

— PSIR OPTIONAL · UPSC CSE

EDITION 2026

PYQ Vault

560

QUESTIONS

50

DAYS

10

YEARS OF PYQS

DAY 33

Changing International Political Order · 12 questions

Every question carries a **Flow Snapshot** — how the answer moves, stage by stage — and a handwritten model answer on the channel.
Work through all fifty days and *no PYQ will be unfamiliar.*

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2016 · 15 marks

Discuss the evolution of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons in the post-Cold War period.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

INTRO ROUTES

R1 regime built for two-power management → after 1991 agenda widens, authority does not → that gap = the evolution

R2 post-1991 record = new treaties, new summits, a prohibition → none of them binds the states holding the weapons

BODY FLOW

NPT stays the core → 1995 indefinite extension = permanence → **Perkovich**: India, Pakistan outside, non-recognition → 1995 freezes the exclusion → deepening stalls: CTBT (1996) not in force, FMCT blocked by US + other weapon states → growth turns sideways → GICNT (2006): non-state actors, nuclear terrorism → Obama push: Prague (2009), UNSC 1887, four Nuclear Security Summits → energy renewed, arsenals stay → 2017 prohibition treaty: first comprehensive ban, no nuclear power inside

COUNTER-VIEW

Waltz: weapons kept the Cold War cold → holders will not disarm what they credit with peace → US-Russia competition revived, New START expiring 2026

CONCLUSION ROUTES

R1 Simpson: under-delivery since the 1990s (Iran, North Korea) → universal, verifiable, non-discriminatory process → non-proliferation now, disarmament later

R2 the period added instruments, not authority → the regime grew in law while consent stayed where 1991 left it

Non-proliferation was built when two powers managed the nuclear problem between them. After 1991 its agenda widened while its authority did not.

The NPT stayed the core; its indefinite extension in 1995 made it permanent. George Perkovich argues that India & Pakistan remain outside because the treaty does not recognise them as nuclear-weapon states.

The CTBT (1996) never entered into force; the FMCT stays blocked by the US and other nuclear-weapon states. The GICNT (2006) took up nuclear terrorism by non-state actors. Obama's Prague speech (2009), UNSC Resolution 1807 and four Nuclear Security Summits gave the agenda fresh energy, though arsenals stayed. The 2017 prohibition treaty, the first comprehensive ban, holds no nuclear power.

Kenneth Waltz held that nuclear weapons kept the Cold War cold; states that credit them with peace do not disarm. US-Russia competition has revived and New START expires in 2026.

John Simpson's states that the agenda has under-delivered since the 1990s, as Iran and North Korea show. Only a universal, verifiable, non-discriminatory process can carry non-proliferation now and disarmament later.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2016 · 20 marks

Explain the socio-economic impacts of arms race and identify the obstacles in the way of disarmament.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

INTRO ROUTES

R1 arms race = competitive acquisition + advancement of military capability → burden falls on economies and societies → yet weapons stay, because they are believed to buy security → disarmament stalls in that gap

R2 the Cold War priced the race: debt, welfare foregone, a collapsed USSR → yet no state surrendered the bomb → obstacle lies in what the bomb is thought to be worth, and in a regime the excluded call unequal

BODY FLOW

economic damage first → debt + dependency for arms importers → India-Pakistan missile competition → **Reagan's** renewed nuclear race + SDI (1983), never realised → strain → collapse of the USSR → economy could not match capitalist living standards → social cost = what goes unspent → armaments money withheld from human welfare → world under a "balance of terror" → peak: Cuban Missile Crisis → hinge: **Gavin** — the race also built a deterrent that prevented direct superpower conflict; **Waltz** — nuclear weapons kept the Cold War "cold" → that belief is obstacle 1: no state gives up what it thinks keeps it safe → obstacle 2: the regime is itself unequal → **Perkovich** — India + Pakistan outside NPT, unrecognised as NWS → 1995 indefinite extension read as discriminatory → NWS resistance blocks CTBT + FMCT → 2017 ban treaty: no major nuclear power in it → verification hard → moral pressure fails on Iran / North Korea → China will not scrap its arsenal → **Perkovich & Acton** — weakened US umbrella → Japan + South Korea towards the bomb

