

# PSIR & GS-2 Daily Brief

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PSIR  
Optional by  
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| ForumIAS |



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# PSIR OPTIONAL 2026

PROGRAMS COMMENCING IN JUNE

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# Article - 1 : PACOM, the deeper meaning behind a dropped prefix

## PACOM, the deeper meaning behind a dropped prefix

The decision by the United States military to change the name of its naval command in the region from "US INDOPACOM" to "US PACOM" – United States Indo-Pacific Command to United States Pacific Command – reverting to its original name that was changed in 2018 can be dismissed as superficial, even trivial. Many have already responded with the Shakespearean "What's in a name?", even as the U.S. Department of War pointed out that US PACOM's area of responsibility, from "the waters off the West Coast of the United States to the western border of India" or what had once been described as "Hollywood to Bollywood, from polar bears to penguins", has never changed. In 2018, U.S. Defence Secretary Jim Mattis said that the name INDOPACOM was a recognition of the "growing significance" of the Indian Ocean, the Indian subcontinent, and India itself, and the U.S. dropped the term "Asia-Pacific" to "Indo-Pacific".

Current U.S. Secretary of War Pete Hegseth gave the signal, on May 30, that this understanding has now changed, at his speech at the annual Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore – compared to more than 30 references to the "Indo-Pacific" in his speech in 2025, his speech this year contained not a single reference to the Indo-Pacific region or strategy.

Given the centre stage that the U.S.'s Indo-Pacific policy has had in India's strategic calculus since 2018, it is necessary, therefore, to go beyond the superficial to the subterranean or submarine, in this case. New Delhi must study how broader trends in U.S. policy are attempting to recast both the region and India's position within it in terms of three broader geographies.

**U.S.-China ties and the Quad**  
The first, is the U.S.'s outreach to China, and concurrently diminishing salience of the Quad (India, Japan Australia, the U.S.), which Beijing has always protested as an "exclusive clique" or derisively as "ocean foam". In the long term, the U.S. and China cannot stay away from the fierce rivalry between them, but it is clear that in the immediate term, Trump 2.0 has decided to play nice.

U.S. President Donald Trump's visit to Beijing in May 2026 and Chinese President Xi Jinping's upcoming visit to the U.S. on September 24, indicate that the two sides do not want their differences to overcome the relationship, and the U.S. is tiptoeing around the Taiwan issue. Mr. Trump's references to a "G-2", including during a press availability with Mr. Modi on the sidelines of the 52nd G-7 summit in France (June 15 to 17), are an early warning of a plan to recast the world into "spheres of influence", where China would be the predominant power in the continent, not as one pole in a multipolar Asia, as India envisions.

As a result, the Quad, rebuilt in Trump 1.0 as a



Subasini Haidar

counter to China in the region, appears to be floundering. The U.S.'s National Defense Strategy released in January 2026 does not mention the Quad even once. In terms of substance, the Quad's combined agenda has been pared down to four areas of cooperation – maritime security, economic prosperity, critical and emerging minerals technology and disaster responses. Even within these limited objectives, there have been setbacks, such as over Artificial Intelligence cooperation. Despite Quad countries signing on to Pax Silica, and Critical Minerals Initiative Framework with the U.S., the Trump administration ordered Anthropic to end access to its latest models for all non-Americans.

Another question concerns the Quad Summit, which India has unsuccessfully sought to host since January 2024. During U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio's visit to Delhi in May 2026, he offered no firm commitment that Mr. Trump would visit Delhi this year, amid indications that the Quad may be relegated to a Foreign Ministers' level grouping. The U.S. Navy's reported actions involving Iranian ship *IRIS Dena* (March 2006) and recent attacks on three ships in which three Indians were killed underscore maritime security and domain awareness concerns within the Quad framework. In July, when he hosts Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi and travels to Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand, Prime Minister Narendra Modi must discuss alternative maritime coalitions and revive the Australia-India-Japan trilateral.

**The U.S.-Iran MoU and West Asia**  
The second geography of concern is West Asia.

The U.S. ceasefire with Iran, after just a few months of a surprisingly badly planned war, is indicative of a general fatigue in Trump 2.0 with U.S. friends and allies in the region. The situation is even more volatile today than it was prior to February 28, especially given the short shrift Israel has received in negotiations with Iran, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's defiance over the ceasefire for Lebanon.

