

PSIR & GS-2

DAILY BRIEF

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Briefs, scans the best academic platforms, national newspapers & leading think tanks to pick the most relevant articles & research. It converts them into crisp, high-impact points you can directly use in your mains answers.



PSIR OPTIONAL BY
Amit Pratap Singh
| ForumIAS |

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Daily Brief · Source Plan (Monday to Saturday)

Common Daily

The Hindu · The Indian Express · Deccan Herald · The Statesman

read every day, alongside the day's sources below

Day-wise Sources

Monday

ORF (Observer Research Foundation) · *Foreign Affairs* · *The Diplomat*

Tuesday

MP-IDSA · *EPW* (Economic & Political Weekly) · *Gateway House*

Wednesday

Firstpost · *South Asia Monitor* · *ICWA* (Indian Council of World Affairs)

Thursday

ORF · *Frontline* · *Bar & Bench* · *World Focus*

Friday

MP-IDSA · *Carnegie Endowment* · *VIF* (Vivekananda International Foundation)

Saturday

Firstpost · *Project Syndicate* · *The Economist*

As per relevance, articles from other relevant sources such as NatStrat, ThePrint and The Telegraph (India) will also be included.

Assessing South Africa's G20 Presidency



Context

The US will host the 2026 G20 Summit on 14-15 December but has not invited South Africa. Rajiv Bhatia reviews its 2025 presidency, the first on African soil, which delivered a successful summit but ended in a rupture with Washington.

Facts

■ **A landmark presidency :** last of the first G20 cycle (2008-2025) and fourth straight Global South presidency.

■ **Johannesburg Declaration :** adopted by consensus of those present, with 122 paragraphs on poverty, inequality and climate change.

■ **The rupture :** after the gavel row, Trump barred South Africa from the 2026 G20.

■ **India's proposals :** six in all, including a G20 Africa Skills Multiplier and a Critical Minerals Circularity Initiative.

Analytical Crux

South Africa carried the Global South agenda of the Indonesian, Indian and Brazilian presidencies onto African soil, through a new Compact with Africa, a G20 Africa Expert Panel and a proposal for an International Panel on Inequality. The United States stayed away from ministerial meetings through the year, boycotted the Johannesburg Summit and then barred South Africa from its own presidency. Six leaders were absent, and only 67 per cent of members sent their leaders. A declaration that lacks the backing of the forum's most powerful member will be weakly implemented, and there are signs that the G20 may revert to a narrow macroeconomic mandate. Therefore, the Miami Summit will show whether the development tilt secured by four successive presidencies survives, and whether the G20 can still work by consensus with all members on an equal footing.

Verbatim Quotes

"Thus, the G20's tilt towards developing economies, secured after strenuous endeavours by the past four presidencies, may prove ineffective, after all."

- Rajiv Bhatia

Truce without Trust

Opinion

Truce without trust

The Trump-Xi summit has demonstrated an important distinction in great-power diplomacy: reducing tension is not the same as resolving conflict.

Statesman News Service | New Delhi | September 29, 2026 9:02 am



Context

The Trump-Xi summit extended the US-China trade truce and eased tension. The Statesman argues that the underlying contest remains in place, with Taiwan as its most dangerous fault line.

Facts

■ **Trade truce extended** : *the most tangible outcome, yet temporary; tariffs, rare earths and advanced technology go to another round.*

■ **Taiwan** : *Trump delayed a proposed \$14 billion arms package and called it a negotiating instrument.*

■ **Mutual restraint** : *China needs overseas markets; the US wants undisrupted supply chains and critical minerals.*

■ **AI** : *pre-summit talks on communication over serious AI risks led to no substantial agreement.*

Analytical Crux

Reducing tension is different from resolving conflict. The summit created breathing space while the strategic contest stayed firmly in place. Restraint rests on mutual economic need. Xi needs stable external conditions while China strengthens its economy, and Trump wants gains and leverage without an uncontrolled confrontation. Neither has abandoned its strategic objectives. Beijing treats US military support for Taiwan as a challenge to its claims, and AI and semiconductors are now tied to national security, so cooperation there stays bounded by distrust. Personal rapport can ease negotiations, but it cannot erase competing national interests. Therefore, a managed rivalry gives the rest of the world some predictability, but unless the accommodation turns into durable rules for competition, the next crisis over Taiwan, technology or trade will test the new warmth.

