

# US–CHINA STRATEGIC STABILITY & THE EMERGING G-2 WORLD ORDER

Geopolitics | International Relations | India's Strategic Interests

GS Paper II (International Relations) | GS Paper III (Security) | Essay | Ethics

## 1. Key Terms and Explanations

Understanding the conceptual vocabulary that underpins the US–China strategic relationship is essential for any serious UPSC aspirant. These terms are drawn from international relations theory, Cold War history, and contemporary geopolitics — they frequently appear in GS Paper II questions and in the Essay paper.

Term / Concept	Explanation & UPSC Relevance
Strategic Stability	Originally a Cold War concept describing the condition where neither the US nor the Soviet Union had an incentive to launch a nuclear first strike. Today it is being revived to describe the managed coexistence of the US and China — signalling mutual recognition of near-equal power. Its use is a diplomatic milestone because it implies acceptance of China as a peer, not merely a rival.
G-2 World Order	A global order dominated by two superpowers — the US and China — who together shape the rules of international politics, economics, and security. Analogous to the US-Soviet Cold War bipolar system. The G-2 concept challenges multilateral frameworks and has direct implications for India's foreign policy calculus.
Bipolarity	A theoretical construct in International Relations (Kenneth Waltz, Realism) where power is concentrated between two major poles. Historically, bipolarity produced a stable deterrence equilibrium during the Cold War. Its re-emergence today is more complex because the world economy remains highly integrated unlike the Cold War era.
Thucydides Trap	A concept popularised by Harvard scholar Graham Allison, derived from the ancient Greek historian Thucydides' observation that the rise of Athens and the fear it inspired in Sparta led to war. Applied today: China's rise creates structural tensions with the incumbent hegemon, the USA, potentially pushing them toward conflict. China invoking this trap is a geopolitical warning signal.
Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue)	A strategic grouping comprising the USA, India, Japan, and Australia. Initially conceived as a maritime security forum post-2004 tsunami, it was revived in 2017 and further elevated to Leader-level summit in 2021. China considers Quad an 'Asian NATO' targeted at containment. Its compatibility with US–China 'strategic stability' is now openly questioned.

Indo-Pacific Strategy	The USA's overarching geopolitical framework for the Asia-Pacific region, framing the ocean space from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific as a single strategic theatre. It underpins alliances like AUKUS, the Quad, and bilateral defence treaties. Any US accommodation with China has direct consequences for this strategy's coherence.
Taiwan Question	The unresolved political status of Taiwan, which China considers an integral part of its territory and seeks to reunify under 'One China.' For the US, Taiwan relations are governed by the Taiwan Relations Act (1979) — a deliberately ambiguous commitment to supply defensive arms without guaranteeing military intervention. The question sits at the heart of US-China tensions.
Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), 1979	A US domestic law (not a treaty) passed after US diplomatic recognition of the PRC. The TRA commits the US to provide Taiwan with defensive arms and maintain the capacity to resist any non-peaceful means to determine Taiwan's future. It avoids an explicit defence guarantee — a policy of 'strategic ambiguity.' Dilution of the TRA is a major geopolitical risk.
Strategic Ambiguity	A deliberate US policy of keeping its military commitment to Taiwan undefined, deterring both Chinese aggression and Taiwanese unilateral declaration of independence. If the US openly abandons strategic ambiguity (in either direction), it radically alters the cross-strait calculus.
Symmetric Leverage	A state of affairs where two powers hold roughly equivalent capacities to impose costs on each other — economically, militarily, or diplomatically. China is now perceived to have developed enough leverage (in trade, technology, regional influence) that even the US hesitates to escalate confrontation freely.
Multipolar vs. Bipolar	Multipolarity implies multiple major powers (US, China, Russia, EU, India, etc.) shaping global outcomes. Bipolarity implies two dominant poles. The US-China strategic stability framework effectively acknowledges a return toward bipolarity, sidelining the multipolar aspirations of countries like India, Russia, and the EU.
Realpolitik / Transactionalism	A foreign policy approach driven by national interest and pragmatic calculation rather than ideology or values. Trump's foreign policy is quintessentially transactional — treating alliances, defence commitments, and even Taiwan as bargaining chips in deal-making with Beijing. This has deep implications for India's strategic partnerships.

## 2. Main Arguments and Substantive Parts

The emergence of a US–China 'strategic stability' framework represents a structural inflection point in global geopolitics — one whose implications are far deeper than a bilateral trade deal or a diplomatic summit communiqué. Let us break down the core thesis and its supporting logic.

### 2.1 The Core Thesis

The US and China have, for the first time since the Cold War, publicly acknowledged a framework of mutual strategic parity — moving from pure rivalry to 'managed bipolarity.' This shifts the architecture of global order.

- **Thesis Statement:** The formalisation of 'strategic stability' between the US and China signals a de facto G-2 condominium, where two powers set the terms of global order — potentially at the expense of multilateralism, US alliances, and the strategic autonomy of middle and regional powers like India.
- **Framing:** The very language of 'strategic stability' has been borrowed from Cold War nuclear deterrence doctrine. When Xi framed the relationship using four pillars — cooperation as mainstay, competition within limits, manageable differences, and expectable peace — he was consciously asserting a co-governing framework for the world.
- **US Endorsement:** Crucially, the US White House readout endorsed the framework, with the caveat 'on the basis of fairness and reciprocity.' Even Rubio, known for hawkish China positions, publicly validated the strategic stability framing, suggesting institutional consensus within the US government.

### 2.2 Key Arguments Presented

- **Bipolarity Acknowledged:** The use of 'strategic stability' — a Cold War term — signals that both Washington and Beijing are treating each other as peers rather than as a hegemon and a challenger. This is historically significant because the US had systematically avoided such explicit parity language.
- **Taiwan's Strategic Downgrade:** The most alarming signal for regional order is the treatment of Taiwan. China issued unusually categorical language linking the entire relationship to the Taiwan question, yet the US readout had no mention of Taiwan, effectively allowing the Chinese framing to stand unchallenged. Trump describing Taiwan as a 'bargaining chip' and a \$14 billion arms package being withheld confirm this downgrade.
- **Indo-Pacific Strategy Under Threat:** If China can successfully argue that the Quad or AUKUS is incompatible with strategic stability, the entire US alliance architecture in Asia — built painstakingly since 2017 — could unravel. For India, this is an existential question about the durability of its most important strategic partnership.
- **Structural vs. Transactional:** There is an important distinction between Trump personally cutting a deal and the structural shift in US-China relations becoming institutionalised. The scheduled September return visit by Xi suggests that the framework has enough momentum to outlast individual transactions.
- **Russia's Role:** Putin's simultaneous presence in Beijing during the summit is not accidental. The Russia-China axis — now reinforced diplomatically while the US narrows its strategic commitments — potentially creates a 'coalition of peer rivals' that challenges the US-led order from both the Eurasian heartland and the Pacific rim.

### 2.3 Supporting Evidence

- **Four Pillars Formula:** Xi's four pillars (cooperation as mainstay; competition within limits; manageable differences; expectable peace) constitute a structured framework — not a casual formulation — suggesting extensive prior diplomatic groundwork and a long-term Chinese strategic intent.

