

PYQ Vault

560

questions

50

days

10 years

of PYQs

Day 32

Key Concepts in International Relations · 9 questions

Every question carries a *Flow Snapshot* — how the answer moves — and a handwritten model answer on the channel.

Work through the fifty days and no PYQ will be unfamiliar.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2016 · 20 marks

Why does global human security need to be emphasized along with economic security? Explain with examples.

FLOW SNAPSHOT

how the answer moves

INTRO ROUTES

R1 traditional/economic security is state- and income-centred → human security shifts the referent to the individual (freedom from fear, want, indignity) → the two are not interchangeable • **R2** a country can grow and guard its borders yet its people stay unsafe → income ≠ dignity or safety → human security must sit alongside economic security

BODY FLOW

referent shift (state → individual) → **Truong**: economically secure states, insecure people → working-woman example (earns well, faces harassment) → comprehensive dimensions (economic/food/health/environmental/personal/community/political) → **Buzan**'s interconnected sectors (threat in one spreads) → **Tickner**'s feminist critique + "security paradox" → shift "freedom from fear" → "freedom from want" → global examples (COVID/health, Syria/societal, Rohingya/political, climate/environmental)

COUNTER-VIEW

realist caution: over-stretched concept risks meaninglessness; state resources finite; raises false expectations

CONCLUSION ROUTES

R1 balance: human security complements, not replaces, economic security • **R2** economic security safeguards the aggregate, human security safeguards the person → both needed together

Traditional security thinking measures safety at the level of the state or of income. Human security rejects this. It shifts the referent from the state to the individual and defines safety as freedom from fear, want and indignity.

Economic security and human security are therefore not the same thing and the first cannot stand in for the second. T.D. Truong argues that states may be economically secure while their people face state violence, patriarchy and environmental harm. A working woman may earn well but face harassment at home or work; her income guarantees neither her dignity nor her safety.

This is why human security is deliberately comprehensive, covering economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political dimensions. Barry Buzan, in *People, States and Fear*, shows these sectors are interconnected and a threat in one quickly spreads to the rest. Therefore, economic strength cannot be sealed off from the others.

Ann Tickner argues that traditional, state-centred security is masculine-biased and produces a "security paradox", heightening rather than reducing the insecurity of individuals. The shift is from "freedom from fear" to "freedom from want".

COVID-19 exposed health insecurity, the Syrian refugee crisis societal insecurity, the Rohingya crisis political insecurity and climate-driven displacement environmental insecurity. Strong economy does not prevent any of them alone.

Realists argues that a concept stretched this far risks meaning nothing and that state resources are finite. Therefore the way forward is that human security is a critical lens that complements and not replaces economic security.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2016 · 15 marks

“The notion of balance of power is notoriously full of confusion.” In the light of this quotation, do you think that the concept of balance of power is relevant?

FLOW SNAPSHOT

how the answer moves

INTRO ROUTES

R1 realist device against domination, works in multipolarity → **Wight's** “confusion” conceded, but located in *definition*, not use • **R2** concept notoriously confused → **Inis Claude** “too many meanings,” **Morgenthau's** four / **Haas's** eight → confusion definitional, not fatal

BODY FLOW

sources of confusion (power hard to measure, interpretations differ, relations unpredictable) → yet practical worth intact: prevents hegemony, manages security competition, explains alliances / power transitions → **Waltz's** structural pull (“abhors unbalanced power”) → US-China, NATO-Russia, Quad → concept adapts not dies: **Walt's** balance of threat, **Paul's** soft balancing (direct balancing of US too costly)

COUNTER-VIEW

liberals: entrenches rivalry → stops operating under unipolarity → globalisation + transnational threats defy balancing

CONCLUSION ROUTES

R1 confused in definition but resilient in practice • **R2** survives in altered forms → relevant, not redundant

Balance of power is a realist perspective meant to stop any single state from growing strong enough to dominate the rest, and it works best in a multipolar order.

Martin Wight's remark that it is "notoriously full of confusion" is fair, but the confusion lies in defining the term, not in its usefulness. Inis Claude argues that the trouble "is not that it has no meaning, but that it has too many meanings".

Hans Morgenthau listed four connotations and Ernst Haas as many as eight. This muddle is natural, because power is hard to measure, interpretations differ, and state relations remain unpredictable.

