



UPSC HUB

WORLD HISTORY • GS PAPER-I

World History: 50 Most Important Topics

From the Renaissance to the contemporary world — key facts, tables, revision tips and FAQs for Prelims & Mains

FREE PDF NOTES

100% original exam-oriented notes • UPSC Prelims & Mains

Table of Contents

Part I: The Making of the Modern World

1	1. Renaissance	6
2	2. Reformation	7
3	3. Age of Discovery & Voyages	8
4	4. Glorious Revolution (1688)	8
5	5. American Revolution (1776)	9
6	6. French Revolution (1789)	9
7	7. Napoleon & Congress of Vienna (1815)	10
8	8. Industrial Revolution	10
9	9. American Civil War (1861–65)	11
10	10. Italian Unification	12
11	11. German Unification	12
12	12. Meiji Restoration (1868)	13
13	13. Scramble for Africa	13
14	14. Imperialism in Asia	14
15	15. Latin American Independence	14
16	16. Russian Revolution (1917)	15
17	17. Chinese Revolution (1911)	16

Part II: World Wars to Cold War

18	18. World War I (1914–18): Causes & Course	16
19	19. Treaty of Versailles & League of Nations	17
20	20. Great Depression (1929)	17
21	21. Rise of Fascism & Nazism	18
22	22. World War II (1939–45): Causes & Course	18
23	23. Formation of the United Nations (1945)	19
24	24. Origins of the Cold War	20
25	25. Truman Doctrine & Marshall Plan	20
26	26. NATO vs Warsaw Pact	21
27	27. Korean War (1950–53)	21
28	28. Cuban Missile Crisis (1962)	22
29	29. Vietnam War	22
30	30. Decolonization of Asia	23
31	31. Decolonization of Africa	24
32	32. Suez Crisis (1956)	24
33	33. Non-Aligned Movement	25

Part III: Contemporary World & Themes

34	34. Fall of the Berlin Wall & USSR Disintegration (1989–91)	25
35	35. European Integration: EC to EU	26

36	36. Arab–Israel Conflict	26
37	37. Iranian Revolution (1979)	27
38	38. Gulf Wars (1991 & 2003)	28
39	39. End of Apartheid (1994)	28
40	40. Globalization & WTO (1995)	29
41	41. 9/11 & the War on Terror	29
42	42. 2008 Global Financial Crisis	30
43	43. Arab Spring (2011)	30
44	44. Rise of China	31
45	45. BRICS & Multipolarity	32
46	46. Climate Politics: Kyoto to Paris	32
47	47. NPT, CTBT & Disarmament	33
48	48. UN Reforms Debate	33
49	49. Nationalism vs Globalism	34
50	50. World History: PYQ Trend Analysis	34

World History: 50 Most Important Topics for UPSC

World history occupies a smaller corner of the UPSC syllabus than Indian history, but it is far from optional. In GS Paper I, the official syllabus asks for the industrial revolution, the world wars, the redrawing of national boundaries, colonization and decolonization, and modern political philosophies — roughly from the mid-18th century to the present. In practice that translates into one or two Mains questions every year and a steady trickle of factual Prelims questions on treaties, dates and personalities. Aspirants who ignore it hand over easy marks; aspirants who try to memorise every European war drown in detail. The middle path works: a clear timeline, the

cause-and-effect chain behind each big event, and the habit of connecting world events to India's own story.

These 50 topics walk through the complete arc — from the Renaissance to today's multipolar world — in three parts. Every topic carries a quick-revision table plus exam-oriented notes: what it is, why it matters, the key facts, and exactly how UPSC tests it. Special attention goes to the India connection, because Mains answers on world history score highest when they show how global events shaped, or were shaped by, India. Use the table of contents below to jump to any topic.

Table of Contents

Part I: The Making of the Modern World

1. [Renaissance](#)
2. [Reformation](#)
3. [Age of Discovery & Voyages](#)
4. [Glorious Revolution \(1688\)](#)
5. [American Revolution \(1776\)](#)
6. [French Revolution \(1789\)](#)
7. [Napoleon & Congress of Vienna \(1815\)](#)
8. [Industrial Revolution](#)
9. [American Civil War \(1861–65\)](#)
10. [Italian Unification](#)
11. [German Unification](#)
12. [Meiji Restoration \(1868\)](#)
13. [Scramble for Africa](#)
14. [Imperialism in Asia](#)
15. [Latin American Independence](#)
16. [Russian Revolution \(1917\)](#)
17. [Chinese Revolution \(1911\)](#)

Part II: World Wars to Cold War

1. [World War I \(1914–18\): Causes & Course](#)
2. [Treaty of Versailles & League of Nations](#)
3. [Great Depression \(1929\)](#)
4. [Rise of Fascism & Nazism](#)
5. [World War II \(1939–45\): Causes & Course](#)
6. [Formation of the United Nations \(1945\)](#)
7. [Origins of the Cold War](#)
8. [Truman Doctrine & Marshall Plan](#)

9. [NATO vs Warsaw Pact](#)
10. [Korean War \(1950–53\)](#)
11. [Cuban Missile Crisis \(1962\)](#)
12. [Vietnam War](#)
13. [Decolonization of Asia](#)
14. [Decolonization of Africa](#)
15. [Suez Crisis \(1956\)](#)
16. [Non-Aligned Movement](#)

Part III: Contemporary World & Themes

1. [Fall of the Berlin Wall & USSR Disintegration \(1989–91\)](#)
2. [European Integration: EC to EU](#)
3. [Arab–Israel Conflict](#)
4. [Iranian Revolution \(1979\)](#)
5. [Gulf Wars \(1991 & 2003\)](#)
6. [End of Apartheid \(1994\)](#)
7. [Globalization & WTO \(1995\)](#)
8. [9/11 & the War on Terror](#)
9. [2008 Global Financial Crisis](#)
10. [Arab Spring \(2011\)](#)
11. [Rise of China](#)
12. [BRICS & Multipolarity](#)
13. [Climate Politics: Kyoto to Paris](#)
14. [NPT, CTBT & Disarmament](#)
15. [UN Reforms Debate](#)
16. [Nationalism vs Globalism](#)
17. [World History: PYQ Trend Analysis](#)

Part I: The Making of the Modern World

1. Renaissance

Key fact	Detail
Meaning & period	"Rebirth" of classical Greek-Roman learning; roughly 14th to 16th century, beginning in Italian city-states
Key figures	Petrarch (humanism), Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Machiavelli (<i>The Prince</i>)
Printing press	Gutenberg's movable-type press (~1440) spread new ideas across Europe

What it is: The Renaissance was the cultural movement that pulled Europe out of its medieval mindset and back toward the art, science and philosophy of ancient Greece and Rome. It began in the wealthy trading cities of Italy — Florence, Venice, Milan — where merchants funded painters, scholars and architects. Humanism, the movement's intellectual core, put human beings and their potential at the centre of inquiry instead of the Church's monopoly on truth. Alongside art, the period revived science: Copernicus challenged the earth-centred universe and Galileo's telescope backed him up.

Why it matters: The Renaissance broke the idea that knowledge had to come from religious authority, which opened the door to the Reformation, the scientific revolution and eventually the Enlightenment. The printing press turned ideas into mass products for the first time — without it, Luther's theses would have stayed a local quarrel. In economic terms, the same Italian cities that funded Renaissance art were the early engines of European capitalism and overseas trade.

Key facts: The fall of Constantinople (1453) pushed Greek scholars westward into Italy, feeding the revival. Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* and Michelangelo's *David* remain its most famous artworks. Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1513) separated politics from morality — a text UPSC loves to reference. The Renaissance reached northern Europe later, carried by thinkers like Erasmus and Thomas More.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks about the printing press, key figures and the meaning of humanism — usually one-liners. Mains occasionally wants the Renaissance as background: how cultural revival fed political and economic change in Europe. Link it forward to the Reformation and the voyages of discovery for a complete answer.

2. 2. Reformation

Key fact	Detail
Trigger	Martin Luther's 95 Theses (1517) against indulgences, nailed at Wittenberg
Other reformers	John Calvin (Geneva), Henry VIII's break with Rome (1534, Anglican Church)
Catholic response	Counter-Reformation; Council of Trent (1545–63); Jesuit order founded 1540
Settlement	Peace of Augsburg (1555); Thirty Years' War (1618–48); Treaty of Westphalia (1648)

What it is: The Reformation was the 16th-century revolt against the Catholic Church's corruption and doctrinal authority. Luther argued that salvation came through faith alone, not through purchased indulgences, and the printing press carried his German Bible to ordinary readers within months. Calvin built a theocratic model in Geneva that spread to Scotland, France and the Netherlands. In England, Henry VIII broke with Rome for political and personal reasons, creating the Anglican Church. The Catholic Church struck back with the Counter-Reformation — reforming its own clergy, founding the Jesuits, and reaffirming doctrine at the Council of Trent.

Why it matters: The Reformation shattered Western Christendom's unity and redrew Europe's political map along religious lines, which is why 16th- and 17th-century European wars were so often wars of religion. The Treaty of Westphalia (1648), which ended the Thirty Years' War, is treated as the birth of the modern state system: sovereign states, non-interference, and diplomacy between equals — concepts that still underpin international relations. The Jesuits, notably, carried Counter-Reformation Catholicism to Asia, including the Mughal court.