A closer look at the 14-paragraph "Islamabad MoU" released by Iran reveals several signals for the region. Paragraph four states that the U.S. commits to "remove its forces from the proximity of the Islamic Republic of Iran" within 30 days after the final deal. Paragraph five says that, after the Hormuz Strait is demined, Iran and Oman will define the Strait's future administration in consultation with Persian Gulf littoral states.

Paragraph 6 stipulates that the U.S., along with regional allies, will provide at least \$300 billion for Iran's reconstruction. These provisions imply commitments on behalf of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) states while giving Iran leverage on key issues – military, connectivity, and economic security. Oman and Qatar are now closer to Iran than

before and have been part of the Pakistan-led mediation process, while countries such as Saudi Arabia are seeking new security arrangements with Türkiye, Pakistan, and Ukraine.

India's policy towards the region requires a rapid revision in light of the post-war, post-deal power structure. What was once a finely balanced approach now appears tilted towards Israel and the United Arab Emirates. New Delhi must also urgently reconsider its compliance with U.S. sanctions on Iranian oil and the Chabahar port, given Washington's shifting positions.

**The U.S. and South Asia**  
Finally, India must study the implications of U.S. foreign policy decisions in its neighbourhood. The appointment of Sergio Gor as both U.S. Ambassador to India and Special Envoy for South and Central Asia signals Washington's growing regional ambitions. New Delhi has pushed back on attempts by the U.S. to become a supra entity in South Asia, as well as its efforts to resolve intra-regional conflicts between India and Pakistan. This ambition was hinted at during Operation Sindoor (May 2025), and repeated by Mr. Trump over the past year, especially as he met the Pakistani leadership many times in this period.

Mr. Gor's recent travels to Kathmandu, Thimphu, Dhaka and Colombo indicate that the U.S. is keen to broaden its efforts across the region. In the absence of effective pan-regional frameworks such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) – both are constrained by New Delhi's political tensions with Islamabad and Dhaka – it is clear that the U.S. is entering into competition with China for influence in South Asia.

Beijing has already built several mechanisms for cooperation with South Asia, and both powers side-stepping India. India, as chair of the Indian Ocean Rim Association, and with Mr. Modi due to attend the planned BIMSTEC summit in Bangladesh and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Pakistan next year, has an opportunity to reassert its regional leadership. Given the opportunities, a revival of the SAARC grouping and other pan-regional initiatives must be considered.

Concerns over the U.S.'s moves across India's geographies may seem contrary to the bonhomie at the Modi-Trump meeting at the G-7 meet in France, and the red carpet for Mr. Rubio's India visit. Shorn of the rhetoric, however, the trends in U.S. policy are clear, and New Delhi must plan accordingly, acknowledging that the shifts run far deeper than the ripples on the surface caused by a dropped prefix.

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**Context** US renaming its regional command from "INDOPACOM" back to "PACOM" is not a trivial relabelling but a signal of deeper shifts in US policy – towards China, West Asia & South Asia.

## Facts

The U.S. reverted "INDOPACOM" to "PACOM", undoing the 2018 change that had folded India into the strategic frame.

Trump's G-2 framing – hints at a spheres of influence world where China dominates Asia.

PACOM's area of responsibility – from the waters off the U.S. West Coast to the western border of India.

## Analytical Crux

The actual story is the US recasting India's strategic neighbourhood across 3 theatres at once. In the Indo-Pacific, Washington is warming to Beijing which collides head-on with India's vision of a multipolar Asia. In West Asia, the Pakistan mediated US-Iran deal reshuffles the regional balance. It forces India to revisit both its tilt and compliance with US sanctions on Iranian oil and Chabahar. In South Asia, a single envoy for India & the wider region signals U.S. ambitions to act as a supra entity. It is turning the subcontinent into an arena of US-China competition while SAARC & BIMSTEC stay frozen. Strategic autonomy now means India must hedge harder, reviving trilaterals & regional groupings and reasserting its own neighbourhood leadership. The US is no longer anchoring the Indo-Pacific frame India had built its calculus around.

### Verbatim Quotes

"Shown of the rhetoric, however, the trends in U.S. policy are clear and New Delhi must plan accordingly, acknowledging that the shifts run far deeper than the ripples on the surface caused by a dropped prefix."

