

# PSIR & GS-2 Daily Brief

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# Article - 1 : Japan is imagining a new Asia story

## In navigating Trump's US & Xi's China, Japan is imagining a new Asia story



**RAJA MANDALA**  
BY C RAJA MOHAN

**S**INCE WORLD War II, Japan has deliberately defined itself as a peaceful nation. Relying on the US for its security, Tokyo built one of the world's largest economies while renouncing nuclear weapons, avoiding the use of force, and refusing to project its conventional military power. That era is now drawing to a close.

China's growing regional assertiveness and America's ambivalence in Asia, especially regarding the defence of Taiwan against potential Chinese aggression, have caused much of Asia to complain about the Donald Trump administration and mutter about its likely abandonment of the region. Tokyo, however, is not wringing its hands; it is acting to defend itself and help others secure themselves against Chinese expansionism and the US volatility.

At the annual Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore last week, Japanese Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi unveiled three broad directions of a new security policy: To step up national defence spending and military modernisation, increase defence cooperation with friendly nations, and lift restrictions on the export of arms. The shift marks one of the major transformations in Asian geopolitics since the end of the Cold War.

For decades, Japan's defence industry

was largely inward-looking. Strict policy controls limited arms exports and constrained military cooperation with foreign partners. Tokyo has now reached a very different conclusion. It argues that preserving peace in Asia requires active participation in shaping the regional balance of power. The result is a historic relaxation of arms exports announced in April this year.

The most visible symbol of this change is the agreement last month to supply II upgraded *Magami*-class frigates to Australia. The contract, estimated at nearly \$7 billion, is the largest defence export in Japan's post-war history, and goes beyond a simple commercial transaction. It creates a framework for Japan's long-term defence-industrial collaboration with Australia and other regional partners. It also points to the construction of regional defence networks that are not dependent on Washington.

In Singapore, Koizumi announced that New Zealand is also interested in the purchase of *Magami*-class frigates from Tokyo. The emerging Japan-Australia-New Zealand security triangle is not a formal alliance but part of a new web of defence cooperation involving production, logistics, technology sharing and interoperability. Similar conversations are unfolding between Japan and the Philippines, as well as with other maritime states anxious about the changing balance of power in Asia.

Koizumi rejected China's high-pitched accusations about Japan's militarism and rearmament. Pointing to China's expanding nuclear arsenal and growing conventional military power, Koizumi gently suggested that "the pot is calling the kettle black". China can't dramatically build up its own military capabilities, indulge in co-

ercion of all kinds and accuse others of rearmament and militarism.

What is driving Tokyo's new military doctrine is not nostalgia for great-power status in the imperial era, but anxiety about the future balance of power in Asia. The Taiwan question has sharpened these concerns. Under Prime Minister Sanae Takachi, Japan has moved closer than ever to publicly acknowledging that its own security is linked to peace in Taiwan.

Tokyo is not breaking from its One China policy. But it has increasingly signalled that a military conflict over Taiwan would have direct consequences for Japan. Chinese reactions have been predictably fierce, with Beijing accusing Tokyo of crossing red lines and interfering in China's internal affairs.

But Takaichi's Japan is not willing to quiver under Chinese bullying. Tokyo believes preservation of peace in the Taiwan Strait is critical to regional stability. This does not mean Japan seeks confrontation. Rather, it reflects a growing belief that deterrence requires both clarity and capability.

The Taiwan issue has become a litmus test for Japan's strategic evolution. For decades, Tokyo preferred ambiguity. Today, it believes peace in Taiwan is critical for Asian security. That the US Secretary of War, Pete Hegseth, tiptoed around the question of Taiwan at the Shangri-La Dialogue is widely viewed as part of President Trump's effort to please China's leader, Xi Jinping, after the Beijing summit last month.

To be fair, Hegseth reaffirmed the US commitment to the balance of power in Asia; he also argued that the US will not allow China to exercise hegemony over Asia. But the way Trump is going about it

has triggered anxieties all around. Hegseth also called on the allies and partners to do more for themselves.