COUNTER-VIEW

Kissinger — deterrence assumes rational actors → the security defence relied on by every nuclear state is itself unsafe

CONCLUSION ROUTES

R1 Simpson — universal + verifiable + non-discriminatory process → cost alone has never disarmed anyone → India's No First Use shows restraint is possible → it spreads only when the excluded accept the order as equal

R2 the obstacle is political, not technical → verification can be engineered, equality cannot be faked → India's No First Use as the model → **Simpson's** three conditions as the way forward

As arms race is the competitive acquisition & advancement of military capability by rival states. Its burden falls on economies and societies, but the weapons stay.

States believe they buy security. Disarmament stalls in that gap. Arms importers take on debt and dependency, as the India-Pakistan missile competition shows. Reagan's renewed nuclear race, with the Strategic Defence Initiative of 1983 intensifying it though never realised. It added the strain that contributed to the collapse of the USSR, whose economy could not match capitalist living standards.

The social cost is what goes unspent. Money locked into armaments is withheld from human welfare and the world lives under a "balance of terror", peaking in the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Francis J. Gavin holds the race also built a deterrent that prevented direct superpower conflict & Kenneth Waltz credits nuclear weapons with keeping the Cold War "Cold". That belief is the 1st obstacle as no state gives up what it thinks keeps it safe.

George Perkovich notes India & Pakistan stayed outside the NPT, unrecognised as nuclear-weapon states, while the 1995 indefinite extension is read as discriminatory. Perkovich and Acton states that a weakened American umbrella could push Japan and South Korea towards the bomb.

But deterrence is unsafe. Henry Kissinger cautioned that it assumes rational actors. John Simpson asks for a universal, verifiable, non-discriminatory process. Cost alone has never disarmed anyone.

India's No First Use shows restraint is possible, but it spreads only when the excluded accept the order as equal.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2017 · 15 marks

Do you endorse the view that the end of Bipolarity and the rise of multiple regional organisations has made Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) more or less irrelevant?

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

INTRO ROUTES

R1 non-alignment ≠ neutrality (**Schwarzenberger**) → negative base: stay out of military alliances → positive base: independence of judgment (Belgrade, 1961) → the question's two changes hit only the first base → endorse in part

R2 NAM born to escape two camps → camps gone, groupings multiplied → real question: was bloc-avoidance ever the whole of non-alignment? → endorse in part

BODY FLOW

the two bases → end of bipolarity empties the negative base → the positive base is untouched → **Sreenivasan**: freedom of judgment and action, valid whether one bloc or two → **Paul**: limited soft balancing, naming and shaming → partial credit for decolonisation, containing proliferation, easing bipolar tension → regional bodies work within regions; NAM's field is the Global South, its work normative

COUNTER-VIEW

Köchler: NAM fitted the bipolar era alone; objectives redundant; members lean on the US; no charter, statute or secretariat → G-7 / ASEAN / SCO / BRICS carry the economic agenda NAM never built → **Raja Mohan**: a movement in a "state of coma"

CONCLUSION ROUTES

R1 structural charge sticks, irrelevance charge fails → **Jaishankar**: independence of action continues as strategic autonomy → less central, not irrelevant

R2 relevance has shifted, not ended → from bloc-avoidance to Global South voice and soft-balancing platform → "shifting and variable coalitions rather than settled alliances"

Non-alignment was never neutrality. Georg Schwarzenberger states that it meant staying out of military alliances and above all Cold War ones. But the Belgrade movement of 1961 rested on a positive base i.e. independence of judgment.

Hans Kochler argues that NAM suited the bipolar era alone. Its objectives are redundant, members lean on the US, and it has no charter, statute or secretariat. The G-7, ASEAN, the SCO and BRICS handle the economic questions NAM never took up. C. Raja Mohan calls it a movement in a "state of coma".

T.P. Sreenivasan held that non-alignment meant freedom of judgment and action, valid whether there is one bloc or two.

T.V. Paul shows what that produced: a limited soft-balancing mechanism of naming and shaming, credited in part with ending colonialism, containing proliferation and easing bipolar tension. Regional organisations do not replace this. Built for trade & neighbourhood security, they work within regions; NAM speaks for the Global South & speaks normatively.

