

PYQ Vault

560

questions

50

days

10

years of PYQs

DAY 46

Global Centres of Power — II

• **10 questions**

Every question carries a Flow Snapshot, and the channel carries a handwritten model answer. **No PYQ will be unfamiliar.**

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2018 · 15 marks

Do you agree that the growing assertiveness of China is leading to multilayered Indo-Japan relations?
Comment.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 ties predate China's rise → 1952 treaty, yen loans 1958, CEPA, high-speed rail → assertiveness changed pace and range, not origin **R2** "multilayered" must be shown, not asserted → layers exist → but unequal in strength

Body flow

same pressure on both: Senkakus + LAC + nine-dash line rejected 2016 → **Panda**: Asia uneasy, Beijing reads friendship as ganging up → layered response: 2+2, Malabar, Quad, Act East Forum-FOIP → 2025 security declaration replaces 2008 → UNICORN co-development 2026 → coercion adds newest layer: Takaichi in Diet, Nov 2025 → travel advisory + seafood ban → July 2026 economic-security declaration: semiconductors, critical minerals, clean energy → no dependence on one country

Counter-view

depth lags breadth → **Jain**: economic ties the weak link, 10 trillion yen slow → **Menon**: strategic autonomy caps Tokyo's balancing hopes → India still engages Beijing while Japan's China ties worsen

Conclusion routes

R1 assertiveness explains breadth better than depth **R2** the layers are real but uneven → agreement with the question, not endorsement of its implied depth

India and Japan were close long before China's rise i.e. a peace treaty in 1952, yen loans from 1958, CEPA in 2011, the Mumbai-Ahmedabad high speed rail.

Chinese assertiveness did not create these ties. It changed their pace & range, widening the partnership into layers of unequal strength. Japan at the Senkakus, India on the LAC, both facing a 9-dash line rejected by arbitration in 2016. Rajaram Panda argues that most of Asia is uneasy with Chinese assertiveness, and Beijing views their friendship as ganging up.

The response has been by the 2+2 dialogue, Malabar, the Quad, an Act East Forum tied to Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific.

A new joint declaration on Security Cooperation in 2025 replaced the 2008 text. In 2026 both agreed to co-develop the UNICORN antenna for Indian warships.

The Modi - Takaichi summit of July 2026 focused on a declaration on economic security covering semiconductors, critical minerals & clean energy, pledging against dependence on one country.

Purnendra Jain calls economic ties "a rather weak link of an otherwise robust strategic partnership." Shivshankar Menon holds that India's preference for strategic autonomy limits Tokyo's balancing hopes.

India engages Beijing politically while Japan's ties with China has worsened. Therefore, assertiveness explains the breadth of these layers better than their depth.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2019 · 20 marks

Describe briefly China's 'One Belt One Road (OBOR)' Initiative and analyze India's major concerns.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 Xi 2013 → belt + maritime road, AIIB behind → Raisina invitation Jan 2017 declined → objection is to terms, not to roads
R2 connectivity as statecraft → India the lone large refuser → question is on what political terms infrastructure arrives

Body flow

description (two limbs, geography, finance) → sovereignty as the first-order concern (CPEC through PoK, title problem) → 2025 Afghan extension → “unacceptable” reply → reciprocity charge (Arunachal vs PoK) → second-order strategic concern (Gwadar / Hambantota / Kyaukpyu, neighbourhood lending) → record 2025 engagement kills the “BRI is fading” reading

Counter-view

debt trap is the weakest Indian leg → **Jones** and **Hameiri** on Hambantota (Colombo's project, small Chinese share, no swap, lease money to Western creditors) → the term itself was coined in Delhi

Conclusion routes

R1 India's case rests on territory and reciprocity, not on predation **R2** sole SCO holdout nine years on → the position holds only if Delhi delivers its own connectivity (**Raja Mohan**)

Announced by Xi Jinping in 2013 & later renamed the Belt & Road Initiative, OBOR joins an overland Silk Road Economic Belt to a 21st century maritime silk road.