On its part, Japan is trying to reconcile two strategic imperatives. The first is preserving the American alliance, which has been the foundation of its security. The second is reducing excessive dependence on the United States by strengthening regional security partnerships and creating Asian defence-industrial networks.

The imperatives for Delhi are similar — engage Washington on defence where beneficial, but also simultaneously enhance strategic collaboration with regional powers like Japan, South Korea, Australia, and the ASEAN countries. Plans for bilateral and regional defence collaboration already exist in Delhi. What India needs is an urgent and purposeful transformation of plans into concrete outcomes.

Unlike China, India has long welcomed Japan to play a larger security role in Asia. What has changed is Tokyo's willingness to act upon that logic. The old Japan was an economic giant and a military minimalist. The new Japan seeks to be something different: A security partner, a defence-industrial power and an active participant in shaping the balance of power in Asia. Tokyo's strategic reorientation is not merely a Japanese story. It is part of Asia's wider search for a new equilibrium in an era of Chinese power and American reorientation.

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**Tokyo is not breaking from its One China policy. But it has increasingly signalled that a military conflict over Taiwan would have direct consequences for Japan**

**Context** Japan is moving away from its old post-war security restraint and is preparing for a stronger defence role in Asia.

## Facts

Japan - peaceful national, depended on the US for security and renounced nuclear weapons since World War II.

Japan - Australia - New Zealand → not formal alliance, a defence cooperation web.

Japan's three new security directions: higher defence spending, deeper defence cooperation and easing arms export limits.

## Analytical Crux

Japan is not returning to militarism; it is responding to a changing balance of power in Asia. There is a double pressure of Chinese assertiveness & US's unpredictability. Japan's new posture shows that middle powers no longer waiting passively for the US to secure Asia. The shift is from dependence to shared regional responsibility. India should keep the US partnership, but build regional defence cooperation with Japan, Australia, South Korea and ASEAN.

## Verbatim Quotes

"Tokyo, however, is not wringing its hands; it is acting to defend itself and help others secure themselves against Chinese expansionism & the US volatility. The shift marks one of the major transformations in Asian geopolitics since the end of the cold war."

- C. Raja Mohan

# Article - 2 : The “harvest” China wants is one India can’t afford

## The ‘harvest’ China wants is one India cannot afford

When Luo Zhaohui, then China’s Ambassador to India, revived the idea of an “early harvest” in India-China boundary negotiations in 2017, India responded with scepticism. The proposal – to settle the Sikkim boundary in isolation from the three other sectors – was an asymmetric concession dressed up in the language of progress. India has resisted it. There is now a gnawing doubt as to whether it can hold that position. The trigger for this piece is a former border negotiator’s concern that India might “stumble” into a damaging course of action under Chinese pressure and driven by the temptation to project contrived progress. Diplomacy that trades long-term strategic interests for short-term optics is self-defeating.

### New Delhi must be cautious

The readout issued by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on the 24th round of the Special Representatives’ Dialogue on the Boundary Question between India and China (on August 19, 2025) between National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi recorded India’s agreement to “set up an Expert Group ... to explore an early harvest in boundary delimitation in the India-China border areas”. China’s own readout was more pointed: it used the term “demarcation” rather than “delimitation” and spoke of “launching boundary demarcation negotiations in sectors where conditions are ripe.”

The MEA press release on the 35th Meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs, held in Beijing on May 27, 2026, mentions that the two sides “discussed issues pertaining to delimitation, border management, mechanism building and cross-border cooperation” and “agreed to work together to make substantive preparation” for the next SRS’ meeting. The reference to ‘delimitation’ is significant as it suggests follow-up discussions on the understanding “to explore Early Harvest in boundary delimitation”.

