PSIR OPTIONAL · UPSC CSE EDITION 2026

# PYQ Vault

| 560 | 50 | 10 |
|---|---|---|
| questions | days | years of PYQs |

## DAY 45 India & the Global Centres of Power, Part 1

- 10 questions

Every question carries a Flow Snapshot, and the channel carries a handwritten model answer. **No PYQ will be unfamiliar.**

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ForumIAS

## PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2017 · 15 marks

The recent differences between India and Russia are the result of misconceptions than facts. Elucidate.

## FLOW SNAPSHOT — *how the answer moves*

**Intro routes**

R1 2016 Pakistan exercise + Indo-Pacific coolness read as betrayal → statement half right → nostalgia explains anger / structure explains divergence R2 misconception is real but misplaced → not about Russian conduct but about Indian expectation of Russia as balancer → differences follow from alignment

**Body flow**

**Raghavan**: 2016 regret not analysis → never a fairy tale → 1962 intelligence to Beijing, Tashkent pressure → Pakistan outreach thin → so far the stem holds → but stated differences are open: artificially imposed construct, **Lavrov** on Quad → India's documented shift: US top supplier 2014 → Major Defence Partner, LEMOA, COMCASA → cause is alignment → **Raja Mohan**: structural contradiction, threat inversion (West vs China) → **Zakharov**: Russia from non-alignment with India to junior coalition with Beijing → real misconception located

**Counter-view**

*(carried early, paragraph two)* → stem's case at full strength: Russian realism is old, Pakistan outreach limited → anger rests on romanticism, not evidence

**Conclusion routes**

R1 misconception explains anger / alignment explains difference → crude base survives mid-2026 → **Nadkarni's** bound → manageable, not imaginary R2 differences real but bounded → correction needed in Indian expectations, not in Russian conduct

Russia's exercise with Pakistan in 2016 and its coolness towards the Indo-Pacific were viewed in India as betrayal.

Srinath Raghavan argues that 2016 produced regret rather than analysis. The partnership was never a fairy tale. Moscow passed intelligence on India to Beijing in 1962 & leaned on Delhi at Tashkent. Its outreach to Pakistan has stayed thin, since existing ties serve Russian purposes.

Russia calls the Indo-Pacific an artificially imposed construct, and Sergey Lavrov describes the Quad as an Asian NATO. The US displaced Russia as its largest arms supplier in 2014, followed by Major Defence Partner status, LEMOA & COMCASA.

C. Raja Mohan identifies a structural contradiction between Russian and Indian security imperatives. Moscow treats West as its main threat and China as the remedy.

Aleksei Zakharov traces Russian thinking from a new non-alignment with India to a coalition with Beijing where Moscow is the lesser partner. India's real misconception was assuming the two would never combine this far.

Misconception explains the anger whereas alignment explains the difference. Russia supplied about half of India's crude in Mid-2026, again its largest supplier.

Vidya Nadkarni states arms dependence and the preference for autonomy will keep it alive. The differences are manageable and not imaginary.

## PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2017 · 20 marks

The natural behaviour of India and the United States is likely to serve each other's interests. Hence, a deliberate strategy of dovetailing their efforts will obviously benefit both. Elaborate.

## FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

**Intro routes**

R1 Nehru, 1949, natural allies → fifty years of distance → **Kux**, estranged democracies → shared democracy settled nothing

R2 naturalness is structural, not sentimental → structure changed, behaviour converged → dovetailing pays as far as structure holds

**Body flow**

China's rise is the structure → **Varshney's** new triangle, first courts the third → India's security search + America's balance search → overlap needs no planning → **Menon**, unstated but China-driven → deliberate effort converts overlap into capability → 1990s dovetailing with engagement and enlargement → Act East + rebalance on one line → Major Defence Partner, foundational agreements, iCET, F414 → defence trade under $1bn (2008) to over $25bn (mid-2025)

**Counter-view**

the certainty overreaches → **Hagerty**, ally's treatment without alliance → complications over China avoided → neo-nonalignment as default → Himalayan doubt → S-400, tariffs, visas

**Conclusion routes**

R1 pays where practical: technology, maritime security, supply chains → weakens where continental threats meet global priorities R2 **Pant**, key partner at a principled distance → entente, not alliance, is the form that fits

Nehru called India & the US natural allies in 1949, though 50 years of distance followed. Dennis Kux described them as estranged democracies.