- **Rubio's Validation:** Marco Rubio, widely seen as a China hawk, explicitly validating 'strategic stability' and calling it something 'we agree' upon is arguably the strongest indicator that the shift reflects US institutional consensus, not merely Trump's personal inclination.
- **Taiwan Arms Package Pause:** The hold on a \$14 billion arms package for Taiwan, confirmed by Trump himself, provides concrete material evidence that strategic stability is already influencing US policy decisions — it is not merely rhetorical.
- **No US Counter on Taiwan:** The absence of Taiwan from the US readout, combined with Rubio's 'we always make clear our position and move on' characterisation, signals a deliberate downgrading of Taiwan in the strategic priority hierarchy.

## 2.4 Counterarguments and Caveats

- **Structural Competition Continues:** Technology decoupling, semiconductor export controls, tariffs, and military posturing in the South China Sea have not ended. The G-2 framework addresses political-diplomatic stability, not the underlying structural rivalry in technology and economic domains.
- **Trump's Unpredictability:** Trump's transactional style means today's strategic framework could be abandoned tomorrow over a trade disagreement. The framework's durability depends on whether it becomes institutionally embedded, beyond Trump's personal deal-making.
- **China's Internal Pressures:** Xi faces domestic economic headwinds — a property sector crisis, demographic decline, and youth unemployment. These internal vulnerabilities could push China toward more aggressive external postures, potentially undermining the very stability the framework promises.
- **Third Party Interests:** Japan, South Korea, Australia, and India all have vital interests in the Indo-Pacific that are not adequately represented in a G-2 framework. Their resistance to strategic marginalisation could constrain the durability of the US-China condominium.

### 3. Historical Evolution of the Issue

The US–China relationship has oscillated between engagement, rivalry, and managed coexistence over seven decades. Understanding this trajectory is essential for contextualising why the current 'strategic stability' formulation is such a landmark shift.

#### 3.1 Foundation Era (1949–1971): Adversarial Isolation

- **1949 – PRC Establishment:** Mao Zedong's proclamation of the People's Republic of China after the Communist victory in the civil war immediately placed the US and China in opposing Cold War blocs. The US recognised the Republic of China (Taiwan) and refused to recognise the PRC.
- **Korean War 1950–53:** The US and PRC militaries clashed directly during the Korean War, cementing mutual hostility. China entered the war after US forces approached the Yalu River, demonstrating its willingness to fight the world's dominant military power.
- **Containment Policy:** US policy through the 1950s and 1960s involved active containment of China — blocking its UNSC seat (held by Taiwan), isolating it diplomatically, and backing Taiwan's defence.

#### 3.2 Nixon's Opening and Normalisation (1971–1989)

- **1971 – UN Seat Transfer:** The PRC replaced the Republic of China in the UNSC, a pivotal diplomatic victory for Beijing. This shifted the global recognition of Chinese legitimacy.
- **1972 – Nixon's Visit and Shanghai Communiqué:** President Nixon's visit to China — facilitated by Henry Kissinger's secret diplomacy — produced the Shanghai Communiqué, where the US 'acknowledged' China's position that there is but one China and that Taiwan is part of China. This laid the groundwork for eventual normalisation.
- **1979 – Diplomatic Normalisation and Taiwan Relations Act:** The Carter administration formally recognised the PRC and passed the Taiwan Relations Act simultaneously. The TRA established 'strategic ambiguity' as the cornerstone of US Taiwan policy — a posture that has survived for over four decades.
- **1989 – Tiananmen and Temporary Friction:** The Tiananmen Square crackdown briefly disrupted relations. The Bush administration imposed sanctions but soon resumed engagement, reflecting the dominance of economic and strategic considerations over human rights concerns.

#### 3.3 Engagement and Integration Era (1990–2008)

- **WTO Accession 2001:** China's entry into the World Trade Organization was the culmination of a US-backed engagement strategy. The assumption was that economic integration would progressively liberalise China's political system — a foundational premise that has since been widely questioned.
- **2001 – EP-3 Incident:** A US surveillance aircraft was forced to land on Hainan Island after a mid-air collision with a Chinese fighter. Despite tensions, both sides managed the incident diplomatically — an early test of crisis management mechanisms.
- **2005 – 'Responsible Stakeholder' Framework:** US Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick called on China to become a 'responsible stakeholder' in the international order. This represented the high-water mark of US engagement optimism — the belief that China would accept and uphold the existing rules-based order.

#### 3.4 Strategic Competition Emerges (2008–2017)

- **2008 Financial Crisis:** The global financial crisis accelerated China's confidence in its development model and reduced deference toward Western-led institutions. Beijing began asserting itself more forcefully in the South China Sea and on Taiwan.
- **2013 – Belt and Road Initiative:** Xi Jinping launched the BRI, projecting Chinese economic and strategic influence across Eurasia, South Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This was the clearest

signal that China was no longer content to be a stakeholder in a US-led order but was building an alternative architecture.

- **2014 – South China Sea Assertiveness:** China's extensive island-building and militarisation of artificial islands in the South China Sea directly challenged US freedom of navigation principles and ASEAN sovereignty claims — marking a decisive shift from 'peaceful rise' rhetoric to assertive strategic behaviour.
- **Obama's Pivot to Asia:** The Obama administration's 'Rebalance to Asia' acknowledged the centrality of the Indo-Pacific theatre, partially responding to China's growing assertiveness. The Trans-Pacific Partnership was designed in part to set trade rules before China could dominate them.

### 3.5 Strategic Rivalry Institutionalised (2017–2024)

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- **2017 – Trump's First Term: Trade War:** Trump imposed sweeping tariffs on Chinese goods, launching a trade war that exposed deep structural vulnerabilities in global supply chains. The framing shifted from engagement to 'decoupling.'
- **2017 – Quad Revival:** The Quad was revived at senior official level and subsequently elevated, forming the institutional backbone of the US Indo-Pacific strategy as a counterweight to China.
- **2019 – Huawei and Tech Decoupling:** The US placed Huawei on the Entity List and began systematic technology decoupling — restricting semiconductor exports, telecommunications infrastructure, and AI technology transfers to China.
- **2021 – AUKUS Announcement:** The Australia-UK-US security pact, which included sharing nuclear submarine technology with Australia, was the most explicit military signal of the anti-China coalition-building in the Indo-Pacific.
- **Biden Era:** Biden maintained Trump-era tariffs, expanded semiconductor export controls, and elevated the Quad to Leader level. Despite tough rhetoric, a direct confrontation framework was avoided. The 'guard-rails' language of the Biden-Xi Bali (2022) and San Francisco (2023) meetings prefigured the current strategic stability formulation.

### 3.6 The Strategic Stability Pivot (2025 Onwards)

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- **2025 – Beijing Summit:** Trump's return and the Beijing summit of May 2025 mark the crystallisation of the strategic stability framework — formally acknowledging US-China bipolarity, downgrading Taiwan's strategic salience, and potentially hollowing out the Indo-Pacific alliance architecture.
- **Simultaneous Russia-China Summit:** Putin's Beijing visit concurrent with the Trump-Xi summit signals a tightening of the Russia-China alignment, further complicating the US strategic calculus and raising the prospect of a consolidated Eurasian counterweight to US hegemony.

