

Examine the rationale behind India's participation in bilateral and multilateral groupings. Analyse how contemporary geopolitical realignments have shaped India's engagement with these forums.

Question Understanding – Finding Information

- **Precise Syllabus Mapping:** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting. (**GS Paper – II**)
- **Marks and words limit:**
 - The marks-oriented approach to answering **(10-mark, 150-word)** questions in the question is to use **Bullet Points** (one idea per bullet point), **Brainstorming**, or a combination of both.
 - The way to score good marks in questions worth **(15 marks. 250 words)** is to use the **Heading** and **Subheading** method while writing your answers.
- **Directive words:**
 - Examine → Probe the reasons and underlying logic
 - Analyse → Critically assess influence of current geopolitical changes
- **Focal points of the questions:**
 - Rationale for India's participation in bilateral and multilateral groupings
 - Impact of contemporary geopolitical realignments on India's engagement

Answer Writing Structure (Outline)

Introduction Paragraph

- Define bilateral and multilateral groupings.
- Link India's participation to national interest and global engagement.

Body Paragraph

A. Rationale Behind India's Participation

Explain why India joins these groupings, not merely listing them.

- **Strategic & Security Interests**
 - Regional stability and maritime security
 - Counter-terrorism and defence cooperation
- **Economic & Developmental Objectives**
 - Trade facilitation and supply chains
 - Access to markets, technology, and finance
- **Diplomatic & Norm-Setting Role**
 - Voice of Global South
 - Participation in global governance institutions
- **Regional Integration & Neighbourhood Stability**
 - Confidence-building measures
 - Regional connectivity and cooperation
- **Strategic Autonomy**
 - Multi-alignment rather than rigid alliances

B. Impact of Contemporary Geopolitical Realignments

Analyse how global changes have shaped India's approach.

- **Multipolarity & Great Power Competition**
 - Balancing relations among major powers
 - Issue-based partnerships
- **Indo-Pacific Realignment**
 - Increased focus on maritime forums
 - Emphasis on rules-based order

- **Shifts in Global Economic Order**
 - Resilient supply chains
 - South-South cooperation
- **Crisis-Driven Diplomacy**
 - Pandemic response, climate action
 - Flexible multilateralism
- **Reinvigoration of Minilateralism**
 - Small, focused groupings for efficiency

Conclusion (max. 40 Words)

- Highlight adaptability and pragmatism of India's foreign policy.

Dos & Don'ts

- **Do for Maximum Marks**
 - ✓ Use Key terms: Strategic autonomy, Multi-alignment, Issue-based coalitions, Rules-based international order
 - ✓ Focus on rationale and strategy, not enumeration
 - ✓ Link engagement to national interest & strategic autonomy
 - ✓ Analyse impact of current geopolitical shifts
 - ✓ Use neutral, diplomatic language
 - ✓ Balance bilateral and multilateral dimensions
 - ✓ Use examples only illustratively
- **Don't do these Common Mistakes**
 - × Do not list forums without explanation
 - × Avoid political or ideological bias
 - × Don't write like GS-III trade answer
 - × Avoid excessive current affairs jargon
 - × Do not ignore geopolitical realignments part

Notes Oriented Content for Writing Answer

India's participation in bilateral and multilateral groupings is rooted in strategic autonomy and pragmatic self-interest, allowing it to maximize its influence in a multipolar world. Contemporary geopolitical realignments have led India to adopt a "multi-alignment" strategy, balancing competing interests to secure national security, economic growth, and a prominent global role.

Rationale Behind India's Participation in Groupings

India's participation in bilateral and multilateral forums is driven by a strategy of "principled pragmatism" and "enlightened self-interest."

- **Strategic Autonomy and Hedging:** By engaging with rival blocs (e.g., Quad for Indo-Pacific security and BRICS for economic cooperation), India avoids over-dependence on any single power while maximizing bargaining leverage.
- **Economic Resilience:** Participation in forums like ASEAN and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) aims to secure resilient supply chains and diversify trade, especially as India targets becoming the world's 3rd largest economy by 2027.
- **Agenda-Setting for the Global South:** India uses its role as a "convening power" (e.g., its 2026 BRICS chairmanship) to advocate for the concerns of developing nations on debt, climate finance, and global governance reform.
- **Energy and Technology Security:** Multilateralism helps India secure energy via diverse sources (e.g., Russian oil and Qatari LNG) and gain access to critical technologies through initiatives like the iCET with the U.S. and the Mineral Security Partnership.

Impact of Contemporary Geopolitical Realignments (2025–2026)

Contemporary realignments marked by transactionalism, the erosion of a rules-based order, and the rise of "minilateralism"—have fundamentally reshaped India's engagement:

- **Shift to Minilateralism:** In 2026, India increasingly favors agile, issue-based "minilaterals" over unwieldy, grand multilateral bodies. **Example:** The Quad and I2U2 allow for functional cooperation on maritime security and critical minerals without the constraints of a formal military alliance.

- **Response to Transactional Geopolitics:** The "Trump 2.0" administration's selective engagement and tariff-driven trade (2025-2026) have reinforced India's need to hedge. **Example:** India accelerated trade negotiations with the EU, UK, and Oman to reduce over-reliance on any single market like the U.S.
- **Sovereignty-Driven Trade (RCEP Minus China Strategy):** India maintains a pragmatic stance by staying out of the RCEP to protect domestic sectors from Chinese competition while signing bilateral FTAs with 14 of its 15 members.
- **Digital Multilateralism:** India is now a "rule-shaper" in emerging tech. **Example:** Hosting the Impact AI Summit 2026 and exporting its Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) through the "Global DPI Repository" as an open-source alternative to Big Tech monopolies.
- **Balancing "Eurasian" and "Indo-Pacific" Interests:** India must maintain its continental stability with Russia through BRICS and SCO while concurrently deepening maritime security with Western partners in the Indo-Pacific.

In 2026, India's "new global playbook" reflects a shift from being a "passive rule-taker" to a "responsible rule-shaper." Its multi-alignment strategy is not a diplomatic tightrope but a deliberate effort to turn global friction into strategic opportunity, ensuring it remains an indispensable "bridging power" in a multipolar world.