

— PSIR OPTIONAL · UPSC CSE

EDITION 2026

PYQ Vault

560

QUESTIONS

50

DAYS

10

YEARS OF PYQs

DAY 40

India & the Non-Aligned Movement · 7 questions

Every question carries a Flow Snapshot — and a handwritten model answer on the channel. Fifty days of this, and no PYQ will be unfamiliar.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2015 · 10 marks

‘Non-alignment’ has been the basic principle of India’s foreign policy since independence. Discuss its relevance in the contemporary context.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 non-alignment ≠ neutrality → **Nehru’s** “best judgment” → blocs ruled out, engagement not → relevance judged on two tracks: principle + movement

Body flow

R2 Belgrade 1961, 25 states, bipolar setting → that setting gone → question is which part of non-alignment has dated
bipolar order gone + movement weakened (over 120 members, scattered priorities, no permanent secretariat, PM absent from summits) → principle outlives institution → **Saran:** principles still govern Indian foreign policy → **Sreenivasan:** core = freedom of judgment and action = strategic autonomy → multi-alignment in practice: Quad + BRICS + SCO, no binding alliance

Counter-view

sceptics go further → **Raja Mohan:** meaning lost even before the Cold War ended → **Karnad:** revival questionable in an order driven by material power

Conclusion routes

R1 movement needs reform, policy has already adapted → **Sood:** “not an abandonment, but a reinterpretation” → each issue judged on own interest

R2 relevance now sits in strategic autonomy plus a collective voice for the Global South → survives by redefinition and reform, not by attendance

Non-Alignment was never neutrality. Jawaharlal Nehru defined it as "acting according to our best judgment", which ruled out Cold war military blocs without ruling out engagement.

Its relevance today must be judged on both: the principle, & the movement built around it. The bipolar order is gone, and the movement has weakened. It has scattered priorities among over 120 members, no permanent secretariat, the PM's absence from recent summits. The principle outlived institution.

Shyam Saran argues that although NAM's relevance narrowed, its principles still govern Indian foreign policy. T.P. Sreenivasan views that as freedom of judgment and action which is now called strategic autonomy. Multi-alignment in the contemporary times follow this.

BRICS, The Quad and the SCO engaged at once, with no binding alliance.

C. Raja Mohan argues that non-alignment lost meaning even before the Cold War ended, and Bharat Karnad questions its revival in an order driven by material power.

Therefore, the movement needs reform. In Rakesh Sood's words, multi-alignment is "not an abandonment, but a reinterpretation", and India still judges each issue by its own interest.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2016 · 10 marks

Comment on India's contribution to Non-Alignment Movement and contemporary relevance.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 India not a member but an author → Belgrade 1961, **Nehru** with **Tito** and **Nasser** → contribution normative, norm outlasts forum

R2 non-alignment as India's own idea, exported into a movement → co-founding at Belgrade → India gave NAM principle, not power

Body flow

Bhattacharya's three fronts → ideological: NIEO at Algiers 1973 vs North-South imbalance → diplomatic: diverse membership held together, New Delhi summit 1983 reasserts roots → humanitarian: peacekeeping + disarmament pressure behind Partial Test Ban Treaty 1963 → Cold War's close removes the rivalry → "non-alignment with whom" → independence of judgment outlives the movement's purpose → today: Quad + BRICS + SCO at once, no binding alliance → Global South leadership, Voice of Global South Summits

Counter-view

Parthasarathy: no binding principles, coalition of convenience → charge fits the movement, not the policy

Conclusion routes

R1 freedom to judge each issue on merit still guides Indian diplomacy amid renewed great-power competition

R2 the forum needs reform, the principle already works → India's contribution survives as its own method, not as NAM's machinery

India did not merely join the NAM, it supplied much of its thinking. At Belgrade in 1961, J.L. Nehru with Josip Broz Tito and Gamal Abdel Nasser, shaped its principles.

The contribution was normative, and the norm has outlasted the forum. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya places India's role on three fronts. Ideologically, it pressed the New International Economic Order at Algiers in 1973 against North-South imbalance.