Their behaviour converges today because the structure changed, and dovetailing pays to the extent that structure holds. The structure is China's rise. Ashutosh Varshney calls it a new triangle, resting on a realist rule i.e. when the first & second ranked powers fight, the first courts the third.

India seeks security against China, US a stable balance in Asia and neither has to plan the overlap. Shivshankar Menon argues that neither government says so openly, though China's ascent has been a significant motivating factor.

The Act East & the US rebalance run along one line. Major Defence partner status, the foundational agreements, iCET & F414 engine production carry it further.

Defence trade grew from under a billion dollars in 2008 to over 25 billion by mid 2025.

Devin T. Hagerty observes that India wants the treatment of an ally without becoming one, taking the security of alignment without its complications over China. Its default posture stays neo-nonalignment. Delhi doubts that US shares its worry about Chinese pressure in the Himalayas, and the S-400, tariffs & visa denials keep friction alive.

Dovetailing therefore pays where it stays practical i.e. tech, maritime security & supply chains. It weakens where India's continental threats & US's global priorities part.

Harsh V. Pant treats India as key to the US effort to hold a stable balance in the Indo-Pacific, while keeping a principled distance. Hagerty's entente, informal & without treaty obligation is the form that suits both.

**PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION** UPSC 2018 · 15 marks

## Discuss the role of Indian diaspora in promoting Indo-US relations.

**FLOW SNAPSHOT** — *how the answer moves*

**Intro routes**

R1 **Hagerty's** three drivers of convergence → diaspora clout alongside Cold War's end + India's reforms → channels, not lobby R2 diaspora sits between domestic and systemic levels → converts India's economic opening into American constituency → conversion stops short of policy

**Body flow**

conversion as the mechanism → education renewal (17.9 per cent, 7.5 billion dollars) → H-1B networks carry IT and services trade → Fulbright-Nehru + GIAN institutionalise → continuity across administrations → **Kapur**: ideas, networks, reputation, not money → political weight overstated → Carnegie 2026: inflation and jobs lead, two per cent place India first → **Dhruva Jaishankar**: no single bloc, generational and ideological splits

**Counter-view**

the bridging channel is the exposed one → visa denials, backlogs, hundred-thousand-dollar H-1B fee on a group filing 71 per cent → **Aghi**: rejection rates + GSP loss thin people-to-people ties

**Conclusion routes**

R1 durable in society, not settled in policy R2 stability no treaty supplies, but market access and mobility stay with governments

Devin T. Hagerty places the clout of a prosperous Indo-US community among the drivers of post-Cold war convergence, with the Cold War's end & India's reforms.

As the largest users of H-1B visas, Indians built the networks that carry IT and services trade. Fulbright-Nehru fellowships & GIAN institutionalised this, giving continuity across changes of administration in both capitals.

Devesh Kapur calls the diaspora as the carrier of ideas, networks & reputation and not of money alone. Carnegie's 2026 Indian-US attitudes survey, co-authored by Milan Vaishnav & Kapur, finds inflation & jobs leading Indian-US priorities. Only 2% placed ties with India first. Dhruva Jaishankar adds that the community is no single bloc, divided by generation & ideology.

Visa denials, appointment backlogs & a new $100,000 fee on H-1B petitions fall on a group filing 71% of them in fiscal 2024. Mukesh Aghi links rejection rates & the loss of GSP benefits to thinning people-to-people ties.

The diaspora therefore makes the relationship durable in society rather than settling it in policy. It gives the partnership a stability no treaty can provide, but market access & mobility remain matters for governments.

**PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION** UPSC 2019 · 10 marks

## How is India responding to the idea of Indo-Pacific?

**FLOW SNAPSHOT** — *how the answer moves*

**Intro routes**

R1 accepted geography / joined institutions / refused alliance → Shangri-La 2018 sets India's own terms R2 Indo-Pacific arrives as someone else's construct → India rewrites it as inclusive, ASEAN-centred → response is adaptation, never adoption

**Body flow**

**Modi's** Shangri-La formulation → Quad raised to summit level, IPOI with Washington inside, IORA, two IPEF pillars → Act East, SAGAR, Project Mausam folded behind net security provider → 2018 US paper assigns the same role → Malabar with Japan permanent 2015, Andaman build-up

**Counter-view**

Moscow's artificial construct, **Lavrov's** Asian NATO, Beijing's Asia-Pacific → India manages both, endorses neither

**Conclusion routes**

R1 Pentagon drops Indo prefix June 2026, NDS silent on Quad → India now holds the idea its sponsor is loosening R2 geography accepted, alliance refused, ownership earned → remaining test is implementation, not vocabulary

India has accepted the geography, joined the institutions & refused the alliance. Narendra Modi's Shangri-La formulation of June 2018 fixed the terms: an Indo-Pacific built on inclusiveness, openness & ASEAN centrality, not a containment bloc.

India works the Quad, raised to summit level, the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative that US has joined, IORA & two pillars of IPEF. Act East, SAGAR & Project Mausam sit behind the ambition of net security provider, a role the 2018 US strategy paper assigned it. Capability followed through Malabar, with Japan permanent since 2015, and the Andaman build-up.

Russia treats the construct as artificial & Sergey Lavrov calls the Quad an Asian NATO & Beijing prefers Asia-Pacific. India manages both without endorsing US formulations.

The pentagon dropped the Indo prefix in June 2026 and Harsh V. Pant argues that the new defence strategy is silent on the Quad.

C. Raja Mohan views Modi's July 2026 Pacific tour as India holding an idea US is loosening. The remaining test is whether Delhi can implement what it signs.

**PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION** UPSC 2020 · 15 marks

Discuss the significance of Indo-US strategic partnership and its implications for India's security and national defence.

**FLOW SNAPSHOT** — *how the answer moves*

| | |
|---|---|
| Intro routes | R1 estrangement to entente (**Hagerty**) → close in practice, no treaty obligation → autonomy kept, defence stays India's own responsibility R2 what changed is Indian military capability, not American obligation → so measure the partnership in capability, not guarantees |
| Body flow | foundational architecture mapped one-to-one (GSOMIA information security → LEMOA logistics → COMCASA secure communication → BECA geospatial data, navigation, precision targeting) → Major Defence Partner 2016 + STA-1 2018, technology release eased → western Indian Ocean cooperation vs Gwadar and Djibouti → the sharper question: capability or only inventory → **Panetta** 2012, move beyond buyer-seller → October 2025 ten-year Framework as the formal answer: co-production in surveillance, undersea domain awareness, munitions; India as regional maintenance hub |
| Counter-view | **Pant** and **Mishra**: pressure to buy may pull it back into the buyer-seller pattern rejected in 2015 → **Pant** and **Bommakanti**: 2026 NDS names India nowhere, silent on the Quad as security provider → commitment cannot be assumed |
| Conclusion routes | R1 deterrence raised, not underwritten → value equals what India absorbs and builds R2 **Staniland**: hard-pressed power → the binding limit sits in Indian capacity, not in American intent |

India-US ties moved from estrangement to what Devin T. Hagerty calls an entente. They are close in practice, informal in obligation, tied to no treaty.

The partnership has transformed what the Indian military can do, while promising nothing about US help in a crisis. India preserved its autonomy & accepted that its defence stays its own responsibility.

GSOMIA, LEMOA, COMCASA & BECA cover information security, reciprocal logistics, secure communication & geospatial data for navigation & precision targeting. Major Defence Partner status in 2016 & STA-1 in 2018 eased technology release. Naval Cooperation in the western Indian Ocean answers Chinese presence at Gwadar & Djibouti.

Leon Panetta urged in 2012 that defence trade move past a buyer-seller relationship into co-production & joint research. Signed in October 2025, the 10 year framework for the US-India Major Defence partnership focuses on 'joint production in surveillance, undersea domain awareness & munitions and India as regional maintenance hub.

Harsh V. Pant & Vivek Mishra argue that pressure to buy could pull the relationship back into the buyer-seller pattern both sides rejected in 2015. Pant & Kartik Bommakanti states that the 2026 US National Defence Strategy makes no specific mention of India & says nothing about the Quad as a security provider.

