooperation”.

### Tracking Domestic Views: A Different Tune Behind the Firewall

Inside China’s domestic online space, the tone around India’s refusal to sign the SCO joint statement is sharper—critical, candid, and often blaming. Despite shifts in developments—from India announcing its participation to ultimately refusing to endorse the joint statement—the underlying sentiment remained consistently undesirable. As 医生谈科普 [Yīshēng Tán Kēpǔ] [remarked](#): “Modi just drew a line with SCO and immediately sent his defence minister to visit China. India needs to give China an explanation”.

Questions soon followed: “What is India’s plan behind this dramatic diplomatic ‘turnaround’?” Despite this being the first Indian ministerial visit to China in five years, India avoided engagement with Pakistan—seen as a sign that the visit targeted Beijing. India’s ambiguous stance—“close and distant”—led some to label its SCO role as “dispensable”. The post further stated: “This should have been a normal multilateral diplomatic event, but it was full of drama because Indian Prime Minister Modi had just publicly distanced himself from the SCO”. India’s divergence was further highlighted when, following Israel’s attack on Iran, the SCO issued a swift condemnation—India pre-emptively declared its non-participation. Commentator viewed this as part of a broader pattern: India stays in the SCO but avoids endorsing initiatives like the Belt and Road. It observed, India is “gradually marginalizing itself”, with an “avoidance [coping] strategy” deepening its diplomatic dilemma. India’s “Global South” rhetoric was sharply critiqued: “This is like trying to plant trees in sand without soil—you can shout ‘independence’, but you cannot avoid China’s core position in the Global South”. This posture was seen as a “self-consoling performance”.

In this context, Singh’s visit was seen as a symbolic necessity —“pushed to the forefront” to justify the Modi government’s unclear stance. Still, scepticism persisted: “But the question is, does India really intend to give China an explanation?” Commentator argued that India prefers bilateral overtures—“focusing on bilateral contacts with China, trying to ‘avoid the real and attack the fake’”.

海外麒谈 [Hǎiwài Qí Tán] [framed](#) Singh’s visit as one with “special purpose”, noting strategic dialogue possibilities even as China continues arming Pakistan. India’s expression of support for China hosting SCO was seen as a shift from past “troublemaking”. Signs of thaw include the [upcoming](#) Meeting of the Special Representatives (SRs) of India and China in Delhi, renewed focus on people-to-people exchanges, like think-tanks, media and cultural exchanges, Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, and the resumption of direct flights.

Moreover, 包医生健康科普 [Bāo Yīshēng Jiànkāng Kēpǔ] [questioned](#): “The Indian Defense Minister is coming to China. Modi has to explain clearly this time why he always sings the opposite tune”. Described as a “journey of explanation”, Singh’s trip followed India’s refusal to support BRICS currency reform or the SCO joint communiqué—moves labelled “strategic speculation” with the question: “Will India be a builder or a spoiler?” Tension at the meeting was palpable. The commentator referred to the recent “May 7 Air War”/Operation Sindoor, picturing even awkward hallway moments. “India deliberately turned around and looked up at the sky”—a form of “gesture diplomacy” saying, “I am here, but I don’t agree”. They see that this pattern extends beyond the SCO. On BRICS reforms, India cited logistical concerns—“it is difficult to turn a big ship around”.



The SCO, in their view, awaits clarity. *“Is India here to cooperate or to play a balancing act?”*. 义晨观察 [Yì Chén Guānchá] [welcomed](#) Singh’s visit post-Galwan incident, but that optimism was before the joint statement refusal. The sharpest critique came from 丢丢观察社 [Diūdiū Guānchá Shè], [calling](#) India’s stance “contradictory”—benefiting from the SCO while undermining its unity: *“This two-faced approach... is indeed puzzling to the international community”*.

The sharpest words came from 商悟社 [Shāng Wù Shè], [accusing](#) India of disruption: *“Is he venting his anger after the defeat?”* India’s grievance over the omission of Pahalgam terror attack references was dismissed with counter-accusations: *“Pakistan... confessed that India secretly supported terrorist activities... India itself has not fulfilled its due obligations”*.