The structural change sticks; the change of irrelevance does not. According to S. Jaishankar, non-alignment belonged to a specific era. The independence of action it stood for continues as strategic autonomy, worked through "shifting and variable coalitions rather than settled alliances."

NAM is less central than it was. It is not irrelevant.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2018 · 15 marks

Discuss the consequences of Trump's "America First" and Xi's "Chinese Dream" on World Politics.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

INTRO ROUTES

R1 define both (America First, 2016: nationalist, unilateralist / Chinese Dream, 2013: national rejuvenation, return of the Middle Kingdom) → US steps back, China steps in → halves of one power transition

R2 the order's architect retreats while its challenger advances → one process, not two → world politics reshaped but not settled

BODY FLOW

America First in practice (patriotism over globalism, UN 2018 → TPP abandoned → WTO dispute settlement blocked → JCPOA scrapped → allied burden-sharing) → **Krauthammer** / **Wright**: return of mercantilism → Chinese Dream in practice (China-centric globalisation: AIIB against Bretton Woods → BRI → A2/AD for regional hegemony) → East and South China Seas: territorial status quo and international law rejected → decline of *Pax Americana* → **Allison**: Thucydides Trap → balancing responses: Quad, Indo-Pacific, Cold War 2.0 → **Chellaney**: G-2 trap, forced choice for third states

COUNTER-VIEW

China's counter-claim: it is the status quo power, the US the real revisionist (decades of spreading liberalism and markets) → **Ikenberry** / **Nye**: this phase more complex than Cold War 1 — interdependence, not ideology

CONCLUSION ROUTES

R1 Hass / **Rapp-Hooper**: no consensus on net impact → order reshaped, not settled

R2 the shape of the transition stays open → it turns on how the transition is managed

Trump's "America First" (2016) turned American policy nationalist and unilateralist ; Xi's "Chinese Dream" (2013) promises national rejuvenation and the return of the Middle Kingdom.

Washington pulled back from the order it built ; Beijing moved in. America first meant patriotism over globalism, as Trump told the UN in 2018 : the TPP abandoned, the WTO's dispute settlement blocked, the JCPOA scrapped, allies pressed to fund their security. Charles Krauthammer and Thomas Wright call this a return of mercantilism.

The Chinese Dream moved the other way, towards China-centric globalisation : the AIIB against Bretton Woods, the BRI, A2/AD in Asian waters for regional hegemony.

Together they hasten the decline of Pax Americana. Graham Allison's Thucydides Trap describes the risk when a rising power confronts an established one.

Brahma Chellaney sees a G-2 trap: states forced to choose between a transactional America and a predatory China.

Beijing replies that it defends the status quo, while America, spreading liberalism and markets for decades, is the real revisionist. John Ikenberry and Joseph Nye finds this phase more complex than the first Cold War: interdependence, not ideology.

No new order has settled. Ryan Hass and Mira Rapp-Hooper find no consensus on the net impact: the doctrines have reshaped world politics, not decided its shape, which turns on how the transition is managed.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2020 · 15 marks

Critically analyze the implications of Sino-American strategic rivalry for the south and south-east Asian region.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

INTRO ROUTES

R1 new bipolarity: economics + military weight, not ideology → main theatre = South & South-East Asia → real stake is autonomy, not war

R2 region sits between Chinese trade and American security → rivalry's real question: can the choice be avoided → autonomy as the test

BODY FLOW

South China Sea as sharpest flashpoint (Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia vs China; US freedom of navigation) → ASEAN refuses the choice (gains from both; ASEAN Way = consensus + non-interference → near neutrality) → **Lee Hsien Loong**: resident power vs reality on the doorstep → South Asia on the same logic (India-US + Quad vs BRI/CPEC) → India's double bind (**Raja Mohan**: opportunity + challenge; land frontier after Galwan + Indian Ocean) → smaller states pay first (**Chellaney**: debt-trap diplomacy — Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Myanmar)

COUNTER-VIEW

competition also brings courtship → US partnerships (Vietnam, Indonesia) give weight they otherwise lack → interdependence (**Nye, Ikenberry**) → rigid blocs unlikely → sharper danger is **Chellaney's** G-2 trap: forced choice between a transactional America and a predatory China

CONCLUSION ROUTES

R1 two futures: driver of peace and prosperity vs epicentre of turbulence

R2 outcome rests on middle powers holding strategic autonomy, not on Washington and Beijing alone

Sino-American rivalry has produced a new bipolarity, resting on economics and military weight, not ideology. Its main theatre is South and South-East Asia.

