

India as the Architect of a New World Order

Strategic Autonomy · Global South Leadership · Principled Diplomacy

GS-II: International Relations | GS-III: Internal Security & Economy
Essay | Ethics (Paper IV) | APSC Integrated

UPSC CSE 2026 Batch

1. Key Terms and Explanations

A. World Order and its Architecture

- **World Order:** The prevailing system of rules, norms, institutions, and power relationships that govern interactions among sovereign states. The post-1945 liberal world order, built around the UN Charter, Bretton Woods institutions, and American hegemony, is currently in a phase of visible stress.
- **Unipolar Moment:** Historian Charles Krauthammer's phrase for the post-Cold War period (1991–c.2008) when the US stood as the sole superpower. The world has since shifted toward multipolarity — a condition where no single state commands unchallenged dominance.
- **Multipolar World:** A configuration featuring several great powers — the US, China, Russia, the EU, India, and increasingly regional actors — each with significant economic, military, or diplomatic heft. For India, multipolarity is both an opportunity and a complexity; it creates space for strategic autonomy but also demands clearer positioning.
- **New World Order:** The emerging, still-contested framework that will replace the post-Cold War dispensation. Its shape remains contested: some envision a rules-based order with reformed multilateralism; others predict a sphere-of-influence model dominated by the US and China.

B. Strategic Autonomy and Related Concepts

- **Strategic Autonomy:** India's long-cherished foreign-policy doctrine — tracing back to Nehru's Non-Alignment — that India should reserve the right to make independent decisions on foreign and security affairs, free from the compulsions of any bloc. It is sometimes criticised as ambiguity in service of non-commitment, but defenders see it as a sophisticated balancing act suited to India's civilisational weight and plural interests.
- **Non-Alignment and its Evolution:** Coined during the Cold War, Non-Alignment 2.0 (a 2012 policy paper) updated the concept for a multipolar world, arguing India should align with its interests, not just avoid alliances. The practical manifestation today is 'multi-alignment' — simultaneous

engagement with the US, Russia, the Gulf, Europe, and ASEAN without ideological subordination to any.

- Hedging: A foreign-policy behaviour where a state avoids locking itself into one camp by maintaining functional relationships across rival powers. India's purchase of Russian S-400 missiles while simultaneously deepening the QUAD is a classic example of defensive hedging.
- De-dollarisation: The gradual reduction of the US dollar's centrality in international trade and finance. Russia's pivot to yuan-denominated oil sales, India's push for rupee trade, and BRICS discussions around an alternative settlement mechanism all represent moves in this direction. It weakens one pillar of American structural power without replacing it with a clear alternative.

C. Key Geopolitical Terms

- Strait of Hormuz: A 33-km-wide maritime chokepoint between Oman and Iran through which roughly 20% of the world's oil supply passes. Any disruption — naval blockade, mining, or Iranian interdiction — immediately transmits into global energy-price shocks. India is acutely exposed, importing over 85% of its crude oil and relying heavily on Gulf trade routes.
- Operation Epic Fury: A hypothetical/scenario-based US military operation framed in the article as a surgical strike against Iran's nuclear programme. It illustrates how limited tactical objectives rapidly expand into theatre-wide strategic consequences — the law of unintended consequences applied to modern warfare.
- Economic Chokehold / Sanctions: Non-military coercive tools — asset freezes, export controls, financial exclusion from SWIFT — used to constrain state behaviour. Iran has been under layered US, EU, and UN sanctions for decades. China's workaround (yuan-denominated purchases) signals the limits of Western financial coercion when alternatives exist.
- Collective Security: The UN Charter's Chapter VII mechanism by which member states collectively respond to threats to peace. NATO is the most institutionalised collective-security arrangement. The Gulf crisis exposed NATO's hesitancy to commit to collective security obligations that do not fit neatly within its geographic mandate.
- Global South: A political-economic category encompassing developing and emerging economies of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Pacific. India increasingly styles itself as the 'Voice of the Global South' — a role it championed explicitly during its G20 Presidency (2023) and which implies representational leadership rather than bloc solidarity.
- LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas): Natural gas cooled to -162°C for maritime transport. As pipeline infrastructure gets disrupted in geopolitical crises, LNG becomes the swing commodity. India is rapidly expanding its LNG import infrastructure; Assam and the Northeast are part of India's gas-grid expansion plans through the Indradhanush Gas Grid.

D. Philosophical / IR Concepts

- Principled Realism: A foreign-policy posture that combines normative commitments (adherence to rules, human rights, sovereignty) with hard-nosed calculations of national interest. The article implicitly advocates a version of principled realism for India — going beyond mere interest-maximisation toward credibility-building through consistent normative behaviour.
- Credibility: In international relations, credibility is the belief other states hold about whether an actor will follow through on its commitments and threats. A state that frequently hedges, remains silent on Charter violations, or issues contradictory signals erodes its credibility. Credibility is the currency of great-power leadership.
- De facto / De jure Power: De jure (formal) power flows from institutional positions — UNSC permanent membership, for instance. De facto power flows from demonstrated capacity to shape outcomes. India is a significant de facto power but lacks de jure recognition commensurate with its weight (no UNSC P5 seat), creating a gap between aspiration and institutional standing.

2. Main Arguments and Substantive Parts

Core Thesis

A cascading regional conflict — centred on the Strait of Hormuz and involving a US naval blockade of Iran — has exposed the fundamental fragility of the existing security architecture. The beneficiaries of this disorder are China and Russia; the losers include the Gulf states, NATO's cohesion, and India's energy-import economy. Against this backdrop, India faces an existential diplomatic choice: whether to continue passive hedging or to step forward as a principled architect of a new, durable global order. The argument is that passive hedging now carries a higher cost than active, principled engagement.

Key Arguments

- **The Paradox of American Power:** By attempting to 'secure' the Gulf through force, the US triggered the very insecurity it sought to prevent. A blockade that disrupted free navigation — the very norm the US champions — undermined its own normative credibility. Military power, when deployed without strategic clarity, becomes a blunt instrument that generates more problems than it resolves.
- **China's Quiet Gains:** China emerged as a 'quiet net beneficiary.' By purchasing discounted Iranian crude in yuan, Beijing accelerated de-dollarisation without firing a shot. China's restraint enhanced its global image — a classic case of what Joseph Nye calls 'soft power' accruing through inaction, while adversaries exhaust themselves in costly operations.
- **Russia's Economic Lifeline:** Despite its grinding war in Ukraine, Russia found a financial lifeline through booming energy sales to sanction-free buyers, including India. Moscow leveraged global attention's drift away from Eastern Europe to consolidate economic resilience, demonstrating the limits of Western coercive diplomacy when the sanctioned state can route trade through alternative economies.
- **Gulf States' Strategic Vulnerability:** The Gulf Cooperation Council states — Saudi Arabia, UAE, etc. — found themselves in an invidious position: publicly advocating diplomacy while privately urging Washington to degrade Iran's capabilities. This split personality reflects their structural vulnerability: massive hydrocarbon wealth, thin military capacity, and a US security umbrella that proved both indispensable and diplomatically costly.
- **India's Energy Exposure and Diplomatic Arithmetic:** India's imports of discounted Russian oil — rising to over two million barrels per day — demonstrated tactical economic dexterity. But India's silence on US-Israeli actions triggering the conflict raised questions about whether India's foreign policy is driven by conviction or expedience. Strategic restraint makes sense when principle collides with national interest; but permanent passivity risks the very credibility that makes India the 'Voice of the Global South.'
- **The Credibility Imperative:** When UN Charter violations multiply and a country claiming representational leadership of the Global South remains silent, it trades long-term credibility for short-term comfort. Credibility, once eroded, is difficult to rebuild. India must recognise that credibility is not a soft, normative aspiration — it is a vital national interest.