## How China’s Content Creators Frame India’s SCO Posture?

### Domestic Video Commentary:

On China’s domestic platforms, content creators have portrayed India’s refusal to sign the SCO joint statement as a direct act of divergence. On *haokan.baidu.com*, a widely used video-sharing site, the tone does not mirror official narratives—critical and assertive. A video hosted by Li Chunguang [李春光] (Researcher) is [titled](#): *“India’s Defence Minister Openly Sang A Different Tune From China On China’s Home Turf And Also Disrupted The SCO Joint Statement?”*—implying a challenge to China’s leadership within the SCO.

Another video by Jiang Fuwei [蒋福伟] [frames](#) the issue historically: *“Indian Defence Minister Came To China For A Meeting, But Refused To Sign The SCO Statement After The Meeting. Modi Is Still Upset About the Defeat”*. The emotional tone hints at lingering tensions post-Galwan. Similarly, Liu Qingbin [刘庆彬] (Researcher) [asserts](#), *“India Refused To Sign The Joint Communiqué, Openly Singing A Different Tune From The Nine SCO Countries. Modi Could Not Swallow the Defeat”*. These commentaries frame India’s stance not as strategic diplomacy, but as reactive behaviour fuelled by rivalry and unresolved frustrations. For Indian observers, such narratives reflect China’s domestic discourse machinery—focused less on India’s policy rationale and more on reinforcing China’s leadership image within multilateral settings.

### How China’s Comment Sections Reflect Popular Sentiment:

While official voices shape China’s public narrative, comment sections on domestic videos offer raw insight into grassroots attitudes. For observers, such comments offer valuable cues to the broader mood behind the firewall. Reactions to India’s SCO stance, drawn from the above three widely viewed videos, cluster around four recurring themes: distrust, exclusion, scepticism of Russia, and accusations of disruption.

**India’s Perceived Weakness:** Some mock India’s assertiveness as hollow: *“India’s attitude is ‘strong’ enough, but its strength is ‘weak’!”* Such remarks dismiss India’s moves as symbolic, not strategic.

**Demands for Expulsion:** A strong thread calls for removing India from regional multilateral groups: *“Expel India from the group”*, and *“Establish an exit mechanism”*; similarly, *“India should be kicked out of BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization!”* Others lump India with Iran: *“There is no point in condemning them... Stay away from India and Iran”*. While some say, *“Both India and Pakistan should be kicked out”*, others argue, *“Pakistan did*

*not oppose and is a close friend of China”, and “Kick India out of the SCO, Pakistan should stay”.*

**Suspicion of Russia’s Role:** Several comments express unease over Russia’s ties with India: *“Russia has invited a deity [referring to India] for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization... If this continues, the possibility of Russia and India colluding is very high”.* The following reflect doubts about Moscow’s alignment with China’s strategic goals: *“The current difficulties of the SCO are all caused by Russia. President Putin should think deeply about this”;* *“These are the consequences of Tsarist Russian imperialism’s request for India to join”;* and *“Russia is happy. Russia’s goal has been achieved”.*

**India as a Destabiliser:** India is also cast as disruptive: *“The third brother [India] is a professional troublemaker! The best policy is to fire him”.* This framing presents India as undermining unity within the SCO.

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**When Joint SCO Statements Fell Apart:** The SCO operates on consensus, making breakdowns in joint statements rare—but not without precedent. The SCO offers its member states to opt out by citing specific objections. Joint statements at four main tiers keenly observed—heads of state, foreign ministers, national security advisers, and defence ministers—and India’s current refusal aligns with past practice. India declined to sign the SCO statement condemning Israeli strikes on Iran, objecting to the explicit naming of Israel. During the 2018 Qingdao Summit, India [abstained](#) from endorsing the joint declaration’s support for China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). More recently, India [distanced](#) itself from the 2023 *SCO 2030 Economic Development Strategy*, citing concerns over a China-centric framing.

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*Notes: The “China Talkies: Reading the Signals” series offers analysis of China’s state, expert, and public discourse in response to international developments. Given the fragmented and often opaque nature of Chinese narratives, the series helps present current views and perspectives more clearly. All quotes, including critical remarks, are translated and preserved verbatim. Social media profile names are user-generated phrases, not real names, and are retained as cited.*

## About the Author

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