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Q7(c)

Examine the evolution of India's role in the global nuclear order

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · PSIR GS 2 · 15 marks · Changing International Political Order

Changing International Political Order: Rise of super powers; strategic and ideological Bipolarity, arms race and Cold War; Nuclear threat; Non-aligned movement; Collapse of the Soviet Union; Unipolarity and American hegemony; relevance of non-alignment in the contemporary world.

Core demand of the question

- Examine the evolution of India's role in the global nuclear order
- Write at 15-mark length

Revision summary

India rejected the **NPT** as a hierarchy of five.

Pokhran 1974 and 1998 marked option then weapons.

Doctrine is minimum deterrence and official no first use.

The 2008 NSG waiver is the civil-nuclear entry ticket without **NPT** accession.

The role is responsible possessor plus campaigner against a frozen club.

Introduction

India moved from a moral critic of nuclear clubs to a State with nuclear weapons that still sits outside the **NPT**. The evolution is 1974, 1998, and the 2008 NSG waiver. Role means both capability and the rules India will accept.

Body**From critic to tester**

- **Nehru's** India backed disarmament and the idea of a world free of nuclear threat, while keeping a scientific option.
- The **NPT** (1968) locked a five-weapon-State hierarchy. India refused as discriminatory.
- Pokhran-I in 1974, a "peaceful nuclear explosion," triggered technology denial and showed the option was real.

Open weapon status

- Pokhran-II in 1998 declared weapon tests. Doctrine later stressed credible minimum deterrence and no first use as official grammar.
- Sanctions followed, then a slow return through the United States civil nuclear bargain.

Partial integration without **NPT accession**

- The 2008 NSG waiver allowed civil nuclear commerce with a non-**NPT** State, a unique carve-out.
- IAEA safeguards on civilian facilities, a waiver not a membership flip.

- India seeks NSG membership and backs a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty in principle while rejecting the **NPT** as it stands.

Role in the order

- India is a de facto nuclear-weapon State that defends a rules-based order it did not join on 1968 terms.
- It supports non-proliferation to others, a tension critics call selective.
- China remains the main nuclear neighbour; Pakistan is the paired deterrent problem.

Continuity

- Disarmament rhetoric never fully vanished. Practice is deterrence plus civil nuclear energy.

Flow diagram

NPT 1968 refused 1968 refused -> Pokhran 1974
Pokhran 1974 -> Pokhran 1998
Pokhran 1998 -> NSG waiver 2008 waiver 2008
NSG waiver 2008 -> De facto NW State outside NPT 1968 refused

Conclusion

India's nuclear role evolved from **NPT** holdout and 1974 tester to 1998 weapon State and 2008 NSG-exception partner. It wants order without accepting a permanent second-class legal status. That is the through-line.

Facts & figures

Pokhran-I 1974

Peaceful nuclear explosion that triggered a long technology-denial regime.

Pokhran-II 1998

Weapon tests that made India an overt nuclear-armed State.

NSG waiver 2008

Nuclear Suppliers Group exception enabling civil nuclear trade with India.

NPT

1968 treaty India never joined; the legal core of the global nuclear order it criticises as unequal.