

WRAP Exams · wrapexams.com

Prelims PYQ, Mains model answers, and copy evaluation. Write to the desk for this paper, a doubt, or the AI waitlist.

ask@wrapexams.com · +91 85951 84903 · wrapexams.com

Q10

"The USA is facing an existential threat in the form of a China, that is much more challenging than the erstwhile Soviet Union." Explain.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · GS II · 10 marks · India and its Neighbourhood

India and its neighborhood - relations.

Core demand of the question

- "The USA is facing an existential threat in the form of a China, that is much more challenging than the erstwhile Soviet Union." Explain
- Honour the official stem. Explain why the China challenge differs from the Soviet one; do not treat 'existential' as unexamined slogan
- Keep the explanation within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

The USSR was a nuclear-ideological rival outside Western production; decoupling was default.

China is inside U.S. trade, tech and finance, and is a military peer in the Western Pacific.

Semiconductors, dual-use fusion and Taiwan make the contest intimate and maritime, not only a missile count.

Allies still trade with China, so coalition discipline is harder than NATO-versus-Warsaw Pact.

'Existential' here is a threat to American primacy and order, not a prediction that the U.S. State will vanish.

Introduction

The Cold War Soviet Union was a nuclear-military and ideological rival with a weak consumer economy. China is a peer competitor inside the same trading and technology system that made American prosperity, which is why many U.S. strategists call it a harder, even 'existential', challenge - a claim that needs unpacking, not chanting.

Body**How the Soviet challenge was bounded**

- The USSR competed in missiles, space, and proxy wars, but it was largely outside Western production networks; decoupling was the starting point, not a painful policy choice.
- Ideological bipolarity organised allies into NATO and the Warsaw Pact; the economic race was a planned economy that ultimately stagnated.
- Mutual assured destruction made a direct great-power war irrational; the threat was military-political, not a daily dependence on Soviet factories.

Why China is described as more challenging

- China is a top trading partner, a central node in electronics, rare earths, pharmaceuticals and green-tech supply chains, and a holder of U.S. financial assets; rivalry and interdependence run together.
- Technology competition - 5G, semiconductors, AI, dual-use civil-military fusion - hits the U.S. innovation model at home, not only at a distant iron curtain.
- China combines a large nuclear-modernising PLA, a first-rate navy in the Western Pacific, and a claim over Taiwan that could force a U.S. war in a crowded maritime theatre.
- **There is no single 'free world' tariff wall:** allies trade with China even as they treaty-bind with Washington, which is a coalition problem Moscow never posed in the same way.

Reading 'existential' carefully

- Existential in this statement means a possible end of uncontested U.S. primacy and of the open order America designed, not a certain end of the American State.
- The USSR could be contained until it collapsed; China is a civilisational state with a dynamic economy, so waiting it out is not a strategy.
- **For India, the same facts argue for multi-alignment:** the China challenge is real, yet a U.S.-China binary is not New Delhi's full map.

Flow diagram

Soviet Union -> Military ideological bloc
 China -> Trade tech supply chains
 China -> PLA Taiwan Western Pacific
 Trade tech supply chains -> Harder US challenge
 PLA Taiwan Western Pacific -> Harder US challenge
 Military ideological bloc -> Containable Cold War

Conclusion

China is more challenging than the Soviet Union because it is a military, technological and economic peer inside America's own supply chains, not a sealed-off bloc. 'Existential' names a threat to primacy and to the post-1945 order, not a scripted collapse of the United States. That is why the competition is longer, more intimate, and harder to fence.

Facts & figures

Cold War bipolarity

NATO versus Warsaw Pact; a sealed economic contest the U.S. could organise as containment.

U.S.-China economic interdependence

Trade, supply chains and financial links that had no Soviet equivalent at this scale.

Technology-military fusion

Chinese civil-military integration in telecom, AI and semiconductors that targets the U.S. innovation edge.

Taiwan / Western Pacific

The most dangerous flashpoint where a U.S.-China war could start, unlike the old European central front's later stability.

Uncontested primacy

The post-1991 U.S. position that a peer China, unlike a declining USSR, can actually contest.

WRAP Exams · Write. Read. Analyse. Practice. · <https://wrapexams.com/upsc/mains-answers/gs-2/2021/the-usa-is-facing-an-existential-threat-in-the-form-of-a-china-that-is-much-more-challenging-than-the-erstwhile-soviet-union-explain/>
· ask@wrapexams.com · wrapexams.com

WRAP Exams