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Amit Pratap Singh
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SCO@25: Nonalignment 2.0 and Limits of Multilateral Diplomacy

This is the futility that must be highlighted. India's moral voice is heard politely but it does not stop missiles. The declaration itself is telling - it condemns strikes on Iran, but contains zero mention of Russia's war, because Moscow would veto it. In summary, Nonalignment 2.0 can inhibit the SCO from becoming anti-West or a China-led grouping but it cannot make Russia end a war Moscow intends to win.



By C Uday Bhaskar | Sep 03, 2026

Context The SCO's 25th anniversary summit at Bishkek shows why India's membership keeps the growing from turning into an anti-West or China-led bloc.

Facts

Shanghai 5 in April 1996 : became SCO in June 2001 when Uzbekistan joined & acts as border confidence-building & force reductions.

India & Pakistan joined in 2017, Iran (2023) & Belarus (2024), with Afghanistan & Mongolia as observers & 15 dialogue partners.

Bishkek declaration : condemns military strikes on Iran and defends its 'inalienable right' to peaceful nuclear energy and excludes 'bloc-based and confrontational methods.'

Analytical Crux

The SCO's achievement at 25 is a negative one. India's presence since 2017 is what keeps that door shut, since without India the grouping would be nine states either tied to Beijing or dependent on Moscow for security. India's membership therefore carries veto value rather than agenda value i.e. it can stop the grouping from becoming something but cannot make it do something. India is also the only SCO member that sits inside the Quad, and that is exactly what gives it the blocking weight. The challenge is not how many documents were adopted but whether India can ever move the text rather than only restrain it. It is the test of what strategic autonomy buys inside a multilateral platform.

Verbatim Quotes

"At 25, the SCO's achievement is what it has not become - an Asian NATO, an anti-dollar union, a China-led order."

- C. Uday Bhaskar

Industrialising Afghanistan- Taliban's economic strategy



Context Kabul is trying to replace an aid-funded economy with an industrial one through tax cuts, industrial parks and import substitution.

Facts

- Aid dependence : economy contracted by 20.7 % after 2021 & further 6.2 % in 2022. \$ 7 billion of central bank assets stands frozen.
- Industrial base : 34 industrial parks across 14 provinces with only 11 operational, 80% of electricity imported from Central Asian neighbours.
- July 2026 : corporate income tax cut from 20 to 10 % for all legal entities except mining firms and five-year exemption for newly established industries.

Analytical Crux

Kabul's industrial push is a survival strategy before it is a growth strategy. When aid stops, a state that ran 3 quarters of its budget on foreign grants has to find another basis for revenue and legitimacy. The instruments are familiar import-substitution kit i.e. tax cuts, industrial parks, protection for new industries and trade diplomacy. Only 11 out of 34 parks working, 4/5 ths of the electricity imported and no reliable banking channel because there is no recognition. Industrial policy is therefore as strong as the energy and finance & Kabul controls name of the three. That is also why Kabul is courting India, Uzbekistan, Iran and Russia at the same time, since here industrialisation is foreign policy by another route.

Verbatim Quotes

"Its long-term viability hinges on overcoming fundamental limitations, especially energy shortages, financial isolation and limited industrial infrastructure."

- Maiwand Safi

India - Japan defence cooperation breaks new ground

India-Japan defence cooperation breaks new ground

The August 2026 visit of Japan's Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi to India marks an important moment in the evolution of a partnership that has often been more developed institutionally than operationally. The agreements that were announced suggest that New Delhi and Tokyo are now attempting to connect these disparate strands into a more coherent security relationship, having spent more than a decade building the institutional vocabulary of defence cooperation through annual dialogues, the 2+2 mechanism, exercises, logistics arrangements and defence technology discussions.

Convergence into operational capability

This matters because the India-Japan defence relationship has reached a stage where additional declarations of strategic convergence have diminishing returns. Both countries already share concerns about coercive attempts to alter the status quo, the security of maritime commons and the growing militarisation of the Indo-Pacific. The challenge has been translating these convergences into arrangements that improve their ability to operate together. The new maritime framework seeks to address this issue.

The emphasis on information sharing and Maritime Domain Awareness is significant as India and Japan occupy critical positions at opposite ends of the Indo-Pacific's principal maritime theatre. Japan's immediate security concerns are concentrated in the East China Sea and the waters surrounding Taiwan, while India's geographical position gives it a central role in the Indian Ocean maritime space. A closer information-sharing architecture could gradually create a more continuous strategic picture across these interconnected maritime spaces. The objective is to develop greater awareness, interoperability, and operational familiarity between the two major maritime powers.

The discussions on naval shipbuilding may prove equally important with an exploration of joint development in naval shipbuilding and



Harsh V. Pant

Vice-President at the Observer Research Foundation



Pratinashree Basu

Associate Fellow - Indo-Pacific at the Observer Research Foundation

India and Japan are advancing a broader Indo-Pacific partnership beyond China-centric security concerns

design by combining Japanese technological expertise with Indian production capabilities. There was also agreement to deepen discussions on Japan's use of Indian production capabilities under the 'Make in India' framework and to move towards reciprocal arrangements for ship repair facilities. This could address a long-standing weakness in the bilateral relationship by giving a fillip to defence-industrial cooperation, which has consistently lagged behind strategic and political convergence.