Key facts: The Peace of Augsburg's formula — *cuius regio, eius religio* (whose realm, his religion) — let each German prince choose his territory's faith. The Thirty Years' War killed roughly a third of Germany's population. The Inquisition and the Index of Prohibited Books were Counter-Reformation tools. Jesuit missionaries like Roberto de Nobili and, later, the panel at Akbar's court show the Reformation's reach into India.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims targets 1517, Luther, Calvin, the Jesuits, and Westphalia 1648 (asked as the origin of the modern state system). Mains may ask how the Reformation shaped European politics or connect the Counter-Reformation to missionary activity in India. Keep the chain tight: corruption → Luther → wars of religion → Westphalia.

3. 3. Age of Discovery & Voyages

Key fact	Detail
Motives	Spices, gold and glory — plus the Ottoman blockade of overland routes to Asia
Key voyages	Dias rounds the Cape of Good Hope (1488); Columbus reaches the Americas (1492); da Gama reaches Calicut (1498); Magellan's crew circumnavigates the globe (1519–22)
Technology	Caravel ships, compass, astrolabe, better cartography
Division of spoils	Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) split the non-European world between Spain and Portugal

What it is: Between roughly 1450 and 1600, European sailors mapped the world's oceans and connected continents that had developed in isolation. Portugal led the way down Africa's coast, seeking a sea route to India's spices that bypassed Ottoman-controlled land routes. Columbus, sailing for Spain, stumbled onto the Americas in 1492. Vasco da Gama's arrival at Calicut in 1498 gave Portugal direct access to the Indian Ocean trade, and Magellan's expedition (1519–22) proved the earth could be circled by sea. Within a century, Spanish silver from the Americas and Portuguese trading posts from Goa to Macao had stitched the first truly global economy.

Why it matters: The voyages mark the start of European colonialism — the story that leads directly to British rule in India. Da Gama's 1498 landing is where our own "Europeans in India" chapter begins. The Columbian Exchange moved crops, animals, diseases and peoples across oceans: potatoes and chillies reached India through these routes, while smallpox devastated the Americas. The Treaty of Tordesillas shows how casually two powers divided the planet between themselves.

Key facts: Prince Henry "the Navigator" of Portugal funded the early voyages. The caravel's lateen sails let ships sail against the wind. Spanish conquest of the Aztec (1521) and Inca (1533) empires followed Columbus. The Manila galleons linked Asia to the Americas across the Pacific. This topic is the direct prelude to the detailed Europeans-in-India material on this site.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks the sequence and years — Dias 1488, Columbus 1492, da Gama 1498 — plus Tordesillas 1494 and the Columbian Exchange. Mains wants the bigger argument: how the voyages launched colonialism and reshaped the global economy. Pair this topic with the Scramble for Africa and Imperialism in Asia for continuity.

4. 4. Glorious Revolution (1688)

Key fact	Detail
Event	Parliament invited William of Orange to replace the Catholic James II — almost bloodless
Outcome	Bill of Rights (1689): parliamentary supremacy, no royal taxation or standing army without consent
Thinkers	John Locke's <i>Two Treatises</i> justified resistance to tyranny

What it is: When England's Catholic king James II tried to rule without Parliament and favour Catholicism, the Protestant political class invited his daughter Mary and her Dutch husband William of Orange to take the throne. James fled without a real fight in 1688 — hence "glorious." Parliament then passed the Bill of Rights (1689), which made the monarchy constitutional: the king could not tax, suspend laws or keep an army without Parliament's consent. John Locke provided the theory, arguing that government rests on the consent of the governed and that people may resist a ruler who breaks that trust.

Why it matters: The settlement created the first stable constitutional monarchy and the model of parliamentary sovereignty that Britain later exported — including to India. Locke's ideas travelled straight into the American and

French revolutions: "life, liberty and property" became Jefferson's "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." For UPSC, this is the bridge between medieval kingship and modern democracy.

Key facts: The Bill of Rights also guaranteed free elections, free speech in Parliament and no cruel punishment. The Toleration Act (1689) gave limited religious freedom to Protestant dissenters. The Bank of England was founded in 1694, giving the new regime financial credibility. Locke's social-contract theory directly influenced the framers of the Indian Constitution through the British parliamentary tradition.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks 1688, the Bill of Rights and Locke. Mains may want the Glorious Revolution as the origin of constitutional government, or ask how British parliamentary ideas influenced India's freedom struggle and Constitution. Keep it short: 1688 → Bill of Rights → Locke → constitutional monarchy.

5. 5. American Revolution (1776)

Key fact	Detail
Declaration	4 July 1776 — "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" (Jefferson)
Trigger	"No taxation without representation" — Stamp Act (1765), Townshend duties, Boston Tea Party (1773)
Outcome	Yorktown (1781); Treaty of Paris (1783); US Constitution (1787) — first written republican constitution

What it is: Britain's thirteen American colonies revolted against taxes imposed by a Parliament in which they had no seats. The slogan "no taxation without representation" captured the grievance; the Boston Tea Party (1773) and Britain's harsh response turned protest into war. On 4 July 1776 the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence, asserting that governments derive power from the consent of the governed. French help proved decisive — money, troops and a navy — and after the British surrender at Yorktown (1781), the Treaty of Paris (1783) recognised American independence. The 1787 Constitution then created the world's first large-scale written republican government.

Why it matters: The revolution proved that a colony could defeat an empire and that Enlightenment ideas could be built into working institutions — written constitution, separation of powers, bill of rights. It bankrupted France (which had funded the Americans), helping trigger the French Revolution. For India, the American example showed colonial rule was not permanent, and its constitutional ideas echoed in our own freedom movement.

Key facts: Thomas Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776) sold hundreds of thousands of copies and pushed opinion toward independence. George Washington commanded the Continental Army. The Articles of Confederation (1781) failed, leading to the stronger 1787 Constitution. The first ten amendments (1791) form the US Bill of Rights.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks 1776, the Boston Tea Party, Yorktown and the Treaty of Paris. Mains compares the American and French revolutions — one preserved property and order, the other turned radical — or asks how the revolution influenced anti-colonial movements. Remember the chain: taxation dispute → French aid → independence → constitutional model.

6. 6. French Revolution (1789)

Key fact	Detail
Spark	Estates-General (May 1789); storming of the Bastille, 14 July 1789
Ideals	Liberty, Equality, Fraternity; Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789)
Phases	National Assembly → Republic (1792) → Reign of Terror (1793–94) → Directory → Napoleon's coup (1799)

What it is: France's Bourbon monarchy was bankrupt from wars and a tax system that exempted the clergy and nobility while crushing the Third Estate — everyone else. When Louis XVI summoned the Estates-General in 1789 to raise money, the Third Estate broke away, swore the Tennis Court Oath not to disband, and Paris rose in revolt,

storming the Bastille on 14 July. Feudal dues were abolished overnight and the Declaration of the Rights of Man proclaimed liberty and legal equality. But the revolution radicalised: the monarchy fell in 1792, Robespierre's Committee of Public Safety ran the Reign of Terror (1793–94) with mass executions, and the chaos finally ended when Napoleon seized power in the coup of 18 Brumaire (November 1799).

Why it matters: The revolution destroyed feudalism in France, spread the ideals of popular sovereignty and nationalism across Europe (often at bayonet point under Napoleon), and gave modern politics its vocabulary — left vs right comes from where deputies sat in the revolutionary assembly. It also showed how revolutions devour their own: the Terror remains the classic warning about unchecked radicalism. Napoleon's Civil Code carried legal equality to every territory he conquered.

Key facts: The three Estates were clergy, nobility and the Third Estate (which paid almost all taxes). The *Marseillaise*, France's anthem, was a revolutionary war song. About 17,000 people were officially executed during the Terror. Napoleon crowned himself emperor in 1804, ending the republic the revolution had built.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks 1789, the Bastille, the Tennis Court Oath, the slogan and Robespierre. Mains loves evaluative questions: was it a bourgeois revolution? How did it spread nationalism? Compare it with the American Revolution. Always link the fiscal crisis → Estates-General → radicalisation → Napoleon chain.

7. 7. Napoleon & Congress of Vienna (1815)

Key fact	Detail
Rise & fall	Coup of 1799; emperor 1804; Moscow disaster 1812; Leipzig 1813; Waterloo, 18 June 1815
Congress of Vienna	1814–15; Metternich's system: legitimacy, compensation, balance of power
Legacy	Napoleonic Code; spread of nationalism; Concert of Europe

What it is: Napoleon Bonaparte rose from artillery officer to ruler of France on the revolution's chaos, crowned himself emperor in 1804, and redrew Europe's map through a decade of victories. His Continental System tried to strangle Britain's trade, his 1812 invasion of Russia collapsed in the winter retreat, and after defeat at Leipzig (1813) and Waterloo (18 June 1815) he was exiled to St Helena. The victors — Britain, Austria, Prussia, Russia — met at the Congress of Vienna (1814–15) under Austria's Metternich to restore the old order: legitimate monarchs returned to their thrones, France was contained but not crushed, and a balance of power was engineered so no single state could dominate again.