Supporting Evidence in Context

Argument	Evidence / Context
Claim	Supporting Evidence/Context

US credibility decline	Shifting war aims from regime change to navigation protection; abandonment of diplomatic channels
China's gains	Yuan-denominated Iranian oil purchases; acceleration of de-dollarisation; enhanced global image
India's energy exposure	85%+ crude import dependence; Gulf imports under threat; gas shortages affecting domestic kitchen economy
India's tactical dexterity	Kept fuel supply running by pivoting to Russian crude and slashing fuel taxes
NATO's fragility	Alliance wary of a conflict driven by whim rather than collective security doctrine
Saudi-UAE dilemma	Both states bore brunt of retaliatory strikes while unable to prevent or avoid them

Counterarguments and Limits of the Thesis

- Counterargument 1 — Strategic Restraint Has a Rational Basis: India has massive stakes in the US-led financial system (SWIFT access, FDI flows) and in Gulf Arab states (facing Iranian drone attacks). Grandstanding on Charter violations, while geopolitically appealing, could jeopardise concrete national interests.
- Counterargument 2 — The Costs of Principled Diplomacy: A more vocal India risks alienating either Washington or Tehran, both of whom India needs for energy, technology, and regional stability. The article's prescription is easier to articulate than to implement without triggering trade-offs.
- Counterargument 3 — Institutional Limitations: India cannot 'architect' a new world order without a UNSC permanent seat, a reserve currency, or a credible military-projection capability matching China or the US. Structural power deficits constrain India's ability to enforce any normative vision.
- Counterargument 4 — Historical Precedent of Non-Alignment: India's tradition of staying out of great-power conflicts has served it reasonably well. Abandoning ambiguity in favour of active norm-setting carries risks of over-extension, a classic great-power trap.

3. Historical Evolution of the Issue

Pre-Independence Foundations (1920s–1947)

- Nehru's intellectual formation drew heavily from the League of Nations experience and Wilsonian internationalism. He believed that a rules-based international order — grounded in collective security and sovereign equality — served newly decolonised states better than a power-politics world dominated by European empires.
- Gandhi's moral internationalism added another layer: the idea that India's global engagement should be characterised by principle and non-violence, not by Realpolitik calculation. This moral-voice tradition has periodically resurfaced in Indian foreign policy, most recently in the Global South narrative.

Non-Alignment and Cold War Navigation (1947–1991)

- 1955 — Bandung Conference: India co-founded the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) with Nehru, Nkrumah, Nasser, Sukarno, and Tito. NAM articulated a 'third path' between the US-led NATO and Soviet-led Warsaw Pact blocs. It established India as a credible voice of the decolonised world.
- 1956 — Suez Crisis: India's vocal opposition to Anglo-French-Israeli military action against Egypt demonstrated that principled positions could enhance India's global standing. This is historically the closest analogue to the article's prescription — speaking clearly on Charter violations even when the aggressor is an ally.
- 1971 — Bangladesh Liberation War: India broke with non-interventionism to assist the liberation of Bangladesh, framing it as humanitarian necessity. The episode demonstrated that strategic interests and principled positions can be aligned when framed correctly — a lesson relevant to today's debate.
- 1974 — Smiling Buddha (Nuclear Test): India's nuclear test signalled sovereign assertion of self-reliance, complicating relations with both superpowers. It is an early example of India prioritising self-defined national interest over international normative expectations.

Post-Cold War Transition and Economic Opening (1991–2008)

- 1991 — Economic Liberalisation: India's integration into the global economy created deep stakes in the US-led international financial system. This economic integration simultaneously made India more capable and more vulnerable — capable of projecting economic weight, but constrained by dependence on Western markets and institutions.
- 1998 — Pokhran-II and Sanctions: India's second nuclear test triggered US sanctions, demonstrating the cost of unilateral assertion. The subsequent Indo-US Civil Nuclear Deal (2008) — the most consequential diplomatic act of India's post-Cold War engagement — reversed course by accepting strategic partnership with Washington, permanently complicating pure non-alignment.
- 2001–2008 — IBSA, BRICS, SCO Membership: India began building alternative multilateral platforms that hedged against Western-dominated institutions. This multi-vector diplomacy foreshadowed India's current multi-alignment approach.

Rise of Multi-Alignment (2008–2020)

- 2008 — Global Financial Crisis: The crisis exposed the limits of the Washington Consensus and accelerated demand for reformed multilateralism. India's G20 entry as a full member gave it a seat at the premier economic governance forum.

- 2014 — Neighbourhood First & Act East Policy: PM Modi's foreign-policy reorientation emphasised economic connectivity and India's immediate neighbourhood, deepening the Northeast's strategic significance as a gateway to ASEAN. This is directly relevant for APSC aspirants — Assam and the Northeast moved from periphery to frontline in India's foreign-policy calculus.
- 2016 — Surgical Strikes & Uri Response: India demonstrated willingness to use limited military force across the LoC, signalling a departure from strategic restraint in its immediate neighbourhood. This hardening posture has not yet been extended to the global normative domain.
- 2017 — Doklam Stand-off: India's 73-day military standoff with China at the Bhutan tri-junction demonstrated credibility in defending red lines. It was also the moment India recognised that its relationship with China required structural rethinking beyond economic engagement.