It includes financing ports, roads, railways & energy across Asia, Eurasia & Africa, with lenders such as the AIIB behind it. Delhi declined the invitation extended at the Raisina Dialogue in 2017. The objection was to the terms on which connectivity was offered.

The CPEC runs through PoK, & joining a project built on Pakistani title would weaken India's claim. The dispute has widened and not settled. After the 2025 Beijing & Kabul trilaterals proposed carrying CPEC into Afghanistan, the government told Parliament that "expansion of the so-called CPEC projects to third country is unacceptable." India argues that China resists Japanese investment in Arunachal Pradesh.

Gwadar, Hambantota & Kyaukpadaung put Chinese-financed facilities along India's sea approaches. Chinese construction & investment across BRI countries touched record levels in 2025.

Lee Jones and Shahar Hashemi show that Hambantota was Colombo's project & Chinese loans were a small share of Sri Lankan debt. No debt was exchanged for the port, & the lease money went to Western creditors. The phrase was coined in Delhi, by Brahma Chellaney, in 2017.

India's case is therefore strongest on territory & reciprocity. 9 years on it remains the only SCO member withholding endorsement.

According to C Raja Mohan, every year lost on frontier infrastructure & regional integration makes the next Hambantota harder to answer.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2020 · 15 marks

What are the notable features of the recently concluded pact or the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) between India and Japan? How is it likely to address the security concerns of India?

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 signed 9 Sept 2020, in force July 2021 → the name says supplies and services, not bases → reach without obligation **R2**
 India's logistics network after LEMOA → Japan added as an enabling framework, not an alliance → worth and limit in the same clause

Body flow

permissive design: either may ask, other may provide → fifteen categories, food to port services → activities: exercises, UN peacekeeping, relief, evacuation, port visits → weapons and ammunition excluded → ten years, auto-renewal → distance converted into range → Djibouti / Andamans / Malacca → Malabar, JIMEX easier to sustain → joins the LEMOA network

Counter-view

Basrur and **Kutty**: autonomy preferred to alliance → so no obligation in a crisis → no reciprocal access agreement, unlike Australia and the Philippines → **Lidarev**: not a full ally → Taiwan contingency, access becomes exposure

Conclusion routes

R1 cost of presence falls, cost of commitment avoided **R2**
 maritime reach gained, land border with China untouched

India & Japan signed the Acquisition & Cross-servicing agreement on 9 September 2020 & entered into force in July 2021.

Its formal name, reciprocal provision of supplies & services, is more exact than 'base sharing'. The pact gives India reach without obligation. 15 categories are covered, from food, fuel & transport to spare parts, repair & maintenance, use of facilities & port services, for joint exercises, UN peacekeeping, disaster relief, evacuation of nationals & routine port visits. Weapons & ammunitions are excluded.

Distance has always limited what these two navies could do together. Logistics converts it into range. Indian ships can draw on Japanese facilities, including the Djibouti base & Japanese ships gain support in the Andamans, astride the Malacca Strait. Malabar & JIMEX grow easier to sustain, and it joins the network built since CEMOA in 2016.

According to Rajesh Basrar & Sumitha Narayanan Kutty, this partnership gives more policy autonomy than alliances, avoiding entanglement in a larger partner's goals. It therefore promises nothing in a crisis. Japan has reciprocal access agreements with Australia & the Philippines covering visiting forces; India has none.

Ivan Lidarev states that "Japan is not a full Indian ally" and a Taiwan crisis could pull India into a war it doesn't want.