The proposed transfer of Japan's UNICORN integrated communications antenna system remains the most visible symbol of this effort. While the Japanese Ministry of Defence describes UNICORN as the first defence equipment transfer project between the two countries, the project itself is not new. A memorandum of understanding for the co-development of UNICORN masts, involving Bharat Electronics Limited, was signed in November 2024. The August meeting therefore represented a further step towards implementation rather than the initiation of a new project. New Delhi and Tokyo have struggled to convert their 2015 agreement on defence equipment and technology transfer into concrete outcomes. The commitment now to early implementation, alongside plans to deepen cooperation between India's Defence Research and Development Organisation and Japan's Acquisition, Technology and Logistics Agency, suggests a recognition that credibility today depends on delivering projects rather than solely identifying possibilities.

On exercises

Japan's fighter aircraft are participating in the Veer Guardian exercise in India (September 9-22, 2026) for the first time. The two sides have agreed to increase the complexity of bilateral exercises, integrate unmanned systems and explore exercises organised at short notice. They also discussed cooperation between special operations forces and India's future integrated theatre commands. These initiatives point

towards a defence relationship increasingly concerned with operational preparedness.

Before travelling to New Delhi, Mr. Koizumi visited the Western Naval Command in Mumbai and INS Chennai. His visit thus extended beyond the familiar strategic geography of the Bay of Bengal and the Strait of Malacca. The western seaboard is central to India's wider maritime interests, encompassing critical sea lanes, energy flows and India's growing responsibilities in the western Indian Ocean.

The broader regional context is impossible to ignore. The joint statement reiterated opposition to unilateral actions that impede freedom of navigation or seek to alter the status quo through force or coercion. Neither country needed to name China for the strategic message to be clear. Yet, the significance of India-Japan cooperation lies precisely in its ability to move beyond a China-centric agenda. Maritime security, resilient supply chains, defence industrial capacity, logistics and third-country cooperation are all becoming components of a wider regional security architecture.

Building a more resilient partnership

The visit also plugs into a broader moment of impetus in India-Japan relations. Coming soon after the July 2026 Annual Summit, which expanded cooperation across economic security, critical technologies and resilient supply chains, the defence ministerial engagement demonstrates that security is increasingly intertwined with the wider strategic partnership. Defence cooperation can provide the connective tissue between these agendas, linking India's industrial capabilities and Japan's technological strengths while reinforcing their shared interest in shaping a more resilient Indo-Pacific. The real test will now be implementation. India and Japan are building the strategic foundations, with Mr. Koizumi's visit suggesting that both are finally beginning to focus on the harder task, which is converting strategic convergence into usable capability.

Context India and Japan stop adding declarations of strategic convergence being tested only on whether anything actually gets built, shared & flown together.

Facts

■ UNICORN antenna transfer, with the BEL co-development MoU : Japan's first defence equipment transfer project between the two countries.

■ Maritime track: new framework built on information sharing & maritime domain awareness, joint development in shipbuilding & design.

Analytical Crux

The India-Japan relationship has run out of things to declare, and only test left is delivery. Geography explains the maritime emphasis, since Japan's concerns sit in the East China Sea and around Taiwan while India's sit in the Indian Ocean, and a shared maritime picture is what joins two separate theatres into one. The joint statement opposed unilateral changes to the status quo without naming China, which is itself the point, since the agenda is now wider than China alone. The challenge is whether the 2015 technology transfer agreement finally delivers and not how many convergences get restated.

Verbatim Quotes

"The India-Japan defence relationship has reached a stage where additional declarations of strategic convergence have diminishing returns."

- Harsh V. Pant & Pratnashree Basu

PSIR 2026, Paper II: “India has adopted multi-alignment to fulfill its core values and interests in International relations. Discuss.”

PSIR 2026, Paper II: “What strategic options can India exercise as a response to the tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan?”

PSIR 2025, Paper II: “NonAlignment 2.0 underscores India’s unique aspiration to emerge as a site for an alternative universality. Comment.”

PSIR 2025, Paper II: “Historical ties between India and Japan grew into a ‘special strategic and global partnership’. Comment.”

GS 2026, Paper II: “IPMDA (Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness) bridges the gap between India’s SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision and the Quad’s collective Indo-Pacific strategy.” Make a critical assessment of the statement focusing on IPMDA.

GS 2024, Paper II: “Critically analyse India’s evolving diplomatic, economic and strategic relations with the Central Asian Republics (CARs) highlighting their increasing significance in regional and global geopolitics.”

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|-----------|--|--|
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| 02 | THE RECORD | Dates, official wording, and the document it came from. |
| 03 | THE ANALYSIS | The argument it raises, and the positions taken on it. |
| 04 | THEORY & VERBATIM QUOTATION | The concept on the syllabus, in the scholar's own words. |
| 05 | FURTHER QUOTATIONS | More lines to cite, each one carrying its source. |
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