## 4. Logical and Philosophical Base

The US–China strategic stability framework is not simply a diplomatic arrangement — it reflects deep theoretical currents in international relations, political philosophy, and strategic studies. Engaging with these underpinnings will give your answers the kind of analytical depth that earns marks in UPSC Mains.

### 4.1 Realist Foundations

- **Structural Realism (Kenneth Waltz):** Waltz's neorealism argues that the structure of the international system — specifically the distribution of power — determines state behaviour. A bipolar system, according to Waltz, is actually more stable than multipolarity because each pole can more effectively deter the other. The emergence of a G-2 framework is consistent with structural realist predictions.
- **Offensive Realism (John Mearsheimer):** Mearsheimer argues that great powers inevitably seek regional hegemony. China's assertiveness in the Pacific and the US's resistance are entirely predictable. The strategic stability framework might represent a temporary 'negotiated pause' rather than a genuine transformation of this structural competition.
- **Power Transition Theory:** A.F.K. Organski's Power Transition Theory predicts that the most dangerous period in international relations is when a rising power approaches parity with the dominant power. The Thucydides Trap invoked by Xi is drawn directly from this intellectual lineage. The strategic stability framework is an attempt to manage this transition without a catastrophic rupture.

### 4.2 Liberal Institutionalism vs. Realist Accommodation

- **Liberal Hope, Realist Outcome:** The post-Cold War order was built on the liberal institutionalist premise that economic interdependence, democracy promotion, and multilateral institutions would prevent great power conflict. The strategic stability framework represents a realist acknowledgement that this liberal bet has not paid off — and that power accommodation, not values-based engagement, must manage the US-China relationship.
- **Kautilya's Mandala Theory:** From an Indian classical perspective, Kautilya's Arthashastra posits a Mandala theory of interstate relations — one's neighbour is a natural adversary, but the neighbour's neighbour is a potential ally. The G-2 framework disrupts India's strategic positioning because its most important counterweight (the US) is now negotiating stability with India's most significant challenge (China).

### 4.3 Philosophical Tensions

- **Justice vs. Order (Hedley Bull):** Hedley Bull's concept of international society distinguishes between order (stability among states) and justice (protecting the rights and interests of all). The strategic stability framework privileges order — specifically order between two great powers — at the expense of justice for smaller states, Taiwan, and multilateral norms.
- **Rawls Critique:** From a Rawlsian perspective, any arrangement that entrenches the power of two dominant actors at the expense of weaker states violates the 'difference principle' — arrangements must benefit the least advantaged. A G-2 condominium that sidelines India, ASEAN, and Taiwan is fundamentally unjust by this standard.
- **Amartya Sen's Capability Approach:** Sen's framework asks: does this arrangement expand the substantive freedoms and capabilities of people and societies? Strategic stability between great powers may reduce the risk of direct conflict, but it can simultaneously freeze unjust power hierarchies, limiting the strategic autonomy of emerging economies and smaller democracies.

### 4.4 Epistemological Considerations

- **The Problem of Misreading Intent:** Rubio's dismissal of China's Taiwan concerns as 'ritualistic' reflects a fundamental epistemological error — the failure to understand how deeply the Taiwan

question is embedded in Chinese strategic culture, nationalism, and legitimacy narratives. Strategic stability built on misread intentions is fragile.

- **The Uncertainty of Trump's Commitments:** There is a deeper epistemological challenge: how do you build a durable strategic framework with a partner (Trump) whose commitments are known to be contingent and transactional? Xi's four-pillar framework tries to anchor the relationship in structural rules precisely to compensate for this uncertainty.
- **The Limits of Analogical Reasoning:** Applying Cold War strategic stability concepts directly to the US-China relationship may be misleading. The Cold War was characterised by minimal economic integration; today's US and China are deeply economically interdependent. The nature of deterrence, escalation dynamics, and the role of non-state actors are all qualitatively different.

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## 5. New Features and Unique Ideas

What makes the current US-China strategic stability framework genuinely novel — distinct from previous diplomatic arrangements — are several unprecedented structural and rhetorical elements that deserve close examination.

### 5.1 The Four-Pillar Architecture: A Structured Coexistence Model

- **Unprecedented Explicitness:** Previous US-China summits produced general language about 'managing competition responsibly.' Xi's four-pillar framework — cooperation as mainstay, competition within limits, manageable differences, expectable peace — is far more architected. It reads less like a summit communiqué and more like a bilateral constitutional compact.
- **Multi-Year Horizon:** The framework was explicitly described as governing the relationship 'for the next three years and beyond' — a departure from the typical summit-by-summit transactional approach. This temporal anchoring suggests a genuine attempt at institutionalisation.
- **Symmetry in Language:** The use of 'fairness and reciprocity' in the US readout — language typically associated with trade negotiations — applied to the entire strategic relationship signals that the US is treating China as an equal partner in setting the terms of the relationship, not as a state being managed within a US-designed framework.

### 5.2 'Strategic Stability' Revived in a New Context

- **Cold War Term Reconceived:** Strategic stability in the Cold War referred primarily to nuclear deterrence. Its revival in a context of conventional military competition, economic rivalry, technology competition, and information warfare suggests an attempt to create a comprehensive deterrence framework that goes beyond nuclear dynamics.
- **Economic Stability as Strategic Stability:** An implicit element of the framework is that the two largest economies maintaining predictable economic relations — avoiding escalatory decoupling — is itself a form of strategic stability with global systemic implications, not merely a bilateral commercial concern.

### 5.3 Taiwan's Elevation as a 'Make or Break' Variable

- **New Categorical Framing:** China's framing — 'if the Taiwan issue is handled properly, the bilateral relationship will enjoy overall stability; otherwise, clashes and even conflicts' — is unusually explicit and threatening for a major summit communiqué. It effectively makes the entire relationship conditional on the Taiwan question.
- **'Fire and Water' Metaphor:** The characterisation of Taiwan independence and cross-strait peace as 'irreconcilable as fire and water' is a rhetorical escalation beyond any previous summit language. Its unopposed appearance in the diplomatic record is itself significant.

### 5.4 The 'Strategic Stability' Constraint on Alliances

- **Alliance Compatibility Test:** For the first time, a US–China agreement creates an implicit test for US alliances and partnerships: are they compatible with strategic stability? This inverts the traditional logic where alliances are sacrosanct and China must accommodate them.
- **UPSC Relevance:** The Quad, AUKUS, and bilateral defence partnerships with Japan, South Korea, and India are all now potentially subject to a new 'compatibility with strategic stability' standard that China can invoke and that the US has implicitly accepted.

### 5.5 Feasibility Assessment

- **Short-term Feasibility: Moderate:** In the short term, the framework provides useful diplomatic cover for both sides to avoid escalatory actions, manage trade tensions, and prevent military miscalculation. Both sides have incentives to maintain the arrangement.
- **Long-term Feasibility: Uncertain:** Deep structural drivers — semiconductor rivalry, South China Sea contestation, Taiwan's political trajectory, domestic nationalism in both countries, and the

unresolved trade imbalances — remain unaddressed. The framework is a diplomatic ceiling, not a structural resolution.