The agreement lowers the cost of Indian presence in the Indo-Pacific. It leaves the land border with China untouched & binds neither side to fight.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2020 · 15 marks

Examine the Geo-strategic points of contention in the bilateral relationship between India and China.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 not a stray boundary row → structural contest for space + status between two rising powers **R2** **Pardesi's** overlapping spheres → Himalayas / South Asia / Indian Ocean as one rivalry, not many

Body flow

three-sector border → west: Aksai Chin (Xinjiang-Tibet highway) → east: "South Tibet" / Tawang → dispute rooted in Tibet + exiled Dalai Lama → second axis = encirclement → Pakistan + CPEC-through-PoK → BRI rejected on sovereignty → String of Pearls (Gwadar-Hambantota) → newer pressure = water → Yarlung Tsangpo mega-dam (Dec 2024), lower-riparian India → Galwan 2020 breaks 1988 consensus (**Banerjee**) → border now conditions everything → India-US + Quad convergence resented

Counter-view

interdependence + BRICS pull toward engagement → Oct 2024 Depsang-Demchok accord restores some calm

Conclusion routes

R1 points interlock — territory, Tibet, Pakistan, ocean, water — one contest for Asian primacy **R2** thaw incremental, not settlement (**Joshi**) → frontier peace the precondition → contention stays geo-strategic and open

The friction between India & China is not a stray boundary quarrel but a structural contest for space & status between two rising powers with overlapping spheres.

The rivalry, Manjeet S. Panderi argues runs across shared arenas i.e. the Himalayas, South Asia & increasingly, the Indian Ocean. The oldest fault line is the unsettled border in three sectors. In the West lies Aksai Chin, valued less in law than for the highway linking Xinjiang with Tibet. In the east China calls Arunachal Pradesh "South Tibet" & presses hardest on Tawang. The dispute is inseparable from Tibet: its 1950-51 annexation made China a neighbour, and the exiled Dalai Lama keeps it politically live.

China's all-weather ties with Pakistan, and the corridor through POK, pushed India to reject the BRI on sovereignty grounds.

Its ring of ports from Gwadar to Hambantota contests Indian primacy in the neighbourhood.

In December 2024 China cleared a mega-dam on the Yaulung Tsangpo before it enters India as the Brahmaputra, leaving lower-riparian India exposed to manipulated flows.

Galwan (2020) hardened all of this. It broke the 1988 consensus that had kept the border apart from the wider relationship, Mayuri Banerjee argues the frontier now conditions everything. China resents India's convergence with the US & the quad.

Manoj Joshi argues that the October 2024 patrolling accord at Depsang & Demchok brings incremental calm, non-settlement. The contention stays geo-strategic & open.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2021 · 15 marks

Explain India's relations with the European Union in the context of Brexit.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 paradox: dense economic ties, thin strategic depth → Britain as India's familiar bridge → Brexit removes it, two tracks **R2** "natural partners" (**Wagner**) but underused → Britain the comfortable gateway into Brussels → Brexit forces a rethink

Body flow

paradox (**Wagner** "natural partners" → **Pant**, late 2004) → Britain = familiar interlocutor inside EU → Brexit removes bridge → immediate concerns (diaspora / moving population / student-visa curbs) → strategic pivot (Jaishankar: under-attended Brussels → engage all 27 directly) → direct-track payoff (FTA resumed 2021 → concluded Jan 2026 + Security & Defence Partnership) → bilateral track (UK freed from EU trade policy → CETA 2025 + AUKUS) → widened Europe (Nordic Summit, Baltics/Balkans missions)

Counter-view

Brexit-as-loss (EU weakened, familiar interlocutor gone, diaspora + visa strain) vs Brexit-as-opportunity (bilateral room, direct Brussels engagement, deeper partnership)

Conclusion routes

R1 net loss for EU's global weight; mixed for India — lost bridge, gained bilateral space **R2** Brexit as catalyst → from bridge-dependence to a direct, deeper Union partnership (FTA + defence) plus a standalone UK track

India's engagement with the EU has long carried a paradox i.e. dense economic ties but thin strategic depth. Christian Wagner calls the two "natural partners".

Harsh V. Pant argues that the Union was slow to take India seriously, formalising a strategic partnership only in 2004. Within it, Britain was India's most familiar interlocutor. Brexit removed that bridge & forced India to approach Europe on two tracks.

Brexit raised worries over the welfare of a nearly 3 million strong diaspora, the large moving population of students, professionals & visitors & visa curbs that had reduced Indian student numbers.