Why it matters: The Congress created the Concert of Europe, a century-long system of great-power consultation that kept general peace until 1914 — the first attempt at collective security. But Metternich's restoration could not kill the nationalism Napoleon had spread: the unifications of Italy and Germany, and the Balkan revolts, were its direct children. The Napoleonic Code (civil equality, property rights, secular law) outlived the empire and still shapes legal systems from Europe to Latin America.

Key facts: The Congress's guiding principles were legitimacy (restore rightful rulers), compensation (reward the victors with territory) and balance of power. The Holy Alliance (Russia, Austria, Prussia) pledged Christian-monarch solidarity. Talleyrand brilliantly defended defeated France's interests at the table. Napoleon's 1812 retreat cost him roughly half a million men.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks Waterloo 1815, Metternich and the Congress's principles. Mains wants the paradox: the Congress restored monarchs yet planted the nationalism that destroyed them. Use it as the hinge between the revolutionary era and the age of unification and imperialism.

8. 8. Industrial Revolution

Key fact	Detail
----------	--------

Where & when	Britain, ~1760s onward; spread to Europe and America in the 19th century
Key inventions	Spinning jenny (1764), Watt's steam engine (1769), power loom, railways (Stockton–Darlington, 1825)
Why Britain first	Coal and iron, colonial markets and capital, stable property rights, scientific culture

What it is: The Industrial Revolution was the shift from hand tools and muscle power to machines driven by steam and later electricity, beginning in Britain's textile mills around the 1760s. James Watt's improved steam engine (1769) supplied power; the factory system gathered workers under one roof; railways (from 1825) moved coal, goods and people at unprecedented speed. Production soared, cities swelled with factory workers, and Britain became the "workshop of the world." The second wave (late 19th century) brought steel, chemicals and electricity, centred on Germany and America.

Why it matters: Industrialisation created the modern world: urbanisation, the working class, trade unions, and the wealth gap between industrial and non-industrial nations. It also created colonialism's engine — factories needed raw materials and markets, which drove the Scramble for Africa and tightened Britain's grip on India (Indian textiles were destroyed by machine-made British cloth). Intellectually, it produced both capitalism's triumph and its fiercest critique: Marx wrote *Das Kapital* studying British factories.

Key facts: The spinning jenny (Hargreaves, 1764) multiplied thread output; Arkwright's water frame and Crompton's mule followed. The railway age began with the Stockton–Darlington line (1825). Child labour and 16-hour days eventually forced Britain's Factory Acts (from 1833). The term "Industrial Revolution" was popularised by historian Arnold Toynbee.

How UPSC tests it: This is explicitly in the GS-I syllabus — Mains has asked why it began in Britain and about its social consequences. Prelims asks the key inventions and dates. For India, always connect: deindustrialisation of Indian textiles, drain of wealth, and the railways' dual role. It's the single most important pre-1900 economic topic.

9. 9. American Civil War (1861–65)

Key fact	Detail
Sides	Union (North, Lincoln) vs Confederacy (South, slave economy)
Turning points	Emancipation Proclamation (1 Jan 1863); Gettysburg (1863); Lee's surrender at Appomattox (1865)
Outcome	Union preserved; slavery abolished (13th Amendment, 1865); ~620,000 dead

What it is: America's bloodiest war pitted the industrial North against the slave-holding South after Abraham Lincoln's election (1860) convinced southern states the federal government would end slavery. Eleven states seceded and formed the Confederacy. The war turned on two of Lincoln's moves: the Emancipation Proclamation (1 January 1863), which made abolition a war aim and kept Britain and France from backing the South, and the Union's superior industry and manpower, which ground the Confederacy down. Lee surrendered at Appomattox in April 1865; Lincoln was assassinated days later. The 13th Amendment then abolished slavery constitutionally.

Why it matters: The war settled that the United States was one indivisible nation, not a compact states could leave — the precondition for America's rise as a great power. It ended legal slavery in the world's largest democracy, though Reconstruction's promise of Black equality was betrayed within a decade. Economically, it accelerated northern industrialisation and the Homestead era. For UPSC, it is the classic case of how an economic system (plantation slavery) shapes politics and war.

Key facts: Gettysburg (July 1863) was the war's bloodiest battle and its turning point; Lincoln's Gettysburg Address redefined the war as a fight for democracy. The war introduced ironclad warships, trench warfare and photography of battlefields. "Reconstruction" (1865–77) tried, and largely failed, to secure Black civil rights in the South.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks 1861–65, Lincoln, the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13th Amendment. Mains may ask about slavery's economic roots or compare the American Civil War with other national unifications. Keep the causal chain: slavery economy → secession → emancipation as strategy → Union victory.

10. 10. Italian Unification

Key fact	Detail
Architects	Cavour (Piedmont's statesman), Garibaldi (Red Shirts), Mazzini (ideologue), Victor Emmanuel II (king)
Milestones	Plombières pact with France (1858); Garibaldi's Expedition of the Thousand (1860); Rome captured (1870)
Completed	1871 — Kingdom of Italy proclaimed, Rome the capital

What it is: In 1815 Italy was a patchwork of Austrian-dominated duchies, the Papal States and the Bourbon Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Unification — the *Risorgimento* — was driven by three very different men: Mazzini, who preached a democratic republic; Cavour, Piedmont's prime minister, who used diplomacy and war; and Garibaldi, whose thousand red-shirted volunteers conquered Sicily and Naples in 1860 and handed them to Piedmont's king. French help expelled Austria from Lombardy (1859), and when French troops withdrew from Rome during the Franco-Prussian War, Italian forces entered the city in 1870. The Kingdom of Italy was proclaimed in 1871.

Why it matters: Italy is the textbook case of nationalism creating a state — the Congress of Vienna's map torn up by popular feeling and clever statecraft. The tension between Mazzini's democratic ideals and Cavour's realpolitik shows how nationalist movements often settle for less than their dreams. Italy's late unification left it hungry for colonies, pushing it into the Scramble for Africa (Libya, Eritrea, Somalia) and, later, into fascist expansionism.

Key facts: Garibaldi's Thousand sailed from Genoa in May 1860 and took Sicily within months. The Pope kept Vatican City after losing Rome, beginning the "Roman Question" (settled 1929). "Young Italy," Mazzini's society founded in 1831, inspired nationalist secret societies across Europe — including, indirectly, Indian revolutionaries who read Mazzini's works.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks the key figures and 1870–71. Mains pairs Italy with Germany: compare the two unifications — one led by diplomacy-plus-people's war, the other by "blood and iron." Mention Mazzini's influence on Indian nationalists (Surendranath Banerjee admired him) for an India link.

11. 11. German Unification

Key fact	Detail
Architect	Otto von Bismarck — "blood and iron"
Three wars	Denmark (1864), Austria (1866, Königgrätz), France (1870–71, Sedan)
Proclaimed	January 1871, at Versailles — German Empire under Kaiser Wilhelm I

What it is: Where Italy unified partly through popular uprising, Germany unified through Prussian military power directed by Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. Bismarck told the Prussian parliament the great questions would be settled "not by speeches and majority votes but by blood and iron" — and proved it. Prussia defeated Denmark (1864) to seize Schleswig-Holstein, crushed Austria at Königgrätz (1866) to expel it from German affairs, and then provoked France into the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71), whose victory rallied the southern German states to Prussia. In January 1871, in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, the German Empire was proclaimed with the Prussian king as Kaiser.

Why it matters: A united Germany shattered the European balance of power: within a generation it out-produced Britain in steel and demanded colonies and a navy, which set the alliances that fought World War I. Bismarck's alliance system (secret treaties binding everyone to everyone) kept peace while he lived and collapsed into rigid blocs after his

dismissal in 1890. The contrast with Italy — top-down military unification vs a mix of diplomacy and popular war — is a UPSC favourite.

Key facts: The Ems Dispatch (1870), edited by Bismarck to provoke France, is a classic study in manufactured crises. Alsace-Lorraine's annexation poisoned Franco-German relations until 1945. Bismarck also pioneered the welfare state (health insurance 1883, pensions 1889) to undercut the socialists — "carrot and stick" governance.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks Bismarck, "blood and iron" and 1871. Mains wants the comparison with Italy and the argument that German unification destabilised Europe. Link forward: the Franco-Prussian War's humiliation of France fed the revanchism behind WWI alliances.

12. 12. Meiji Restoration (1868)

Key fact	Detail
Event	1868 — Tokugawa shogunate overthrown; power "restored" to Emperor Meiji
Trigger	Commodore Perry's black ships (1853) exposed Japan's weakness; unequal treaties followed
Programme	Charter Oath (1868); abolition of feudal domains; rapid Western-style industrialisation

What it is: For two centuries Japan's Tokugawa shoguns kept the country isolated and feudal — until American warships under Commodore Perry sailed into Edo Bay in 1853 and forced Japan open at gunpoint. The humiliation of unequal treaties discredited the shogunate; young samurai from the Satsuma and Chōshū domains overthrew it in 1868 and restored the teenage Emperor Meiji as the symbol of a new Japan. What followed was the fastest modernisation in history: feudal domains became prefectures, a conscript army and navy were built on Western models, railways and factories rose, and a constitution (1889) and parliament gave the new order a modern shell.