Diplomatically, it held a diverse membership together, the New Delhi summit of 1983 reasserting non-aligned roots.

Humanitarian work showed in peacekeeping and in disarmament pressure behind the Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963.

The end of Cold war removed the rivalry behind the posture, and critics asked "non-alignment with whom". According to G. Panthasanthu, NAM lacked binding principles & was a coalition of convenience.

India now engages the Quad, BRICS & the SCO at once without binding alliance and leads the Global South through the Voice of Global South Summits.

Therefore, India took from it the freedom to judge each issue on merit. It still guides its diplomacy amid renewed great-power competition.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2019 · 10 marks

Compare and contrast Non-alignment 1.0 with Non-alignment 2.0.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 1.0 = **Nehru**'s answer to bipolarity → materially weak new state keeps freedom of decision by refusing both blocs
→ 2.0 = 2012, twelve experts → same freedom, almost opposite means

R2 one label, two settings → bipolarity vs multipolarity → the real question: has the purpose changed, or only the method?

Body flow

shared ground first: anti-colonial / anti-imperialist → sovereignty + territorial integrity → no binding military bloc
→ 2.0's own continuity claim ("strategic autonomy... defining value") → then divergence: Cold War → globalisation | **Nehru**'s personal initiative → multipolar order no leader designed | distance from blocs → several alignments at once | neighbours diluted → Act East / Link West | strict Nehruvian bar → LEMOA, COMCASA

Counter-view

Karnad → 2.0 a regressive roadmap → moral influence over-weighted where material power decides

Conclusion routes

R1 purpose survives the change of method → autonomy in decision-making is the constant

R2 **Raja Mohan** → from choosing sides to maximizing options

Non-alignment 1.0 was J.L. Nehru's answer to bipolarity. A materially weak new state guarded its freedom of decision by refusing both blocs. Non-alignment 2.0 - framed in 2012, pursues the same freedom by almost opposite means.

Both remain anti-colonial and anti-imperialist, both put sovereignty and territorial integrity first and neither accepts a binding military bloc. The document itself claims this continuity i.e. "strategic autonomy has been the defining value" since independence.

The methods diverge. 1.0 belonged to the Cold War & was largely Nehru's personal initiative. The 2.0 grew from globalisation & a multipolar order no single leader designed.

Distance from bloc politics has given way to several alignments held at once.

Ties with neighbours, diluted under 1.0, are deepened through Act East & Link West. LEMOA & COMCASA would not have cleared the strict Nehruvian bar on military alignment.

Bharat Karnad calls 2.0 as a regressive roadmap, over-invested in moral influence where material power decides. The purpose, though, survives the change of method i.e. autonomy in decision-making.

C. Raja Mohan states policy is "no longer about choosing sides, but about maximizing options."

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2021 · 20 marks

“Non-alignment was little more than a rational strategy on the part of a materially weak India to maximise its interests with a bipolar distribution of global power.” Comment.

FLOW SNAPSHOT – how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 not neutrality, not equidistance → independent policy = no alliances + freedom of judgment → the calculation is read correctly, “little more than” is the weak word

Body flow

R2 1947, little military or economic weight → alliance = obligation without adequate defence → autonomy of policy inside bipolarity, not distance from it

material weakness → alliance meant obligation without defence + quarrels serving no Indian purpose → **Nehru**: strategy, not dogma, ready to “join the side which is to our interest” → **V.P. Dutt**: idealism in appearance, pragmatism in substance → returns concrete: Bokaro, US Congress refuses, Soviet aid taken, policy unchanged → **Tharoor**: flexibility + influence beyond actual capability → **turn**: a weak state cannot buy influence, so moral standing becomes capability → agenda outruns Indian interest: decolonization, disarmament, apartheid, NIEO → “Trade Union of the Third World” → **Bandyopadhyaya**: universalized the international system, weaker states from objects into subjects

Counter-view

Morgenthau: neutrality as weakness where power politics governs → 1962: what diplomatic standing could not do against force