S. Jaishankar admitted that Delhi has not given Brussels adequate attention, and India began engaging all 27 members directly.

Free trade talks resumed in 2021 & were concluded in January 2026, alongside a new Security & Defence Partnership that supplies the strategic content the relationship earlier lacked.

Freed from the Union's common trade policy, Britain struck its own deal, the India-UK CETA of 2025, while its Indo-Pacific turn through AUKUS deepened this channel. India further widened its reach beyond the France-Germany-UK core, adding the Nordic Summit & new missions across the Baltics & Balkans.

Brexit therefore weakened the Union's global weight but proved a mixed, productive outcome for India. It costs a bridge into Brussels while opening bilateral space and a deeper partnership with the Union itself.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2022 · 20 marks

What are the main drivers of India-Japan Strategic and Global Partnership?

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

RI India's most conflict-free major-power tie → never adversaries, no dispute → Abe's "natural ally" **R2** frictionlessness as the base → complementarity + China + Indo-Pacific stacked on it

Body flow

complementarity (capital/tech/ageing ↔ market/young) → economic base (yen loans, CEPA, ODA → ¥5tn to ¥10tn) → China the sharper driver (**Pardesi**: rise revives a frozen tie) → **Panda** (Asia resents assertiveness; Senkaku / boundary) → shared vision (Abe "confluence" → Act East Forum ↔ FOIP → **John**: construct makes it regional-global) → why now (US unpredictable + China rival → **Pant**: Japan dependable) → institutional density (SSGP 2014, 2+2, Quad) → newest driver: economic security (semiconductors / critical minerals / clean energy → de-risking China)

Counter-view

least encumbered yet most under-realised → trade below potential, out of RCEP, defence-industrial lag → Japan's 2025 export-rule review + UNICORN begin to close it

Conclusion routes

RI drivers structural + complementary → China/Indo-Pacific = push, capital/market = pull **R2** warmth is real; the future turns on converting it into hard content

NO major-power tie of India's is a free of conflict as the one with Japan. The two have never been adversaries & share no territorial or ideological dispute, which is why Shinzo Abe called India a natural ally.

Japanese capital, technology & an ageing workforce meet India's market, resources & young population. The relations consist of yen loans from 1958, CEPA, & long-standing ODA. The 2022 pledge of ¥5 trillion was raised in 2025 to ¥ trillion, about US \$ 68 billion, over the decade.

Manjeet S. Pardesi shows that China's rise revived a tie the Cold War had frozen. Rajaram Panda argues that Asia resents Chinese assertiveness, Japan over the SenKaku islands, India over its boundary. The Act East Forum links India's Act East to Japan's Free & Open Indo-Pacific.

For Jojin V. John, the Indo-Pacific construct made a narrow bilateral a regional and global partnership. As Washington turns unpredictable & Beijing stays a rival, Haresh V. Pant calls Tokyo India's most dependable partner.

The 2014 Special Strategic & Global partnership, the 2+2 dialogue, & the Quad drives economic security. The 2025 declaration ties semiconductors, critical minerals & clean energy to supply chains less dependent on China.

But the trade stays below potential & India stayed out of RCEP. Defence-industrial content trails political warmth, though Japan's 2025 review of its defence-export rules & the UNICORN antenna project begin to close the gap.

The drivers are structural & complementary i.e. China & the Indo-Pacific supply the push, capital and market the pull. Its future depends on converting warmth into hard content.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2023 · 15 marks

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) performs an important role in India's strategic balancing act to withstand the dominance of China in Asia. Discuss.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 four Indo-Pacific democracies in dialogue → India's balancing instrument, but indirect, no alliance **R2** 2004 tsunami origins → dormant → revived 2021 as China encircles → Quad as India's answer

Body flow

tsunami 'core group' / **Shyam Saran** → 2021 leaders' revival / South China Sea militarisation + BRI encirclement → **Pant:** counterbalance, rise above middle-power, 'like-minded' defence + info links, Vaccine Maitri + supply chains → maritime edge (domain awareness, coast guard) → **Tarapore:** "zone balancing" — shape the region, build partners' resilience, not a direct race → limited hard balancing after Galwan

Counter-view

Beijing = AUKUS clique / Lavrov "Asian NATO" vs no treaty obligation → suits strategic autonomy + Japan's pacifist constitution

Conclusion routes

R1 balance without entanglement → value lies in coalition, not alliance **R2** withstand Chinese dominance while keeping the freedom to choose

The Quad brings four Indo-Pacific democracies, Australia, Japan, India & the US into a security dialogue. For India it is a balancing instrument against China, but one that works indirectly, without the burdens of an alliance.

