

ANANTAM IAS · OPTIONAL NOTES

History Optional

The World after World War II

Paper 2 · Unit 23

Cold War blocs, the UN, NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and non-alignment: 50 marks in four years, and the unit that supplies the international context for decolonisation.

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UPSC SYLLABUS

The world after World War II: emergence of two power blocs; emergence of the Third World and non-alignment; UNO and the global disputes.

The emergence of two blocs

Asked in 2024 on whether the blocs symbolised two competing ideologies and two models of economic growth. Both halves of that claim need evidence.

- Wartime cooperation dissolved rapidly, and **Yalta in February and Potsdam in July 1945** already showed disagreement over Poland, German reparations and the political future of eastern Europe.
- **Churchill's Fulton speech of March 1946**, with the iron curtain phrase, and **Kennan's Long Telegram** of the same year articulating containment, mark the intellectual formation of the western position.
- **Truman Doctrine of March 1947** pledged support to Greece and Turkey and committed the United States to containing communism globally, which is the formal beginning of the Cold War in policy.
- **Marshall Plan** from 1948 provided about thirteen billion dollars for European recovery, and Soviet refusal to participate and prohibition of participation by its satellites divided Europe economically.
- **Cominform in 1947 and Comecon in 1949** were the Soviet institutional replies, and the **Berlin blockade of 1948 to 1949** was the first direct confrontation, answered by the airlift.
- **NATO in 1949** and the **Warsaw Pact in 1955**, the latter created after West German admission to NATO, completed the military division of Europe.
- Ideological competition was genuine, setting **liberal democracy and market capitalism** against **one-party rule and central planning**, and each bloc claimed to represent the future of humanity.
- Economic models differed substantively, since Soviet planning delivered rapid heavy industrialisation and full employment while western economies delivered higher consumption and, after 1945, welfare provision.
- For the 2024 question, the answer is that the blocs did represent two ideologies and two growth models, with the qualification that both were also straightforward great-power spheres of influence, and Soviet behaviour in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 showed which mattered more.

Cold War in practice

The confrontation was global and mostly indirect. Learn the flashpoints as a sequence, because questions often ask about escalation and management.

- **Berlin** was the recurring pressure point, from the blockade of 1948 to the construction of the Wall in 1961, and it was where the two systems physically touched.
- **Korea from 1950 to 1953** was the first hot war of the period, fought under a UN flag made possible only by the Soviet boycott of the Security Council, and it ended in armistice at roughly the original line.
- **Cuban missile crisis of October 1962** brought the closest approach to nuclear war, and its resolution produced the hotline, the Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963 and the beginnings of arms control.
- **Vietnam** from the 1950s to 1975 was the longest and most damaging American commitment, and it demonstrated the limits of superpower military power against a determined national movement.

- **Detente** in the 1970s produced SALT I in 1972, the Helsinki Accords of 1975 and increased trade, and it collapsed with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.
- **Second Cold War** in the early 1980s brought renewed confrontation under Reagan, the Strategic Defense Initiative and the euromissile crisis.
- **Gorbachev** from 1985 pursued **glasnost and perestroika**, renounced the Brezhnev Doctrine, and allowed the eastern European revolutions of 1989 to proceed without Soviet intervention.
- **Fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989** and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991 ended the bipolar order, and the 2023 question about American supremacy having its own challenges begins here.
- **Nuclear arms race** underpinned the whole period, from the Soviet test of 1949 through thermonuclear weapons, intercontinental missiles and the doctrine of mutually assured destruction, which made direct superpower war irrational and proxy war the only available form.
- **Proxy conflicts** in Angola, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, Afghanistan and elsewhere are where the Cold War was actually fought and where most of its casualties occurred, which is a point worth making in any answer.

The United Nations

Asked in 2023 as a necessity of its time whose achievements and shortcomings should be critically examined. Structure and record both matter.