- **For India:** The framework's durability from India's perspective depends on whether the US maintains the Quad and its Indo-Pacific commitments even within the strategic stability architecture, or whether those are gradually traded away in the broader G-2 bargaining.

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## 6. Sustainability of the Idea

Assessing sustainability requires us to look beyond immediate diplomatic optics and examine whether the strategic stability framework can endure across political cycles, structural pressures, and competing interests.

### 6.1 Political Sustainability

- **Trump's Transactionalism:** Trump's foreign policy has no ideological anchor — commitments are only as durable as the deal they underpin. If China fails to deliver on economic concessions, tariff adjustments, or North Korea, the framework could be abandoned as quickly as it was constructed. Xi, by contrast, is building a long-term structural architecture.
- **US Domestic Politics:** The China-hawk consensus in the US Congress — bipartisan and deeply institutionalised after 2019 — is unlikely to simply accept a strategic accommodation. Congressional pressure, through measures like Taiwan arms sales, CHIPS Act, and export controls, will create structural tensions with the executive's framework.
- **China's Domestic Legitimacy:** Xi needs the Taiwan narrative for domestic legitimacy — any perceived concession on Taiwan would be domestically costly. Conversely, any genuine strategic concession by the US on Taiwan would risk a crisis of confidence among US allies.

### 6.2 Structural Sustainability

- **Technology Cold War Continues:** The technology competition — semiconductors, AI, quantum computing, space, and biotech — operates on a logic of strategic denial and national security that is incompatible with sustained strategic stability. US export controls on advanced chips and Chinese countermeasures will continue regardless of diplomatic frameworks.
- **Military Posture:** Neither side is reducing its military deployments, capability investments, or strategic deterrence posture. The US continues FONOPS (Freedom of Navigation Operations) in the South China Sea; China continues its anti-access/area-denial build-up. Strategic stability at the diplomatic level coexists with military competition on the ground.

### 6.3 Ethical and Normative Sustainability

- **Democracy and Human Rights:** A G-2 framework that prioritises great power stability over the values commitments of the rules-based order — human rights in Xinjiang, democratic freedoms in Hong Kong, Taiwan's self-determination — raises fundamental ethical questions about what kind of order is being stabilised.
- **Smaller State Interests:** The sustainability of any great power framework depends partly on whether smaller states accommodate or actively resist it. ASEAN, India, Japan, South Korea, and Australia all have strong incentives to resist strategic marginalisation — their collective resistance could constrain the G-2 framework's reach.

### 6.4 India-Specific Sustainability Assessment

- **Double-Edged Pressure:** India faces a uniquely difficult dilemma: a less restrained China emboldened by G-2 recognition, and a less reliable US whose Indo-Pacific commitments are now contingent on strategic stability with China. This is the worst of both worlds for Indian strategic planning.
- **Assam and Northeast Lens:** For APSC: the strategic stability framework has direct implications for India's Northeast. A China emboldened by reduced US pressure will likely intensify its activities along the LAC, including in Arunachal Pradesh. The infrastructure and military posture India has built in the Northeast becomes even more critical in this new environment.

## 7. Challenges Related to the Issue

The US-China strategic stability framework faces challenges from multiple directions — structural, political, normative, and from third-party actors. Each category of challenge needs to be understood clearly for a comprehensive UPSC answer.

### 7.1 Structural Challenges

- **Hegemonic Transition Trap:** Power transition theory predicts that the most dangerous moment is when a rising power approaches parity with the dominant one. The framework attempts to manage this transition diplomatically, but structural incentives for conflict — particularly over Taiwan — remain unresolved.
- **Technology Rivalry:** Semiconductor wars, AI governance, cyber operations, and space competition create a parallel domain of competition that strategic stability in the political-military sphere cannot fully contain. Technology decoupling follows its own logic.
- **Economic Interdependence Paradox:** The US and China are deeply economically interdependent — China is a major US trading partner, holds substantial US debt, and is central to global supply chains. This interdependence creates both incentives for stability and enormous leverage for coercive economic statecraft.

### 7.2 Implementation Challenges

- **Mechanism Deficits:** Unlike the US-Soviet relationship, which had formal arms control treaties (SALT, START, INF), hotline protocols, and nuclear risk reduction centres, the US-China framework has no equivalent institutional infrastructure. Crisis management mechanisms remain underdeveloped.
- **Communication Gaps:** US-China military-to-military communication — essential for preventing accidental escalation — has been periodically severed. Strategic stability requires reliable communication channels, which remain fragile.
- **Third Party Trigger Risk:** Taiwan itself is an autonomous actor. Its political choices — particularly around any formal independence moves — could trigger a crisis that neither the US nor China can fully control, regardless of their bilateral framework.

### 7.3 Stakeholder Resistance

- **Allied Anxiety:** Japan, South Korea, and Australia are deeply concerned that strategic stability between the US and China could lead to strategic decoupling from their security guarantees. Their resistance will manifest through independent defence buildups and demands for explicit security assurances.
- **India's Dilemma:** India occupies a particularly sensitive position. It cannot simply accept a G-2 condominium that sidelines its interests. But open resistance risks alienating both Washington and Beijing simultaneously, undermining India's multi-alignment strategy.
- **Taiwan's Agency:** Taiwan's own democratic politics and leadership choices are not under the control of either Beijing or Washington. Elections in Taiwan could produce leadership more or less willing to accommodate Beijing's terms, independently of what the G-2 framework prescribes.

### 7.4 Normative Challenges

- **Rules-Based Order Erosion:** The strategic stability framework implicitly deprioritises values commitments — human rights, democratic governance, self-determination — in favour of great power interest management. This erodes the credibility of the rules-based international order that India, ASEAN, and the EU have invested in sustaining.
- **UN and Multilateral Institutions:** A functional G-2 condominium would effectively reduce multilateral institutions — the UN, WTO, IMF — to forums for post-hoc legitimisation of decisions already made bilaterally between Washington and Beijing. This fundamentally undermines the principle of sovereign equality among states.

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## 8. Multidimensional Analysis

A genuinely insightful UPSC answer requires examining an issue from multiple analytical planes simultaneously. The US-China strategic stability framework is particularly rich in this regard because it touches every dimension of international and domestic affairs.

### 8.1 Social Dimension

- **National Identity and Nationalism:** The Taiwan question is not merely a geopolitical problem — it is deeply embedded in Chinese national identity and the narrative of '100 years of humiliation' and national rejuvenation. Any perceived retreat by China on Taiwan would carry massive domestic political costs for the CCP. Conversely, nationalist public opinion in Taiwan — increasingly identifying as Taiwanese rather than Chinese — makes reunification more complex over time.
- **Diaspora and Soft Power:** China's significant diaspora communities in Southeast Asia and the Pacific serve as instruments of cultural and economic influence. A China operating with reduced US scrutiny under strategic stability could accelerate soft power projection through these communities.
- **People-to-People Impact:** Strategic stability may reduce direct military risks but does not address the social impacts of economic decoupling — manufacturing job losses, supply chain disruptions, and educational/research restrictions (student visa curbs, Confucius Institute closures) that affect ordinary people in both countries.