Why it matters: Japan is the great exception to 19th-century imperialism — the one Asian country that industrialised instead of being colonised, then became an imperialist power itself (defeating China in 1895 and Russia in 1905). For India, the Meiji story was electrifying: it proved an Asian nation could master Western science and beat a European power. Japan's 1905 victory over Russia inspired nationalists across Asia, including Indian revolutionaries.

Key facts: The slogan was *fukoku kyōhei* — "rich country, strong army." The Iwakura Mission (1871–73) toured the West studying its institutions. Japan revised the unequal treaties by 1911 through demonstrated strength. The 1889 Meiji Constitution kept real power with the emperor and oligarchs, not the elected Diet.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks 1868 and Perry's 1853 visit. Mains wants the comparative question: why did Japan modernise while China and India were colonised? Use it as the counterpoint to imperialism-in-Asia answers and link Japan's 1905 victory to Asian nationalism.

13. 13. Scramble for Africa

Key fact	Detail
Berlin Conference	1884–85 — European powers set rules for claiming African territory
Result	By 1914, only Ethiopia and Liberia remained independent
Worst case	Belgian Congo under Leopold II — millions dead from forced labour

What it is: In 1870 Europeans controlled about a tenth of Africa, mostly coastal trading posts. Within thirty years they had carved up nearly the entire continent. The trigger was competition: France's move into Tunisia (1881), Britain's occupation of Egypt (1882), and King Leopold II of Belgium's private grab of the Congo forced Bismarck to convene the Berlin Conference (1884–85), which laid down that a claim required "effective occupation." The result was a map drawn with rulers in European chancelleries — straight-line borders that sliced through ethnic groups and kingdoms, dividing peoples like the Somalis among five territories.

Why it matters: The Scramble poisoned Africa's future: artificial borders are the root of many of the continent's later conflicts, and the colonial extraction model — raw materials out, manufactured goods in — locked in underdevelopment. It also sharpened European rivalries (the Fashoda Incident of 1898 nearly caused an Anglo-French war; Morocco's crises fed WWI tensions). For India, the connection is direct: the same imperial logic governed both continents, and Indian soldiers and labourers served across British Africa.

Key facts: Ethiopia defeated Italy at Adwa (1896), preserving its independence — a landmark African victory. The Boer War (1899–1902) was Britain's costly fight for South Africa's gold. The Congo Free State was Leopold's personal property, not Belgium's colony, until international outrage forced annexation in 1908. The "Year of Africa" (1960) finally reversed the Scramble.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks the Berlin Conference (1884–85) and which two states stayed independent. Mains wants the consequences: artificial borders, economic distortion, and how colonial rivalries fed WWI. This topic pairs naturally with decolonization of Africa later in the notes.

14. 14. Imperialism in Asia

Key fact	Detail
China	Opium Wars (1839–42, 1856–60); "spheres of influence"; Boxer Rebellion (1900)
South-East Asia	British Burma and Malaya; French Indochina; Dutch East Indies; independent Siam as buffer
India's place	The "jewel in the crown" — Britain's richest colony and the base for Asian expansion

What it is: While Africa was partitioned in decades, Asia was subjugated through a longer mix of trade, war and treaty. Britain fought two Opium Wars to force China open to Indian-grown opium, seizing Hong Kong (1842) and carving "spheres of influence" along China's coast. France took Indochina (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia), the Dutch tightened their grip on Indonesia, and Britain added Burma (1885) and Malaya to an empire already anchored in India. Siam (Thailand) survived as a buffer between British and French zones. Japan alone reversed the pattern, joining the imperial club after 1895. China's Boxer Rebellion (1900), crushed by an eight-nation force, showed both the depth of humiliation and the first sparks of resistance.

Why it matters: The "century of humiliation" (1839–1949) is the founding trauma of modern Chinese nationalism — Beijing's foreign policy still reads through that lens. The unequal treaties, extraterritoriality and concession ports were Asia's version of Africa's partition. For India, this is context, not background: Indian opium financed the China trade, Indian troops fought in the Boxer expedition, and the same colonial administration ran Burma as part of British India until 1937.

Key facts: The Treaty of Nanking (1842) ceded Hong Kong and opened five treaty ports; the Treaty of Tientsin (1858) legalised the opium trade. The Open Door Policy (1899), proposed by America's John Hay, tried to keep China open to all traders rather than partitioned. Sun Yat-sen called China a "hypo-colony" — subjugated without formal colonisation.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks the Opium Wars, the Boxer Rebellion and which power held where. Mains wants the comparison with Africa (informal vs formal empire) and the link to Chinese nationalism. This topic feeds directly into the Chinese Revolution (1911) and the rise-of-China topics.

15. 15. Latin American Independence

Key fact	Detail
Leaders	Simón Bolívar (north), José de San Martín (south)
Period	1810–1826 — most of Spanish America free; Brazil separates from Portugal (1822)

US response	Monroe Doctrine (1823): "America for the Americans"
-------------	---

What it is: Napoleon's invasion of Spain (1808) shattered Madrid's control over its American colonies, and creole elites — American-born Spaniards shut out of high office — seized the moment. Simón Bolívar, "the Liberator," campaigned across Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia (named for him); José de San Martín freed Argentina, crossed the Andes in an epic march, and liberated Chile and Peru. By 1826 almost all of Spanish America was independent. Brazil took a quieter path: the Portuguese prince Pedro declared independence in 1822 and crowned himself emperor. The new republics, however, quickly fell to *caudillos* — military strongmen — and economic dependence on Britain and later America.

Why it matters: Latin America is the first great wave of decolonization — a century before Asia and Africa. It shows the pattern that would repeat: colonial elites leading independence, then betraying its democratic promise. The Monroe Doctrine (1823), warning Europe against recolonising the Americas, became America's licence for its own interventions in the hemisphere — "Yankee imperialism" replacing Spanish rule. Bolívar's dream of a united Spanish America failed, leaving the fragmented map we see today.

Key facts: Haiti (1804), born of a slave revolt led by Toussaint L'Ouverture, was the first independent Latin American state — and was punished with isolation and a crushing indemnity to France. Bolívar's Gran Colombia broke apart within a decade. The Monroe Doctrine was initially unenforceable; Britain's navy, not America's, kept Europe out.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks Bolívar, San Martín and the Monroe Doctrine (1823). Mains may ask why Latin American independence produced strongmen rather than democracies, or compare it with later Asian-African decolonization. It's a lower-weightage topic — know the names, dates and the pattern.

16. 16. Russian Revolution (1917)

Key fact	Detail
Two revolutions	February 1917 — Tsar abdicates; October 1917 — Bolsheviks seize power
Leaders	Lenin ("Peace, Land, Bread"); Trotsky; later Stalin
Outcome	USSR founded 1922 — the world's first communist state

What it is: Tsarist Russia collapsed under the strain of World War I — military defeats, food shortages and a discredited autocracy. In February 1917 (March by the Western calendar) strikes and mutinies forced Tsar Nicholas II to abdicate; a liberal Provisional Government took over but fatally decided to continue the war. Lenin, smuggled back from exile, promised "Peace, Land and Bread" and, in October 1917, the Bolsheviks stormed the Winter Palace in an almost bloodless coup. Civil war (1918–21) followed against the Whites, backed by foreign intervention; the Bolsheviks won, and in 1922 the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was proclaimed.

Why it matters: The revolution created the communist pole of the 20th century — without it there is no Cold War, no Chinese Revolution as we know it, and no Soviet model that inspired planned economies from India to Egypt. It terrified capitalist governments into reforms: welfare states and labour laws were partly built to prevent revolution at home. For India, the Soviet example directly influenced Nehru's socialism, the Planning Commission and the public-sector-led development model.

Key facts: The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (March 1918) bought peace with Germany at the cost of huge territory. The Tsar and his family were executed in July 1918. War Communism gave way to Lenin's New Economic Policy (1921); Stalin's Five-Year Plans and collectivisation followed from 1928. The Comintern (1919) spread communist organisation worldwide, including to India.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks February vs October 1917, Lenin's slogan and Brest-Litovsk. Mains wants the big evaluations: why did the revolution succeed in backward Russia? How did it shape the 20th century? Always carry the India link — Soviet planning's influence on India's development strategy is a ready-made Mains point.

17. 17. Chinese Revolution (1911)

Key fact	Detail
Event	Wuchang Uprising, 10 October 1911 — Qing dynasty falls
Leader	Sun Yat-sen — "Father of modern China"; Three Principles of the People
Outcome	Republic of China proclaimed (1912); last emperor Puyi abdicates

What it is: The Qing dynasty, humiliated by a century of defeats and unequal treaties, finally broke in 1911. A bomb accidentally exploding in a revolutionary hideout in Wuchang (10 October) triggered a mutiny that cascaded across the provinces; within weeks the Qing's authority evaporated. Sun Yat-sen, the revolutionary organiser returning from exile, became the provisional president of the new Republic of China, and the six-year-old last emperor Puyi abdicated in February 1912 — ending two thousand years of imperial rule. But the republic was stillborn: power passed to the warlord Yuan Shikai, and China fragmented into warlord fiefdoms.

Why it matters: 1911 ended imperial China but solved nothing — the warlord era, the May Fourth Movement (1919), the Communist Party's founding (1921) and the long civil war all flow from this incomplete revolution. Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles (nationalism, democracy, people's livelihood) became the shared vocabulary of both the Nationalists and, in adapted form, the Communists. For India, the parallel is instructive: both were ancient civilisations humiliated by imperialism, but China's revolution came decades before its independence, while India's freedom movement built the state first.

