

PSIR & GS-2

DAILY BRIEF

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Firstpost.



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Under PM Modi's leadership, India's foreign policy has grown confident in its own skin

The prime minister is a generational leader and a global statesman, with a unique blend of vision, timing and influence.



Context

Over the last twelve years India's foreign policy has moved from caution to confidence, and from accepting global rules to shaping them.

Facts

■ **Rule-shaping agenda** : India pushed the Global South's shift "from rule-takers to rule-shapers", with a IO-proposal global governance reform roadmap.

■ **BRICS positioning** : India kept BRICS 'non-Western' rather than 'anti-Western', which protected its strategic flexibility.

■ **Security widened** : Security now covers economic, technological and health resilience, beyond military preparedness and counterterrorism.

Analytical Crux

India has stopped reacting to the international order and started shaping it. India produced an agreed G20 declaration in 2023 despite the Ukraine divide, and a unanimous BRICS declaration in 2026, while keeping BRICS non-Western rather than anti-Western so that the Global South need not pick a side. The aim is to keep every major door open i.e. a technology partnership with the United States, energy ties with Russia despite Western pressure, and normalisation with China on India's condition of peace on the border. Security widens to cover supply chains, technology and health, and help to neighbours. Therefore, this record reads as multi-alignment in practice, built on institutions and continuity as much as on personal diplomacy.

Verbatim Quotes

"A reflexively cautious approach has given way to self-assured maturity, and its regional footprint has extended to the global stage."

"In this framework, true sovereignty requires shielding the nation from weaponised supply chains and technological dependencies."

– Sreemoy Talukdar

The Russia-China bilateral deepens



Context

Russia and China, rivals after the Sino-Soviet split, have built a close partnership. The reasons for it are a settled border, Western sanctions on Russia, growing trade and warm public opinion.

Facts

■ **Public opinion** : A Levada Centre poll of January 2026 found 83 per cent of Russians view China favourably. The figure was under 50 per cent in 1996.

■ **Trade** : Bilateral trade grew 22 per cent in the first half of 2026, to over 135 billion US dollars.

■ **Putin's state visit to China in May 2026** : marked 25 years of the Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation.

Analytical Crux

Russia and China have moved on from the Sino-Soviet split. Its foundation was the step-by-step settlement of their border between 1991 and 2008. Western pressure pushed Moscow towards Beijing, first after the Georgia war of 2008 and more after the Ukraine war and the sanctions. China has also built the tie through visa-free travel, students, tourists and dubbed television, and Russian opinion moved with diplomacy, from under 50 per cent favourable in 1996 to 83 per cent in 2026. Parts of the Moscow elite resent Russia's growing dependence on China, while Beijing values Russia as an energy source and a partner against Western influence in Central Asia and the Global South.

Verbatim Quotes

"Beijing essentially views Moscow as both a reliable source of energy and a partner to counter Western expansion in Central Asia and the Global South, a role the Russians are comfortable with."

– Ajay Kamalakaran

China’s strategy amid West Asia’s security realignment

China’s strategy amid West Asia’s security realignment

Chinese President Xi Jinping’s visit to Egypt (September 1-2, 2026) marked a shift in Beijing’s engagement with West Asia. In talks with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, Mr. Xi set out a four-point formula for a new regional security architecture. Beijing has long talked about the need to rethink regional security, but this is the first time it has elaborated what such an architecture should look like.

Among the four points, the first is the need to “unleash the internal momentum of regional common security”. The core component of this is to reduce the “interference by external forces” while supporting regional countries to strengthen dialogue on peace and security. Second, Mr. Xi called for the issues in the region to be discussed comprehensively, while prioritising the goal of a two-state solution for the Palestinian question. Third, he stressed that “lasting stability and security in West Asia relies fundamentally on development”. In doing so, he articulated Beijing’s opposition to the weaponisation of international waterways, while positioning economic diplomacy and development cooperation as the preferred instrument for Chinese engagement. Finally, Mr. Xi insisted that all these efforts must happen through the United Nations framework.

A shifting security order

The announcement comes at an interesting moment in the evolution of West Asian geopolitics. The United States-Israeli war against Iran, the fracturing of Gulf security assumptions, disrupted energy flows and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, and rising Türkiye-Israel tensions have all pressed on Chinese interests. Pakistan’s brokering of a U.S.-Iran understanding, which Beijing supported, offered a template for extending influence without exposure. Then came the Mecca joint Defence Agreement on August 7, 2026 between Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye.

In theory, a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-style mutual defence agreement would



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The Chinese President’s visit to Egypt has outlined Beijing’s approach

not be welcome in Beijing. Over the years, the Chinese leadership has repeatedly pushed back against what it says is Cold War mentality and bloc politics. But in this case, it has been extremely cautious. There has been no formal comment, no direct leadership statement, and no word from its ambassadors. That, however, does not mean that there has not been an internal debate.

