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Q6(b)

## **Critically examine the major factors responsible for a turnaround in the trajectory of India's foreign policy in the post-cold war period**

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · PSIR GS 2 · 15 marks · Recent developments in Indian Foreign policy

Recent developments in Indian Foreign policy: India's position on the recent crisis in Afghanistan, Iraq and West Asia, growing relations with US and Israel; vision of a new world order.

### **Core demand of the question**

- Critically examine the major factors responsible for a turnaround in the trajectory of India's foreign policy in the post-cold war period
- Write at 15-mark length

### **Revision summary**

Soviet collapse and the 1991 crisis forced an economic and diplomatic reset.

**Look East** and later Act East opened a second geography.

The **1998 tests** and the US civil nuclear path recast status and technology access.

China's rise pushed hedging without a NATO choice.

NAM vocabulary survived inside a wider multi-alignment.

### **Introduction**

The Cold War's end removed the bipolar frame in which Indian non-alignment had been easiest to explain. The 1990s turnaround was toward economic opening, **Look East**, and later a US nuclear path, without a formal alliance.

### **Body**

#### **Structural factors**

- Soviet collapse cut a diplomatic and arms pillar. Waltzian polarity change forced adaptation.
- The 1991 balance-of-payments crisis tied foreign policy to markets, the IMF moment, and later WTO entry.
- Unipolarity, then China's rise, recast threat and opportunity.

#### **Domestic and leadership factors**

- Economic reforms made trade, oil, and investment first-order diplomatic goals.
- **Look East** under Narasimha Rao, nuclear tests in 1998, the Pokhran-to-NSG path, and the India-US civil nuclear breakthrough were sequential bets on status and technology.
- Coalition politics and a growing diaspora in the West pulled policy toward Washington without erasing Moscow.

### **Ideas**

- From NAM as the centre of gravity toward strategic autonomy and multi-alignment.
- Gujral's neighbourhood doctrine, Vajpayee's US opening, and later Act East named the turn.

### Critical caution

- Russia, NAM summits, and Global South language never vanished. The turnaround is mix, not a conversion to a US ally.
- **1998 tests** angered the West before they enabled the later nuclear bargain. Trajectory was jagged.
- China policy oscillated between partnership slogans and border military crisis.

### Flow diagram

Cold War end 1991 crisis -> Policy turnaround  
Look East -> Policy turnaround  
1998 tests US nuclear path -> Policy turnaround  
China rise -> Policy turnaround

### Conclusion

Post-Cold War Indian foreign policy turned because polarity, bankruptcy risk, and China's rise made old single-track non-alignment insufficient. Reforms, **Look East**, 1998, and the US nuclear path are the markers. Autonomy remained the stated end. The partner set widened.

### Facts & figures

#### 1991 reforms

Balance-of-payments shock that linked Indian diplomacy to trade, capital, and multilateral economic clubs.

#### Look East

Early 1990s outreach to ASEAN that later thickened into Act East and connectivity.

#### 1998 tests

Pokhran-II declared nuclear-weapon status, then sanctions, then a long bargain toward civilian nuclear trade.

#### India-US 123 path

Civil nuclear cooperation in the 2000s that broke decades of technology denial.