Definitional confusion, however, has not weakened its practical worth. The concept explains how states prevent hegemony, manage security competition and form alliances during power transitions.

For Kenneth Waltz it is not a passing fashion but a structural pull i.e. "as nature abhors a vacuum, so international politics abhors unbalanced power." Present rivalries between the US and China, NATO and Russia, and the working of the Quad show it in operation.

Stephen Walt's balance of threat and T.V. Paul's soft balancing recognise that balancing the US directly is too costly, so states resort to diplomacy and institutions. Critics like liberals argue it entrenches rivalry and it stops operating under unipolarity.

Globalisation and transnational threats defy simple balancing. It stays confused in definition but resilient in practice & relevant in altered forms.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2016 · 10 marks

“A combination of internal pressures (ethnic and regional forces) and external threats (EU, UN, TNC, global market, etc.) has produced what is commonly referred to as a ‘crisis of the nation-state.’” Elaborate.

FLOW SNAPSHOT

how the answer moves

INTRO ROUTES

R1 nation-state as long-central actor → now squeezed from three directions at once → subnational + transnational + supranational • **R2** the ‘crisis’ = simultaneous pressure from below, across and above → state pressed on all three fronts

BODY FLOW

internal squeeze (militancy / secession / autonomy / identity denial / regional discrimination → Yugoslavia) → external squeeze (globalisation + regionalisation → sovereignty made multinational) → **Nye**: MNC direct/indirect pressure → **Simmons**: NGO policy influence → forced re-regulation (climate / terrorism / finance via transnational frameworks) → hyperglobalist redundancy claim

COUNTER-VIEW

Buzan → economic role reduced, but state still the sole security provider → uniquely holds both capacity to act + authority to define a threat

CONCLUSION ROUTES

R1 reshaped, not dissolved → survives as the central unit • **R2** continuous crisis, not collapse → the state is remade, not ended

The nation-state, long the central actor in world politics, is squeezed from three directions at once. Pressure from subnational, transnational and supranational forces is what is meant by a 'crisis of the nation-state'.

Internal pressure rises from within the territory. Militancy, secession and autonomy demands, the non-recognition of identity and regional discrimination weaken the state's hold, as the breakup of Yugoslavia showed.

External pressure works from outside. Globalisation & regionalisation turn domestic questions into multinational ones, so sovereignty can no longer be exercised alone. Joseph Nye shows how multinational corporations apply direct and indirect pressure on governments.

P.J. Simmons views how non-governmental organisations shape domestic and foreign policy.

States are therefore forced to collaborate, re-regulating climate, terrorism and finance through transnational frameworks. Hyberglobalists calls this as proof that the state is becoming redundant.

But Barry Buzan disagrees. Even with a reduced economic role, the state remains the principal provider of security. It is because it has the capacity to act and the authority to define a threat.

The state is therefore reshaped, not dissolved and the central unit still, but living in continuous crisis.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2017 · 15 marks

Discuss the changing nature of modern state with reference to transnational actors.

FLOW SNAPSHOT

how the answer moves

INTRO ROUTES

R1 modern state = sole authority over security & economy → transnational actors unsettle it → state now shares space it once held alone • **R2** modern state historically supreme within its borders → cross-border actors work independently of governments → line staked: state reshaped, not replaced

BODY FLOW

Thiel: transnational actors = agents with trans-societal goals, apart from state control (MNCs, NGOs, terror/criminal, diasporas) → MNCs / **Nye:** loss of control over currency & trade → transfer mispricing + treaty shopping → extraterritoriality → diluted labour/health regulation → NGOs / **Simmons:** agenda-setting, negotiating outcomes, conferring legitimacy → aid agencies bypass governments → suspected as Western agents (China, Russia, India) → terrorist/non-state actors: security dilemma + distorted policy → FDI deterred → **Scholte:** states pushed into post-sovereign governance (Basel, OECD, FATF) → **Cooper:** European “postmodern states” within security communities

COUNTER-VIEW

realist rejoinder, **Buzan** → state still the principal security provider → only body with both capacity to act and authority to define a threat

CONCLUSION ROUTES

R1 state transformed and constrained, but not displaced → remains central • **R2** authority now shared, sovereignty reshaped → state adapts via post-sovereign governance rather than dissolving

The modern state claimed sole authority within its borders over security and economy. Transnational actors have unsettled that claim. They cross borders and pursue goals independently of governments forcing the state to share space it once held alone.