# Article - 2 : Strengthening the nested geometry of RIC-SCO-BRICS



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## Strengthening the Nested Geometry of RIC-SCO-BRICS

June 24, 2026 | Issue Brief



Prashant Kumar Singh  
Research Fellow

Dr. Prashant Kumar Singh follows the strategic and

**Context** India should actively strengthen the interlinked relationship among 3 non-western groupings i.e. RIC, SCO & BRICS for its strategic autonomy and systemic balancing.

## Facts

BRICS formalised in 2006 - more than 40% of global oil production, around 35% of world GDP in PPP terms.

SCO came from Shanghai-5 process & was founded in 2001; SCO development bank has been demanded since 2010.

RIC (Russia-India-China) began as a foreign minister level dialogue - an informal meeting in September 2002 but dormant after 2021.

## Analytical Crux

India's engagement with RIC, SCO & BRICS is not ad-hoc opportunism. It flows from three anchors i.e. strategic autonomy, strategic balancing and leadership of the Global South. With Trump era unpredictability, the fallout of the Iran-war and an India-China thaw, India's BRICS presidency is the moment to revive the dormant RIC and tighten the "nested" RIC-SCO-BRICS link. India straddles both Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific & it must stay active in both - Eurasia secures resources, connectivity (INSTC, TAPI) and global-order reform. The Indo-Pacific secures economic & technological stakes because China may agree for a 'managed G-2' with the U.S. While Russia insists on multipolarity, keeping the Russia-India-China triangle balanced is a strategic gain for India.

### Verbatim Quotes

"Strategic autonomy is not about ad hoc transactionalism. It is about anchoring one's foreign policy on stable, durable pillars that must be safeguarded from external pressures."

## Ideology, defection, and the death of purpose in politics



THAROORTHINK  
BY SHASHI THAROOR

THE DUST has barely settled on the West Bengal Legislative Assembly elections, yet the landscape of its politics has been transformed by a tectonic internal collapse of the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC). Beyond its poll defeat, the party is experiencing an existential mutiny: Dozens of MLAs, a massive exodus of local municipal councillors, and 20 Members of Parliament have broken away to align with the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA). Meanwhile, two-thirds of the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena MPs have crossed over to Eknath Shinde's, and rumours swirl around other parties.

The undercurrents are altogether familiar. Widespread public perception points to an orchestrated transition, with the BJP acting as a highly effective conductor. But this column is not a post-mortem of party splits, nor a lament for how the anti-defection law is being systematically bypassed in New Delhi. Instead, this dramatic fragmentation — coming on the heels of nearly a decade of similar wholesale desertions from the Indian National Congress and various regional satrapies, all to the ruling party — demands that we pause and confront a foundational question: What, ultimately, is politics for? In its truest sense, politics is the struc-

tural framework through which human beings organise themselves to build a better society, a more equitable economy, and a stronger nation. It is the means to achieving a shared civilisational end. To enter the political arena, therefore, requires a vision, an answer to a fundamental question: What makes a better India?

For some, that vision is anchored in welfare economics, secularism, and the decentralisation of power; others may prefer market liberalisation, national security, and cultural nationalism. These distinct viewpoints are precisely why political parties exist. A party is meant to be a laboratory of ideas, an ideological collective where individuals bind themselves to a specific set of principles, policies, and values to advance them legislatively. You join a party because its platform reflects your preferred blueprint for the country. In a parliamentary system, the party is the vehicle for your vision of a better India.

When we look at the recent events, or the long parade of defectors over the last decade who have traded their original party colours for a seat in the Union cabinet, we find an absolute absence of principle. Not a single major defection in recent memory has been preceded by an ideological epiphany. We have not seen leaders resign because they suddenly realised they prefer right-wing economics over centre-left welfarism, or because they had a profound change of heart regarding federalism.

Instead, the ideological switch is flicked instantaneously. The rhetoric of a lifetime is discarded overnight. These politicians are animated entirely by the pursuit of power for its own sake, stripping

the profession of even the pretence of public purpose. India's political contestation has transitioned from a battle of ideas into a marketplace of personal profit.

When a politician defects from a defeated party to a triumphant one, he is making a purely transaction-based calculation. In the case of the TMC split, rebel leaders openly admit that staying in the Opposition exposes them to public anger, local vulnerabilities, and the cold reality of central investigative scrutiny. Joining or supporting the ruling establishment offers an immediate insurance policy, and allegedly, lucre.