The region's test is autonomy i.e. whether it gains leverage from the competition or is forced to choose sides. The South China Sea is the sharpest flashpoint. China's claims and island-building set it against Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia & Indonesia; Washington asserts freedom of navigation. ASEAN way of consensus and non-interference keeps them near neutrality.

According to Lee Hsien Loong, US is a resident power and China a reality on the doorstep. The India-US partnership and the Quad antagonise Beijing, while BRI and CPEC extend China's reach into India's neighbourhood.

C. Raja Mohan calls this India's "greatest geopolitical opportunity and biggest diplomatic challenge since independence" holding the land frontier after Galwan, checking China in the Indian ocean.

Smaller states pay first, exposed to Brahma Chellaney's "debt-trap diplomacy": Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Myanmar. Competition also brings courtship. Deep US-China interdependence, as Joseph Nye and John Ikenberry argue, makes rigid blocs unlikely. The sharper danger is Chellaney's 9-2 trap: a forced choice between a transactional America and a predatory China.

Cooperation would make the Indo-Pacific a "driver of peace & prosperity"; sustained hostility, an "epicentre of turbulence". The outcome rests less on Washington and Beijing than on whether the region's middle powers hold their strategic autonomy.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2020 · 20 marks

Discuss the ways to strengthen the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) to enable it to address the challenges faced by the developing countries.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

INTRO ROUTES

R1 Cold War rationale gone → developing-world vulnerabilities remain (unequal trade, coercion, UN system they cannot shape) → machinery weak, founding idea intact → rebuild the surviving framework

R2 strengthening presupposes worth → critics ("coma", "dying organisation") vs defenders (soft balancing) → framework still functions → reshape and re-energise, not reinvent

BODY FLOW

Repair 1, structural: **Köchler** — no charter / statute / secretariat → 120-odd members, declarations never become decisions → consensus → diffuse agenda → fix: permanent secretariat + coordination mechanisms + specialised functionaries + frequent deliberation / Track-II → Repair 2, method: **Jaishankar** — loose grouping → results-oriented organisation → agenda already exists (17th Summit, Margarita Island 2016: UNSC reform, climate justice, unilateral coercive measures, financial architecture) → delivery is the gap → **Khanna** — economic turn, North-South bridge, inequality binds members → Repair 3, political: **Paul** — soft balancing, naming and shaming, Bandung spirit revivable → multilateral partnerships + forward-looking agenda + South-South cooperation + India's natural leadership

COUNTER-VIEW

Pant — dying organisation, drop old shibboleths → members now depend on the US → no reform buys hard power

CONCLUSION ROUTES

R1 order drifting towards rival blocs (Sino-American rivalry) → Global South platform = leverage weaker states lack alone → rebuilt body + strategic autonomy → serves developing countries

R2 never a third pole of power → but a repaired platform: structure, delivery, South-South economics → autonomy preserved in a bloc-forming order

NAM was forced to keep newly independent states out of Cold war blocs. That rivalry has ended, but unequal trade, external coercion and a UN system they cannot shape still weigh on developing countries.

Its machinery has weakened, not its founding idea; strengthening means rebuilding the framework that survives. Hans Kochler notes that NAM has no charter, statute or secretariat: 120-odd members cannot turn declarations into decisions and consensus keeps the agenda diffuse. A permanent secretariat, coordination mechanisms and specialised functionaries would carry work between summits, aided by frequent deliberation and Track-II channels.

S. Jaishankar asks that a loose grouping be reformed into a results-oriented organisation. The agenda exists: the 17th Summit at Margarita Island (2016) sought Security Council reform, climate justice, an end to unilateral coercive measures and reform of the financial architecture.