Markus Thiel describes transnational actors as political, social, cultural and economic agents with trans-societal relations across borders. MNCs, NGOs, terrorist & criminal groups, diasporas steadily narrow the state's room for independent action.

Joseph Nye, in "MNCs: The Game and the Rule", argues that they pressure governments directly and indirectly. States lose control over currency and foreign trade.

P.J. Simmons shows that they set agendas, negotiate outcomes and confer legitimacy, while aid agencies bypass governments.

Terrorist groups add a further strain, creating a security dilemma and distorting domestic policy, as attacks deter foreign investment.

J.A. Scholte argues that states are pushed into post-sovereign governance through the Basel Committee, OECD frameworks and FATF. Robert Cooper sees European states becoming postmodern states within security communities.

But the state is not displaced. Barry Buzan calls it the principal security provider i.e. the only body with both the capacity to act and the authority to define a threat.

Therefore, the modern state is transformed and constrained but it remains central.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2018 · 10 marks

What, according to Joseph Nye, are the major sources of a country's soft power? Discuss its relevance in the contemporary world politics.

FLOW SNAPSHOT

how the answer moves

INTRO ROUTES

R1 soft power (**Nye**) = make others want what you want → attraction / co-option, not coercion → set against hard power • **R2** power is not only force → **Nye** adds a second face: attraction through appeal → opens the three sources

BODY FLOW

three sources → culture (when attractive) → political values: democracy / human rights / rule of law (applied consistently) → foreign policy (when legitimate, just) → US illustration → relevance rises with interdependence + information tech → instruments: cultural diplomacy / education / media (yoga, China's broadcasting, EU multilateralism) → issue areas: institutional reform, climate justice, peacekeeping

COUNTER-VIEW

attraction alone insufficient → **Jaishankar**: soft power without hard power is pointless → **Nye's** own move to smart power (hard + soft)

CONCLUSION ROUTES

R1 attraction now integral to world politics → but supplements, not replaces, material capability • **R2** soft power reshapes influence in an interdependent, information age → yet effective only when anchored in hard power (smart power)

According to Joseph Nye, soft power is the ability to make others want what you want, attracting and co-opting them rather than coercing. It works by shaping preferences through appeal and stands in contrast to hard power.

Nye locates soft power in three sources. The first is a country's culture, where this is attractive to others. The second is its political values i.e. democracy, human rights and the rule of law when the state applies them consistently. The 3rd is its foreign policy, when others see it as legitimate and just. US soft power, resting on liberal democracy, free markets and human rights, is the classic example.

Its relevance has grown with interdependence & information technology. States project influence through cultural diplomacy, education and media as seen in India's yoga diplomacy, China's broadcasting and the EU's multilateralism. It also aids institutional reform, climate justice and peacekeeping.

According to Dhruv Jaishankar, soft power not backed by hard power is pointless. This is why Nye himself called for smart power i.e. combining the two. Attraction is integral to world politics, but it supplements rather than replaces material capability.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2018 · 15 marks

“Some feel Multinational Corporations (MNCs) are a vital new road to economic growth, whereas others feel they perpetuate underdevelopment.” Discuss.

FLOW SNAPSHOT

how the answer moves

INTRO ROUTES

R1 growth thesis (**Friedman, Bhagwati**) vs underdevelopment (**Frank, Myrdal**) • **R2** growth ≠ development; structural dependence obscured by GDP gains

BODY FLOW

pro-growth: FDI, employment, knowledge transfer → BUT **Frank's** trap: wealth extraction → **Myrdal's** backwash → **Nye's** sovereignty mechanisms (mispricing, extraterritoriality) → **Stiglitz**: political autonomy lost → **Wallerstein's** core-periphery: unequal exchange entrenched

COUNTER-VIEW

glocalisation (**Appadurai**), post-sovereign governance (Basel, OECD) as partial corrections — insufficient without structural control

CONCLUSION ROUTES

R1 growth alone is hollow; development requires ownership, autonomy, equity • **R2** MNCs generate growth within a structure that perpetuates underdevelopment

MNCs expansion have raised a central debate i.e. MNCs generate growth, but not the kind that resolves underdevelopment.