### 8.2 Political Dimension

- **US Domestic Politics:** Trump's strategic stability framework faces resistance from a bipartisan China-hawk consensus in Congress, defence establishment concerns about signalling weakness to allies, and human rights advocacy groups. The framework's political durability within the US is far from assured.
- **Chinese Domestic Politics:** Xi Jinping has consolidated unprecedented power through the removal of term limits and political rivals. Yet economic pressures — youth unemployment, property sector crisis, slowing growth — create political vulnerabilities. Aggressive external posturing may serve as a political pressure valve for domestic discontent.
- **Third Country Political Impact:** The strategic stability framework will reshape political calculations in Japan (potential remilitarisation acceleration), South Korea (nuclear weapons discussion), India (recalibration of multi-alignment strategy), and ASEAN states (hedge between US and China more explicitly).
- **APSC Angle:** For Assam and the Northeast, any heightened Chinese assertiveness along the LAC — emboldened by reduced US pressure — will intensify the political salience of border security, infrastructure development in border districts, and the civilian population dynamics in strategic areas.

### 8.3 Legal Dimension

- **Taiwan Relations Act:** The TRA is a US domestic law — it cannot be unilaterally overridden by executive action. Any explicit abandonment of Taiwan would require Congressional action, creating a legal firewall against the most extreme forms of strategic accommodation. However, strategic ambiguity can be eroded without formally amending the TRA.
- **UNCLOS and South China Sea:** China's expansive claims in the South China Sea — invalidated by the 2016 UNCLOS Arbitral Tribunal ruling — remain legally contested. The strategic stability framework does not address this legal dispute, leaving it as a persistent source of friction.
- **International Law Implications:** If the US and China collectively deprioritise international legal norms in favour of bilateral strategic arrangements, it sets a precedent that erodes the authority of international law more broadly — with implications for smaller states' ability to invoke legal protections against great power pressure.

## 8.4 Ethical Dimension

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- **Self-Determination vs. Order:** The strategic stability framework effectively trades Taiwan's right to self-determination for great power stability. This is a profound ethical choice — prioritising order between two powerful states over the political agency of 24 million Taiwanese people.
- **Sacrificing Values for Stability:** Deprioritising concerns about human rights abuses in Xinjiang, the erosion of Hong Kong's autonomy, and aggressive economic coercion of smaller states in the name of 'strategic stability' raises deep ethical questions about the moral foundations of the framework.
- **The Ethics of Alliance:** If the US signals that its alliance commitments are contingent on strategic stability with China, it raises fundamental questions about the ethics of alliance — can partners like India, Japan, or South Korea trust US security guarantees, or are they being used as strategic bargaining chips?

## 8.5 International Dimension

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- **Bipolarity vs. Multipolarity:** India, Russia, the EU, and ASEAN have all at various points articulated a preference for a multipolar world order. The G-2 framework directly threatens this preference by concentrating global agenda-setting power in Washington and Beijing. India's championing of the 'Global South' at the G20 becomes more urgent in this context.
- **Russia-China Axis:** Russia's simultaneous strategic embrace of China creates a Eurasian counterweight to US influence. A US distracted by managing its G-2 relationship with China may have fewer resources and attention to manage Russian revisionism in Europe, allowing Moscow greater latitude in its neighbourhood.
- **Impact on Indo-Pacific Architecture:** The Quad, AUKUS, US-Japan-South Korea trilateral, and the US-India defence partnership were all built on the premise of US strategic competition with China. If strategic stability softens that competition, the rationale and intensity of these partnerships will be tested.
- **ASEAN Centrality at Risk:** ASEAN has carefully cultivated a position of 'centrality' in Indo-Pacific governance. A G-2 framework that bypasses ASEAN mechanisms — ASEAN Regional Forum, East Asia Summit — in favour of bilateral US-China arrangements directly undermines ASEAN centrality and could fracture ASEAN's internal consensus.

## 8.6 Economic Dimension

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- **Trade War Context:** The strategic stability framework emerged in the context of escalating tariffs (US imposing 145% tariffs on Chinese goods; China retaliating with 125%). The diplomatic framework and the trade war are simultaneous — the economic rivalry is being managed through political accommodation, not resolved.
- **Supply Chain Reconfiguration:** The assumption that strategic stability will slow economic decoupling may be premature. Supply chain diversification — 'China+1' strategies across global manufacturing — has its own structural momentum independent of political signals. The strategic stability framework may slow the pace but cannot reverse the direction.
- **Global Economic Implications:** Both the US and China are each other's largest trading partners (along with other major economies). Sustained instability in their relationship risks global economic disruption. Strategic stability, to the extent it reduces economic uncertainty, has positive implications for global trade, investment, and commodity markets.
- **India's Economic Opportunity:** A US-China managed competition opens space for India to attract manufacturing relocating from China ('China+1'), strengthen its semiconductor and electronics ecosystem, and position itself as a trusted supply chain partner for both the West and the Global South. This window, however, requires rapid domestic structural reforms.

## 9. Linkages with NCERTs

NCERT textbooks form the conceptual bedrock of UPSC preparation. The US-China strategic stability issue connects to multiple NCERT chapters across political science, history, and geography.

NCERT Book / Class	Chapter / Topic	Connection to Issue
Political Science Class 12 (Contemporary World Politics)	Chapter 3 – US Hegemony in World Politics	Explains US hegemony post-Cold War, its exercise through military, economic, and cultural means. Directly relevant to understanding the challenge China poses to US hegemony and the strategic stability response.
Political Science Class 12	Chapter 4 – Alternative Centres of Power	Discusses China's rise as an alternative power centre (ASEAN, EU also covered). Foundation for understanding today's G-2 dynamic.
Political Science Class 12	Chapter 5 – Contemporary South Asia	Covers India-China relations, border disputes, and Pakistan's role. Directly links to the strategic implications of the G-2 framework for South Asia.
Political Science Class 12	Chapter 9 – Globalisation	Explains economic interdependence and its political consequences. Relevant to understanding why US-China economic integration complicates pure strategic competition.
Political Science Class 11 (Political Theory)	Chapter 9 – Peace	Discusses theories of peace — liberal internationalism, realism, peace through strength. Provides conceptual tools to evaluate whether strategic stability constitutes genuine peace.
History Class 12 (Themes in World History)	Chapter 10 – Displacing Indigenous Peoples / Colonialism	While not directly linked, Cold War history context is provided through related chapters on the US-Soviet relationship and post-WW2 order.
Geography Class 12 (India People and Economy)	Chapter on International Trade	Covers trade patterns and dependencies. Relevant to India's strategic economic positioning in the context of US-China trade rivalry.

Geography Class 11 (Fundamentals of Physical Geography)	Chapter on Pacific Ocean Currents and Geography	Provides foundational geographic context for the Indo-Pacific strategic theatre — why it is simultaneously an economic and military space.
Economics Class 12	Chapter on Balance of Payments and International Trade	Conceptual foundation for understanding the US- China trade imbalance that underlies the tariff war and the economic dimension of strategic competition.

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## 10. Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus

Mapping this issue to the UPSC syllabus helps prioritise preparation and identify the specific paper and section from which questions are most likely to be asked. This is among the most internationally significant topics of 2025-26 and has high probability across multiple GS papers.