The cornerstone of Special Representative negotiations is the Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles, signed on April 12, 2005. Article III explicitly envisages “a package settlement” covering all sectors of the India-China boundary. It establishes a three-step process: first political parameters, then a framework for a final settlement, then delineation and demarcation. Demarcation – placing physical markers on the ground – comes last, not first. China’s proposal to begin demarcation in a single “ripe” sector inverts this sequence and, in effect, asks India to abandon the package architecture in exchange for the appearance of progress. India should decline.

Why does the package settlement matter so much? Because the four sectors of the



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Diplomatic optics must not dictate India’s boundary negotiations with China

India-China boundary are strategically interlinked, requiring give and take across sectors. It also guards against China extracting concessions sector by sector. An early harvest in Sikkim, where India holds comparative geographical advantage, would let Beijing bank a settlement on its preferred terms while leaving the other three sectors unresolved.

### The Sikkim stakes

The Sikkim Sector boundary is not, as sometimes claimed, a simple matter. Clashes at Nathu La and Cho La in 1967, with heavy casualties, showed how sharp these differences are. Article I of the 1890 Great Britain-China Convention identifies “Mount Gipmochi on the Bhutan frontier” as the starting point of the Sikkim-Tibet boundary, but it is preceded by an assertion that the boundary “shall be the crest of the mountain range separating the waters flowing into the Sikkim Teesta and its affluents from the waters flowing into the Tibetan Mochu”. China reads the article as placing the trijunction at Gipmochi. India and Bhutan hold that the trijunction lies at Batang La, some 6.5 kilometres to the north, on the watershed – which is the operative geographical principle in Article I.

Zompehri (or Jamphehri) Ridge adjoining Geymochen commands a direct view of the Siliguri Corridor, the narrow strip connecting mainland India to its northeastern States. Any settlement implicitly endorsing the Gipmochi trijunction would hand China a legal instrument to press its claim to the very edge of the Himalayas, exposing the Corridor. The Chinese objective is to deepen and widen its Chumbi Valley and increase pressure on India’s most acute territorial vulnerability.

The Doklam dimension reinforces this concern. Since 2017, China has systematically consolidated its position in western Bhutan – building roads and military facilities, constructing villages including Pangda on the Amo Chu river, and developing routes to the Jamphehri Ridge that bypass the 2017 Doklam standoff site. A Sikkim settlement would immediately be leveraged by Beijing to step up pressure on a vulnerable Bhutan to settle its boundary with China. India and China have agreed that trijunction points must be finalised in trilateral consultation with all countries concerned. Even if the trijunction point is left out, China could force Bhutan to settle the rest of the disputed boundary on its own terms and present India with a *fait accompli* in Doklam.

Since the Eastern Ladakh transgressions of 2020, China has pursued multiple pressure tracks simultaneously: military consolidation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), steady resurrection of the “Zangnan” (South Tibet) narrative to describe Arunachal Pradesh, renaming of places in Arunachal Pradesh, and expansion of “border defence villages” close to India-China LAC.

The resumption of Special Representative talks is welcome, but dialogue must be conducted with strategic clarity, not under diplomatic pressure or for the optics of progress. Three principles should guide India’s approach.

First, hold the 2005 Agreement’s framework firm. The Expert Group agreed upon in August 2025 must not become a vehicle for an early harvest in Sikkim. Agreeing to “explore” is not a commitment to accept. India should reject a standalone Sikkim delimitation or demarcation exercise.

Second, make peace and tranquillity on the LAC the non-negotiable condition of progress. China has periodically attempted to delink border management from the broader relationship; India has resisted this, and should continue to do so. Unilateral alterations to the LAC cannot be normalised. Indeed, the so-called “buffer zones” in Eastern Ladakh must not be allowed to persist.

