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Q5(a)

Explain the major features of India's Foreign Policy in the 21st century.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · PSIR GS 2 · 10 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

- Identify the major changes in India's foreign policy in the 21st century
- Keep the answer within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

India kept autonomy and added many partnerships at once.

The US civil nuclear path and later defence logistics marked a new Western channel.

Act East, BIMSTEC, and a stalled SAARC reshaped the neighbourhood method.

China's rise and the Quad moved policy toward the Indo-Pacific.

G20 and Global South summits updated older NAM claims for a growth-centred State.

Introduction

India's 21st-century foreign policy kept strategic autonomy and added multi-alignment, economic statecraft, and a harder maritime view of China. The change is of mix and of partners, not a simple drop of NAM language.

Body**From non-alignment as centre to multi-alignment**

- The Cold War NAM core remains a vocabulary. Practice added simultaneous work with the United States, Russia, the European Union, Japan, and the Global South.
- The 2008 India-United States civil nuclear path and later logistics and foundational agreements showed a strategic partnership that 20th-century non-alignment had not contained.
- Russia remained a defence and energy partner even as its share of new arms orders fell.

Neighbourhood and East

- **Neighbourhood First and Act East** replaced a thinner Look East slogan with connectivity, BIMSTEC, and ASEAN-centred diplomacy.
- SAARC stalled. Sub-regional and trans-regional clubs grew.

China, Quad, and the sea

- Border crises, including 2020 in eastern Ladakh, moved China from a manageable rivalry toward a central military problem.

- The Quad's revival, Malabar exercises, and Indo-Pacific language placed India in a maritime balancing set without a NATO treaty.
- Offensive-realist readings of Chinese power and defensive-realist caution about over-alignment both appear in official practice.

Global South and domestic link

- Energy, diaspora, and trade became first-order tools. G20 presidency in 2023 and Voice of Global South diplomacy updated NAM-era claims.
- Foreign policy is now sold more openly as a support to growth, technology, and Indian-origin communities abroad.

Flow diagram

20th century NAM core -> Multi-alignment
Multi-alignment -> Quad US Japan
Multi-alignment -> Russia energy arms
Multi-alignment -> Global South G20

Conclusion

The major 21st-century changes are multi-alignment, a tighter economic and diaspora policy, **Act East**, and a maritime-plus-border response to China. Autonomy is still the stated doctrine. The partner set is wider than the 20th-century NAM map.

Facts & figures

India-US 123 Agreement path

Civil nuclear cooperation completed in the late 2000s, a structural break with technology-denial decades.

Act East

Policy name that thickened Look East into connectivity and security work with ASEAN and Japan.

Quad revival

Australia, India, Japan, United States consultations restored in the late 2010s and expanded after 2020.

Ladakh 2020

Border clash with China that hardened Indian military and diplomatic attention on the northern front.

G20 2023

Indian presidency that seated the African Union and used Global South language in a premier economic forum.

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