### 10.1 GS Paper II — Governance and International Relations (Primary)

- **Bilateral, Regional, and Global Groupings:** The US-China framework directly maps to the syllabus requirement for understanding important international groupings and agreements and India being affected through such groupings. This is the most direct syllabus linkage.
- **India's Foreign Policy:** Implications for India's multi-alignment strategy, India-US relations (Quad, GSOMIA, defence deals), and India-China relations (LAC tensions, border infrastructure, SCO engagement) are all directly relevant.
- **Effect of Policies of Developed Countries on India's Interests:** The strategic stability framework is exactly the kind of policy shift by a developed country (US) that directly affects India's interests — strategic, economic, and security.
- **Important International Institutions:** UN, Quad, ASEAN, G20, WTO — all affected by the G-2 framework. Understanding how these institutions function under G-2 pressure is a key UPSC concern.

### 10.2 GS Paper III — Economy, Security, and Disaster Management

- **Indian Economy and Issues:** US-China trade rivalry creates supply chain opportunities for India (semiconductor ecosystem, manufacturing). The economic dimension of strategic stability has direct implications for India's economic strategy.
- **Security Challenges:** Internal security implications: China's assertiveness along the LAC (Arunachal, Aksai Chin), proxy support for Pakistan, cyber threats, and information warfare — all intensified by a more emboldened China operating under a G-2 umbrella.
- **Technology and Security:** Semiconductor rivalry, AI competition, cyber operations, and space competition are all directly relevant to GS III technology and security chapters.

### 10.3 GS Paper I — History, Society, and Geography

- **Post-World War II International Order:** The historical evolution from US-Soviet bipolarity through unipolarity to the current G-2 dynamic is a key historical context question.
- **Distribution of Key Natural Resources:** The South China Sea dispute involves control over critical maritime trade routes and potentially significant hydrocarbon reserves — a geography-economics-security convergence.

### 10.4 GS Paper IV — Ethics, Integrity, and Aptitude

- **Ethics in International Relations:** The ethical dimensions — sacrificing Taiwan's self-determination for stability, trading values for power accommodation — are directly relevant to case studies on political ethics and moral dimensions of policy.
- **Philosophical Foundations:** Realism vs. liberalism in IR, Rawlsian justice vs. utilitarian stability calculations — all highly relevant for the philosophical section of GS IV and for the Ethics paper.

### 10.5 Essay Paper

- **High Potential Essay Themes:** 'Has the age of US hegemony finally ended?'; 'Strategic stability is the new name for great power bargaining'; 'Multi-alignment in a G-2 world: India's strategic dilemma'; 'Power, not principle, shapes world order.'
- **Approach:** Essays on IR themes benefit enormously from the philosophical grounding (Rawls, Kautilya, Bull, Mearsheimer) and the multidimensional analysis outlined in this module.

### 10.6 Optional Subjects

- **Political Science and International Relations (PSIR):** This is a core optional topic. US foreign policy, China's rise, Thucydides Trap, bipolarity theory, nuclear deterrence, Indo-Pacific strategy, and India's foreign policy are all standard PSIR paper topics.
- **History:** The evolution of the international order from the Congress of Vienna through the Cold War to the present is highly relevant for the History optional's Modern World History section.
- **Sociology / Public Administration:** Global governance, multilateralism, and the role of international institutions provide linkages for these optionals.

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## 11. Best Linkages with Syllabus, Philosophy, and Epistemology

The deepest UPSC answers are those that integrate empirical knowledge with philosophical and epistemological frameworks. The US-China strategic stability issue is exceptionally rich in this regard — it allows you to deploy thinkers from across intellectual traditions.

### 11.1 Thucydides Trap and Power Transition

- **Thucydides (460-395 BCE):** Athens' rapid rise created an existential fear in Sparta that led to the Peloponnesian War. Xi's invocation of this trap was not casual — it was a deliberate historical reference warning of the structural risk of great power conflict embedded in US-China competition. Graham Allison's modern application (2017) provides the contemporary framing.
- **UPSC Angle:** Any question on war and peace, great power competition, or India's strategic challenges can integrate the Thucydides Trap — it demonstrates historical depth and conceptual sophistication.

### 11.2 Rawls, Sen, and the Justice of Global Order

- **John Rawls – Justice as Fairness:** Rawls' 'difference principle' requires that inequalities benefit the least advantaged. Applied globally: a G-2 condominium that entrenches great power dominance without mechanisms for redistributing security and prosperity to smaller states is fundamentally unjust.
- **Amartya Sen – Development as Freedom:** Sen's capability approach asks whether global arrangements expand substantive freedoms. Strategic stability between the US and China may reduce conflict risk but simultaneously constrains the strategic autonomy and developmental choices of smaller states — a capability deprivation.

### 11.3 Kautilya and India's Strategic Tradition

- **Mandala Theory:** Kautilya's Arthashastra describes a Mandala (circle) of states: one's neighbour is naturally an adversary; the neighbour's neighbour is a potential ally. India's strategic challenge is that the US — its 'neighbour's neighbour' against China — is now cutting a deal with China, disrupting the Kautilyan calculus.
- **Saptanga Theory (Seven Limbs of the State):** Kautilya identifies territory, treasury, army, allies, and counsel as pillars of state power. The US-China framework tests all these pillars for India — territory (LAC), treasury (trade opportunities), army (defence partnerships), and allies (Quad resilience).

### 11.4 Hedley Bull and the Society of States

- **Order vs. Justice:** Bull distinguished between an international system (states merely interacting) and an international society (states sharing common norms and institutions). The G-2 framework risks reducing the international society back to a mere system where two powers determine norms unilaterally.
- **The Anarchical Society:** Bull's classic text argues that even in an anarchical international system, states develop shared norms to manage conflict. The strategic stability framework can be read as a sophisticated attempt to create exactly such norms — but only for the two most powerful actors.

### 11.5 Epistemological Reflection: What Can We Know?

- **Uncertainty of Intentions:** The central epistemological challenge in IR is the problem of accurately reading other states' intentions. The US side's tendency to treat China's Taiwan statements as 'ritualistic' reflects a systematic underestimation of Chinese resolve — a catastrophic epistemological failure with potentially war-triggering consequences.
- **The Limits of Models:** Theoretical models — bipolarity, power transition, deterrence theory — provide frameworks but cannot fully predict behaviour in a world of nuclear weapons, economic

interdependence, non-state actors, and information warfare. UPSC answers that acknowledge model limitations demonstrate genuine analytical maturity.

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## 12. Way Forward

India cannot afford a passive response to the G-2 strategic realignment. What follows is a set of strategic, diplomatic, economic, and institutional recommendations — grounded in India's constitutional foreign policy principles and its civilisational traditions of strategic thinking.