Key facts: 10 October is still celebrated as Double Ten Day in Taiwan. Sun Yat-sen is revered by both Beijing and Taipei. Yuan Shikai's attempt to crown himself emperor (1915–16) collapsed within months. The May Fourth Movement (1919), protesting the Versailles Treaty's transfer of German concessions to Japan, radicalised a generation toward communism.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks 1911, Sun Yat-sen and the Wuchang Uprising. Mains may ask why the 1911 revolution failed to stabilise China, or compare the Chinese and Indian paths to modernity. Link it to the May Fourth Movement and the 1949 communist victory for the full arc.

Part II: World Wars to Cold War

18. 18. World War I (1914–18): Causes & Course

Key fact	Detail
Spark	Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo, 28 June 1914
Deep causes	Alliance blocs, militarism, imperial rivalries, Balkan nationalism
End	Armistice, 11 November 1918; ~10 million soldiers dead

What it is: Europe in 1914 was a powder keg: two rigid alliance blocs (Triple Entente vs Triple Alliance), naval arms races, colonial quarrels, and Balkan nationalism straining the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires. The assassination of Austria's heir at Sarajevo lit the fuse; alliance commitments then dragged every great power in within weeks. Germany's Schlieffen Plan — knock France out fast, then turn on Russia — failed at the Marne, and the Western Front froze into four years of trench slaughter. New weapons (machine guns, poison gas, tanks, submarines) made the killing industrial. America's entry in 1917 tipped the balance; Germany's allies collapsed one by one, and the Kaiser abdicated in November 1918.

Why it matters: The war destroyed four empires — German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian and Ottoman — redrawing the maps of Europe and the Middle East (the Sykes-Picot carve-up still shapes West Asia). It bankrupted Europe and shifted financial power to America. For India, the war was a turning point: Britain's broken promises, the Rowlatt Act,

and the return of politicised soldiers fed directly into the Home Rule and Non-Cooperation movements. The war also proved that industrial economies could be mobilised totally — the template for the 20th-century state.

Key facts: The Schlieffen Plan required violating Belgian neutrality, which brought Britain in. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (1918) knocked Russia out after the Bolsheviks seized power. Unrestricted submarine warfare, sinking American ships, pulled the US into the war in April 1917. The "Spanish flu" pandemic of 1918–19 killed more people than the war itself.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks Sarajevo (28 June 1914), the alliance blocs and the armistice date. Mains wants the causes debate and — the real marks lie here — WWI's impact on India. Connect the war to the Russian Revolution, the League of Nations and the Versailles settlement.

19. 19. Treaty of Versailles & League of Nations

Key fact	Detail
Treaty	Signed 28 June 1919; War Guilt Clause (Article 231); heavy reparations on Germany
League	Born January 1920, HQ Geneva; collective security; the US never joined
Verdict	"A peace to end all peace" — humiliation without disarmament bred revisionism

What it is: The Paris Peace Conference (1919) was dominated by the Big Four — Wilson, Lloyd George, Clemenceau and Orlando — and produced the Treaty of Versailles, which blamed Germany entirely for the war (Article 231, the War Guilt Clause), stripped its colonies, shrank its army to 100,000 men, and imposed reparations eventually fixed at 132 billion gold marks. President Wilson's Fourteen Points promised self-determination and a League of Nations to keep the peace through collective security. The League was created, headquartered at Geneva, but fatally weakened from birth: the US Senate rejected membership, and the League had no army of its own.

Why it matters: Versailles is the classic case of a punitive peace that fails: it humiliated Germany enough to breed Hitler's revanchism but left Germany strong enough to rearm. The League's impotence — it watched Japan seize Manchuria (1931) and Italy invade Ethiopia (1935) without acting — discredited collective security and taught the UN's founders what not to do. For India, the betrayal mattered: Indians had been promised self-government for their war effort and got the Rowlatt Act instead, while Wilson's self-determination rhetoric inspired nationalists worldwide.

Key facts: Germany's territorial losses included Alsace-Lorraine (to France) and the Polish Corridor. The mandate system handed German and Ottoman colonies to Britain and France as League "trusts." The League did succeed in smaller tasks — refugee resettlement, health work (a forerunner of the WHO) and settling minor border disputes. Keynes resigned from the British delegation and wrote *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919) warning the treaty would ruin Europe.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks 1919, Article 231, Geneva HQ and why the US stayed out. Mains wants the evaluation: did Versailles cause WWII? Compare the League with the UN — same dream, different design (the veto and great-power membership). This is prime "peace settlement" material.

20. 20. Great Depression (1929)

Key fact	Detail
Crash	Wall Street, October 1929 — Black Thursday (24th) and Black Tuesday (29th)
Depth	US output fell by a third; 25% unemployment; global trade collapsed
Responses	Roosevelt's New Deal (1933); Britain left the gold standard (1931)

What it is: The roaring American stock-market bubble of the 1920s burst in October 1929, wiping out fortunes in days. But the crash was the trigger, not the cause: underlying rot included overproduction, shaky banks, war-debt

tangles and the gold standard transmitting the shock worldwide. Bank failures destroyed savings, spending collapsed, factories shut, and unemployment hit 25% in America and millions more in Germany. The Smoot-Hawley Tariff (1930) choked world trade further as every country tried to export its way out. Recovery only came with massive state intervention — Roosevelt's New Deal put the government into the economy at a scale America had never seen.

Why it matters: The Depression discredited laissez-faire economics and made Keynesian state intervention respectable — the intellectual foundation of the post-war welfare state and of India's own planned economy. Politically, it destroyed the Weimar Republic's legitimacy and handed Hitler his mass following: Germans who lost savings in 1923's hyperinflation and jobs in 1929 turned to extremism. For India, the Depression crashed agricultural prices, deepening rural distress during the Civil Disobedience Movement — the peasant anger Gandhi harnessed had global economic roots.

Key facts: Keynes's *General Theory* (1936) argued governments should spend their way out of slumps. Britain abandoned the gold standard in 1931, freeing its monetary policy. The New Deal's alphabet agencies (TVA, WPA, Social Security 1935) reshaped American government permanently. Germany's unemployment peaked above 30%, the soil in which Nazism grew.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks 1929, Black Tuesday and the New Deal. Mains wants the causes debate and the political consequences — especially the Depression-to-fascism link and its impact on India's freedom struggle. It's also useful in economy answers as the original case for counter-cyclical fiscal policy.

21. 21. Rise of Fascism & Nazism

Key fact	Detail
Italy	Mussolini's March on Rome (1922); one-party state; invasion of Ethiopia (1935)
Germany	Hitler Chancellor (Jan 1933); Enabling Act; Nuremberg Laws (1935); Munich (1938)
Ideology	Ultranationalism, glorification of violence, leader cult, scapegoating minorities

What it is: Fascism — Mussolini's invention — promised national rebirth through a strong leader, a disciplined one-party state and the crushing of both communism and liberal democracy. Mussolini seized power in Italy in 1922 after his Blackshirts' March on Rome. Hitler adapted the formula in Germany with a lethal addition: racial ideology. Appointed Chancellor in January 1933, he used the Reichstag fire to grab emergency powers, the Enabling Act to rule by decree, and the Nuremberg Laws (1935) to strip Jews of citizenship. Britain and France's appeasement — the Munich Agreement (1938) handing Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland to Hitler — only fed his appetite until the invasion of Poland forced war.

Why it matters: Fascism is the 20th century's warning about what happens when democracy fails to deliver: economic despair plus national humiliation produced movements that destroyed democracy from within, legally. The Holocaust — the systematic murder of six million Jews — remains history's starkest lesson in where state-sponsored hatred leads. For India, the period forced a choice: the Congress condemned fascism early (Nehru wrote powerfully against it), while some found Japan's anti-Western posture tempting — a tension UPSC occasionally probes.

Key facts: The Lateran Treaties (1929) settled Mussolini's quarrel with the Pope. The Night of the Long Knives (1934) purged Hitler's rivals. Kristallnacht (November 1938) marked the turn to open anti-Jewish terror. Appeasement's architect, Neville Chamberlain, returned from Munich declaring "peace for our time" — eleven months before the war.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks 1922, 1933, the Nuremberg Laws and Munich 1938. Mains wants the conditions that breed fascism (Versailles humiliation + Depression + weak democracy) and the appeasement debate. Use it as the bridge between Versailles and WWII.

22. 22. World War II (1939–45): Causes & Course

Key fact	Detail
----------	--------

Outbreak	Germany invades Poland, 1 September 1939; Britain and France declare war
Turning points	Stalingrad (1942–43), Midway (1942), D-Day (6 June 1944)
End	VE Day 8 May 1945; Hiroshima/Nagasaki August 1945; ~70 million dead

What it is: Hitler's invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939 finally forced Britain and France to honour their guarantees, and the war exploded across the globe. Germany's Blitzkrieg overran Poland, France fell in six weeks (1940), and Britain survived the Blitz alone until Hitler's invasion of the USSR (June 1941) and Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor (7 December 1941) created the Grand Alliance of Britain, America and the Soviet Union. The tide turned at Stalingrad (1942–43), where the German 6th Army was destroyed, and at Midway in the Pacific; D-Day (6 June 1944) opened the western front. Germany surrendered in May 1945; America dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August, ending the Pacific war.