Third, press for genuine political engagement on a comprehensive settlement. Decades of talks have shown that the respective narratives cannot be reconciled through legal arguments. The 2005 Agreement recognised this: it called for a political settlement that would “safeguard the vital interests of both countries” and set out principles such as the two sides “safeguard(ing) due interests of their settled populations in the border areas”. Any breakthrough requires political will on both sides. India should press for meaningful boundary negotiations, not paper over the lack of progress with working groups. The test of China’s seriousness will be whether it is prepared to engage on the framework for a comprehensive settlement – and whether it is prepared to hold the LAC stable while that engagement proceeds. Absent those conditions, the Special Representative process risks becoming what it has sometimes been before: a forum for managing appearances while China improves its position on the ground.

### Stay the course

In boundary talks, China has a track-record of cherry-picking and resiling from formal commitments, as it did in the case of an explicit agreement to arrive at a common understanding of the LAC after exchanging maps showing the entire alignment. India must prevent the Agreement on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question from meeting a similar fate. If peace and tranquillity on the LAC is the foundation for rebuilding India-China relations, the 2005 Agreement is the road map for resolving the boundary question. India has nothing to gain from an early harvest limited to Sikkim and must maintain its negotiating space through a comprehensive negotiation. India cannot afford a shortcut to a destination that suits China.

## Context India not to

accept China’s ‘early harvest’ proposal in the Sikkim boundary sector because it may weaken India’s long-term position on the entire boundary question.

## Facts

The 2005 Agreement Political Parameters & Guiding principles- package settlement, not sector wise settlement.

35th WMCC meeting on May 27, 2026 - China used “demarcation” instead of “delimitation”.

## Analytical Crux

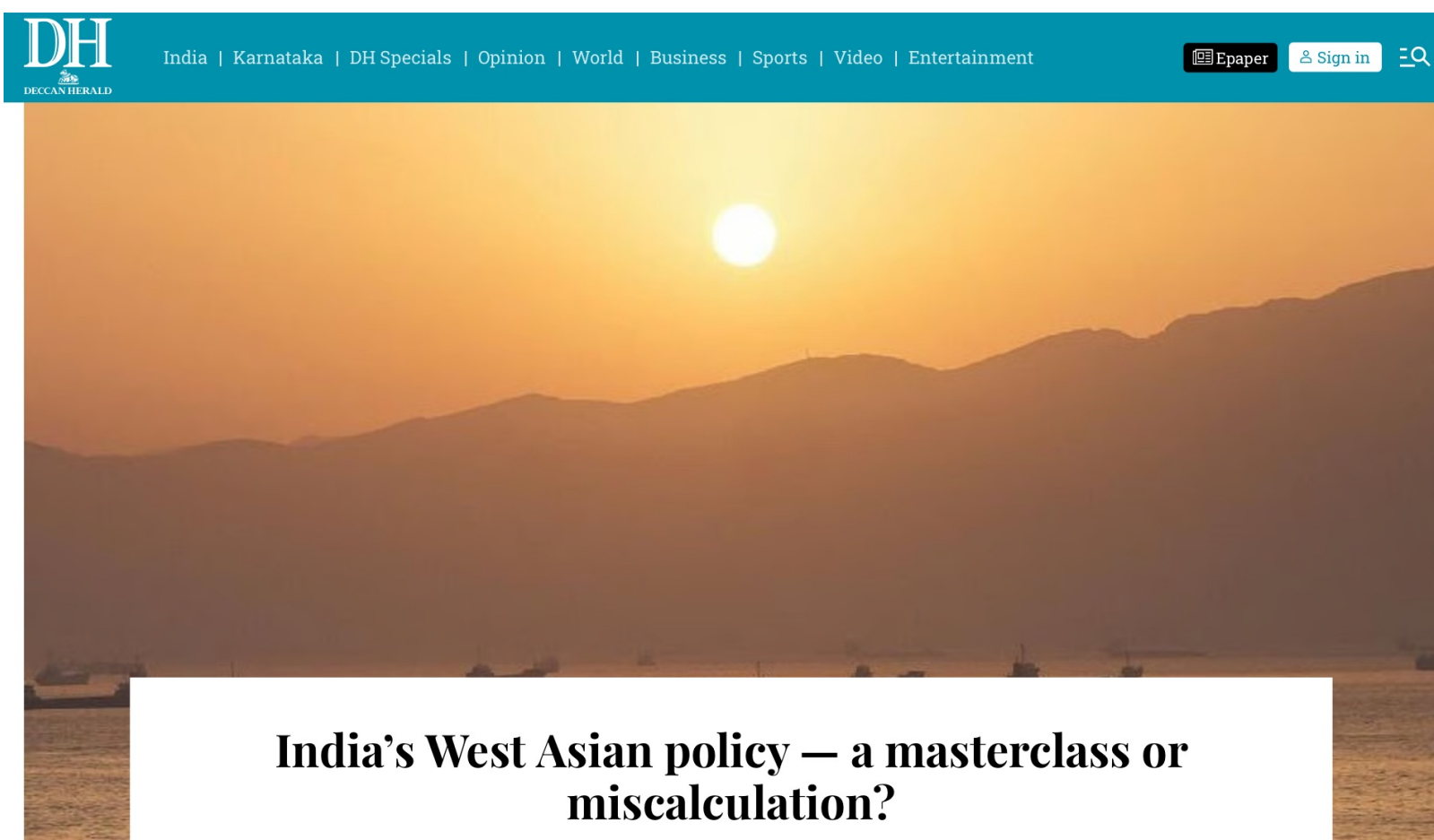
China's "early harvest" is not a confidence-building step; it is a sector-wise bargaining trap. Sikkim cannot be separated from Doklam, Bhutan, Chumbi Valley, Siliguri corridor & larger LAC problem. India's roadmap should be the 2005 package settlement because it protects its negotiating space across all sectors. Unilateral alterations to LAC cannot be normalised and peace on the LAC is the condition for any progress. India should not trade strategic depth for diplomatic optics.