Conclusion routes

R1 calculation real, reduction false → a device fitted only to bipolarity would have ended with bipolarity → blocs gone, freedom of judgment still directs Indian diplomacy

R2 strategy and ethic were not rivals → for a weak state the norms were the instrument, and they outgrew the purpose they were built for

Non-alignment was neither neutrality nor equidistance between the blocs. It meant an independent foreign policy: no military alliances, and freedom to judge each question on its merits. The statement reads India's calculation correctly. Where it fails is in the words "little more than"

India in 1947 carried little military or economic weight. J.L. Nehru treated it as strategy, not dogma, and was ready to "join the side which is to our interest" if forced to choose. V.P. Dutt put it plainly: what appeared as idealism was in substance pragmatism.

The returns were concrete. When the US congress refused aid for the Bokaro steel plant, India took Soviet assistance & changed nothing in its foreign policy. According to Sashi Tharoor, non-alignment gave India diplomatic flexibility and an influence out of proportion to its actual capabilities.

Here the statement stops short. A materially weak state cannot buy influence, so its moral standing becomes its capability. India's did not stay confined to Indian interest: it pressed decolonization, disarmament, the end of apartheid and a new international economic order for the whole developing world, work that earned India the label "Trade Union of the Third World". For Jayantanjaya Bandyopadhyay, the movement universalized the international system, turning weaker states from objects into subjects of international relations.

The realist objection goes further than the statement. **Hans Morgenthau** read neutrality as weakness in a world governed by power politics, and 1962 exposed how little diplomatic standing could do against force.

The calculation was real; the reduction is not. A device fitted only to bipolarity would have ended with bipolarity. The blocs are gone; the freedom to judge each issue on its merits still directs Indian diplomacy.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2024 · 15 marks

“India has of late, chosen to debunk non-alignment in its pursuit of multi-alignment.” Comment.

FLOW SNAPSHOT – how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 non-alignment ≠ withdrawal → **Nehru**’s “best judgment” → freedom of choice, not equidistance → method changes, idea holds

Body flow

R2 test the verb “debunk” → posture vs principle → grammar of policy shifts, core survives
departure is real: LEMOA/COMCASA, PM absent from NAM summits, **Jaishankar**’s engage–manage–cultivate–reassure → but neither recent nor complete: **Nehru** ready to join the side of interest, 1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty, **Ganguly**’s realist turn after 1962, deepened 1991 → the constant is strategic autonomy: Non-Alignment 2.0 → defining value, “maximum options” → multi-alignment spreads commitments (Quad, BRICS, SCO, Russia) so no partner decides for India → **Saran**: substance vs posture

Counter-view

Pant → no rigid non-aligned pigeonhole → but the charge lands on NAM as institution and Cold War idiom, not on freedom of judgment → Global South leadership carries it forward

Conclusion routes

R1 “debunk” overstates → **Sood** → reinterpretation, not abandonment

R2 from avoiding sides to maximising options → autonomy is the continuity, alignment only the instrument

Non-alignment never meant withdrawal from world politics. J.L. Nehru described it as acting "according to our best judgment," placing freedom of choice, not equidistance, at its centre.

India's recent conduct changes the method of protecting that freedom, not the idea itself. S. Jaishankar's formulation, "engage America, manage China, cultivate Europe, reassure Russia", describes simultaneous engagement with rival powers.

The shift is neither recent nor complete. Nehru treated it as strategy, not dogma, ready to "join the side which is to our interest" if a choice became unavoidable. According to Sumit Ganguly, after 1962 the rhetoric remained while behaviour turned realist, a drift 1991 deepened.

NAM 2.0 calls it the defining value & seeks to give India "maximum options". Multi-alignment serves that end by spreading commitments across the Quad, BRICS, the SCO & Russia, so no partner can settle India's choice.

Shyam Saran holds that non-alignment's principles still govern Indian policy, separating substance from posture.

Hansh V. Pant argues that India cannot be pigeonholed into a rigid non-aligned stance. The critics argues NAM as an institution and its Cold War vocabulary & not the freedom of judgment beneath, which India's Global South leadership still carries.