Why it matters: WWII ended European dominance, created the superpower duopoly (US and USSR), and made decolonization unstoppable — exhausted empires could no longer hold Asia and Africa. For India the war was decisive: the Cripps Mission's failure, the Quit India Movement (1942), Subhas Bose's INA, and the post-war Labour government's bankruptcy all flowed from it. The war also produced the UN, nuclear weapons, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights — the institutional furniture of the modern world.

Key facts: Operation Barbarossa (June 1941) was the largest invasion in history. The Holocaust murdered six million Jews alongside millions of others. The Manhattan Project built the atomic bomb; Hiroshima (6 August) and Nagasaki (9 August) 1945 remain the only wartime nuclear uses. India contributed over 2.5 million soldiers — the largest volunteer army in history.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks the key dates (1939, Pearl Harbor, D-Day, VE Day). Mains wants WWII's impact on India — almost a guaranteed question in some form — and the war's role in ending colonialism. Connect it to the UN's founding and the Cold War's origins.

23. 23. Formation of the United Nations (1945)

Key fact	Detail
Charter	Signed 26 June 1945 at San Francisco; in force 24 October 1945
Structure	General Assembly, Security Council (5 permanent members with veto), ECOSOC, ICJ, Secretariat
India	Original signatory — signed as British India in 1945

What it is: Determined not to repeat the League's failure, the Allies designed the UN with great-power muscle built in: the Security Council's five permanent members (US, USSR, Britain, France, China) each hold a veto, so the organisation can act forcefully only when the great powers agree. The Charter was signed at San Francisco on 26 June 1945 and came into force on 24 October — celebrated as UN Day. Alongside the Council sits the universal General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the International Court of Justice at The Hague, and the Secretariat led by the Secretary-General. India signed the Charter as a founding member in 1945, two years before independence.

Why it matters: The UN is the central switchboard of world politics: peacekeeping (India is among the largest troop contributors), decolonization (the 1960 declaration), human rights (the 1948 Universal Declaration), and development (the SDGs). Its flaw is also its design — the veto lets any P-5 member block action, which is why Syria, Ukraine and Gaza have exposed its paralysis. For India, the UN is both a platform (peacekeeping, G4 reform campaign) and a grievance (no permanent seat despite being central to the organisation's work).

Key facts: The first Secretary-General was Norway's Trygve Lie; the current HQ stands on donated New York land. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (10 December 1948) was drafted under Eleanor Roosevelt. UN peacekeeping began with the 1948 Middle East mission; India contributed to Korea, Congo and dozens more. The veto has been used hundreds of times, mostly by the US and USSR/Russia.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks 1945, San Francisco, the P-5 and the veto. Mains wants the reform debate (covered in detail in topic 48) and evaluations of peacekeeping. Always note India's founding-membership-plus-no-permanent-seat paradox — it's the heart of the UN-reforms answer.

24. 24. Origins of the Cold War

Key fact	Detail
Meaning	1945–91: US–USSR rivalry short of direct war — fought through proxies, arms races and ideology
First cracks	Yalta (Feb 1945) vs Potsdam (July 1945); "Iron Curtain" speech (1946)
Logic	Security dilemma + ideological hostility + power vacuum in Europe and Asia

What it is: The wartime alliance barely survived victory. At Yalta (February 1945) Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin papered over differences; by Potsdam (July 1945) Truman and an electorally weakened Britain faced a Stalin determined to keep Eastern Europe as a buffer. The USSR installed communist regimes across the east; America saw expansionism. Churchill's "Iron Curtain" speech (1946) named the division. Each side's defensive moves looked aggressive to the other — the classic security dilemma — and ideological hatred (capitalism vs communism) made compromise feel like betrayal. The result was a bipolar world: two superpowers armed with nuclear weapons, competing everywhere but fighting nowhere directly.

Why it matters: The Cold War is the frame for everything from 1945 to 1991 — Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, the arms race, the space race, and decolonization itself (both blocs courted new nations). It explains NATO, the Warsaw Pact, and why the UN Security Council froze so often. For India, the Cold War was the environment Nehru navigated with non-alignment: refusing both camps while extracting aid and technology from each.

Key facts: Historians debate the start: the orthodox view blames Soviet expansion; revisionists blame American economic imperialism; post-revisionists blame mutual misperception. Kennan's "Long Telegram" (1946) prescribed containment. The Berlin Blockade (1948–49) was the first great crisis, answered by the Allied airlift.

How UPSC tests it: Mains asks for the causes debate — know all three schools (orthodox, revisionist, post-revisionist) for a sophisticated answer. Prelims may ask Yalta/Potsdam or the Iron Curtain speech. Link it to non-alignment: India's foreign policy only makes sense inside this frame.

25. 25. Truman Doctrine & Marshall Plan

Key fact	Detail
Truman Doctrine	1947 — America will aid any nation resisting communist takeover (first applied to Greece and Turkey)
Marshall Plan	1948–52 — ~\$13 billion to rebuild Western Europe (European Recovery Program)
Soviet answer	Molotov Plan; Cominform (1947); Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (1949)

What it is: In March 1947 President Truman asked Congress for aid to Greece and Turkey, declaring America would "support free peoples resisting attempted subjugation" — the Truman Doctrine, which turned containment from an idea into a global commitment. The Marshall Plan (1948) was its economic arm: roughly \$13 billion (over \$150 billion today) to rebuild Western Europe's shattered economies, on the theory that prosperity would inoculate the continent against communism. Sixteen nations joined the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation to administer it. Stalin forbade Eastern Europe from participating and answered with the Molotov Plan and the Cominform, hardening the continent's split.

Why it matters: These two moves institutionalised the Cold War: America was now permanently engaged in Europe, and economic aid had become a weapon of rivalry. The Marshall Plan worked spectacularly — Western Europe's "economic miracle" of the 1950s — and became the template for development aid ever since, including to India. It also

planted the seed of European integration: administering the plan together taught Europeans the habits of cooperation that led to the ECSC and the EEC.

Key facts: The Plan's administrator, George Marshall, won the Nobel Peace Prize (1953). Britain and France got the largest shares; Germany's inclusion signalled rehabilitation. The Soviet Union's refusal — and its veto on its satellites — made the East-West economic split permanent. India's early Five-Year Plans were debated in a world where the Marshall Plan was the fashionable model of aided development.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks 1947/1948 and the Greece-Turkey origin. Mains wants the significance: how American aid shaped Cold War Europe and pioneered development assistance. It's a compact, high-yield topic — know the doctrine-to-plan sequence.

26. 26. NATO vs Warsaw Pact

Key fact	Detail
NATO	1949, Washington Treaty; Article 5 — attack on one is attack on all; HQ Brussels
Warsaw Pact	1955 — Soviet answer after West Germany joined NATO
After Cold War	Warsaw Pact dissolved 1991; NATO survived and expanded eastward

What it is: The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, signed in Washington in April 1949, bound America to Western Europe's defence: Article 5 declares an attack on one member an attack on all. It was America's first peacetime military alliance — a revolution in US foreign policy. The Soviet Union answered in 1955 with the Warsaw Pact, after West Germany's entry into NATO ended any pretence of a neutral Germany. For 35 years the two alliances faced each other across the Iron Curtain with hundreds of thousands of troops and thousands of nuclear warheads, in a standoff that never turned hot in Europe.

Why it matters: NATO is the Cold War institution that refused to die: after 1991 it expanded into Eastern Europe (Poland, the Baltics and others), which Russia cites as the original provocation behind today's confrontation over Ukraine. The alliance shows how institutions outlive their causes — and how yesterday's security guarantee becomes today's grievance. For India, NATO's eastward expansion is the textbook example of the security dilemma it studies in IR, and India's own partnerships (the Quad) are often analysed against the alliance model.

Key facts: NATO's first Secretary-General, Lord Ismay, joked its purpose was "to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down." France withdrew from NATO's military command in 1966 (returning in 2009). The Warsaw Pact was used to crush Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968). NATO's post-Cold War missions included Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Libya.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks 1949, Article 5 and 1955. Mains connects NATO expansion to the Ukraine crisis — one of the most current-affairs-linked history topics. It's also the go-to example for alliance politics in IR answers.

27. 27. Korean War (1950–53)

Key fact	Detail
Outbreak	25 June 1950 — North Korea invades the South across the 38th parallel
Course	UN (US-led) intervention; China's entry; stalemate near the 38th parallel
End	Armistice, 27 July 1953 — no peace treaty; Korea still divided

What it is: Korea, liberated from Japan in 1945, had been divided at the 38th parallel into a Soviet-backed North and an American-backed South. On 25 June 1950 the North invaded, nearly overrunning the peninsula before General MacArthur's daring landing at Inchon reversed the tide. As UN forces approached China's border, Mao sent in "volunteers" and the war ground into a bloody stalemate around the original dividing line. The 1953 armistice simply

froze the division — technically, the two Koreas are still at war. Three million people died, most of them Korean civilians.