T.V. Paul shows that NAM worked by soft balancing, naming and shaming its tools and that the Bandung spirit can be revived. That asks for genuine multilateral partnerships, a forward-looking agenda & South-South Cooperation, with India leading the one grouping where its primacy is natural.

Haush V. Pant calls NAM a dying organisation and asks India to drop old shibboleths; many members now depend on the US. No reform gives the movement hard-power weight.

As the order drifts towards rival blocs under Sino-American rivalry, a Global South platform gives weaker states leverage they lack alone. Rebuilt as a working body and carried forward as strategic autonomy, NAM can still serve developing countries.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2021 · 15 marks

Critically examine the decline of the United States of America as a hegemon and its implications for the changing international political order.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

INTRO ROUTES

R1 hegemony = material dominance + consent → **Gramsci**: leadership by consent vs by force → verdict staked: decline real but partial → consent weakens faster than capability

R2 the peak was short (1989 → 2007-09 crash) → **Gilpin's** fragile pillars → what cracked first is legitimacy, not capability

BODY FLOW

primacy built: containment / critical technologies / military reach / dollar's reserve status → brief peak 1989–2007–09 → **Gilpin**: fragile pillars = dollar + MNCs + nuclear weapons → markers of decline: 9/11 → 2008 crisis (neoliberalism's limits) → Afghanistan 2021 → Russia–Ukraine → erosion deepest at the consent pillar → de-dollarisation (China, Russia, India, Iran, Saudi Arabia) → AIIB / NDB rival Bretton Woods → China across UN agencies

COUNTER-VIEW

capability is another matter → **Strange**: structural power (military, international credit, services, dollar, education) → **Zakaria**: still unrivalled in many spheres → adaptation, not collapse, decides the future

CONCLUSION ROUTES

R1 no handover: West → Asia, unipolarity → multipolarity, no successor hegemon → **Allison's** "Thucydides Trap" → order open to rivalry and economic shocks → **Keohane**: an order can outlive its hegemon

R2 Behuria: "Multipolarity is what the states make of it" → widened strategic autonomy for India → but room for strong powers to bend norms

American hegemony after 1945 rested on two supports: material dominance and the consent of others. Antonio Gramsci separated leadership by consent from leadership by force.

By that distinction, American decline is real but partial. Consent has weakened faster than capability. Primacy was built on containment, critical technologies, military reach & dollar's reserve status, peaking briefly, from 1989 to the crash of 2007-09. Robert Gilpin called such power fragile, since it rested on the dollar, MNCs & nuclear weapons.

Erosion runs deepest where consent was produced. De-dollarisation by China, Russia, India, Iran & Saudi Arabia attacks the currency; the AIIB & the NDB rival Bretton Woods; China's widening role across UN agencies contests the Institutions. Capability is another matter.

Susan Strange located American dominance in structural power: the military, international credit, services, the dollar and education. For Fareed Zakaria, it stays unrivalled in many spheres; adaptation will decide its future.

Graham Allison's "Thucydides Trap" places the danger of war exactly here, leaving the system open to rivalry and economic shocks. Robert Keohane argues that an order can outlive its hegemon.

As Ashok Kumar Behuria puts it, "Multipolarity is what the states make of it", widening India's strategic autonomy while letting strong powers bend norms.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2022 · 10 marks

Bipolar structure of the world is more stable than the multipolar one. Comment.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

INTRO ROUTES

R1 polarity = distribution of power → statement is neorealist → Cold War appears to prove it → set the test: the structure, or the weapons the poles carried?