India and the Emerging Multipolar Moment (2020–Present)

- 2020 — Galwan Valley Clash: The killing of 20 Indian soldiers triggered the most severe India-China rupture in decades. India banned Chinese apps, restricted FDI, and began accelerating defence self-reliance — signalling that economic interdependence does not automatically prevent conflict.
- 2022 — Russia-Ukraine War: India's abstention from UNGA resolutions condemning Russia, combined with massive purchases of discounted Russian oil, demonstrated both tactical economic pragmatism and the limits of India's norm-setting credibility. Critics across the West labelled India an 'opportunistic hedger'; defenders called it principled non-alignment.
- 2023 — India's G20 Presidency: India successfully positioned itself as the indispensable mediator between the Global South and Western economies, securing the African Union's admission to the G20 and framing the Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (world as one family) narrative. This was India's most successful assertion of the architect role — precisely what the article advocates.
- 2024–2025 — West Asia Escalation: Iran-Israel conflict, US military involvement, and the Strait of Hormuz blockade brought India's energy vulnerability to the fore. The tension between tactical economic gains (cheap Russian and Iranian oil) and strategic credibility (silence on Charter violations) has become India's defining diplomatic dilemma.
- Northeast India Context: The Act East Policy's success depends on Gulf stability (for diaspora remittances), ASEAN connectivity (for trade via Northeast), and maritime security (for energy imports through the Indian Ocean). Assam's petrochemical sector (OIL India, NRL Numaligarh) is directly linked to crude oil price volatility driven by Gulf crises.

4. Logical and Philosophical Base

A. Philosophical Traditions Underpinning the Argument

- **Kantian Cosmopolitanism:** Immanuel Kant's Perpetual Peace (1795) argued that a federation of free republics bound by international law and republican governance could achieve lasting peace. The UN Charter system is the most ambitious practical realisation of Kantian cosmopolitanism. When great powers violate Charter norms with impunity, they undermine the cosmopolitan project. India's advocacy for the rules-based order aligns with this tradition.
- **Rawlsian Justice and International Order:** John Rawls, in *The Law of Peoples*, extended his theory of justice to the international sphere, arguing that peoples have duties of mutual assistance and that 'outlaw states' — those that violate basic norms — should be constrained by the international community. India's silence when powerful states violate Charter norms conflicts with Rawlsian obligations of a 'well-ordered people.'
- **Kautilyan Realism:** The Arthashastra's Mandala theory treats neighbouring states as natural adversaries and distant states as potential allies. It advocates strategic deceit, economic leveraging, and calibrated use of force — all in service of *rashtrahit* (national interest). India's current multi-alignment has deep Kautilyan roots: maintain options, maximise leverage, never subordinate to a single patron.
- **Nehruvian Idealism:** Nehru's belief that small and medium powers benefit most from a rules-based order — because raw power differentials favour great powers in an anarchic world — remains highly relevant. Principled diplomacy is not merely moral posturing; it is rational self-interest for a rising power that cannot yet match US or Chinese hard power.
- **Gramscian Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony:** Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony — the combination of force and consent that sustains dominant power — applies to the international order. The US-led order combined military dominance with the consent of other states, secured through institutional design (IMF, World Bank, WTO). As US military ventures produce backlash rather than consent, the hegemonic legitimacy erodes. India can help build an alternative consensus — a Gramscian counter-hegemonic project — through the Global South platform.
- **Amartya Sen's Capability Approach:** Sen argues that the measure of justice is the expansion of real freedoms and capabilities. Applied internationally, an order that consistently fails to protect vulnerable populations (Gaza, Yemen, Ukraine) from great-power politics fails the capability test. India's leadership of the Global South carries an implicit normative commitment to building an order more attentive to human capabilities than the current one.

B. Underlying Logic of the Article's Argument

- **The Credibility–Interest Alignment Thesis:** The article's central logical move is to reframe credibility from a normative aspiration into a national interest. This is important because it takes the debate out of the morality-vs-realism dichotomy and places it squarely within a realist framework: India needs credibility not because it is the right thing to do, but because credibility is the instrument through which India will exercise global influence.
- **The Structural Vacuum Argument:** Wars create power vacuums; old structures that fail to prevent catastrophe get replaced. The article suggests that the current conflict has created exactly such a vacuum — an opening for a credible, principled voice. If India does not claim this role, China (cloaked in restraint) or a reconfigured Western coalition will shape the new order on their terms.
- **The Asymmetric Cost Argument:** The cost of speaking up (some diplomatic friction with Washington or Tehran) is lower than the cost of continued silence (permanent credibility erosion and loss of the Global South leadership mantle). The article implies that India has systematically miscalculated these costs, prioritising short-term discomfort avoidance over long-term positioning.

UPSC Insight — Epistemological Dimension

The article embodies a tension between epistemological positions: the empiricist tradition (policy derived from observed facts — energy dependence, economic exposure) vs. the normativist tradition (policy derived from principles — Charter adherence, human dignity). UPSC Mains expects candidates to navigate this tension rather than collapse it into simple moralism or crude realism. The sophisticated answer acknowledges that in foreign policy, the empirical and the normative are not opposites but complements — principled behaviour generates the trust that makes empirical cooperation more efficient.



5. New Features and Unique Ideas

A. Novel Conceptual Propositions

- The 'Credibility as National Interest' Reframing: Most Indian foreign-policy debate frames credibility as a soft, moral surplus — nice to have but subordinate to hard interests. The article's innovation is to argue that credibility is itself a hard interest, because it determines India's ability to shape coalitions, extract concessions, and mobilise the Global South. This reframing has significant policy implications: it means India should invest in credibility-building even at short-term cost.
- Beyond Tactical Manoeuvring — Strategic Clarity: The article distinguishes between 'tactical manoeuvring for survival' (what India currently does) and 'strategic clarity of diplomatic leadership' (what India must aspire to). This is a genuinely novel policy framework — arguing that rising powers cannot remain permanently tactical; they must eventually offer a vision of order that others can coalesce around.
- Supply Corridor Diplomacy: The proposal for India to prioritise 'viable supply corridors, energy diversification, and a coherent energy-security framework' as instruments of principled diplomacy is innovative. It suggests that India's economic infrastructure (ports, pipelines, LNG terminals, energy grids) can be deployed as diplomatic instruments — creating dependencies that give India structural leverage without military coercion.
- The Affected Country vs. Passive Observer Distinction: The article argues India is not merely an 'affected country' but a 'stakeholder in the survival of the global commons.' This distinction matters enormously for policy: an affected country responds reactively; a stakeholder shapes proactively. It is an implicit argument for India to move from a reactive foreign-policy posture to a constitutive one.

B. Feasibility Assessment

Idea / Proposal	Feasibility
Idea	Feasibility Assessment
Credibility-building through norm advocacy	Feasible in medium term. India's G20 success demonstrates it can lead multilateral processes when it invests political capital. Risk: consistency requirements constrain tactical flexibility.
Supply corridor as diplomatic instrument	Highly feasible. Chabahar Port (Iran), INSTC (Russia-Iran-India), and the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC) are already operationalised. Northeast India's role as gateway to ASEAN fits directly.
Energy diversification framework	Feasible but requires 10–15 year horizon. Domestic renewable buildout (500 GW by 2030), LNG import diversification, and uranium fuel cycle development all progress. Short-term Gulf dependence remains structural.
UNSC reform advocacy with P5 support	Low near-term feasibility. China and Russia (both P5) will veto any reform that adds India. However, the normative argument for reform is powerful and India must sustain pressure.
Multi-alignment without credibility erosion	The central tension. Feasible only if India develops clear red lines — topics on which it will consistently speak regardless of bilateral consequences.