- Founded at **San Francisco in June 1945** with fifty one original members, the UN replaced the League with a structure designed to correct its predecessor's weaknesses.
- **Security Council** has five permanent members with veto power and ten elected members, and it alone can authorise binding enforcement measures under Chapter VII.
- The **veto** is the deliberate design choice, since the founders concluded that an organisation acting against a great power's will would collapse as the League had, so paralysis was preferred to dissolution.
- **General Assembly**, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice and the Secretariat complete the principal organs.
- **Uniting for Peace resolution of 1950** allowed the Assembly to act when the Council was deadlocked, and it was used for Suez in 1956, though its legal force is contested.
- Achievements are substantial and should be given concretely: **decolonisation** through the Trusteeship Council and the 1960 Declaration, **peacekeeping** from Suez onwards, and the specialised agencies including WHO, UNESCO, UNICEF, ILO and UNHCR.
- **Health** is the strongest single record, with smallpox eradicated by 1980 under WHO leadership, and the humanitarian agencies have operated where no state would.
- Failures are equally concrete: **Cold War paralysis**, inaction in Rwanda in 1994 and at Srebrenica in 1995, the failure to prevent the Iraq war of 2003, and the Security Council's composition frozen in 1945.
- **Peacekeeping** evolved substantially, from the interposition forces of the Suez model to the complex multidimensional missions of the 1990s involving policing, elections and civil administration, and the doctrinal shift is worth naming.
- **Reform** has been debated for decades, with India, Japan, Germany and Brazil as the G4 seeking permanent seats and the African Union pressing the Ezulwini Consensus, and the veto is the obstacle to all of it.

- The balanced verdict for the 2023 question: the UN was indeed a necessity of its moment, it has succeeded where great powers agreed or were indifferent, and it has failed wherever a permanent member's interest was engaged, which is a design feature rather than an accident.

KEY TERMS

Uniting for Peace — The 1950 resolution allowing the General Assembly to recommend collective measures when the Security Council is deadlocked by veto.

The Third World and non-alignment

Named explicitly in the syllabus and the part of the unit where India is central, so it deserves full treatment.

- **Third World** as a term comes from Alfred Sauvy in 1952, by analogy with the third estate, denoting states aligned with neither bloc rather than merely poor ones.
- **Asian Relations Conference at Delhi in 1947** and the conference on Indonesia in 1949 were Nehru's early attempts to give newly independent Asia a collective voice.
- **Panchsheel**, the five principles of peaceful coexistence agreed between India and China in 1954, comprise mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression, non-interference, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.
- **Bandung Conference of 1955** brought twenty nine Asian and African states together and is the founding moment of Afro-Asian solidarity, with Nehru, Sukarno, Nasser, Zhou Enlai and Nkrumah the leading figures.
- **Non-Aligned Movement** was formally founded at **Belgrade in 1961** by **Nehru, Tito, Nasser, Sukarno and Nkrumah**, and its membership grew to well over a hundred states.
- Non-alignment meant **independent judgement on each issue** rather than neutrality or equidistance, a distinction Nehru made repeatedly and which candidates routinely miss.
- Achievements included giving new states diplomatic weight, pressing decolonisation at the UN, opposing apartheid, and advancing the **New International Economic Order** demand in the 1970s.
- Criticisms are real: members were often aligned in practice, India's 1971 treaty with the Soviet Union being the obvious case, the movement was divided by its own conflicts including India and China in 1962, and it had little economic leverage.
- **Group of 77**, formed at UNCTAD in 1964 and now numbering well over a hundred members, is the economic counterpart of the political non-aligned grouping, and it carried the New International Economic Order demand into UN negotiations.
- **Relevance after 1991** is genuinely contested, since the bipolarity that gave non-alignment meaning disappeared, and the movement has since functioned more as a developing-country caucus than as a strategic position.

Global disputes and the UN record

The syllabus names global disputes, so know the cases where the UN acted and where it did not, and why the difference.

- **Palestine** was referred to the UN in 1947, partitioned by General Assembly Resolution 181, and the resulting conflict has occupied the organisation ever since without resolution.
- **Kashmir** came to the Security Council in 1948, produced UNCIP and a ceasefire line, and the plebiscite provided for was never held, which India cites as evidence of the futility of internationalisation.
- **Korea** in 1950 saw the only major UN-authorized combat operation of the Cold War, made possible by a Soviet boycott that was never repeated.
- **Suez in 1956** was the UN's clearest success, since Uniting for Peace and American pressure forced British, French and Israeli withdrawal, and the first peacekeeping force UNEF was created.
- **Congo from 1960** was the largest early peacekeeping operation, cost Secretary-General **Dag Hammarskjöld** his life in 1961, and exposed the difficulty of intervening in a civil conflict.
- **Apartheid South Africa** faced a UN arms embargo from 1963 and sustained General Assembly condemnation, and the campaign is generally counted a success.
- **Rwanda in 1994** is the gravest failure, since the peacekeeping force was reduced as the genocide began and member states declined to reinforce it.
- **Responsibility to Protect**, adopted at the 2005 World Summit, was the doctrinal response to Rwanda and Srebrenica, and its invocation over Libya in 2011 and non-invocation over Syria show its selective application.
- The pattern to state: the UN acts effectively when the permanent members agree or are indifferent, and it is paralysed when their interests conflict, which explains both the successes and the failures without needing separate theories for each.