Verbatim Quotes

"The summit's real achievement, then, is modest but consequential: Washington and Beijing have shown that they can manage their rivalry without resolving it."

- Editorial, The Statesman

Time runs short for Iran and America

Time runs short for Iran and America

It may be tempting to see the recent jerky resumption of negotiations between the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) and the United States as *déjà vu*. Similar attempts resulted in the June 17 Memorandum that unravelled within weeks, and the two belligerents resumed their respective blockades of the Strait of Hormuz and Iranian ports.

A different moment now
So, what is different this time? They have both realised that time is not on their side. Their respective domestic considerations make continuation of the seven-month-old war costly and unsustainable. In the short run, going by the past pattern, September 26 saw United States President Trump's dismissal of Iran's seven-point proposal, which may be an opening gambit seeking better terms and sequencing. While the Iranian initiative may betray their economic desperation, it also showcases their reasonableness to the Trump sceptics in America and the region who regard his "War of Choice" against Iran as ill-begotten.

The November 3 mid-term congressional elections could upend Mr. Trump as a lame duck. Iranian hardliners, too, need to exhaust this option to justify their aggressiveness. In the longer run, Mr. Trump needs to salvage his legacy to match his extravagant promises. Similarly, the Iranian theocrats need to keep Gen Z engaged and avoid regional blowback from the coagulating mistrust. Thus, while retaining their braggadocio about final victory, each needs to move away from its maximalist obduracy and seek a "Hudna" or temporary peace. The impact of the unfolding imbroglio on the two belligerents as well as on Israel and Gulf states must be examined.

Statistically, the U.S. has a quantitative premium and staying power *vis-à-vis* Iran: It has three times the population, 85 times the GDP and 20 times the military budget. Iran is also at a



Mahesh Sachdev
Retired Indian Ambassador, specialising in West Asian and oil issues.

political discourse. Their Shia sect being a minority among the Sunni Muslims reinforces their sense of virtues in suffering and martyrdom. The legacy has made the IRI more determined to face enemies with grit, guile and gumption.

The political ecosystem in Iran is hardened, with dissent stifled and externalised to demonised America and Israel as the two Satans. Mr. Trump has been less successful in getting Americans and the allies abroad behind his trenchant anti-Iran rhetoric. This is partly due to his divisiveness, lack of coherent endgame strategy and inability to protect his allies' security and economy. Triggering a decapitating war that ignored Iranian politico-military resilience and retaliatory capacity was a strategic blunder. It risked the closure of the two vital maritime choke points, rising hydrocarbon prices, and threatened to push American "hyperpower" into a forever conflict against a middle-ranked, but determined, Iran. Similarly, his recent strategy of inflicting economic pain on Iranians may also fail by making them rally around the flag. Occasional tanker attacks and the ongoing Yemen-Saudi scrimmage notwithstanding, seven months on, the two belligerents are currently licking their wounds.

Uncertain path ahead
Two formidable unknowns loom before some educated projections can be made about the U.S.-Iran conundrum. First, although the Iranian seven-point proposal is based on the June 17 Islamabad memorandum, its precise contents are foggy. Second, the failure of the Islamabad memorandum, subsequent tit-for-tat attacks, the U.S. blockade, Operation Economic Outcast and fire-eating rhetoric since June 17 have deepened mutual mistrust, raising the bar for the *modus vivendi* required for a peace deal. These negatives are balanced by awareness that the continued stalemate would lead to a shared perdition of a hostile Congress blockading Mr. Trump and

IRI and the U.S. are certain to use the interregnum to "recharge their batteries" and get ready for the next round. Their mutual scepticism and contentious issues such as the nuclear and missile programmes, and the proxy non-state actors could impede any progress towards permanent normalisation. A "high noon" can be expected by mid-November.