6. Sustainability of the Idea

A. Environmental and Resource Sustainability

- The article's prescription includes energy diversification as a pillar of principled diplomacy. This is inherently aligned with long-term environmental sustainability: reducing fossil fuel dependence reduces both climate vulnerability and geopolitical exposure. However, India's 2030 commitment to 500 GW of renewable capacity, while ambitious, still leaves it dependent on Gulf hydrocarbons for baseload and transportation fuel.
- Brahmaputra Basin Relevance (Northeast India): Climate change-driven glacial retreat threatens water flow in the Brahmaputra, which feeds the hydropower ambitions of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. India's principled diplomacy must eventually include climate governance leadership — not merely energy security — and the Northeast's water-energy nexus makes this a lived reality for the region.
- Northeast India's Green Energy Potential: Assam's biomass, Arunachal's hydropower, and Meghalaya's solar potential offer a model of energy security that simultaneously reduces fossil dependence. The Bodoland Territorial Council's development plans and the Northeast's integration into the gas grid (Indradhanush Gas Grid) are immediate policy expressions.

B. Constitutional and Legal Sustainability

- India's foreign-policy posture must remain consistent with constitutional values: sovereign equality, peaceful coexistence, respect for international law (Article 51 of the Constitution). The prescription for more active diplomacy is constitutionally grounded rather than contrary to it.
- However, any move toward active military engagement or security guarantees for third parties would require parliamentary scrutiny and potentially constitutional reconsideration of India's 'no first use' nuclear doctrine and defence partnership treaties.

C. Ethical Sustainability

- India's Global South leadership carries an implicit ethical compact: the countries that follow India's lead expect it to advocate for their interests in global forums — on debt relief, climate finance, WTO reform, and security. If India's norm-advocacy is selective (vocal on issues that serve its interests, silent on those that do not), it violates this ethical compact and undermines the very coalition it seeks to lead.
- The ethics of strategic silence: When a state that claims moral leadership chooses silence during Charter violations, it implicitly legitimises those violations. This creates a long-term erosion of the normative architecture that India's own security depends on — a paradox of ethical unsustainability embedded in realist prudence.

D. Societal Sustainability

- Domestically, India's foreign-policy assertiveness must track with public opinion and democratic accountability. Indian public opinion, particularly after Galwan, has grown more assertive. However, foreign-policy adventurism that risks energy price spikes — as Gulf crises demonstrably do — affects the Indian kitchen economy directly, creating political constraints on principled posturing.
- The Northeast India Dimension: Assam's economy is directly tied to energy prices (OIL India, NRL Numaligarh Refinery), agricultural supply chains dependent on Gulf migrant remittances, and ASEAN connectivity opportunities. Any foreign-policy framework that fails to factor in these regional realities lacks societal sustainability for a significant part of India.

7. Challenges Related to the Issue

A. Structural / Systemic Challenges

- **Absence of UNSC Permanent Membership:** India lacks the veto power that P5 states enjoy. Any Indian resolution in the Security Council can be killed by Chinese or Russian veto. Without formal institutional power, India's normative prescriptions risk being advisory at best, irrelevant at worst. The G4 campaign (India, Brazil, Germany, Japan) for UNSC expansion has been stalled for decades.
- **Economic Dependence Constraints:** India's dependence on US technology (semiconductors, aerospace), Western FDI, and Gulf hydrocarbons creates structural constraints on foreign-policy independence. Principled diplomacy that antagonises any of these partners carries immediate economic costs — costs that fall most heavily on India's poorest citizens.
- **Defence Industrial Deficiency:** India's defence import dependence (among the world's largest importers) means it cannot credibly threaten military force in support of diplomatic positions. A state that cannot enforce its red lines has limited coercive credibility, which in turn weakens its normative credibility. Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence is therefore a foreign-policy necessity, not just an economic aspiration.

B. Diplomatic / Stakeholder Challenges

- **China Factor:** Any Indian move to strengthen the rules-based order in West Asia, the Indian Ocean, or Southeast Asia will be perceived by Beijing as containment. China has consistently blocked India's bids for expanded multilateral roles (NSG membership, UNSC seat, FATF leadership). Beijing's quiet gain from the current crisis makes it an active opponent of any India-led normative architecture.
- **Pakistan's Spoiler Role:** Pakistan's security agreement with Saudi Arabia, and its China-backed positioning in West Asia, creates a triangular dynamic that complicates India's Gulf diplomacy. Any India-Gulf partnership deepening must navigate Pakistan's efforts to position itself as the preferred Muslim-majority security partner in the region.
- **Alliance Resistance from the West:** Western partners who value India's QUAD participation are uncomfortable when India purchases Russian oil, abstains on Ukraine resolutions, or criticises US military operations. Managing the contradiction between QUAD alignment and multi-alignment is a persistent diplomatic challenge without an obvious resolution.

C. Implementation Challenges

- **Institutional Capacity of Indian Diplomacy:** India's Ministry of External Affairs is significantly understaffed relative to its ambitions — approximately 600 Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officers for a country of 1.4 billion with global aspirations. Architecting a new world order requires sustained diplomatic engagement across dozens of multilateral forums, bilateral relationships, and regional organisations simultaneously.
- **Domestic Political Economy:** Coalition pressures, electoral cycles, and vocal diaspora interests (particularly from the Gulf, where six million Indians live) create domestic political constraints on foreign-policy consistency. Principled diplomacy requires a degree of insulation from short-term domestic politics that Indian democratic governance does not always provide.
- **Energy Transition Speed:** India's ability to exercise supply-corridor diplomacy depends on accelerating domestic energy transition. Delays in renewable capacity addition, land acquisition bottlenecks for solar parks, and transmission infrastructure gaps all slow the pace at which India can reduce its fossil-fuel geopolitical exposure.

8. Multidimensional Analysis

A. Social Dimension

- **Diaspora Vulnerability:** Over 8 million Indians live in the Gulf states (UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain). Any conflict in the Gulf exposes them to direct risk — disrupted remittances, evacuation challenges, and social dislocation. The 2020 COVID evacuation (Vande Bharat Mission) illustrated both India's logistical capacity and the human scale of this vulnerability. Assam and Kerala are among the states most dependent on Gulf remittances.
- **Domestic Inflation and the Kitchen Economy:** Energy price shocks transmit directly into food inflation through transportation costs, fertiliser prices (natural gas-based), and rural income disruption. India's inflation-vulnerable poor — disproportionately concentrated in Assam's tea gardens, Bihar's smallholder farms, and UP's agricultural belts — bear the social cost of geopolitical crises most acutely.
- **Identity and the Global South Narrative:** India's positioning as the Global South's voice has a social resonance domestically — it reinforces a civilisational narrative of India as a non-Western, non-colonial power with a distinct moral heritage. This narrative has domestic electoral appeal, but it also creates obligations: the Global South expects India to deliver, not merely to claim leadership.