Shyam Saran argues that "India's full capabilities came as a surprise to the world." It lay dormant, reviving at leaders' level only in 2021. China's militarisation of the South China Sea & the BRI's port facilities produced a sense of encirclement in New Delhi.

Harsh V. Pant argues that India counterbalances China's presence, rises above middle-power status & turns "like-minded" ties into defence and information-sharing links. The vaccine Maitri & supply chain diversification add economic weight. Its practical edge is maritime where domain awareness and coast-guard initiatives help regional states secure their waters.

Anzar Tarapore views India's post-2020 embrace of the Quad as "zone balancing" shaping the region of competition and building partners' resilience rather than a direct race with Beijing.

Beijing equates the Quad with AUKUS, and Sergey Lavrov calls it an "Asian NATO". But it carries no treaty obligation which suits India's strategic autonomy and Japan's pacifist constitution alike.

The Quad gives India balance without entanglement. Its value lies in staying a coalition, not an alliance. It is a way to withstand Chinese dominance while keeping the freedom to choose.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2024 · 10 marks

Bhutan has historically been an ally of India, but the China-Bhutan border related issues have become a security issue for India. Discuss.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 closest ally, only S. Asian state without China ties → yet India's security runs through the China-Bhutan border, not its own **R2** Bhutan negotiating its own boundary → outcome sets India's Himalayan exposure → India not at the table

Body flow

five-finger policy → two disputed sectors (Doklam west / Jakarlung-Pasamlung north) → Doklam trivial for Thimphu, decisive for India → trijunction + Siliguri “chicken's neck” → Doklam 2017 → sharpening: 2021 Roadmap + 2023 talks → “package deal” (west for north) → 2020 Sakteng pressure → swap touching Doklam = Chinese forces above the corridor

Counter-view

Amit Ranjan: Thimphu won't sign a deal that alarms Delhi → 2012 understanding: trijunction fixed only with all three

Conclusion routes

R1 India's lever is the calibrated special relationship + CBMs, not a bilateral seat **R2** security rests on keeping the corridor secure, so Bhutan ties are handled with care, not pressure

Bhutan is India's closest partner & the only South Asian state without ties to China. India's Himalayan security turns less on its own China frontier than on where Bhutan settles its boundary with Beijing.

Bhutan is one finger of China's 5-finger policy. Its boundary is disputed at Doklam in the west and the northern Jakarlung & Pasamlung valleys. Doklam matters little to Thimphu but decides Indian security. It sits at the trijunction, minutes from the Siliguri Corridor, the "chicken's neck" to the Northeast. Doklam 2017 proved the stake.

Since the 2021 "3-step Roadmap" & 2023 boundary talks, a package deal is live i.e. Bhutan conceding the strategic west for recognition of its north.

China's 2020 claim over eastern Sakteng adds pressure. A swap touching Doklam would place Chinese forces above the corridor.

Amit Ranjan argues that Thimphu will not accept a settlement that alarms New Delhi, and a 2012 understanding fixes trijunction points only with all three.