Jagdish Bhagwati and the Chicago School emphasise FDI inflows, employment and knowledge transfer. India's services sector proves that MNCs brought capital, technology and jobs. Thomas Friedman's thesis linking MNC globalisation to prosperity has historical support.

But Andre Gunder Frank's "development of underdevelopment" and Gunnar Myrdal's "backwash effect" argues a structural trap. MNCs extract wealth outward while locking the periphery into dependency on foreign goods and capital. Joseph Nye argues that MNCs exert direct pressure on governments, cause loss of control over currency and trade, & use transfer mispricing and treaty shopping & eroding sovereignty.

Joseph Stiglitz states that MNCs limit developing states' political autonomy, dictating tax regimes and labour standards. Immanuel Wallerstein's core-periphery model shows the cheap raw materials flow North, expensive goods flow South. Growth occurs, but within an unequal structure.

Aijun Appadurai's "glocalisation" moderates the cultural critique and post-sovereign governance (Basel, OECD) attempts regulation. But these remain insufficient.

Growth & development are not synonymous. MNCs are vital for GDP expansion but not for development which demands ownership of resources, control over technology and labour sovereignty. Without that control, growth remains shallow, perpetuating the periphery's structural dependence.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2019 · 10 marks

Discuss the utility of Nuclear Deterrence Theory in the context of the recent standoff between India and Pakistan.

FLOW SNAPSHOT

how the answer moves

INTRO ROUTES

R1 deterrence's core logic: catastrophic retaliation / MAD deters attack → **Brodie's** dictum → applied to India-Pakistan dyad • **R2** India's NFU + credible minimum deterrence vs Pakistan's TNW → grounded back in MAD logic

BODY FLOW

MAD logic → **Brodie** "ready, never used" → India's NFU/CMD vs Pakistan's TNW (offsets conventional asymmetry) → held since 1998 → 2019 Pulwama-Balakot: escalation but restraint → **Schelling's** stability-instability paradox → non-state actors evade the nuclear threshold

COUNTER-VIEW

Manoj Joshi: deterrence alone insufficient → strategic stability still needs conventional capability + diplomacy

CONCLUSION ROUTES

R1 deterrence secures against full-scale war, not full peace • **R2** balance of terror real but bounded → conventional strength and diplomacy fill the rest

Nuclear deterrence rests on the logic that threat of catastrophic retaliation, or Mutually Assured Destruction, deters an adversary from attack. Bernard Brodie states that a credible deterrent must be "always at the ready, but never used".

Between India and Pakistan, the logic works through India's credible minimum deterrence and No First Use, set against Pakistan's tactical nuclear weapons, built to offset conventional asymmetry. This balance has held since 1998. Even the 2019 Pulwama-Balakot crisis, despite escalation, ended in restraint, not full-scale war.

Thomas Schelling's stability-instability paradox argues that nuclear weapons secure large-scale peace but push rivalry into smaller, sub-conventional conflict.

In this standoff, Pakistan's reliance on non-state actors below the nuclear threshold complicates India's calculus, escaping deterrence's logic altogether. Manoj Joshi states that strategic stability still needs strong conventional capability and diplomacy.

Deterrence has kept India and Pakistan from full-scale war but not full peace. It holds off high-intensity conflict; the low-intensity conflict beneath it still depends on conventional strength and diplomacy, a real but bounded balance of terror.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2022 · 15 marks

Discuss the conceptual dimensions of collective security.

FLOW SNAPSHOT

how the answer moves

INTRO ROUTES

RI realism leaves every state to secure itself → collective security makes security of one the concern of all → liberals read it as an institutionalised balance of power • **R2** the defining shift → competitive balancing replaced by a universal guarantee → every conceptual dimension follows from that shift

BODY FLOW

universality as the defining mark → **Hartmann's** "mutual insurance plan... anywhere and everywhere" → no enemy named in advance, neutrality precluded → three conditions (treaty procedure / renunciation of war except self-defence / pledge to defend the victim) → **Schwarzenberger's** machinery for joint action → institutional dimension → League: Article 10, each member judged aggression → Manchuria, Ethiopia → Charter centralises the judgement in the Security Council → Articles 39, 41, 42

COUNTER-VIEW

the same universality strains → sovereignty indivisible, escape hatch retained → aggressor pleads self-defence, aggression left undefined → **Morgenthau**: freezing a status quo vs politics as struggle for power → **Mannheim**: "relative utopia" → the dilemma of waging war to prevent war

CONCLUSION ROUTES

RI premise is overwhelming power, not equilibrium • **R2** Korea shows it can work, Ukraine how seldom it does → noble in principle, constrained in practice

Realism leaves every state to secure itself. Collective security makes the security of one the concern of all. Liberals treat it as an institutionalised form of balance of power i.e. competitive balancing replaced by a universal guarantee.

