



Mains Practice Question

Q. The US seeks to formalise ties with countries of the Indo-Pacific region similar to something like the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) with an aim to counter China. Discuss the prospects and challenges for India to become a regional power. (250 words)

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Approach

- Introduce with a few lines on the US intention to form a NATO like organisation in Indo-Pacific region.
- Discuss the prospect and challenges of India becoming a regional power considering the growing influence of the USA in South Asia.
- Provide a way forward that India should seek.
- Conclude suitably on a positive note.

Introduction

- The US Deputy Secretary of State revealed the intention of the US to seek to formalise its closer defence ties with countries of the India-Pacific region -- India, Japan and Australia - similar to something like the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) with an aim to counter China.
- The external influence in and focus on the Indo-Pacific region has created an opportunity for India to play a bigger role in the region.

Body

Prospect of India becoming a regional power

- **Growing international influence:** India's influence in international politics and a prominent voice in world affairs have tremendously increased in the recent past.
- **Growing economy:** The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projects India to be the fastest-growing major economy this year in a world plunged into a recession by the coronavirus pandemic, despite drastically slashing its growth rate to a paltry 1.9%.
 - A bigger economy means a better influence in the region and hence, a regional giant.
- **Demography:** India has 62.5% of its population in the age group of 15-59 years which is ever increasing and will be at the peak around 2036 when it will reach approximately 65%.
 - This means rapid industrialisation and urbanisation because of a higher number of employment seeking population that would force higher economic activities.
 - This is a significant factor in contrast to the rapidly ageing Asian countries.
- **Huge foreign Investment flow:** According to the UNCTAD India was the 9th largest recipient of FDI in 2019, with 51 billion dollars of inflows during the year, an increase from the 42 billion dollars of FDI received in 2018 when India ranked 12 among the top 20 host economies in the world.
 - In the "developing Asia" region, India was among the top five host economies for FDI.
- **Geographic position:** Geography has placed India in a peculiar position and her foreign policy is

bound to reflect it. India has been the meeting ground of various cultures and religions. Therefore, her influence on surrounding countries and Indian Ocean has been considerable.

Challenges to India becoming a regional power:

- **The increasing influence of China:** China remains a key player in South Asian politics and in Indo-pacific region. China's strategic partnership with Pakistan remains a major irritant for India. More recently, India and China's border standoff has increased tension between neighbours.
- **Differences with immediate neighbours:** The government of India and its neighbours have differences over several issues including sharing of river water, territorial disputes etc. Given its size and power, they are bound to be suspicious of India's intentions. India, on the other hand, feels exploited by its neighbours.
- **Chinese Claims:** China's military build-up in the South China Sea and its sweeping territorial claims across the strategic waterways.

Way Forward

- To promote peace and stability in the region India must keep in mind three objectives:
 - To enhance Indian security with effective diplomacy
 - To bolster India's economic prosperity.
 - To promote democracy in Asia.
- By pursuing these objectives, India seeks to promote a stable, secure, prosperous and peaceful Asia where it remains a dominant player, partner, and beneficiary.

Conclusion

- India is clearly an emerging power not only in Asia but on a global scale. As it rises to take up its role and responsibilities, the challenges it faces are enormous.
- In the new era of international governance, India needs to reshape its domestic policies and structures in order to gain power and influence in the region.