### 12.1 Strategic Autonomy: Deepening, Not Abandoning Multi-Alignment

- **Protect Quad Architecture:** India must work actively with Japan, Australia, and the US Congress to ensure the Quad remains institutionally robust even if Trump's executive foreign policy softens. The Quad's working groups on vaccines, semiconductors, climate, and infrastructure give it resilience beyond pure security framing.
- **Engage Russia Carefully:** As Russia deepens its China embrace, India must maintain its historically privileged relationship with Moscow without compromising its Western partnerships. The defence supply relationship, energy cooperation, and shared concerns about Chinese dominance in Central Asia provide a basis for continued India-Russia engagement.
- **Build the Global South Leadership:** India's G20 Presidency outcomes, the Voice of the Global South summits, and the India-Africa-ASEAN diplomatic engagement must be sustained and deepened. India leading a coalition of middle powers that resists both G-2 dominance and Chinese revisionism is the most viable long-term strategy.

### 12.2 Border and Security Imperatives

- **Accelerate LAC Infrastructure:** The strategic stability framework may reduce immediate escalation risk, but it simultaneously reduces the inhibitions China faces on long-term boundary pressure. India must accelerate the construction of border roads, tunnels, connectivity, and logistics infrastructure along the LAC — particularly in Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin approaches.
- **Defence Indigenisation:** Greater self-reliance in defence manufacturing — through DRDO, DPSUs, and private sector defence companies — reduces dependence on US defence supplies that are now explicitly being treated as bargaining chips.
- **APSC Angle:** For Assam and the Northeast: the connectivity infrastructure in border districts (BRO roads, Sela tunnel, Atal Setu), the Agnipath-trained security personnel, and civilian infrastructure development in strategic areas all gain higher salience in the G-2 era.

### 12.3 Economic Resilience and Strategic Industry Policy

- **Semiconductor and Electronics Ecosystem:** India must operationalise the semiconductor incentive scheme, attract TSMC/Intel/Samsung fabs, and build a domestic chip design ecosystem. The US-China tech war creates a narrow window where India can become a credible alternative supply chain partner.
- **Critical Minerals Strategy:** India should develop its critical minerals diplomacy — engaging Africa, Australia, and Latin America for lithium, cobalt, and rare earths — reducing dependence on Chinese-controlled mineral supply chains.
- **Trade Diversification:** Accelerating FTA negotiations with the UK, EU, and GCC, combined with deepening the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with UAE and Australia, reduces India's trade dependence on any single country or bloc.

### 12.4 Diplomatic and Institutional Architecture

- **Strengthen ASEAN Engagement:** India must actively support ASEAN's centrality in the Indo-Pacific architecture through ASEAN-India summits, the East Asia Summit, and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+). A strong ASEAN-India partnership provides a multilateral counterweight to G-2 bilateralism.
- **Revitalise UN Reform Push:** India's UNSC permanent membership bid gains additional urgency in a world where a G-2 framework bypasses UNSC multilateralism. Building a coalition of middle

powers (Brazil, Japan, Germany, South Africa) for comprehensive UNSC reform is an immediate diplomatic priority.

- **Cyber and Information Warfare Capacity:** India must build robust offensive and defensive cyber capabilities, develop a National Cybersecurity Strategy with real enforcement mechanisms, and invest in information resilience to counter Chinese and Pakistani information warfare — increasingly significant in the strategic stability era.

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## 13. Previous Years' UPSC and APSC Questions

The following questions — from UPSC CSE Prelims, Mains, and APSC — are either directly relevant or thematically linked to the US-China strategic relationship, Indo-Pacific dynamics, and India's foreign policy challenges. Studying these alongside this module builds pattern recognition essential for UPSC.

### 13.1 UPSC CSE Mains — GS Paper II

Year	Question	Linkage
2023	What is the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)? How can it benefit India in the current geopolitical environment?	US Indo-Pacific strategy, trade alternatives to China
2023	The Quad is just one of India's plurilateral groupings and it should not be elevated to the status of an alliance. Do you agree? Justify your view.	Quad, multi-alignment, G-2 impact
2022	What are the main impediments to the India-China border settlement? Do you think that Chinese domination of geopolitics in Asia is inevitable?	India-China relations, LAC, China's rise
2022	Critically examine the role of the US as a guarantor of Indo-Pacific security.	US reliability as strategic partner in G-2 era
2021	AUKUS is the latest in a series of US-led Indo-Pacific strategic alliances. What is its significance for India? What does it signal about the changing power structure in the Pacific?	AUKUS, Indo-Pacific, changing alliances
2020	'The US has long used trade and technology to maintain its global hegemony.' Discuss in the context of recent US-China trade war.	US hegemony, trade war, tech rivalry
2019	Is the emerging alliance between China and Russia a geopolitical challenge for India? Discuss.	Russia-China axis, India's multi-alignment
2018	How far do you agree that the Belt and Road Initiative, in its current form, undermines India's sovereignty and geopolitical concerns?	BRI, China's assertiveness, India's concerns
2016	What are the consequences of recent developments in the South China Sea for India and the wider world?	South China Sea, UNCLOS, Indo-Pacific

### 13.2 UPSC CSE Prelims — Relevant Questions

- **Prelims 2023:** With reference to 'Quad', consider the following statements: (1) The Quad comprises the USA, Japan, Australia, and India. (2) The Quad nations conduct joint naval exercises. Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (Both correct) — Tests basic factual knowledge of the Quad framework.
- **Prelims 2021:** Consider the following countries: 1. Australia 2. Canada 3. China 4. India 5. Japan 6. USA — Which of the above are members of G7? (Answer: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, UK, USA) — Tests institutional membership knowledge.
- **Prelims 2019:** Recently, India signed a deal known as LEMOA with the USA. The term LEMOA stands for Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement. This is related to India-US military

logistics access — directly relevant to the defence cooperation dimension of the US-India relationship.

### 13.3 APSC (Assam Public Service Commission) Relevant Questions

- **APSC 2022 (GS Paper II):** Discuss India's Act East Policy and its significance for Assam and the Northeast region. What are the challenges in its implementation? (Linkage: Act East Policy is India's eastward diplomatic engagement strategy, directly connected to India's response to China's influence in Southeast Asia and the relevance of the Northeast as India's gateway to ASEAN.)
- **APSC 2021:** What is the significance of the Brahmaputra river in India-China relations? Discuss the water dispute concerns and India's response. (Linkage: Water diplomacy between India and China is a microcosm of the broader strategic competition — China's control over Brahmaputra headwaters is a strategic lever in bilateral relations.)
- **APSC 2020:** Examine the role of Northeast India in India's Look East/Act East Policy. How does the strategic location of Assam matter for India's foreign policy? (Linkage: Assam as the hub of India's connectivity to Southeast Asia — BCIM Corridor, Trans-Asian Rail, Kaladan Multi-modal Transit — becomes even more geopolitically significant in the G-2 era.)

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## 14. Model Answers for Selected Questions

The following model answers are structured to UPSC Mains standards — approximately 250 words, with a clear introduction, analytical body, and a forward-looking conclusion. Read them for structure and language, then practise writing your own versions without notes.

### 14.1 Question: The Quad is just one of India's plurilateral groupings and it should not be elevated to the status of an alliance. Do you agree? (UPSC 2023)

Model Answer: ~250 words | GS Paper II | International Relations

The Quad — comprising India, USA, Japan, and Australia — has evolved rapidly from a nascent security dialogue into a prominent plurilateral mechanism. Whether it should be elevated to a formal alliance merits careful examination.