B. Political Dimension

- **Strategic Autonomy as Domestic Political Asset:** The multi-alignment doctrine has bipartisan support in India — from Nehru's non-alignment to Modi's 'India First.' But it is increasingly strained: the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha have seen growing debates about whether India's silence on Gaza, Ukraine, and now the Gulf conflict reflects genuine autonomy or politically motivated ambiguity.
- **G20 Presidency as Political Capital:** India's successful G20 Presidency (2023) gave it a template for norm-setting — the New Delhi Declaration's consensus on debt restructuring, climate finance, and Global South priorities demonstrated that India can convene and deliver. This political capital must be spent on shaping the new order, not hoarded.
- **Northeast India's Political Stakes:** The BJP government's political consolidation in Assam and the Northeast (through the Bodo Peace Accord, NLFT settlement, and infrastructure investment) is directly tied to Act East connectivity. Myanmar's instability — worsened by great-power neglect — directly threatens the Moreh-Imphal corridor and India's ASEAN connectivity ambitions, giving Northeast politics an international dimension that APSC aspirants must appreciate.

C. Legal Dimension

- **UN Charter and Use of Force (Article 2(4)):** The Charter prohibits the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. A naval blockade of a sovereign state's coast is a classic act of war under international law, requiring UNSC authorisation under Chapter VII. Unilateral naval blockades, regardless of the justification, violate this framework. India's silence on Charter violations weakens the very legal architecture that protects its own sovereignty.
- **Customary International Law and Freedom of Navigation:** The Strait of Hormuz is an international strait under UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea), which guarantees transit passage rights for all vessels. Disrupting this passage violates customary international law. India, as a major maritime trading nation, has a direct legal interest in upholding freedom of navigation — including when the violator is a strategic partner.
- **Sanctions and Extraterritorial Jurisdiction:** US secondary sanctions (penalties on third parties that trade with sanctioned entities) represent an assertion of extraterritorial jurisdiction that India has consistently opposed in principle. India's purchase of Iranian oil and Russian crude — and America's reluctant tolerance of these purchases — reflects a de facto challenge to secondary

sanction universality. This legal tension will persist and must be managed through domestic legislation (like India's Blocking Statute proposals) as well as diplomacy.

D. Ethical Dimension

- **The Ethics of Silence:** Edmund Burke's famous aphorism — 'the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing' — applies with uncomfortable precision to India's strategic silence on Charter violations. A country that claims moral authority cannot indefinitely remain silent when that authority's normative foundations are being dismantled. Ethical credibility requires consistency.
- **Complicity and Moral Hazard:** India's purchase of discounted Russian oil after the Ukraine invasion, and its silence on US military actions in the Gulf, risk creating a moral hazard: signalling to all great powers that India will accommodate any aggression as long as it can extract an economic benefit. This is ethically corrosive and strategically self-defeating.
- **Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and its Limits:** The R2P doctrine — which India supported at the 2005 World Summit — requires states to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing. Gulf conflict civilian casualties implicate R2P considerations. India's silence on these dimensions is in tension with its R2P commitments.

E. International Dimension

- **Great Power Competition and India's Location:** India sits at the intersection of the China-US rivalry, the Russia-West confrontation, and the emerging Gulf-Israel-Iran triangle. No other major power occupies this position simultaneously. This creates extraordinary leverage — if India can convert positional advantage into principled leadership — but also extraordinary vulnerability if it continues to oscillate without a coherent narrative.
- **BRICS, SCO, and Alternative Multilateralism:** India's membership in BRICS (with China, Russia, Brazil, South Africa, and new entrants) and the SCO (with China, Russia, and Pakistan) creates platforms for Global South agenda-setting. However, these forums are riven by India-China and India-Pakistan tensions, limiting their utility for concerted action.
- **The Indo-Pacific and Maritime Security:** India's Sagarmala project, its Indian Ocean outreach (IORA, IONS), and the QUAD security dialogue all reflect an emerging maritime strategy. But maritime strategy and Gulf diplomacy are not yet integrated in India's foreign-policy architecture — a gap the article implicitly identifies.

F. Economic Dimension

- **Energy Security as Economic Security:** India's GDP growth trajectory (targeting 8% annually) is directly linked to stable energy prices. A 10% spike in crude oil prices typically adds 0.3–0.5% to India's inflation. The Gulf crisis — by threatening the Strait of Hormuz — poses an existential economic risk that no amount of tactical oil-purchase diversification can fully hedge.
- **De-dollarisation and Rupee Internationalisation:** India's push for rupee-denominated trade settlements with Russia, the UAE, and select African nations is accelerating. This is simultaneously an economic instrument (reducing dollar-denominated transaction costs) and a geopolitical one (challenging US financial coercive power). For Assam and the Northeast, rupee trade with Bangladesh and Myanmar directly facilitates Act East connectivity.
- **Chabahar Port and Supply Chain Resilience:** The India-operated Chabahar Port in Iran, exempted from US sanctions, is a critical node in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) connecting India to Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Russia. Gulf instability threatens not just oil supplies but also the supply chains that flow through this corridor, affecting India's connectivity aspirations from Assam to Eurasia.

9. Linkages with NCERTs

NCERT Book / Chapter	Linkage to the Issue
NCERT Reference	Relevance to the Issue
Class 12 Political Science — Contemporary World Politics (Ch. 1: Cold War Era)	Establishes the foundations of bipolarity, NAM, and India's original non-alignment strategy — the historical baseline against which current multi-alignment is measured.
Class 12 Political Science — Contemporary World Politics (Ch. 3: US Hegemony in World Politics)	Directly relevant: analyses US unipolar dominance post-1991, the tools of American hegemony (military, economic, cultural), and the seeds of its contemporary contestation.
Class 12 Political Science — Contemporary World Politics (Ch. 9: Globalisation)	Explores the relationship between economic interdependence and political sovereignty — the core tension in India's foreign-policy dilemma between energy dependence and diplomatic independence.
Class 12 Political Science — India's Foreign Policy (Ch. 4)	Covers India's foreign-policy evolution from non-alignment through the Look East / Act East transition — foundational for understanding the current multi-alignment approach.
Class 11 Political Science — Political Theory (Ch. 9: Peace)	Kant's perpetual peace, collective security, and the philosophical foundations of international order — directly relevant to the article's normative framework.
Class 10 Social Science — Geography (Ch. 3: Water Resources)	Links to Brahmaputra basin water security and Northeast India's geopolitical significance — relevant for APSC candidates contextualising the international in the local.
Class 12 Economics — Macro (Ch. 6: Open Economy Macroeconomics)	Current account, trade balance, exchange rate dynamics — foundational for understanding India's energy import exposure and its macroeconomic consequences.
Class 11 History — Themes in World History (Ch. 11: Paths to Modernisation)	The decolonisation context that produced the Global South as a political category — relevant for understanding India's civilisational claim to Global South leadership.

10. Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus

GS Paper II — Governance, Polity, and International Relations

- India's foreign policy — evolution, determinants, and contemporary challenges (multi-alignment, strategic autonomy, UNSC reform, Indo-Pacific)
- India's bilateral, regional, and global groupings (QUAD, BRICS, SCO, G20, NAM, IBSA, IORA, IONS)
- Geopolitics of energy security — West Asian instability and its implications for India
- International institutions — UN, UNSC, reform proposals, collective security mechanisms
- India and its neighbourhood — connectivity, stability, and the Northeast gateway
- Important international institutions, agencies, and fora (WTO, IMF, World Bank, IAEA, OPEC)

GS Paper III — Economy, Security, and Environment

- Energy security — India's hydrocarbon dependence, diversification strategies, renewable transition
- Maritime security — Indian Ocean, chokepoints, piracy, freedom of navigation
- Internal security — linkages between external instability and internal security (NE India insurgency with external dimensions)
- Inclusive growth and global economic governance — de-dollarisation, Rupee internationalisation, India's trade strategy
- Defence and security — indigenisation, Atmanirbhar Bharat, defence exports

GS Paper I — History and Geography

- Post-independence Indian history — foreign-policy evolution, Non-Alignment, Panchsheel, Bandung Conference
- Geopolitics — Strait of Hormuz, maritime chokepoints, Indian Ocean geopolitics
- World geography — Middle East / West Asia geography, oil-producing regions, strategic waterways

GS Paper IV — Ethics, Integrity, and Aptitude

- Ethics in international relations — doctrine of strategic silence, complicity, moral hazard in foreign policy
- Probity in governance — consistency between stated values and actual behaviour (credibility as institutional integrity)
- Philosophical underpinnings — Kant, Rawls, and international ethics

Essay Paper

- 'India's role in shaping a multipolar world order'
- 'Strategic autonomy in a world of great-power competition'
- 'The moral responsibilities of a rising power'
- 'Energy security is the new frontier of geopolitics'

Optional Subjects Relevant

- Political Science and International Relations — International Relations theory (Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism), India's foreign policy, international law, multilateralism
- History — Post-1947 world history, Cold War, NAM, decolonisation
- Geography — Maritime geography, West Asia, Indian Ocean region, energy resources
- Public Administration — Foreign policy making, inter-ministerial coordination, MEA capacity



11. Best Linkages with Syllabus, Philosophy, and Epistemology

Deepest Syllabus Connection

GS Paper II: 'India and its foreign policy' is the primary home for this debate. The syllabus expects not just descriptive knowledge of India's positions but analytical capability to evaluate trade-offs, identify inconsistencies, and propose calibrated improvements. This issue tests exactly that analytical depth.

A. Philosophical Depth for UPSC Mains

Thinker	Application
Philosopher / Thinker	Application to India's Global Role
Kant (Perpetual Peace)	India's support for rules-based order is a Kantian commitment — peace requires institutional constraint on state behaviour. India violates its own Kantian commitments when it is silent on Charter breaches.
Rawls (Law of Peoples)	A just international order requires that 'decent peoples' hold 'outlaw states' accountable. India's multi-alignment risks making it complicit in legitimising outlaw behaviour.
Kautilya (Arthashastra)	Strategic interest calculation supports principled diplomacy: credibility maximises India's mandala leverage. Non-commitment is only strategically rational if it preserves optionality without credibility cost.
Gramsci (Hegemony)	India can build counter-hegemonic consensus through the Global South coalition — not by opposing the West militarily but by constructing an alternative normative architecture.
Amartya Sen (Development as Freedom)	A world order that fails to expand human capabilities in the Global South — through debt traps, climate inaction, or militarised chokepoints — fails the capabilities test. India should lead capability-expanding multilateralism.
Habermas (Communicative Rationality)	India's diplomacy should move from strategic communication (saying what is expedient) to communicative rationality (saying what is true and defensible). Habermasian discourse ethics demands consistency between stated norms and actual behaviour.

B. Epistemological Angles

- **Constructivism in IR:** The constructivist school (Wendt, Finnemore) argues that international structures are socially constructed — they persist because states believe in them and act accordingly. If India and other states stop acting as if the Charter matters, the Charter ceases to matter. India's principled engagement is therefore constitutive: it helps build the reality it claims to believe in.
- **Critical Theory and Power-Knowledge:** Following Foucault, international norms are not neutral — they reflect the interests of those powerful enough to frame them. The 'rules-based international order' is partly a Western construct. India's challenge is to neither simply accept Western framing

nor to anarchically reject it, but to reshape norms from within through strategic norm entrepreneurship.

- Empiricism vs. Normativism in Foreign Policy: India's current policy leans empiricist — derived from observable facts (energy costs, trade flows, military balances). The article advocates a normativist correction: policy must also incorporate principled commitments that are not infinitely negotiable. The epistemological sophistication lies in holding both simultaneously.



12. Way Forward

A. Immediate Diplomatic Measures

- **Articulate Red Lines on Charter Violations:** India should develop a principled framework for its responses to UN Charter violations — a set of minimum conditions (civilian protection, freedom of navigation, sovereign equality) on which India will consistently speak, regardless of who the violator is. This creates predictability without foreclosing flexibility on other issues.
- **Activate the Global South Platform Institutionally:** Building on the G20 Presidency success, India should propose a permanent Global South Coordination Forum — a standing body that aggregates developing-country positions on security, climate, and trade governance. This transforms episodic summitry into structural influence.
- **Gulf Stability Diplomacy — India as Mediator:** India has unique access to all parties in the Gulf — the US (QUAD partner), Iran (Chabahar agreement), Saudi Arabia (energy partner), Israel (defence imports), and the Gulf states (diaspora ties). India should offer structured mediation track II processes, positioning itself as the indispensable convener rather than a passive bystander.

B. Structural / Long-term Measures

- **Energy Diversification as Foreign Policy:** Accelerate the domestic renewable transition (offshore wind, green hydrogen, nuclear under the SHANTI framework) to reduce Gulf dependence. Each percentage point reduction in crude import dependence expands the space for principled diplomacy by reducing the economic cost of principled positions.
- **Defence Indigenisation for Diplomatic Credibility:** Accelerate the implementation of the Atmanirbhar Bharat defence production targets. A state that cannot threaten credible military force cannot enforce diplomatic red lines. DRDO, HAL, and private sector defence enterprises must scale up capabilities to underpin India's normative ambitions with coercive credibility.
- **MEA Capacity Building:** Triple the Indian Foreign Service cadre strength over a decade. India's diplomatic influence aspirations are structurally constrained by its thin diplomatic corps. Specialist tracks in international economic law, climate diplomacy, and multilateral governance should be created within the MEA.
- **UNSC Reform — Sustained Campaign:** Continue the G4 campaign but also build parallel mechanisms: an enhanced UNGA Emergency Special Session mechanism that can act when the UNSC is deadlocked; reform of the UNSC's Working Methods; and coalition-building with African Union states for expanded representation.