Why it matters: Korea was the Cold War's first hot war and set its rules: superpowers would fight through proxies, not each other, and nuclear weapons would not be used. It globalised containment — America rearmed massively, signed alliances across Asia (including with Japan, 1951) and decided decolonization must not mean communist gains. For India, the war was Nehru's first great diplomatic test: India chaired the UN commission on POW repatriation, and an Indian general headed the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission — non-alignment's debut as peacemaking.

Key facts: The USSR was boycotting the Security Council over China's seat, so it couldn't veto the UN intervention — a blunder Moscow never repeated. Truman sacked MacArthur in 1951 for insubordination. The Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) remains one of the world's most fortified borders. India's 60th Parachute Field Ambulance served in Korea, winning praise from all sides.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks 1950–53, the 38th parallel and India's POW role. Mains wants Korea as the template of limited war and as the stage for India's early diplomacy. It's the classic "proxy war" case study.

28. 28. Cuban Missile Crisis (1962)

Key fact	Detail
Dates	16–28 October 1962 — "thirteen days"
Standoff	USSR placed nuclear missiles in Cuba; Kennedy ordered a naval "quarantine"
Resolution	Khrushchev withdrew missiles; US secretly agreed to remove Jupiter missiles from Turkey

What it is: After America's failed Bay of Pigs invasion (1961) and its Jupiter missiles in Turkey, Khrushchev secretly installed Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba — 90 miles from Florida. American U-2 spy planes photographed the sites on 14 October 1962. President Kennedy, after thirteen days of secret deliberation with his EXCOMM advisers, chose a naval "quarantine" (blockade by another name) over air strikes, while the world held its breath. A tense exchange of letters followed; finally Khrushchev agreed to withdraw the missiles in return for a US pledge not to invade Cuba — plus a secret deal to remove American missiles from Turkey. The world had come closer to nuclear war than ever before or since.

Why it matters: The crisis taught both superpowers that nuclear brinkmanship could slip out of control — a Soviet submarine officer, Vasili Arkhipov, famously refused to authorise a nuclear torpedo during the blockade. The aftermath brought the hotline (1963), the Limited Test Ban Treaty (1963) and the beginnings of détente: crisis management became a Cold War discipline. For students of strategy, it remains the definitive case study in coercive diplomacy, misperception and the fog of decision-making.

Key facts: Kennedy's televised address on 22 October announced the quarantine to the world. The US had about 17-to-1 nuclear superiority, which paradoxically made the crisis more dangerous — Khrushchev felt he had to gamble. The secret Turkey deal stayed hidden for decades. Robert Kennedy's memoir *Thirteen Days* is the classic insider account.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks 1962, Kennedy and Khrushchev. Mains uses the crisis for questions on nuclear deterrence, crisis diplomacy and decision-making under pressure — it also fits GS-IV discussions of leadership ethics. Know the quarantine-vs-strike debate for analytical depth.

29. 29. Vietnam War

Key fact	Detail
Phases	French defeat at Dien Bien Phu (1954); US escalation (1965–73); Saigon falls (1975)
US cost	58,000 American dead; massive domestic protest; "Vietnam syndrome"

Outcome	Unified communist Vietnam (1976) — America withdrew without victory
---------	---

What it is: Vietnam's struggle began against French colonialism: Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh crushed the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, and the Geneva Accords split Vietnam at the 17th parallel pending elections that were never held. America, fearing a communist domino effect across Asia, backed South Vietnam's regimes and escalated after the Gulf of Tonkin incident (1964) — at the peak, over half a million US troops fought in the jungle. But guerrilla warfare, the Tet Offensive's shock (1968) and television beaming the war into American living rooms destroyed domestic support. The Paris Accords (1973) extracted America; in 1975 North Vietnamese tanks rolled into Saigon, unifying the country under communism.

Why it matters: Vietnam proved the limits of superpower military might against determined nationalism — the most powerful military in history was defeated by a peasant army. The "Vietnam syndrome" made America wary of foreign interventions for a generation, and the war shattered Cold War consensus at home, fuelling the 1960s protest movements. For the developing world, it was proof that decolonization could defeat even America. India's consistent opposition to the war (Nehru and later Indira Gandhi condemned the bombing) burnished its non-aligned credentials.

Key facts: Agent Orange defoliation and napalm became symbols of the war's brutality. The Pentagon Papers (1971) leak exposed official deception. The war spilled into Laos and Cambodia, where America's bombing helped the Khmer Rouge rise. Vietnam today is a one-party state with a market economy — and a major Indian strategic partner.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks Dien Bien Phu (1954), the Tet Offensive and 1975. Mains wants the lessons: limits of military power, the domino theory's failure, media's role in war. Pair it with the Korean War to compare two models of Cold War conflict.

30. 30. Decolonization of Asia

Key fact	Detail
Wave	1945–1950s — India (1947), Indonesia (1949), Indochina wars
Drivers	WWII's destruction of empires, nationalist movements, Cold War competition, UN pressure
Varieties	Negotiated (India, Philippines), violent (Indonesia, Vietnam, Algeria)

What it is: Asia's empires collapsed with astonishing speed after 1945. Britain, bankrupt and exhausted, quit India in 1947 and Burma and Ceylon in 1948; the Dutch fought a bitter four-year war before conceding Indonesia's independence in 1949; France clung to Indochina until Dien Bien Phu (1954) and then fought an even bloodier war in Algeria. The Philippines got independence from America in 1946. Each case differed — negotiation in India, war in Indonesia and Vietnam — but the direction was one-way: by the mid-1950s, European rule in Asia was essentially over, with only pockets like Portuguese Goa (liberated 1961) and Hong Kong remaining.

Why it matters: Decolonization created the modern map of Asia and the "Third World" as a political force — the constituency for non-alignment and the UN's anti-colonial resolutions. It also created Asia's enduring conflicts: Partition's Kashmir dispute, the divided Koreas, Taiwan's status, and Israel's creation (1948) all date to this moment. For India, 1947 was both independence and the template: our non-violent mass movement became the moral reference for freedom struggles everywhere, and India led the diplomatic campaign against colonialism at the UN.

Key facts: The Atlantic Charter (1941) promised self-determination, which nationalists quoted back at the empires. The UN's 1960 Declaration on Decolonization legitimised the process legally. Bandung (1955) gathered 29 Asian-African nations — the political coming-out of the decolonised world. Portugal's Asian and African colonies were the last to fall, only after its 1974 revolution.

How UPSC tests it: Mains asks about the causes and patterns of decolonization — know the negotiated-vs-violent distinction. India's role (Bandung, UN diplomacy, support to freedom movements) is the high-scoring India angle. This topic is the bridge between WWII and the Non-Aligned Movement.

31. 31. Decolonization of Africa

Key fact	Detail
"Year of Africa"	1960 — 17 new states; Ghana (1957) had led the way under Nkrumah
Patterns	British: mostly negotiated; French: Community then exit; Portuguese: wars until 1974–75
Last bastions	Zimbabwe (1980), Namibia (1990), South Africa's apartheid (1994)

What it is: Africa's freedom came a decade after Asia's and far faster than anyone expected. Ghana's independence in 1957 under Kwame Nkrumah electrified the continent; then 1960 — the "Year of Africa" — saw 17 states born, most from French West and Equatorial Africa. Britain generally negotiated exits (Nigeria 1960, Kenya 1963 after the Mau Mau uprising), France tried to keep its colonies in a French Community before de Gaulle let them go, and Portugal fought brutal colonial wars in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau until its own 1974 revolution ended them. The settler colonies resisted longest: white Rhodesia's illegal independence (1965) lasted until Zimbabwe's birth in 1980, and apartheid South Africa held out until 1994.

Why it matters: African independence created the UN's largest voting bloc and the Organisation of African Unity (1963) — the institutional voice of the continent. But the colonial inheritance was cruel: arbitrary borders, economies built for extraction, and Cold War meddling turned many new states into battlegrounds (Congo's crisis of 1960–65 is the archetype). For India, Africa was the great cause of its foreign policy: India was the first country to raise apartheid at the UN (1946), funded liberation movements, and built the development partnership that continues today.

Key facts: The Congo crisis saw the UN's first large peacekeeping force and the death of Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld (1961). The Mau Mau uprising (1952–60) forced Britain's hand in Kenya. Nkrumah's dream of a United States of Africa failed, but the OAU (now AU) endures. India's Technical and Economic Cooperation programme (ITEC, 1964) began as aid to newly free African nations.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks 1960, Ghana 1957 and the OAU. Mains wants the problems of the colonial inheritance and India's Africa policy — a rich, underused answer area. Connect the Scramble for Africa (topic 13) to this topic for a full-arc answer.

32. 32. Suez Crisis (1956)

Key fact	Detail
Trigger	Nasser nationalises the Suez Canal (July 1956) after the US withdraws Aswan Dam funding
Invasion	Britain, France and Israel invade Egypt (Oct–Nov 1956)
Outcome	US and USSR force a humiliating withdrawal — the end of Britain as a great power

What it is: When America withdrew funding for Egypt's Aswan Dam, President Nasser retaliated by nationalising the British-French-owned Suez Canal in July 1956. Britain and France, desperate to reverse decolonization, secretly colluded with Israel: Israel would attack Sinai, and the two powers would "intervene" to seize the canal. The invasion (October–November 1956) was a military success and a political catastrophe — America, furious at not being consulted, threatened to sell sterling bonds and collapse the pound, while the USSR threatened rocket attacks. Humiliated, Britain and France withdrew. Prime Minister Anthony Eden resigned; Britain's days as a world power were over.