This fundamentally subverts the democratic mandate. When citizens vote, they do not usually just vote for a name; they vote for a platform, a promise, and a counterweight to the ruling power. When an elected representative defects, they effectively erase the votes of thousands of citizens. They treat the public mandate as personal equity, a commodity to be bartered for a ministerial berth or a corporate concession. If political allegiance can be bought, coerced, or traded without an iota of accountability, then the ballot box becomes a fraud on the public and politics is reduced to a self-serving instrument of a transactional elite.

This brings us to the most important question: If politics is just about individual advancement, why do we maintain the expensive, elaborate theatre of political parties and a parliamentary system? Our system requires a robust Treasury bench to govern and a principled Opposition to question and challenge power, with political parties as the scaffolding, ensuring that debates are around policy differences rather than personalities.

However, if parties are merely vessels used to secure a ticket, only to be discarded the moment the wind changes direction, the system collapses. Parliament transforms from a deliberate assembly into a revolving door of opportunism. The anti-defection law — originally designed to prevent the infamous "Aaya Ram, Gaya Ram" culture of the 1960s — has been reduced to a subvertible hurdle. Politicians no longer jump ship one by one; they manufacture a two-thirds split, shifting factions to preserve their seats while changing their masters. This is politics decoupled from any vision for India.

The spectacle of TMC MPs huddling in Delhi to pledge allegiance to the NDA is not an isolated incident of political manoeuvring; it is a symptom of a deeper, systemic rot. It is the logical conclusion of a political culture that rewards victory at any cost and treats morality as an affliction of the powerless. If India is to fulfil the hopes of 1947, its political class must remember what politics was invented for. It cannot remain an unprincipled scramble for the spoils of office. We need to foster a political environment where defection carries an irreversible social and electoral stigma; where leaving a party over anything less than a profound, demonstrable disagreement on policy is recognised for what it is: An act of public betrayal.

Until the principles of ideology and public service are restored to the centre of our political contestation, our democratic institutions will continue to lose their moral authority — unless voters force those who seek their votes to prove that they are fighting for a better India, rather than just a better seat at the table.

The writer is a fourth-term Congress MP from Thiruvananthapuram

We need to foster a political environment where defection carries an irreversible stigma; where leaving a party over anything less than a profound, demonstrable disagreement on policy is recognised for what it is: An act of public betrayal

**Context** Tharoor asks what is politics actually for and argues that when defection is driven by power and self-interest rather than ideology, it hollows out parties, betrays the voter's mandate and corrodes democracy itself.

## Facts

■ The anti-defection law was designed to prevent the "Aaya Ram, Gaya Ram" defection culture of the 1960s.

■ Defectors "manufacture a two-thirds split" — to preserve their seats while switching sides, neutralising anti-defection law.

■ After the West Bengal assembly elections — defections of TMC MLAs, municipal councillors & 20 MPs to the ruling NDA.

## Analytical Crux

Politics exists to pursue a shared vision of a better society & parties exist as ideological vehicles for competing visions. However, recent defections carry no ideological reason, they switched for power, protection from investigative scrutiny and office. It turns the voter's mandate into "personal equity" to be bartered, erases the votes that elected them. It reduces the anti-defection law to a hurdle gamed by manufacturing two-thirds splits. This is not merely a legal-loophole problem but a moral-institutional one. The way forward is normative rather than statutory. It is to make defection carry an irreversible social and electoral stigma and force candidates to prove they are fighting for a better India, not just a better seat at the table.

## Verbatim Quotes

"India's political contestation has transformed from a battle of ideas into a marketplace of personal profit. They treat the public mandate as personal equity, a commodity to be bartered for a ministerial berth or a corporate concession."

**PSIR PAPER II, 2025:** "India continues to invoke its time-tested policy of strategic autonomy vis-à-vis both the USA and Russia... Comment."

**PSIR PAPER II, 2025:** "For India, a multipolar world order would also mean a multipolar Asia. Comment."

**PSIR PAPER II, 2025:** "Non-Alignment 2.0 underscores India's unique aspiration to emerge as a site for an alternative universality. Comment."

**PSIR PAPER II, 2024:** "Discuss the rationale behind replacing the 'Asia-Pacific strategy with the new term 'Indo-Pacific' strategy."

**PSIR PAPER II, 2024:** "Discuss the future of SAARC in the light of India's increased focus on other regional groupings like ASEAN and BIMSTEC."

**PSIR PAPER I, 2023:** The decade 1989-1999 has created an epochal shift in the Indian party system at the national level. Identify the major national trends in the party system during this era.

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● ONGOING

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