C. Northeast India-Specific Policy Recommendations

- **Integrate Northeast Connectivity into Gulf Diplomacy:** The ASEAN-India connectivity that flows through Assam and Manipur depends on stable Gulf shipping lanes for the manufactured goods trade. India's Gulf diplomacy should explicitly cite Northeast India's Act East interests as a domestic stake, making Northeast connectivity a foreign-policy argument rather than merely an infrastructure project.
- **Gas Grid Completion and NRL Expansion:** The Indradhanush Gas Grid connecting Northeast India to the national gas network, and the expansion of NRL Numaligarh Refinery, must be prioritised as instruments of both energy security and regional economic development. These investments reduce Assam's vulnerability to Gulf price shocks.
- **Bodo Peace Accord and Internal Security as Diplomatic Enabler:** A stable, peaceful Northeast India is a prerequisite for the Act East Policy's success. Consolidating the gains of the Bodo Peace Accord, addressing residual ULFA concerns, and mainstreaming the Sixth Schedule areas into

development corridors is therefore not merely a domestic security matter — it is a foreign-policy necessity.



13. Previous Years' Questions — UPSC CSE and APSC

UPSC CSE Mains — GS Paper II (International Relations)

- 2023: 'India's G20 Presidency demonstrated the country's capacity to lead global governance. Critically examine.' (GS II)
- 2022: 'India's foreign policy in West Asia has to be calibrated keeping in view India's hydrocarbon imports and the large Indian diaspora. Analyse.' (GS II)
- 2021: 'The QUAD grouping reflects a fundamental shift in India's approach to strategic autonomy. Evaluate.' (GS II)
- 2020: 'Indian foreign policy has come to be defined by the principle of multi-alignment. Discuss with examples.' (GS II)
- 2019: 'India's role in the United Nations needs to be reviewed in the context of India's aspiration to become a permanent member of the UNSC. Examine.' (GS II)
- 2018: 'What is the significance of the Strait of Hormuz for India's energy security? Analyse.' (GS II)
- 2017: 'India's stand on issues of global governance such as climate change, terrorism, and trade has been shaped by the doctrine of strategic autonomy. Discuss.' (GS II)
- 2016: 'The concept of Non-Alignment has lost its relevance in the contemporary world. Critically evaluate.' (GS II)
- 2015: 'India's Look East Policy has been converted into an Act East Policy. Examine the strategic rationale and expected outcomes.' (GS II)
- 2014: 'Analyse India's role in the United Nations and suggest reforms that would enhance India's contribution to global governance.' (GS II)

UPSC CSE Mains — GS Paper III (Energy and Security)

- 2023: 'Maritime security in the Indian Ocean is indispensable to India's economic growth. Discuss.' (GS III)
- 2021: 'Energy security and energy independence are fundamental to India's national security. Examine India's strategies.' (GS III)
- 2019: 'India's dependence on Gulf hydrocarbons makes it vulnerable to geopolitical shocks. Critically analyse and suggest alternatives.' (GS III)
- 2018: 'How does India balance its energy requirements with its foreign policy imperatives in West Asia?' (GS III)

UPSC CSE Mains — Essay Paper

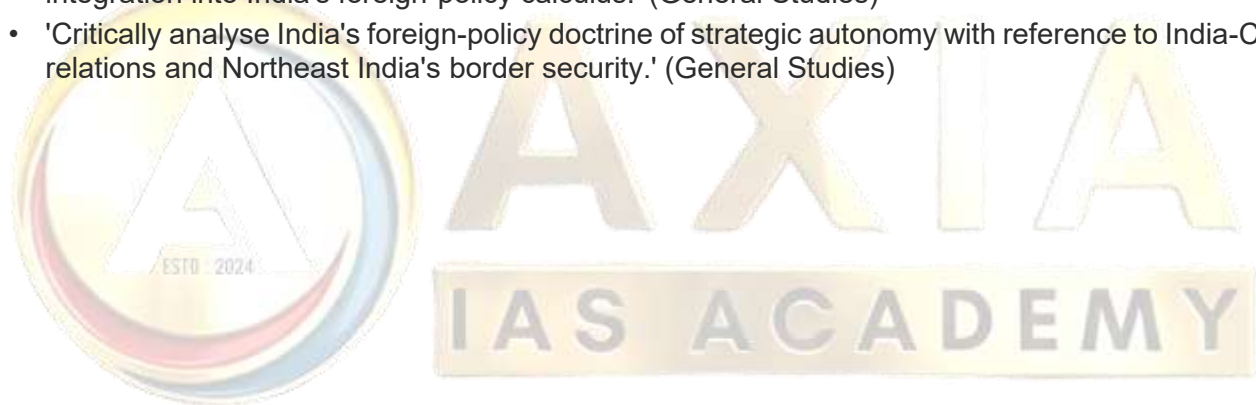
- 2023: 'A ship in the harbour is safe but that is not what ships are built for.' (Reflections on India's strategic restraint)
- 2022: 'The process of self-discovery has now been technologically outsourced.' (Metaphorically applicable to India's foreign-policy identity)
- 2021: 'The past is a permanent country from which we all emigrate.' (NAM legacy and India's foreign-policy evolution)
- 2019: 'Courage to accept and dedication to improve are two keys to success.' (India's multilateral diplomacy challenges)
- 2018: 'A people that values its privileges above its principles soon loses both.' (Direct relevance — Eisenhower quote applicable to India's credibility dilemma)

UPSC CSE Prelims — Relevant Theme Questions

- Strait of Hormuz — its location, strategic significance, and the countries it connects (Prelims GS)
- India's bilateral and multilateral energy agreements (Prelims GS)
- UNSC — composition, veto power, reform proposals (Prelims GS)
- QUAD — members, objectives, recent summits (Prelims GS)
- Chabahar Port — location, India's involvement, strategic significance (Prelims GS)
- INSTC (International North-South Transport Corridor) — route, members, significance (Prelims GS)
- BRICS, SCO — members, recent summits, India's role (Prelims GS)

APSC Mains — Relevant Questions (Assam/Northeast Lens)