Therefore, India's answer lies not in a seat at the table but in the calibrated special relationship that keeps the corridor secure.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2025 · 10 marks

Historical ties between India and Japan grew into a 'special strategic and global partnership'. Comment.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 dispute-free civilizational base (Buddhism, no rivalry) → goodwill real but not sufficient → strategy did the building **R2** Japan as early symbol of Asian resurgence → historic warmth → but the formal partnership is strategy-driven, not sentiment-driven

Body flow

staged upgradation: Global Partnership 2000 → Strategic & Global 2006 (Abe) → Special Strategic & Global 2014 (Tokyo Declaration) → **Pardesi's** drivers (Cold War's end, reforms, China, sea lanes) → content fills the label: CEPA, bullet train, non-NPT civil-nuclear, Quad, FOIP → Aug 2025 summit: ten-year vision, ¥10 trillion, economic security (semiconductors, critical minerals)

Counter-view

Pant: best-ever, yet the most under-realised → trade below potential, delivery lagging the political warmth

Conclusion routes

R1 history supplied trust, strategy supplied momentum → judged by delivery, not sentiment **R2** real in framing and capital, thin in trade/industrial content → next decade's test is execution

Few of India's relationships carry as little baggage as the one with Japan. Civilizational contact through Buddhism, the absence of territorial or ideological dispute, & Japan's early image as Asia's resurgent power gave the two a reservoir of goodwill.

The strategic rise is through the Global Partnership (2000), a Strategic and Global Partnership under Shinzo Abe (2006) & the special strategic and Global Partnership through the 2014 Tokyo declaration. According to Manjeet S. Panderi, re-engagement followed the Cold War's end, India's reforms, China's rise and Indian ocean sea-lane security.

It included CEPA, the Shinkansen bullet train, the first civil-nuclear pact Japan signed with a non-NPT state, the Quad and a shared FOIP. The August 2025 summit added a ten-year vision, a ¥10 trillion investment target, and an economic-security push into semiconductors and critical minerals.

Harsh V. Pant calls the relationship the best it has ever been, though it stays the most under-realised as trade below potential, delivery lagging the political warmth. Its next decade will be judged by delivery & not sentiment.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2025 · 15 marks

The tariff threats have pushed India and the European Union closer. Evaluate the India-EU partnership.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 India-EU long “below potential,” trade-dense / strategy-thin (**Wagner**) → 2025 tariff shock changed tempo → stalled talks close as Jan 2026 FTA **R2** US 50% duty + Russia-oil pressure → “mother of all deals” concluded → but tariffs = trigger, not foundation

Body flow

real driver is convergence, not tariffs → “strategic autonomy” + “economic security,” balancing middle powers in a multipolar order (**Gurjit Singh**: each a stabilising force) → base already there: FTA 2022, TTC 2023 (semiconductors / 6G), goods trade > USD 137bn → accord read as de-risking vs unpredictable Washington + over-reliance on China → IMEC could cut freight time 40%

Counter-view

frictions persist → CBAM + deforestation rules; data adequacy; Mode 4 mobility; EU’s own China exposure; **Pant** — EU can’t speak with one voice

Conclusion routes

R1 convenience → alignment; durability rests on domestic reform + investible TTC projects, not the tariff moment **R2** bond now real, not yet self-sustaining → tariff was catalyst; strategic depth must be earned

For decades India EU ties were dense in trade but thin in strategy. Christian Wagner records observes dismissing them as a "loveless arranged marriage" running below potential.

The tariff shock of 2025 changed it when the US imposed a 50% duty on Indian goods and pressed Europe to follow over Russian oil. A negotiation stalled since 2013 closed as the January 2026 FTA as the "mother of all deals". Tariffs, though, were the trigger but not the foundation.

Both frame their aim as "strategic autonomy" & "economic security" in a multipolar order, acting as balancing middle powers & not followers of a great-power binary. Anujit Singh calls each a stabilising force for the other.

The FTA talks resumed in 2022, the Trade & Technology Council in 2023 produced understandings on semiconductors & 6G & goods trade crossed USD 137 billion.

The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism & deforestation rules trouble Indian exporters. The data adequacy & Mode 4 mobility stay unresolved. Europe's own China exposure limits alignment, and Harsh V. Pant views it difficultly speaking with one voice.

The partnership has moved from convenience to alignment, but its durability rests not on the tariff moment but on domestic reform. It turns council workstreams into investible projects. The bond is real, but not self-sustaining.

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