F.H. Hartmann called it "a mutual insurance plan against aggression anywhere and everywhere." No enemy is named in advance; neutrality is precluded. Three conditions that follows are a treaty fixing the decision procedure, renunciation of war except in self-defence and a pledge to defend any victim.

According to Georg Schwarzenberger, it is machinery for joint action against any attack on an established international order. Article 10 of the League Covenant supplied it first, but the League let each member judge aggression, failing before Japan in Manchuria & Italy in Ethiopia.

The charter vests that judgement in the Security Council : Article 39 determines aggression, Article 41 provides sanctions, Article 42 force.

Sovereignty is indivisible ; great powers keep an escape hatch. Aggressors plead self-defence and defining aggression defeated both the League and the UN. Hans Morgenthau held that freezing a status quo is doomed where politics is a struggle for power. For Karl Mannheim it is a "relative utopia", realistic in aim but retaining elements of fantasy. Its dilemma is basic i.e. war is waged to prevent war.

Its premise, then, is overwhelming power, not equilibrium. Aggression meets the combined force of all. Korea showed this can work, Ukraine how seldom it does. Noble in principle, constrained in practice.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2025 · 15 marks

Transnational actors have qualitatively transformed the world by the way of their fresh insights and actions. Illustrate your answer with suitable examples.

FLOW SNAPSHOT

how the answer moves

INTRO ROUTES

RI Thiel: cross-border agents pursuing goals independently of governments
 → impact is qualitative, not additional → interstate cooperation gives way to multi-actor governance • **R2** open with the shift itself: rules once written only by states → today ideas, delivery and legitimacy come from outside them → place **Thiel's** definition inside that shift

BODY FLOW

fresh insights = ideas → advocacy networks + epistemic communities + World Bank / UNESCO → knowledge, agenda-setting, norm diffusion → persuasion, not command → winning coalitions built with domestic actors
 → **Risse** → then actions → MSF + Amnesty in Syria, Myanmar, Ukraine → **Simmons:** agenda, negotiation, legitimacy → MNCs (Google, Amazon, Apple) on tax and labour → **Nye:** direct and indirect pressure → Taliban and Hamas win recognition → state response → **Scholte:** post-sovereign governance (Basel, OECD, FATF) → formal inclusion: Cardoso Report, Global Compact

COUNTER-VIEW

realists: these actors run on state sponsorship, no independent role → feminists: MNC policies harm women → **Buzan:** state remains the principal security provider

CONCLUSION ROUTES

RI the transformation is qualitative → rule-making, implementation and legitimacy are now shared tasks • **R2** states remain central but are no longer the sole authors of world order → governance is multi-actor, not post-state

Markus Thiel describes transnational actors as social, economic and cultural agents who work across societies and pursue goals somewhat independently of governments.

Advocacy networks, epistemic communities & bodies like world bank and UNESCO produce knowledge, set agendas & spread new norms. They rarely command states. Thomas Risse holds that the contemporary world system cannot be theorised "without taking their influence into account."

Doctors Without Borders and Amnesty International work in Syria, Myanmar and Ukraine, providing relief and evidence where governments cannot or will not. P.J. Simmons shows how such bodies set agendas, negotiate outcomes and confer legitimacy.

Google, Amazon & Apple shape tax and labour policy & Joseph Nye highlights the direct and indirect pressure they place on governments.

The Taliban and Hamas have even won a measure of recognition.

J.A. Scholte points to "post-sovereign governance" through the Basel Committee, OECD frameworks and the FATF, while the Cardoso Report and the Global Compact brought non-state voices formally into the UN.

Realists argues that such actors work on state sponsorship, and feminists show that MNC policies harm women. For Barry Buzan, the state remains the principal security provider.

The transformation is therefore qualitative. Rule-making, implementation and legitimacy are now shared tasks & states govern alongside actors they neither created nor fully control.

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