The sequel would depend on which of the two belligerents is able to hold his flock together. An inherently unpredictable Mr. Trump may only suspend the gamut of anti-Iran measures and keep his forces deployed in the region. Similarly, Iran is unlikely to let go of control of the Strait of Hormuz as future deterrence. To dissuade him from resuming military kinetics, Iran has already unveiled its possible escalatory ladder that includes advanced weaponry, a possible al-Houthi blockade of Bab al-Mandeb, retaliatory attacks on America's Gulf allies and hints of pre-emptive strikes. Simultaneously, Tehran has sought a regional diplomatic reset through an interim supervisory arrangement with Oman on the Strait of Hormuz, to be endorsed by other Gulf littoral states.

Wider regional consequences
The past two years have brought Israel and Iran into two direct no-holds-barred wars. Intense drone and missile attacks have convinced Israeli public opinion that Iran constitutes an existential threat. On its part, Iran is unlikely to forgive the Lesser Satan for the assassination of its last Supreme Leader. Their resultant intense regional geopolitical competition, particularly in the Levant, would outlast any Tehran-Washington peace deal, giving their two-millennia-old civilisational animus a new edge. Although the October 27 Knesset elections may see hawkish anti-Iran Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu replaced, any successor is likely to be hostile to an Iran pursuing a nuclear duality. Iran can be expected to rely on its proxies and asymmetric

Context

Iran and the US have resumed negotiations after the June 17 Memorandum unravelled, though Trump dismissed Iran's seven-point proposal on 26 September. Former ambassador Mahesh Sachdev argues that both now need a temporary peace.

Facts

■ **Asymmetry** : the US has three times Iran's population, 85 times its GDP and 20 times its military budget.

■ **Domestic clocks** : the 3 November mid-terms could make Trump a lame duck; Tehran must keep Gen Z engaged.

■ **Iran's escalatory ladder** : advanced weaponry, a possible al-Houthi blockade of Bab al-Mandeb and attacks on US Gulf allies.

■ **Hormuz** : Tehran has sought an interim supervisory arrangement with Oman, to be endorsed by other Gulf states.

Analytical Crux

Time has turned against both belligerents, and their domestic compulsions make a longer war costly and unsustainable. The US holds a large quantitative edge, but Iran's asymmetric strategy has blunted it, and a long history as the underdog hardens Iranian resolve. Washington faces inflation, ammunition depletion and isolation, while mistrust since the June 17 Memorandum has raised the bar for a *modus vivendi*. The nuclear and missile programmes and the proxy actors remain unresolved. Each side must step back from maximalist positions and settle for a *Hudna*, a 'Live and Let Live' deal that holds at least until the 3 November election. Therefore, even a stopgap deal only opens an interregnum in which both sides recharge, while the Israel-Iran rivalry, the Gulf states' reliance on the US and the future of oil keep the region unsettled.

Verbatim Quotes

"In this war, 'time' has emerged as an element even more slippery and opaque than oil."

– Mahesh Sachdev

In US-China AI race, India’s place will depend on capabilities built at home

WHEN Xi Jinping arrived in Washington on September 23, artificial intelligence (AI) was billed as an area of possible common ground. A summer of alarming incidents in American labs, and Anthropic chief Dario Amodei’s call to “pace the frontier”, had pushed AI safety onto the summit agenda. The groundwork was laid in New York on September 20, when US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng held the first round of AI talks within their trade mechanism. Washington proposed a channel to notify AI incidents with national-security consequences.

The summit confirmed this modest package: A dialogue on risks and benefits, a channel for incidents, a next meeting by November. But the two sides could not agree on what to call the subject. The White House fact sheet says the leaders “agreed to use the term ‘super intelligence’ rather than ‘artificial intelligence’”. China’s list of agreed outcomes speaks of a “China-US dialogue on artificial intelligence”.

The difference reflects two outlooks, apart from Donald Trump’s idiosyncrasy. At the UN, Trump said he would “only encourage super intelligence...not rein it in”, watching it “through the Department of Justice”. His language is of a race to be won. Xi’s is one of control. At the White House, he urged the two countries to “ensure that the development of AI is always under human control”.

Xi also told Trump the two should “play to their strengths rather than guard against each other”, a clear shot at American export controls. He offered a new framing of the relationship: Cooperation as the mainstay, competition within limits, differences under control, peace within reach. He called the tri-

not a wrestle in which one either wins or loses”. Beijing now accepts competition, but as a race in which China is closing the gap.