## Verbatim Quotes

"Diplomacy that trades long-term strategic interests for short term optics is self-defeating. Demarcation i.e. placing physical markers on the ground - comes last, not first."

— Ashok K. Kantha

# Article - 3 : India's West Asia policy-masterclass or miscalculation



**Context** India's UAE-centred West Asia strategy is too transactional and ignores the deeper political and security fractures of the Gulf.

## Facts

- India's West Asia approach is "portfolio politics" – building external partnerships sector by sector instead of aligning with one political bloc.
- IMEC – supports India's connectivity with Europe through Arabian Peninsula.

## Analytical Crux

India cannot treat West Asia as a set of separate portfolios like trade, technology, defence & labour. The region's politics is deeply connected: UAE - Saudi rivalry, Israel - Iran hostility, Pakistan's security role and Gulf instability all affect India's interests. IMEC will not succeed because it is economically attractive; it also needs political acceptability and regional security. India's challenge is to protect connectivity, diaspora and energy interests without locked into one polarising camp.

## Verbatim Quotes

"A transcontinental corridor cannot function when its primary transit states are engaged in a fierce zero-sum competition for regional primacy." - Bahram Kalvizi

"The structural contradiction of pursuing economic integration through a highly polarising security alignment exposes long-term fragility of New Delhi's ambitions."

- **PSIR 2025:** “Historical ties between India and Japan grew into a ‘special strategic and global partnership’. Comment.”
- **PSIR 2025:** “India maintains strong ties with countries that will assure a free and open Indo-Pacific and guarantee greater connectivity with rest of the world. Analyze.”
- **GS-II 2025:** “Energy security constitutes the dominant kingpin of India’s foreign policy, and is linked with India’s overarching influence in Middle Eastern countries. How would you integrate energy security with India’s foreign policy trajectories in the coming years?”
- **PSIR 2024:** “Bhutan has historically been an ally of India, but the China-Bhutan border related issues have become a security issue for India. Discuss.”
- **GS-II 2024:** 'The West is fostering India as an alternative to reduce dependence on China's supply chain and as a strategic ally to counter China's political and economic dominance.' Explain this statement with examples.

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