India and the post-war order

Not a separate syllabus heading, but examiners reward Indian connections in Paper 2 Section B and this is the natural place for them.

- India became a founding UN member in 1945, before independence, and used the platform from the outset to raise the treatment of Indians in South Africa.
- **Nehru's foreign policy** rested on non-alignment, Asian solidarity, anti-colonialism, opposition to racialism and support for the UN, and it gave a poor new state diplomatic weight out of proportion to its power.
- **Peacekeeping** became a lasting Indian contribution, with participation from Korea and the Congo onwards and India among the largest cumulative troop contributors.
- **1962 war with China** damaged the non-aligned position severely, since Panchsheel had been signed with the same state, and it forced a reappraisal of the relationship between principle and capability.
- **1971 Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation** with the Soviet Union was a departure from strict non-alignment made necessary by the Bangladesh crisis and by American tilt towards Pakistan.
- **Nuclear policy** followed from the same logic, with the 1974 test conducted outside the NPT that India refused to sign on the ground that it was discriminatory.
- **Post-1991 reorientation** towards economic liberalisation, the Look East and later Act East policy, and a strategic partnership with the United States marks the end of the non-aligned era in practice.

- **Security Council reform** remains India's principal institutional demand, and the G4 grouping with Japan, Germany and Brazil is the vehicle, blocked by the Uniting for Consensus group and by the veto powers themselves.

Assembling the answers

Three questions in four years, on the UN, on the two blocs and on NATO. All are institutional and all reward structure over narrative.

- Where the question is about an **institution**, give founding, structure, purpose, record and reform debate in that order, and resist writing a Cold War chronology instead.
- On the two blocs, address **both halves** of the claim, the ideological and the economic, and add the qualification that they were also spheres of influence.
- Non-alignment questions require the **distinction from neutrality**, since that is what separates a good answer from a textbook one.
- Bring **India** into Section B answers wherever the syllabus permits, since it demonstrates range and examiners in this paper reward the connection.
- Close any UN question with the **design point**, that the veto was a deliberate choice preferring paralysis to collapse, because it converts a list of failures into an argument.

Last-mile revision

- Yalta February and Potsdam July 1945; Fulton March 1946; Long Telegram 1946; Truman Doctrine March 1947; Marshall Plan 1948; Cominform 1947, Comecon 1949.
- Berlin blockade 1948-49, NATO 1949, Warsaw Pact 1955, Wall 1961; Korea 1950-53; Cuba October 1962; SALT I 1972; Helsinki 1975; Afghanistan 1979.
- UN founded San Francisco June 1945 with 51 members; veto as deliberate design; Uniting for Peace 1950; smallpox eradicated 1980.
- Third World from Savvy 1952; Panchsheel 1954; Bandung 1955 with 29 states; NAM founded Belgrade 1961 by Nehru, Tito, Nasser, Sukarno, Nkrumah.
- Disputes: Palestine 1947 Resolution 181, Kashmir 1948 UNCIP, Suez 1956 and UNEF, Congo 1960 and Hammarskjöld, Rwanda 1994, R2P 2005.
- India: founding member 1945, 1962 war, 1971 Soviet treaty, 1974 test outside the NPT, G4 seat demand.

Common errors to avoid

- Treating non-alignment as neutrality. Nehru defined it as independent judgement on each issue, which is the opposite of equidistance.
- Saying the UN failed because of the veto. The veto was a deliberate design choice preferring paralysis to the League's collapse.
- Dating the Non-Aligned Movement to Bandung. Bandung in 1955 was Afro-Asian solidarity; NAM was founded at Belgrade in 1961.

- Forgetting that Korea was authorised only because the Soviet Union was boycotting the Security Council.
- Presenting the Cold War as confined to Europe. Most of its casualties occurred in proxy conflicts in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Mains Practice

The emergence of two power blocs not only symbolised two competing ideologies but also two alternative models of economic growth. Explain.

20 marks · 250 words · 2024

“UNO was the necessity of the time when the World War II ended.” Critically examine its achievements and shortcomings.

20 marks · 250 words · 2023

Discuss the core principles and significance of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

10 marks · 150 words · 2026