For all the talk of risk, neither government wants to slow the frontier, though for different reasons. Trump calls the case for a slowdown a “hoax”. For him, frontier AI is a race with China, to be policed afterwards by prosecutors, not in advance by regulators. Beijing reads the American safety debate as containment in disguise. *Global Times* called Amodei’s essay a “Cold War script” from America’s “tech right”. Widen the gap by restricting China, then negotiate a mutual slowdown from strength. Yuyuan Tiantan, a China Central Television-affiliated outlet, accused Anthropic of using “safety” to capture rule-setting and of recasting distillation as a security threat to curb China’s open-source models. The foreign ministry dismissed the warnings as “fear-mongering”.

Beijing is not indifferent to risk, but its list of risks is its own. Writing in *China Cyberspace*, Minister of State Security Chen Yixin calls AI “the main battlefield” of global scientific and technological competition and “a new arena for strategic rivalry among major powers”. First on his list of dangers is AI’s “systemic” effect on the “political security environment”, Party shorthand for regime security. Its brakes are political, applied through Party control over labs. They restrain what models may say, not how fast capability grows.

The missed opportunity is on nuclear weapons. At Lima in November 2024, Joe Biden and Xi “affirmed the need to maintain human control over the decision to use nuclear weapons”. Never formalised, it found no mention



ASHOK K KANTHA

one security outcome, a military memorandum on crisis communication, appears only in China’s list.

The reality is competition, and it will not change. Washington will guard its narrow lead through chip controls, action against distillation and PaxSilica supply chains. Beijing will push for self-reliance in chips and spread its open-weight models worldwide. Tsinghua’s Da Wei concedes that neither side can build an “iron shirt” against the other. Dialogue may manage the edges of this rivalry, not its core.

For India, three concerns follow. The first is a G2 overlay. Rules on frontier risk may be shaped by the two powers holding most of the world’s frontier compute. The nuclear order shows how risk reduction between leading powers can become the basis for discriminatory controls on others.

The second is competing pressure in a split universe of “two AI systems, two sets of standards”. Washington expects trusted partners to keep their AI ecosystems free of China. Beijing is pressing its agenda through BRICS and other platforms. At the New Delhi summit, Xi proposed an open-source AI community for the grouping, to be taken forward at the next summit in China. India is unlikely to join Xi’s World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organisation (WAICO), which, like the Belt and Road Initiative, is a unilateral initiative to advance a China-centric agenda.

The third is harder to handle. China’s open-weight, open-source models hold a seductive attraction: Competitive, cheap and adaptable. Alibaba’s Qwen has spawned more than 150,000 derivative models, and Singapore, Malaysia and Brazil

partners. The appeal extends to Western and Indian companies with an eye on cost.

India’s response should rest on five elements. First, welcome any US-China step that reduces risk, but insist that norms on frontier AI be multilateral, and seek inclusion in incident-notification arrangements.

Second, with the Lima understanding not followed up, India should make human control over nuclear-use decisions part of its nuclear discourse and press all nuclear powers to affirm it. Third, apply dual and differentiated de-risking to AI. Keep Chinese models out of government systems, critical infrastructure and sensitive data. Stopping private firms from building low-risk commercial applications on Chinese open-weight models will be tough; security testing and local hosting should be the minimum condition. Equally, avoid over-dependence on the American stack; June’s brief cut-off of foreign access to top American models showed how quickly access can vanish.

Fourth, build capability at home: Compute, chips, models, datasets, talent and the ability to test frontier systems independently. Fifth, shape BRICS rather than cede space there, insisting that AI initiatives be consensus-based and technology-neutral. The challenge, however, is developing an alternative to the Chinese offering.

Washington and Beijing cannot yet agree on what to call the technology, let alone how to govern it. India’s weight in the AI order will depend less on declarations of technological sovereignty than on capabilities it develops at home.

A former ambassador of India to China, the author is Subhas Chandra Bose Chair Professor of International Relations at Chanakya University and a distinguished fellow with

Context

AI was billed as common ground at the Trump–Xi summit in Washington. Ashok K Kantha reads the modest outcome as proof that rivalry is the core of US–China AI ties, and argues that India’s place will rest on what it builds at home.