Mecca pact, Chinese views

For instance, Long Chen of Renmin University’s Chongyang Institute has argued that the Mecca pact might actually serve American purposes. Every administration since (then) U.S. President Barack Obama has sought to shed direct security costs, the 2025 National Security Strategy says as much explicitly, and regional states arming themselves is precisely what offshore balancing requires. He noted that all three signatories remain dependent on American weapons and intelligence. Of course, what all of this ignores is the difficult security relationship that Mecca pact members have with Israel, a key American ally in the region.

Others such as Zhou Li, a former Vice-Minister of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China has argued that the pact is an exercise of regional strategic autonomy, produced by the erosion of American hegemony, and consonant with China’s Global Security Initiative. Mr. Zhou has contended that comparing this agreement to a NATO-style treaty is foolhardy, as there is no published text, no joint command, no cost-sharing, and no binding obligation.

Essentially, Mr. Zhou concludes that such a pact dilutes American primacy without creating a rival bloc that Beijing would have to position itself against. Mr. Zhou also suggested that the next member to join the agreement could be Egypt, which is where Mr. Xi’s statement and the choice of venue for it are significant. In calling to “unleash the internal momentum of regional common security”, Mr. Xi seems to have weighed

in on the domestic debate, leaning in favour of Mr. Zhou’s argument.

What likely prompted him to do so is the belief that while Washington remains the preponderant military power in the region, its ability to defend allies against Iranian strikes, to enforce its will in the Strait, and to sustain commitment as its dependence on Gulf energy declines are all now open questions. Gulf states are, therefore, hedging, buying insurance from Pakistan and others. In other words, the American credibility problem has become an opportunity too juicy to miss out on. This is a moment during which Beijing can throw cautious support behind attempts among regional actors to pursue autonomy, with little practical cost to itself.

Beijing’s interests

China has significant economic and energy stakes in West Asia. If regional states are building their own architecture, Beijing can support the process economically and remain militarily disengaged. It already has substantial defence and technology trade with Pakistan, growing ties with Saudi Arabia, and openings in Türkiye and Egypt. Saudi Arabia and Egypt together absorbed roughly a third of China’s combat drone deliveries in the decade to 2023, according to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) data. Riyadh has also built domestic solid-fuelled ballistic missile capacity with Chinese technical assistance and is increasingly attracting Chinese technology investment. So there could be money to be made and influence to be cemented in terms of defence and technological engagement.

In essence, the formula announced by Mr. Xi in Cairo is a significant position being articulated with regard to the emerging security framework in West Asia. Whether this framework will demand certain guarantees that China remains reluctant to offer is something that must be noted going forward. More interestingly, it seems that despite all the friction, Beijing and Washington might be able to find some common ground in West Asia.

Context

What Xi Jinping's four-point plan for West Asian security reveals about China's approach to the region.

Facts

■ **Cairo formula** : In talks with President El-Sisi, Xi set out a four-point formula for a new West Asian security architecture.

■ **China** : unleash the internal momentum of regional common security by reducing "interference by external forces".

■ China opposes the weaponisation of international waterways and prefers economic diplomacy.

Analytical Crux

Xi's Cairo formula is China's first detailed plan for West Asian security. Its idea is that the region should look after its own security, with fewer outside powers, development as the base of stability and the United Nations as the framework. It comes as the war on Iran, the closure of Hormuz and doubts about American protection push Gulf states to hedge. *The Mecca pact focuses on regional strategic autonomy i.e. a loose arrangement that dilutes American primacy without forming a bloc China must oppose.* China gains influence through arms and technology trade while staying militarily disengaged.

Verbatim Quotes

"This is a moment during which Beijing can throw cautious support behind attempts among regional actors to pursue autonomy, with little practical cost to itself."

– Manoj Kewalramani

- PSIR 2026, Paper II: India has adopted multi-alignment to fulfill its core values and interests in International relations. Discuss.
- PSIR 2026, Paper II: Critically evaluate India-Russia relations in the 21st century. How have both the countries responded to America meddling in their relations in the recent times.
- PSIR 2026, Paper II: India has recognised that West Asia is not a single contest, but a tangle of rivalries, bargains and anxieties. Comment.
- PSIR 2025, Paper II: Critically analyze the different phases of India's foreign policy since independence. How justified, do you think, is S. Jaishankar's classification of the current phase as the phase of 'energetic diplomacy'?
- GS 2025, Paper II: "The reform process in the United Nations remains unresolved, because of the delicate imbalance of East and West and entanglement of the USA vs. Russo-Chinese alliance." Examine and critically evaluate the East-West policy confrontations in this regard.
- GS 2025, Paper II: "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?

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| 03 | THE ANALYSIS | The argument it raises, and the positions taken on it. |
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