Paul Staniland argues that India is a hard-pressed power, and what this partnership adds to national defence is only what India can absorb & build.

**PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION** UPSC 2021 · 20 marks

‘Relations between India and Russia are rooted in history, mutual trust and mutually beneficial cooperation.’ Discuss.

**FLOW SNAPSHOT** — *how the answer moves*

**Intro routes**
R1 the phrase is India’s own official vocabulary → all three claims hold, but not equally → history and trust inherited, mutual benefit must be earned afresh R2 a treaty that outlived one of its signatories → the base is real → the question is not whether the three foundations exist but which of them still grows

**Body flow**
history is structural, not sentimental (Bhilai 1955 / 1971 Treaty renewed 1993, 2000 / **Sikri** / Cold War plants still on Russian servicing) → trust is a record, not affection (veto, no sanctions after 1998 / **Raghavan’s** realism, 1962, Tashkent / predictability not agreement / July 2026 protest followed by full review) → mutual benefit has thinned (70% equipment, BrahMos as joint production / **Zakharov**: $68.7bn FY 2024-25, crude ~80%, Russia 31st in investment)

**Counter-view**
**Nadkarni**, pragmatic and market-driven without the old strategic logic → **Sharma**, Russia can no longer balance China → December 2025 summit: small joint ventures, no large agreement

**Conclusion routes**
R1 right about the foundations, silent about their direction → sustainable in old spheres, stagnant where new ones are undefined R2 history and trust hold it; only mutual benefit can grow it → the pillar that needs renewal is the one policy can actually touch

The partnership rests officially on equality, trust & mutual benefit. History & trust are inherited & still work but mutual benefit must be earned afresh, and it has narrowed.

Soviet assistance built Bhilai in 1955, after the West refused a public sector plant. The 1971 Treaty, renewed in 1993 & 2000, survived the Soviet collapse. For Rajiv Sikri, Russia remains a steadfast privileged partner. The inheritance still operates i.e. plants raised with Soviet help depend on Russian supplies & servicing today.

Moscow used its veto for India & refused to join the sanctions after 1998. Srinath Raghavan treats Russian policy as always realist, as 1962 & Tashkent showed. Trust here means predictability rather than agreement. In July 2026 India summoned Russia's chargé d'affaires over 4 Indian seafarers killed off Odesa & reviewed the partnership two days later.

Over 70% of Indian equipment is Russian in origin & BrahMos moved the tie from purchase to joint production. Aleksei Zakharov argue that trade reached $68.7 billion in FY 2024-25, but crude was about 80% of it, & Russia ranks 31st as a source of investment.

Vidya Nadkarni calls the post-Soviet relationship pragmatic & market driven, lacking the strategic logic of the old nexus. Raj Kumar Sharma states that Russia can no longer balance China for India. The December 2025 summit fitted this, producing small joint ventures and no large agreement.

The statement is right about the foundations & silent about their direction i.e. sustainable in the old spheres, stagnant where new ones remain undefined. History and trust hold it & only mutual benefit can grow it.

## PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2022 · 10 marks

Explain the significance of Basic Exchange and Co-operation Agreement (BECA) for Indo-US strategic relations.

## FLOW SNAPSHOT — *how the answer moves*

**Intro routes**

R1 Oct 2020, third 2+2 → last of the four → GSOMIA, LEMOA, COMCASA complete R2 NGA to MoD → partnership shifts from selling platforms to sharing the data they run on

**Body flow**

content: geomagnetic/gravity, charts, imagery, high-quality GPS → navigation + precision targeting → Oct 2025 ten-year framework → co-production in surveillance, undersea domain awareness → hinge: access ≠ capability

**Counter-view**

**Sinha**: no obligation to supply, nothing on Pakistan, China depends on the administration → March 2026 imagery halt → India announces its own Defence Geospatial Agency

**Conclusion routes**

R1 capability + interoperability without a duty to defend → entente, not alliance R2 **Pant**: 2026 US defence strategy does not name India → better eyes, borrowed, not India's own

Signed at the third 2+2 dialogue in October 2020, BECA completed the four foundational agreements, after GSOMIA (2002), LEMOA (2016) & COMCASA (2018).

