

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2016 · 10 marks

Critically analyze India's nuclear policy.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 two goals held at once: security + universal disarmament → strategic ambiguity (**Pant**) **R2** 2003 doctrine institutionalises the restraint-deterrence balance → NFU + credible minimum deterrence

Body flow

strategic ambiguity (**Pant**) → 2003 doctrine (CMD + NFU/CBW caveat + assured retaliation + civilian NCA) → strengths (responsible image, cost discipline, de-mated posture) → internal fault-line: "minimum" vs "massive" → **Karnad** (retaliation neither proportionate nor deliverable) → **Narang** (neither credible vs China nor minimal vs Pakistan) → recent shifts: Agni-V MIRV 2024 + canisterised/mated missiles → flexible, counterforce-ready deterrence → China ~600 vs India ~180 (SIPRI 2025) → "minimum" strained

Counter-view

restraint case (responsible image, cost discipline, de-mated posture, no arms race) vs credibility critique (minimum-massive incompatibility, modernising China + Pakistan's tactical weapons, drift toward counterforce)

Conclusion routes

R1 distinctive place: outside NPT/CTBT (discriminatory) yet inside the non-proliferation norm **R2** pragmatic and restrained, tensions unresolved → periodic review + clearer operational definitions

Since independence India has pursued two goals at once i.e. national security & universal disarmament. Harsh V. Pant shows the result was a posture of strategic ambiguity i.e. moral aversion to the weapons alongside a security hedge.

The 2003 doctrine set that balance i.e. credible minimum deterrence, No-First use & assured retaliation under strict civilian command. Its strength are responsible-power image, cost discipline and a de-mated posture.

"Minimum" sits awkwardly beside "massive" i.e. against Pakistan's tactical weapons. Bharat Karnad finds massive retaliation neither proportionate nor deliverable. Vipin Narang argues that India risks being neither credible against China nor minimal against Pakistan.

Recent shifts deepen the strain as the 2024 Agni-V MIRV test & canisterised, mated missiles push the arsenal toward flexible, counterforce ready deterrence. Against China's roughly 600 warheads to India's 180 (SIPRI, 2025), the "minimum" claim looks harder to sustain.

India's place stays outside the NPT & CTBT as discriminatory, but inside the non-proliferation norm through a clean record & export controls.

The policy is pragmatic & restrained, but its unresolved tensions make periodic review & clearer operational definitions the real task.