R2 1945–91: no great-power war → 1914 and 1939: multipolar systems collapsed into war → record looks decisive → but ask what actually held the peace

BODY FLOW

Waltz (1979): bipolarity most stable — national interests align with bloc interests, two powers leave little room for miscalculation →

Mearsheimer puts it in reverse: "back to the future" after 1991, both World Wars grew from multipolar systems, fluid balances let ambitious powers expand → **Gaddis**: the result was the "Long Peace"

COUNTER-VIEW

classical realists read the same record differently → **Morgenthau + Carr**: multipolarity more stable — alliances balance, limited wars threaten no one directly → two rigid blocs make every dispute zero-sum → Berlin, Cuba: that calm could turn nuclear

CONCLUSION ROUTES

R1 Waltz himself credits nuclear weapons with keeping the war cold → discipline came from deterrence and crisis management → no structure supplies that alone → bipolarity narrows conflict; peace still has to be managed

R2 true as description (fewer war-triggers), weak as a law of peace → today's US-China "new bipolarity" carries deep interdependence and behaves nothing like the first → stability follows statecraft, not the count of poles

Polity describes how power is distributed among states. The claim is neorealist and the Cold War appears to prove it.

Kenneth Waltz (1979) held bipolarity to be the most stable order, as national interests align with bloc interests and two powers leave little room for miscalculation. John Mearsheimer put the case in reverse, predicting a "back to the future" after 1991: both World wars grew out of multipolar systems, whose fluid balances let ambitious powers expand. John Lewis Gaddis called the result the "Long Peace".

Classical realist like Hans Morgenthau and E.H. Carr found multipolar systems more stable, since powers balance through alliances and fight limited wars that threaten no one directly.

Two rigid blocs make every dispute zero-sum: Berlin and Cuba showed how quickly that calm could turn nuclear.

Waltz himself credited nuclear weapons with keeping the Cold War cold. The discipline of those decades came from deterrence & crisis management, which no structure supplies alone.

Therefore, bipolarity narrows the field of conflict but peace still has to be managed.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2023 · 20 marks

Discuss the relevance of the normative ethos of the Non-Aligned Movement in magnifying India's soft power in pursuit of her national interest.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

INTRO ROUTES

R1 Nye: soft power = attraction, not coercion → others follow because they admire the values → India's attraction sourced in NAM's normative ethos → ethos outlives the movement

R2 1947: no economic or military capability → values the only usable currency → non-alignment chosen as India's instrument of influence

BODY FLOW

ethos named: sovereignty, non-interference, anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, peaceful coexistence (Havana Declaration, 1979) → **Lehmann:** capability deficit → non-alignment as soft-power instrument → T. V. **Paul:** limited soft balancing, naming and shaming → partial credit: decolonisation, containing proliferation → ethos survives in new instruments → **Jaishankar:** era over, independence of action continues; rejection ≠ rush to alignment → reframed as strategic autonomy → legitimises balancing among major powers → South-South: ITEC, International Solar Alliance → anti-colonial memory becomes standing in the Global South

COUNTER-VIEW

Nehru at Belgrade: tests condemned, initiator unnamed → equidistance can equate aggressor and victim → attraction fades once impartiality looks contrived → **Mehta:** contingent balancing — Washington after 1962, Soviet treaty of 1971 → **Pant:** movement dying, drop old shibboleths

CONCLUSION ROUTES

R1 platform thinned, vocabulary intact → **Shankar:** bridge and balancing third pole between US and China → values that once made up for weakness now add to strength

R2 relevance shifts from organisation to ethos → strategic autonomy as non-alignment's afterlife → soft power serves interest only while the values stay credible

Joseph Nye locates soft power in attraction rather than coercion.

A state gets what it wants because others, "admiring its values, emulating its example", want to follow it.

India's influence grew from such a source i.e. the normative ethos of the Non-Aligned Movement, which has outlived the movement. That ethos i.e. sovereignty, non-interference, anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, peaceful coexistence, restated in the Havana declaration of 1979 gave a weak state a usable currency.

According to Lehmann, India, lacking economic & military capability after independence, chose non-alignment as an instrument of considerable soft power. T.V. Paul calls the result limited soft balancing through naming and shaming, with partial credit for decolonisation & containing proliferation.

S. Jaishankar accepts that non-alignment belonged to a specific era, but the independence of action it enshrined remains a continuity in Indian foreign policy; rejecting it is not a rush to alignment.

At Belgrade, J.L. Nehru asked both superpowers to halt nuclear tests without naming who began them; such equidistance can appear to equate aggressor and victim, and attraction built on impartiality fades once it looks contrived. India's conduct was contingent balancing, as Pratap Bhanu Mehta notes: Washington after 1962, the Soviet Treaty of 1971. For Manohar V. Pant the movement is dying and India should drop all shibboleths.