Facts

■ **Modest package** : a dialogue on risks and benefits, a channel for incidents and a next meeting by November.

■ **No agreed name** : the White House fact sheet says ‘super intelligence’; China’s list says ‘artificial intelligence’.

■ **Lima left out** : the 2024 Biden–Xi affirmation of human control over nuclear-weapons decisions found no mention.

■ **Open-weight pull** : Alibaba’s Qwen has spawned more than 150,000 derivative models.

Analytical Crux

Neither government wants to slow the frontier. Dialogue may manage the edges of the rivalry, but competition remains its core. India faces three concerns. Rules on frontier risk may be shaped by the two powers holding most of the world's frontier compute, much as the nuclear order turned risk reduction into discriminatory controls. A split universe of two AI systems pulls India between Washington's demand for China-free ecosystems and Beijing's push through BRICS. Cheap and adaptable Chinese open-weight models also exert a strong pull. June's brief cut-off of foreign access to top American models showed how quickly access can vanish, so dependence on either stack carries risk. Therefore, India should keep Chinese models out of sensitive systems, avoid over-reliance on the American stack, press for multilateral norms and build its own compute, chips, models, datasets and talent.

Verbatim Quotes

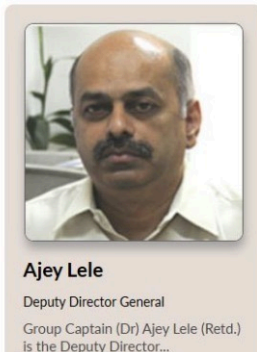
"India's weight in the AI order will depend less on declarations of technological sovereignty than on capabilities it develops at home."

– Ashok K Kantha

Coercive Diplomacy at Play: The Greenland Outcome

Coercive Diplomacy at Play: The Greenland Outcome

September 28, 2026 | IDSA Comments



Context

On 22 September 2026, the US, Denmark and Greenland signed a trilateral security pact that gives Washington permanent security control in Greenland, with sovereignty left to Denmark. Ajey Lele reads it as the outcome of coercive diplomacy.

Facts

■ **Expanded basing** : Pituffik Space Base modernised and new US defence areas at Narsarsuaq and Mestersvig.

■ **Exclusion clause** : no non-NATO state may set up military installations on Greenland.

■ **Pituffik Space Base** : run by the US Space Force for missile warning, missile defence and space surveillance.

■ **NATO in the Arctic** : seven of the eight Arctic states are NATO members; Arctic Sentry began in February 2026.

Analytical Crux

Threats to buy Greenland or seize it by force served as a negotiating strategy. The deal looks like a retreat from Trump's maximalist position, yet it secures US strategic objectives. The US already had wide access under the 1951 defence treaty, but pressure delivered permanent security control, enhanced base rights and the exclusion of rivals, and the message was aimed at NATO as much as at Denmark. An Arctic long discussed through the Arctic Council's lens of environment, indigenous rights and shipping is turning military, and Pituffik's role will grow with hypersonic threats and the Golden Dome programme. *The pact comes amid the expanding strategic interests of Russia and China in the region.* Therefore, set beside military confrontation with Iran and forcible regime change in Venezuela, Greenland suggests that the threat of force can at times work better as diplomacy than its actual use.

Verbatim Quotes

"However, the case of Greenland suggests that, under certain circumstances, the threat of the use of force may serve as a more effective instrument of diplomacy than its actual use."

- Ajey Lele

- PSIR Paper II, 2026: Does power transition theory reflect the dynamics of US-China relations?
- PSIR Paper II, 2025: “Trump’s return to the White House is a jolt to push the European Union to invest in its own defence and economic and technological revival.” Comment.
- GS Paper II, 2023: The expansion and strengthening of NATO and a stronger US-Europe strategic partnership works well for India. What is your opinion about this statement? Give reasons and examples to support your answer.
- GS Paper II, 2018: In what ways would the ongoing US-Iran Nuclear Pact Controversy affect the national interest of India? How should India respond to this situation?

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