It ties America's National Geospatial-Intelligence agency to India's Ministry of Defence & moves the partnership from selling platforms to sharing the data they need.

Its content is geomagnetic & gravity data, maps, nautical and aeronautical charts, imagery & high-quality GPS for navigation & precision targeting. The 10-year defence framework of October 2025 extends this into co-production in surveillance and undersea domain awareness.

Manoj Sinha argues that US need not supply in every case, is unlikely to help on Pakistan, and may be less obliging on China under another administration.

In March 2026 a US imagery firm halted West Asian sales for a fortnight. India has since announced its own Defence Geospatial Agency.

BECA raises capability & interoperability without obliging US to defend India, an entente rather than an alliance. Harsh V. Pant views the 2026 US defence strategy, which does not mention India, as a warning against assuming that commitment.

Therefore, BECA lends India better eyes and it does not make them India's own.

**PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION** UPSC 2023 · 20 marks

Arms trade, economic ties and congruent geo-political interests are no longer the three pillars of India - Russia relationship in the emerging strategic context. Comment.

**FLOW SNAPSHOT** — *how the answer moves*

| | |
|---|---|
| Intro routes | R1 right about one pillar, overstated about two → congruence gave the other two their purpose R2 pillars not fallen but turned round → dependence survives, partnership does not |
| Body flow | arms still densest → SIPRI: 70 per cent (2011-15) to 40 per cent (2021-25), France/Israel/US take the gap → but India absorbs close to half of Russia's total exports → dependence inverted, not ended → economy: US$68.7bn but crude four-fifths, Indian exports under five billion → size up, content down → congruence: Indo-Pacific as artificially imposed construct, **Lavrov's** Asian NATO, no-limits partnership leaves Russia junior to India's principal rival → **Raja Mohan**, rework the great power sums → the cost: no defence deal at the December 2025 summit, **Zakharov** reads the logistics agreement as technical because outlooks do not align |
| Counter-view | **Nadkarni**: autonomy, ageing Russian arsenal, willingness to co-produce → no withering |
| Conclusion routes | R1 pillars bear weight without giving direction → **Raghavan's** transactional as settled form R2 new areas named but not built → managing a dependence, not building a partnership |

MODEL ANSWER

Arms & trade have not collapsed but what they rest on has changed. Congruent geopolitical interest gave the other two their purpose and it alone has gone.

SIPRI's March 2026 data puts Russia's share of Indian arms imports at 40% for 2021-25, against about 70% in 2011-15. France, Israel and the US gained the ground Russia lost. Close to half of all Russian arms exports in the same period went to India. Moscow needs this trade more than Delhi does.

The economic pillar has grown in size & narrowed in content. Trade reached $68.7 billion in 2024-25, but crude is close to four-fifths of it and Indian exports stay under five billion.

Moscow calls the Indo-Pacific an artificially imposed construct & Sergey Lavrov described the Quad as an Asian NATO.

The no-limits partnership with China leaves Russia the junior partner of India's principal rival. C. Raja Mohan holds that India must rework its great power sums.

The December 2025 summit announced no defence deal and Aleksei Zakharov treats the reciprocal logistics agreement of 2025 as technical rather than strategic.

Vidya Nadkarni's caution holds. Autonomy, an ageing Russian arsenal and Moscow's readiness to co-produce mean the relationship will not wither.

Srinath Raghavan called the relationship transactional, and is now its settled form. Until energy transition, digital tech, the Arctic & connectivity become working projects, India & Russia will manage a dependence rather than build a partnership.

**PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION** UPSC 2024 · 10 marks

Discuss the rationale behind replacing the "Asia-Pacific" strategy with the new term "Indo-Pacific" strategy.