The platform has thinned; the vocabulary has not. It is what lets P.R. Shankar see a rising India as a bridge & balancing third pole between the US and China. Values that once made up for weakness now add to strength.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2023 · 15 marks

Discuss the various constraints on American hegemony today. Which of these are likely to become more prominent in the future?

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

INTRO ROUTES

R1 hegemony ≠ military dominance alone → realist material base + Gramscian consent through ideas/institutions → both foundations under strain → spine: foundational constraints, not flashpoints, will grow

R2 start from the record: Iraq, Afghanistan 2021, Ukraine → force no longer enforces outcomes → so the real constraints sit in the material base and in consent → same spine

BODY FLOW

material constraint: China (technology, markets, value chains, since 2008) + Russia (Eastern Europe, Middle East) → limits of force (Iraq / Afghanistan / Ukraine) → economic constraint: **Gilpin's** fragility (dollar, MNCs, nuclear weapons) → deficit spending + instability → de-dollarisation (China, Russia, India, Iran, Saudi Arabia) → institutional constraint: AIIB, NDB vs Bretton Woods → China's weight in the UN system → ideational constraint: liberal order's appeal weakened → **Rapp-Hooper's** "alliance deficit"

COUNTER-VIEW

not collapse → **Ilhan**: American pullback creates a "false perception" of multipolarity → neither Russia nor China is yet a peer competitor

CONCLUSION ROUTES

R1 what grows is what touches the foundations: technology and supply chains, de-dollarisation, institutional competition → Taiwan and the Indian Ocean test the hegemon; a peer competitor can replace it

R2 constraints limit, they do not dismantle → adaptation, not collapse, settles the outcome (**Zakaria**)

Hegemony is not only military dominance. Realists measure it in material resources; Antonio Gramsci and the neo-Gramscians show that a hegemon also rules by consent, through ideas and institutions.

The material constraint is China: an autonomous competitor for technology, markets and value chains since 2008, while Russia presses in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Iraq, the 2021 exit from Afghanistan and the inability to prevent the Ukraine war expose a hegemon unable to enforce outcomes.

Robert Gilpin held that American hegemony is fragile because it rests on the dollar, MNCs and Nuclear Weapons. Deficit spending and instability in the US-led economy weaken that base, and China, Russia, India, Iran & Saudi Arabia now pursue de-dollarisation.

Mira Rapp-Hooper identifies an "alliance deficit": Beijing courts partners while transactional American leadership strains its own.

Bekir Ilhan calls the American pullback as creating a "false perception" of multipolarity: neither Russia nor China is yet a peer competitor.

Technology and supply-chain rivalry with China, de-dollarisation, institutional competition. Taiwan and the Indian Ocean stay dangerous, but a flashpoint tests a hegemon; a peer competitor in technology and economics can replace it.

Whether they prove decisive depends, as Fareed Zakaria suggests, on America's capacity to adapt.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2024 · 10 marks

The changing global order and ongoing regional conflicts, with the global powers taking sides, have jeopardised the progress made towards disarmament in the past. Comment.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

INTRO ROUTES

R1 disarmament was a product of structure → parity + dialogue + shared institutions → those supports withdrawn → statement holds

R2 past gains came when rivals could still bargain → present order removes the bargaining floor → jeopardy is real

BODY FLOW

détente converts parity into treaties (SALT, ABM, hotline, START) → non-aligned push carries PTBT 1963 → that machinery gone → both arsenals modernising → New START lapse (Feb 2026), no cap in fifty-plus years → CTBT / FMCT / 2017 ban treaty blocked or boycotted → Ukraine destroys parity, dialogue, institutions → side-taking in regional wars: West Asia arms supplies + Iran-Saudi → South Asia standoff → doubtful US umbrella → Japan / South Korea / Gulf may revisit non-nuclear status (**Perkovich & Acton**) → side-taking spreads weapons

COUNTER-VIEW

failure predates these wars → **Simpson**: under-delivery since the 1990s, blocked by the nuclear powers themselves → **Mearsheimer**: a thin order still carries arms control

CONCLUSION ROUTES

R1 machinery of bargaining collapsed; restraint has not → India's No First Use → verifiable, non-discriminatory framework

R2 the statement describes a real reversal, not a permanent fate → rebuild the missing supports: verification, non-discrimination, dialogue

Past disarmament rested on conditions the present order no longer supplies: rough parity between two superpowers, working dialogue, shared institutions.