- 'Discuss the significance of the Act East Policy for Assam's economic development and connectivity with Southeast Asia.' (General Studies)
- 'How does India's energy dependence on West Asia affect Assam's economic interests? What policy measures can insulate the Northeast from global energy price shocks?' (General Studies)
- 'Examine Assam's role as a gateway to Southeast Asia under India's Act East Policy, with reference to specific infrastructure projects.' (General Studies)
- 'The Bodo Peace Accord (2020) and its implications for Assam's stability and Northeast India's integration into India's foreign-policy calculus.' (General Studies)
- 'Critically analyse India's foreign-policy doctrine of strategic autonomy with reference to India-China relations and Northeast India's border security.' (General Studies)



14. Model Answers for Selected Questions

Model Answer 1

Q: 'India's foreign policy in West Asia has to be calibrated keeping in view India's hydrocarbon imports and the large Indian diaspora. Analyse.' (GS II, 2022-style) India's West Asia policy sits at the intersection of several vital national interests — energy security, diaspora welfare, counter-terrorism cooperation, and maritime stability — making it among the most complex theatres of Indian diplomacy. On the energy front, India imports over 85% of its crude oil, of which roughly 60% originates from the Gulf states. The Strait of Hormuz, through which half of India's crude imports flow, constitutes a structural vulnerability that no amount of domestic oil production can quickly eliminate. Any disruption — naval blockade, mining, or military escalation — transmits directly into inflationary pressure on the Indian economy, affecting farm incomes, transport costs, and manufacturing input prices most acutely. The diaspora dimension adds another layer of complexity. Over 8 million Indians live and work in the Gulf states, sending home approximately USD 40 billion annually in remittances. States like Kerala, Telangana, and Assam are among the largest recipients. Any conflict that disrupts Gulf stability triggers immediate humanitarian and economic crises for millions of Indian households. India has managed this dual exposure through a calibrated multi-alignment strategy — maintaining functional relationships with Iran (Chabahar Port, oil imports), Saudi Arabia and UAE (energy partnerships, diaspora protection), Israel (defence imports, technology), and the US (QUAD, strategic partnership) simultaneously. This multi-vector approach has achieved tactical objectives but has come at the cost of strategic ambiguity: India's silence on Charter violations during Gulf escalations undermines its credibility as a principled power. The Way Forward lies in proactive energy diversification (renewables, rupee trade, LNG diversification), structured diplomatic mediation leveraging India's unique access to all Gulf parties, and articulating clear red lines on Charter adherence — transforming tactical manoeuvring into principled architecture. For the Northeast, Gulf stability is not abstract: Assam's OIL India and NRL Numaligarh Refinery are directly exposed to crude price volatility, while the gas grid connecting the Northeast to national infrastructure depends on import price stability. West Asia policy is, in this sense, also Assam policy.

Model Answer 2

Q: 'The concept of Non-Alignment has lost its relevance in the contemporary world. Critically evaluate.' (GS II, 2016-style) Non-Alignment — India's foundational foreign-policy doctrine, articulated by Nehru at Bandung in 1955 — was the product of a specific historical conjuncture: a bipolar Cold War world in which newly decolonised states risked subordination to either superpower. In that context, Non-Alignment was not idealism but strategic rationality — it maximised the developmental space and diplomatic autonomy of states too weak to resist great-power pressure. The classical Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) has undoubtedly lost much of its institutional relevance. The Cold War's end dissolved the bipolar structure that gave NAM its logic; the movement's 120-member diversity makes consensus difficult; and many NAM states have since concluded bilateral security agreements with great powers, hollowing out the non-aligned principle in practice. However, dismissing Non-Alignment entirely misses its evolved relevance. In a multipolar world defined by US-China strategic competition, the logic of avoiding bloc subordination has returned — not as NAM but as 'multi-alignment.' India's simultaneous engagement with the QUAD (US-led), SCO (China-Russia led), BRICS, and the Gulf states represents Non-Alignment 2.0: aligning with interests rather than identities, maintaining options rather than choosing sides. The contemporary challenge is that multi-alignment without principled anchors risks being perceived as mere opportunism. For Non-Alignment's successor doctrine to remain relevant, it must be grounded in consistent normative commitments — respect for sovereignty, Charter adherence, and multilateral dispute resolution — not merely in the arithmetic of bilateral relationships. For Assam and the Northeast, multi-alignment's relevance is concrete: Act East connectivity requires stable relations with ASEAN, China-border management, Myanmar

engagement, and Gulf energy security simultaneously. No single-alliance loyalty could serve these diverse regional interests; multi-alignment remains structurally necessary.

Model Answer 3

Q: 'Maritime security in the Indian Ocean is indispensable to India's economic growth. Discuss.' (GS III, 2023-style) The Indian Ocean is India's strategic neighbourhood in the most literal sense: it is the medium through which 90% of India's trade by volume flows, and through which India's energy lifeline — crude oil from the Gulf, LNG from Qatar and Australia — passes. Maritime security in this space is not an abstract defence concern; it is an economic necessity. The Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Malacca, and Bab-el-Mandeb are the three critical chokepoints that bracket India's maritime trade routes. Any interdiction at these points — whether through state-sponsored blockade, piracy, or non-state armed conflict — creates immediate economic disruption. The 2021 Ever Given blockage of the Suez Canal (a related waterway) demonstrated that even accidental chokepoint disruption can cost global trade USD 9 billion per day. India's response has been multi-layered. The SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) doctrine — articulated in 2015 — frames India as the net security provider of the Indian Ocean, responsible for maritime domain awareness, anti-piracy, hydrographic cooperation, and humanitarian assistance. Sagarmala, India's port-led development initiative, is the domestic complement — building port capacity to leverage maritime trade for coastal economic development. For the Northeast, maritime security translates directly: the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Corridor (Kolkata–Sittwe–Mizoram) and the proposed Agartala–Akhaura rail link depend on stable Bay of Bengal shipping lanes. Assam's Act East connectivity — the ultimate rationale for the Bogibeel Bridge and four-lane highways to the Myanmar border — assumes that maritime routes from Kolkata to ASEAN ports remain open and affordable. The Way Forward requires India to deepen IORA (Indian Ocean Rim Association) institutional capacity, invest in coastal radar networks for maritime domain awareness, operationalise the Colombo Security Conclave with island neighbours, and negotiate information-sharing agreements with the US Indo-Pacific Command — all while maintaining the strategic autonomy to engage China on Indian Ocean governance.



IAS ACADEMY

Why This Issue is UPSC-Critical

This topic is among the most integrative in the UPSC GS syllabus. It tests international relations theory, energy economics, constitutional values, ethical reasoning, and historical knowledge simultaneously — exactly the kind of multidimensional question that GS Paper II and III reward. Its direct linkage to Northeast India's Act East ambitions makes it mandatory reading for APSC aspirants.

Note-Making Tips: Use the 14-section framework above as your template. For this topic, make a separate one-page mind map linking: Gulf Crisis → India's Energy → Diaspora → Credibility → Global South → UNSC Reform → Act East → Northeast India.