**FLOW SNAPSHOT** — *how the answer moves*

| | |
|---|---|
| Intro routes | R1 Asia-Pacific: 1960s origin, APEC 1980s → rim-centred map, India outside, Indian Ocean read apart → renaming = deciding who counts R2 a region is a strategic choice, not a coastline → the old map left out India and the Indian Ocean → the new name written to bring India in |
| Body flow | Hormuz + Malacca, half of maritime oil trade → India's weight cannot sit off the map → **Khurana** 2007, alternative that takes India in → **Abe's** confluence, Australian + American support → both oceans one theatre → Quad's premise → India past South Asia |
| Counter-view | resistance mirrors adoption → Beijing prefers Asia-Pacific, keeps China central → Moscow: artificial → **Chacko**: trade density stayed Asia-Pacific, region built from anxiety over China, India as balancer |
| Conclusion routes | R1 strategic, not cartographic → 2025 NSS hemisphere first, 2026 NDS deterrence second-order → the name holds only while the strategy is funded R2 renaming decided who counts → India gained standing, China lost centrality → a map survives on its sponsors' investment, not on its logic |

Asia-Pacific took shape in the 1960s and was institutionalised by APEC in the 1980s. That map arranged Asia around the Pacific rim, kept India outside, and read the Indian Ocean separately.

Hormuz and Malacca carry more than half of maritime oil trade, and India could not stay off the map. Gurpreet Khurana proposed Indo-Pacific in 2007 as an alternative that would take India in. Shinzo Abe's confluence of the two seas, with Australian & US support, carried it into policy. Both oceans as one theatre is the Quad's premise, and it lifts India past South Asia.

Beijing prefers Asia-Pacific, which keeps China at the centre and Moscow calls the Indo-Pacific artificial.

Priya Chacko argues that trade stayed concentrated in the Asia-Pacific, and the new region was built out of anxiety about China, with India as balancer.

The 2025 US security strategy places the Western Hemisphere first, and the 2026 defence strategy makes Indo-Pacific deterrence a second-order aim.

Therefore, renaming decided who counts and the name will hold only while the strategy behind it is funded.

**PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION** UPSC 2024 · 15 marks

"India and USA have become such strong strategic partners that they need not become formal allies." Comment.

**FLOW SNAPSHOT** — *how the answer moves*

| | |
|---|---|
| Intro routes | R1 **Hagerty's** entente → informal, outside treaty, flexible on what support is owed → treatment of an ally without the status of one R2 claim right about where the partnership stands → wrong about why alliance stays away → obligation is the price India will not pay |
| Body flow | partnership delivers most of what alliance would → GSOMIA / LEMOA / COMCASA / BECA → interoperability without Article-5 → ten-year Framework, Oct 2025 → what alliance adds is obligation → freedom of manoeuvre + non-aligned record → **Parpiani** and **Pant**, autonomy *through* partnerships → **Jaishankar**, partner not subordinate ally |
| Counter-view | the design has a price → 2025 tariffs at fifty per cent, half for Russian oil → framework signed while tariffs stood → February 2026 reset to eighteen → **Pant** and **Bommakanti**, 2026 NDS silent on India and the Quad |
| Conclusion routes | R1 alliance would not have stopped the tariffs → a burden-shifting Washington promises little more R2 India's reply was capability and hedging, not a treaty → deep in capability, shallow in obligation, both prefer it there |

Devin T. Hagerty calls the relationship after 2008 an entente: informal, outside treaty, flexible about what support is owed in a crisis. India wants the treatment of an ally without the status of one.

GSOMIA, LEMOA, COMCASA & BECA give information security, logistics, secure communication & geospatial data, and so interoperability, without an Article-5 commitment. The 10 year framework for the major defence partnership, signed in October 2025, carries it a decade further.

Obligation would restrict India's freedom of manoeuvre and cut against a long non-aligned record. Kashish Parpiani & Harsh V. Pant view autonomy as attainable through strengthened partnerships, not by avoiding them. S. Jaishankar's line is partner, not subordinate ally.

US tariffs on Indian goods reached 50% in 2025, half a penalty for Russian oil, and the defence framework was signed. A February 2026 deal brought the rate down to 18%. Pant, with Kartik Bommakanti, argues that the 2026 National Defense Strategy mentions India nowhere and is silent on the Quad as a security provider.

The alliance would not have stopped the tariffs and a US asking partners to carry their own defence promises little more. India met 2025 with capability & hedging, not treaty.

Therefore, the partnership stays deep in capability & shallow in obligation, and both prefer in there.

# All 10 questions — PDF + handwritten answers

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