Detente turned parity into agreement: SALT, the ABM Treaty, the hotline, later START; non-aligned pressure carried the Partial Test Ban Treaty (1963). That machinery has gone. Both arsenals are modernising. New START lapsed in 2026, leaving them uncapped for the 1st time in over 50 years and the CTBT, FMCT and 2017 ban treaty stay blocked or boycotted.

Ukraine destroyed the parity, dialogue and institutions that made detente workable, Arms supplies & Iran-Saudi rivalry feed West Asia's race; South Asia's standoff continues.

If the US umbrella weakens, PerKovich and Acton expect Japan, South Korea & the Gulf states to revisit their non-nuclear status: taking sides now spreads weapons.

The failure predates these wars. John Simpson find the agenda under-delivering since the 1990s, blocked by the nuclear powers themselves. John Mearsheimer expects a thin order where they bargain over arms control.

The machinery of bargaining has collapsed; restraint has not, as India's NO First Use shows. A verifiable non-discriminatory framework is the route back.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2024 · 15 marks

Do you agree with the view that the USA uses NATO as a traditional tool of strategy to perpetuate its hegemony in the world?

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

INTRO ROUTES

R1 NATO 1949, US-led mutual defence pact vs USSR; Warsaw Pact 1955 → agree on the purpose, dispute the method → hegemony perpetuated, but not by coercion

R2 the question's premise is realist (**Mearsheimer**: hegemon strengthens self, weakens rivals) → NATO's post-1991 record fits that purpose → but the method is consent, not coercion

BODY FLOW

realist premise stated (**Mearsheimer**) → NATO outlives the enemy it was built against → institutionalises US military leadership in Europe → carries American influence eastward into the former Soviet space → **Hurrell**: Cold War's end frees the USA from geopolitical constraints, less tolerant of alternative orders → Ukraine war read partly as a contest over that expansion → European strategic autonomy discouraged → pivot: how the alliance holds its members → US backing for European reconstruction and integration → allies "bandwagon" instead of balancing → **Gramsci**: leadership by consent vs by force beats a purely material account → explains the alliance holding together after the Soviet threat went

COUNTER-VIEW

a pure instrument of American will would obey → Europe resents being "dragged into" US confrontations → "Sinatra Doctrine" impulse → separate China policy → burden-sharing: "fund its security" → **Rapp-Hooper's** "alliance deficit"

CONCLUSION ROUTES

R1 agreement must be qualified → hegemony perpetuated by consent → consent can be withheld

R2 Zakaria: the future of that hegemony turns on America's capacity to adapt

NATO began in 1949 as a US-led mutual defence pact to contain the Soviet Union; the Warsaw Pact followed in 1955. The claim is right about the purpose and wrong about the method: NATO does perpetuate American hegemony, though not as a traditional instrument of coercion.

The premise is realist. For John Mearsheimer, a hegemon strengthens itself and weakens its rivals and NATO's post-1991 record fits. It outlived the enemy it was built against, institutionalised US military leadership in Europe and carried American influence eastward into the former Soviet space.

Andrew Hurrell notes that the Cold War's end freed the USA from geopolitical constraints, leaving it less tolerant of alternative orders.

The Ukraine war is read partly as a contest over that expansion, and NATO still discourages European strategic autonomy.

Antonio Gramsci's distinction between leadership by consent & leadership by force captures this better than any material account of power. It explains why the alliance held together once the Soviet threat disappeared.

Europe resents being "dragged into" US confrontations, wants a "Sinatra Doctrine" of its own and runs a separate China policy. Demands that it "fund its security" strained ties further, producing what Mira Rapp-Hooper calls an "alliance deficit".

NATO perpetuates hegemony by consent, and consent can be withheld. Its future, as Fareed Zakaria suggests, depends on US's capacity to adapt.

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