Arguments for restraint in elevating Quad to an alliance are compelling. India's foundational foreign policy tradition — rooted in strategic autonomy and non-alignment — cautions against binding defence commitments. An explicit alliance would constrain India's freedom to simultaneously engage China through diplomatic channels (SCO, BRICS, bilateral summits) and Russia for defence supplies. India's Constitution commits to international peace (Article 51), which formal bloc membership complicates.

Moreover, the Quad's current architecture is deliberately flexible — working groups on vaccines, semiconductors, clean energy, and disaster relief give it a positive agenda beyond security containment. This broad mandate makes it more acceptable to ASEAN states, which resist an 'Asian NATO' framing, and allows India to engage without triggering a Chinese overreaction.

However, emerging G-2 dynamics challenge this equilibrium. The US–China strategic stability framework of 2025 raises legitimate concerns about whether the US will maintain its Indo-Pacific commitments under Chinese pressure. India must ensure the Quad retains institutional resilience through codified cooperation mechanisms, regular Leader-level summits, and concrete deliverables — even if formal alliance status is avoided.

In conclusion, India should resist formal alliance elevation while simultaneously deepening Quad institutionalisation. Strategic autonomy and security partnership are not mutually exclusive — the Quad's plurilateral, positive agenda offers precisely this balance. The way forward lies in substance, not labelling.

### 14.2 Question: Is the emerging alliance between China and Russia a geopolitical challenge for India? (UPSC 2019 — now more relevant than ever)

Model Answer: ~250 words | GS Paper II | Bilateral and Global Relations

The deepening Russia-China partnership — now operationalised through coordinated summitry, energy supply deals, and shared diplomatic positions — presents India with a distinctive geopolitical challenge that demands calibrated strategic thinking.

The challenge is multidimensional. First, India's primary defence supplier has been Russia, while its primary strategic concern is China. A tighter Russia-China axis limits India's ability to leverage Russia as an implicit counterweight to Chinese assertiveness. Second, China and Russia jointly dominate the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, potentially using it to marginalise Indian concerns. Third, simultaneous Russian-Chinese economic presence in Central Asia — through SCO and BRI — constrains India's access to a region vital for connectivity (North-South Transport Corridor) and energy supplies.

However, the challenge is not absolute. Russia and China have deep structural tensions — competing interests in Central Asia, historical territorial disputes, Russian concerns about Chinese economic encroachment in the Russian Far East, and differing visions for Eurasia's political order. India must diplomatically leverage these fault lines while maintaining its privileged relationship with Moscow through energy, defence, and cultural ties.

India's strategic response should combine four elements: maintaining Russia engagement on its own terms (not as a China vassal); deepening the Quad and India-US defence partnerships for credible deterrence; building economic alternatives to Russian defence dependence through Atmanirbhar Bharat;

and cultivating the Global South coalition to resist both great power blocs from claiming to speak for the developing world.

In a G-2 world, India's multi-alignment is not a weakness — it is its most sophisticated strategic asset.

### **14.3 Question: What are the consequences of recent developments in the South China Sea for India and the wider world? (UPSC 2016 — contextualised for 2026)**

Model Answer: ~250 words | GS Paper II | India and Neighbourhood / Indo-Pacific

The South China Sea — through which approximately \$5 trillion of trade transits annually — has become the epicentre of the US-China strategic competition. China's extensive island-building, militarisation of artificial reefs, and expansive nine-dash-line claims (rejected by the 2016 UNCLOS Arbitral Tribunal) have fundamentally altered the strategic geography of the Indo-Pacific.

For India, the consequences are direct and immediate. First, approximately 55% of India's external trade passes through the South China Sea — supply chain disruption would have severe economic consequences. Second, Chinese maritime assertiveness sets a precedent that India fears could be replicated in the Indian Ocean, where PLAN presence has been steadily growing through the 'string of pearls' port investments. Third, the principle of freedom of navigation — vital for India's trade and naval operations — is directly threatened by China's expansive claims.

For the wider world, the South China Sea developments represent a foundational challenge to UNCLOS-based maritime law, ASEAN's territorial integrity, and the global trading system's stability. The US-China strategic stability framework of 2025 does not address South China Sea disputes, leaving this as an active flashpoint even within the G-2 equilibrium.

India's response must include active support for UNCLOS's integrity through ASEAN partnerships, enhanced Indian Naval deployments in the Strait of Malacca and Andaman Sea, and investment in alternative trade routes (IMEC — India-Middle East-Europe Corridor) that reduce dependence on South China Sea passage.

The South China Sea is not merely a maritime dispute — it is the crucible in which the new world order is being forged.

## UPSC Relevance Summary and Note-Making Tips

### Why This Issue is Critically Important for UPSC 2026

The US–China strategic stability framework represents the most significant shift in global geopolitics since the end of the Cold War. No serious UPSC aspirant can afford to ignore its implications for India's foreign policy, security doctrine, and economic strategy.

- **GS Paper II Centrality:** This topic sits at the absolute core of the International Relations section. It connects India-US relations, India-China relations, the Quad, ASEAN, and the multilateral order — virtually every IR topic in GS II is refracted through this framework.
- **Essay Potential:** The G-2 theme is ideal for essays on power, order, justice, and India's role in the world. Students who can deploy Kautilya, Rawls, Thucydides, and Hedley Bull alongside contemporary data will stand out decisively.
- **Cross-Paper Connectivity:** Unlike narrowly topical issues, this framework connects to GS I (history of Cold War, world order), GS III (economic security, defence indigenisation, semiconductor policy), GS IV (political ethics, global justice), and the APSC-specific Northeast security concerns.
- **Current Affairs Momentum:** The Beijing summit (May 2025), the Xi Washington return visit (September 2025), and ongoing US-China trade negotiations will keep this issue in the news throughout the 2025-26 preparation cycle. Every development is an opportunity to add specifics to your answer.

### Note-Making Tips for This Module

- **One-Page Concept Map:** Draw a central node 'G-2 Strategic Stability' with branches connecting to: Taiwan, Quad, India's dilemma, Economic rivalry, Russia axis, ASEAN impact, Philosophy (Thucydides/Rawls/Kautilya). Visual note-making accelerates recall.
- **Three-Column Notes:** Divide a page into three columns: Facts (who, what, when), Analysis (why, so what), India Angle (implications for India/Northeast). This mirrors the UPSC answer structure: context → analysis → implications.
- **Thinker Cards:** Make brief flashcards for each philosopher — Thucydides (power transition), Rawls (justice), Kautilya (Mandala), Hedley Bull (order vs. justice), Mearsheimer (offensive realism). Being able to deploy two thinkers per answer paragraph significantly elevates answer quality.
- **Timeline Practice:** Practise writing the historical evolution of US-China relations in 150 words — from Nixon to strategic stability. This 'compressed narrative' skill is essential for historical context paragraphs in Mains answers.
- **APSC Specific Note:** Always maintain a separate 'Northeast India Angle' section in your notes. For this topic: LAC border in Arunachal, Act East Policy and ASEAN connectivity through Assam, Brahmaputra water security, and the strategic significance of Assam's location as India's gateway to Southeast Asia.