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Q2(c)

Transnational actors have qualitatively transformed the world by the way of their fresh insights and actions. Illustrate your answer with suitable examples

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · PSIR GS 2 · 15 marks · Key concepts in International Relations

Key concepts in International Relations: National interest, Security and power; Balance of power and deterrence; Transnational actors and collective security; World capitalist economy and globalisation.

Core demand of the question

- Define transnational actors (not states, operating across borders)
- Illustrate with MNCs, NGOs, epistemic communities, violent networks, diasporas and platforms
- Show qualitative change in agenda-setting, norms and sometimes force
- Keep the state in the picture

Revision summary

Transnational actors are organised non-state forces that operate across borders.

MNCs, epistemic communities, NGOs, terrorist and criminal networks, diasporas and platforms are the main types.

They changed agenda-setting, norms and sometimes the use of force - a qualitative, not only quantitative, shift.

Keohane, Nye, Rosenau, Haas and Strange supply theory.

The state still licenses, bans and fights; world politics is a mesh, not a replacement of Westphalia.

Introduction

Transnational actors are organised forces that work across borders without being sovereign states: firms, churches, scientific networks, terror groups, diasporas and platforms. Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, James Rosenau, and later constructivists argued that they changed not only the quantity of international contacts but the **quality of world politics - who sets agendas, who writes norms, who can hurt.**

Body

Market and expert actors

Multinational corporations allocate investment, set labour and data standards, and lobby trade rounds. Apple, Aramco, and semiconductor alliances shape the Indo-Pacific as surely as destroyers. **Epistemic communities - Peter Haas** - wrote the ozone regime and still staff climate IPCC summaries. Philanthropic verticals (Gavi, Global Fund, large foundations) bankroll vaccines when WHO's assessed budget cannot. These actors bring fresh insight: they see supply chains and pathogens that foreign ministries meet late.

Norm and protest actors

Amnesty, ICRC, climate NGOs, and feminist transnational networks (from CEDAW lobbying to **Woman, Life, Freedom** amplification) name shame and draft soft law. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines showed that a coalition of NGOs and middle powers can produce a treaty great powers dislike. Such actors do not replace the UN; they **crowd** it.

Dark and hybrid actors

Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and Lashkar-type groups are transnational too. They forced states into extra-territorial war and surveillance. Criminal markets in fentanyl, arms and wildlife fold into **non-traditional security**. Digital platforms - X, Meta, TikTok - are a new class: they socialise open and closed societies, host both democratic backlash and disinformation. Diasporas fund parties, temples, and sometimes militancy.

Qualitative transformation

The transformation is **polycentric authority**. Issues are no longer only inter-state. Human rights, climate, health and tech standards are made in a mesh. Yet the state is not obsolete. It licenses firms, bans apps, kills terrorists, and still monopolises legitimate nuclear arms. **Susan Strange's** structural power of finance and knowledge sits beside Waltz's military structure. A 2025 world of Trump tariffs, WHO fights and Pahalgam terrorism is unintelligible if one counts only foreign offices. It is equally unintelligible if one pretends Google can sign a peace treaty.

Flow diagram

Transnational actors -> MNCs and platforms
Transnational actors -> NGOs and epistemes
Transnational actors -> Violent and criminal nets
Transnational actors -> Diasporas
State -.licenses and fights. -> Transnational actors

Conclusion

- **Transnational actors added new authors to world politics:** capital, science, conscience, crime and code. They transformed agendas and sometimes force. They did not abolish the state; they made it share the stage.

Facts & figures

Keohane and Nye

Transnational relations and complex interdependence: multiple channels beyond foreign offices.

Epistemic community

Peter Haas: networks of knowledge-based experts who help states identify interests under uncertainty, e.g. ozone science.

Ottawa Treaty

1997 anti-personnel mine ban driven by NGOs and middle powers, a classic norm-entrepreneur case.

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