"Debunk" therefore overstates the change. Rakesh Sood calls it as "not an abandonment, but a reinterpretation."

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2025 · 10 marks

Does the Non-Aligned Movement have any future in the wake of India's growing indifference towards it?

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 NAM born 1961 → new states clear of both blocs → sovereignty + equitable development → India's absence real, future turns on NAM's own reform

R2 absence from recent summits = post-1991 shift to multi-alignment → the question is NAM's condition, not India's attendance

Body flow

decline predates India's drift → **C. Raja Mohan**: meaning lost before the Cold War ended, failed to shape events → 120-plus members, fragmented priorities → no permanent secretariat → agenda absorbed by African Union / ASEAN / BRICS → but small and marginalised states still need a voice → **M.K. Narayanan**: collective voice on global issues → global governance + UN reform → **T.V. Paul**: space for soft balancing, onus on smaller countries → future conditional on reform → **Harsh V. Pant**: "old shibboleths", no new goals → **Keethaponcalan**: permanent secretariat + selective engagement in place of non-cooperation

Counter-view

NAM a spent force (no achievement, no machinery, regional bodies took over the agenda) vs NAM the one collective platform left to weaker states

Conclusion routes

R1 a future exists, but a reformed one → India's absence weakens the platform, does not decide it

R2 the decline was NAM's own → reform of agenda and structure settles the question, not India's return

The NAM was founded in 1961 so that newly independent states could stay clear of both blocs & press for sovereignty and equitable development.

India's absence from recent summits belongs to its post-1991 turn towards multi-alignment. The movement's future, however, depends on its own reform. C. Raja Mohan holds that NAM lost meaning even before the Cold war ended, having failed to shape global affairs. Fragmented priorities among 120-plus members, no permanent secretariat and the rise of African Union, ASEAN and BRICS had already narrowed its work.

M.K. Narayanan holds that the movement gives the smaller states a collective voice on global issues ; on global governance & UN reform it remains their platform . T.V. Paul calls space for soft balancing by weaker countries , though " the onus is on smaller countries , "

Harsh V. Pant argues that " old shibboleths " without new goals leave NAM ineffective . NAM can have a future, but a reformed one , and India's absence does not decide it.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2025 · 15 marks

Non-Alignment 2.0 underscores India's unique aspiration to emerge as a site for an alternative universality. Comment.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 NA 2.0, 2012, twelve experts → what order should a rising India want → autonomy + openness, not hegemony or blocs → claim of universality sits here

R2 incumbent universal = Western liberal hegemony → other pole = rigid bloc politics → NA 2.0 positions India as a third site

Body flow

strategic autonomy as defining value → “maximum options” → polycentric world, networks not fixed alliances → so the universal offered is a method, not a creed for export → pedigree: **Bandyopadhyaya**, weaker states from objects to subjects → same claim restated for multipolarity → Voice of Global South Summits + AU into G20 under India's presidency = building the site

Counter-view

Karnad: regressive roadmap → ideational and moral influence overweighted against material power → a site that cannot deliver remains only an intention

Conclusion routes

R1 aspiration real and distinctly Indian → universality turns on converting convening power into usable outcomes

R2 1.0 universalised by making weak states subjects → 2.0's test is the same work done by delivery, not declaration

NAM 2.0 (2012), framed by twelve experts on foreign & strategic policy, asks what order a rising India should want. Its answer rests on autonomy & openness rather than hegemony or blocs.

The document treats strategic autonomy as the defining value of Indian policy, aiming to give India "maximum options". It pictures a polycentric world where states cooperate in networks rather than fixed alliances.

Jayantnuja Bandyopadhyaya held that non-alignment universalized the global system by turning weaker states from objects into subjects. The document restates it for a multipolar world. The Voice of Global South Summits and the African Union's entry into the G20 under India's presidency are efforts to build that site.

Bhanat Karnad calls the document as a regressive roadmap, too invested in ideational & moral influence where material power decides outcomes. A site of universality that cannot deliver stays an intention.

The aspiration is real & distinctly Indian. Whether it becomes a universality depends on converting convening power into outcomes others can use.

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