Why it matters: Suez is the moment the old imperial order visibly died: two former great powers were ordered about by the new superpowers, and the whole world watched. It supercharged Arab nationalism — Nasser became the hero of the Arab world — and pushed the Middle East into the Cold War's front line. The crisis also created UN peacekeeping: Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld improvised the first UN Emergency Force to supervise the

withdrawal. For India, which condemned the invasion, Suez vindicated non-alignment's anti-colonial stance at the moment of maximum drama.

Key facts: The canal, opened in 1869, was the lifeline of Britain's empire — the shortcut to India. The secret Sevres Protocol documented the collusion. Lester Pearson of Canada proposed the peacekeeping force and won the Nobel Peace Prize (1957). The crisis coincided with the Soviet crushing of Hungary's uprising — the superpowers were both exposed in the same fortnight.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks 1956, Nasser and the canal's nationalisation. Mains wants Suez as the turning point: the end of British great-power status and the birth of UN peacekeeping. It's a compact topic with outsized analytical value.

33. 33. Non-Aligned Movement

Key fact	Detail
Founding	Belgrade Summit, 1961 — 25 nations; roots in Bandung (1955)
Leaders	Nehru (India), Nasser (Egypt), Tito (Yugoslavia), Sukarno (Indonesia), Nkrumah (Ghana)
Core idea	No military blocs; independent foreign policy; anti-colonialism and disarmament

What it is: As the Cold War hardened, the newly independent nations refused to be drafted into either camp. The 1955 Bandung Conference of 29 Asian and African nations declared the principle; the 1961 Belgrade Summit, hosted by Tito's Yugoslavia, formally launched the Non-Aligned Movement with 25 members. NAM was never neutrality — members took loud positions against colonialism, apartheid and nuclear weapons — but it rejected military alliances with either superpower. At its peak it spoke for 120 nations, the largest grouping after the UN itself.

Why it matters: NAM gave the Third World a collective voice and India a global leadership role far beyond its material power: Nehru was its philosopher, and India hosted the 1983 summit. It shaped the UN's agenda on decolonization and disarmament for decades. Critics called it hypocritical (members tilted toward Moscow when convenient) and irrelevant after 1991 — but its core logic, strategic autonomy, is exactly what guides India's multi-alignment today: the Quad plus BRICS plus SCO is NAM's grandchild, not its opposite.

Key facts: The five Panchsheel principles (1954, India-China agreement) fed into NAM's philosophy. The Havana Summit (1979) saw Cuba try to tilt NAM toward Moscow; India resisted. The 1983 New Delhi summit was NAM's high-water mark as an event. Today's debates ask whether NAM should be revived or formally buried — a live Mains question.

How UPSC tests it: This is core IR/GS-II territory: Prelims asks 1961, Belgrade and the founders; Mains asks whether NAM is still relevant. The sophisticated answer: the name is dated, but the principle — refusing exclusive alliances — is more alive than ever in India's foreign policy. Always link to the Cold War origins topic.

Part III: Contemporary World & Themes

34. 34. Fall of the Berlin Wall & USSR Disintegration (1989–91)

Key fact	Detail
Wall falls	9 November 1989 — East Germans cross freely after a botched announcement
USSR ends	December 1991 — Belavezha Accords; Gorbachev resigns 25 December; 15 republics independent
Causes	Economic stagnation, Afghan war, Gorbachev's glasnost/perestroika, nationalist upsurges

What it is: The Berlin Wall — the Cold War's concrete symbol since 1961 — fell almost by accident on 9 November 1989, when an East German spokesman bungled a press conference and crowds surged through the checkpoints.

Within a year Germany reunified. In Moscow, Gorbachev's reforms (glasnost — openness, perestroika — restructuring) had been meant to save socialism but instead uncorked nationalism and economic chaos; the failed hardline coup of August 1991 finished the centre's authority. In December 1991 Russia, Ukraine and Belarus declared the USSR dissolved, Gorbachev resigned on Christmas Day, and fifteen new states emerged — the Cold War ended without a shot between the superpowers.

Why it matters: 1991 created the unipolar moment — America as the sole superpower — and the triumphalist "end of history" mood that shaped the 1990s: globalization, liberalisation (India's own 1991 reforms belong to this wave), and Western interventions. It also created today's map: the Baltic states, Central Asia, Ukraine's independence — and Russia's humiliation, which fuels its politics to this day. For India, the Soviet collapse ended a quarter-century of quasi-alliance and forced the foreign-policy reinvention of the 1990s.

Key facts: The Wall fell 28 years after it rose (13 August 1961). German reunification was formalised on 3 October 1990. The Belavezha Accords (8 December 1991) were signed in a Belarusian forest hunting lodge. Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History* (1992) captured the era's liberal optimism — prematurely, as events showed.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks 1989 and 1991. Mains wants the causes of Soviet collapse and its consequences — for the world order, for India, for the "end of history" debate. It's the hinge between the Cold War and contemporary topics like multipolarity.

35. 35. European Integration: EC to EU

Key fact	Detail
Start	ECSC (1951, Treaty of Paris); EEC (1957, Treaty of Rome)
EU born	Maastricht Treaty (1992); euro launched 1999, notes and coins 2002
Shock	Brexit referendum (2016); UK left the EU in 2020

What it is: Europe's integration began modestly: France and Germany pooled their coal and steel industries under the 1951 Treaty of Paris (ECSC) so that war between them would become "not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible." The 1957 Treaty of Rome created the European Economic Community — a common market among six nations. Step by step it deepened: the Single European Act, the Maastricht Treaty (1992) creating the European Union with a common foreign policy and the euro, and eastward enlargement after 2004. Then came the shocks: the eurozone debt crisis (2010–12) exposed the currency union's flaws, and Britain's 2016 Brexit referendum — followed by its 2020 exit — showed integration could run backwards.

Why it matters: The EU is history's most ambitious experiment in pooling sovereignty — 27 nations sharing a currency, a parliament and open borders, built from the ashes of two world wars. Its successes (peace, prosperity, regulatory power) and failures (democratic deficit, the euro's design flaws, migration crises) are the textbook case for every regional-integration debate, including SAARC's. For India, the EU is a major trade partner and the model — and warning — for Asian regionalism.

Key facts: The Schuman Declaration (9 May 1950) is celebrated as Europe Day. The euro is used by 20 EU members (the eurozone); several members, like Poland and Sweden, kept their currencies. The Lisbon Treaty (2009) gave the EU its current institutional shape. Brexit was driven by immigration, sovereignty and economic grievance — a case study in the nationalism-vs-globalism theme.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks the treaties (Paris 1951, Rome 1957, Maastricht 1992) and Brexit. Mains wants the evaluation: has integration succeeded? What lessons for regional cooperation in South Asia? It's excellent material for answers on regionalism and sovereignty.

36. 36. Arab–Israel Conflict

Key fact	Detail
----------	--------

Roots	Balfour Declaration (1917); UN Partition Plan (1947); Israel's creation (14 May 1948)
Wars	1948, 1956 (Suez), 1967 (Six-Day War), 1973 (Yom Kippur War)
Peace efforts	Camp David (1978); Oslo Accords (1993); Abraham Accords (2020)

What it is: The conflict began as two nationalisms claimed the same land: Zionism, seeking a Jewish homeland after centuries of persecution, and Palestinian Arab nationalism. Britain's Balfour Declaration (1917) promised a Jewish "national home"; the UN's 1947 Partition Plan divided Palestine; Israel declared independence on 14 May 1948 and defeated invading Arab armies. The 1967 Six-Day War left Israel occupying the West Bank, Gaza, Sinai and the Golan; the 1973 Yom Kippur War ended in stalemate and led to Camp David (1978), peace with Egypt. The 1993 Oslo Accords created the Palestinian Authority but the two-state solution stalled; the 2020 Abraham Accords normalised Israel's ties with the UAE and others, bypassing the Palestinians — and the October 2023 Gaza war shattered the status quo again.

Why it matters: This is the world's most intractable conflict and the key to West Asian politics — oil, American foreign policy, terrorism and refugee crises all run through it. For India, it is a live balancing act: India recognised Israel in 1950 but established full diplomatic relations only in 1992, and today maintains close defence and technology ties with Israel alongside support for the Palestinian cause and energy dependence on the Arab world. UPSC treats it as the archetypal "intractable conflict" case study.

Key facts: The Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) secretly divided Ottoman lands between Britain and France, planting the conflict's seeds. UN Resolution 242 (1967) set the "land for peace" formula. The PLO, led by Yasser Arafat, was recognised as the Palestinians' representative. India voted against the 1947 Partition Plan alongside the Arab states.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks Balfour 1917, 1948, 1967 and Camp David. Mains wants India's balancing act and the two-state solution's prospects — highly current-affairs-linked. Know the war sequence cold: 1948 → 1967 → 1973 → peace processes.

37. 37. Iranian Revolution (1979)

Key fact	Detail
Event	Shah overthrown (Jan 1979); Khomeini returns; Islamic Republic proclaimed
Flashpoint	US embassy hostage crisis (Nov 1979 – Jan 1981, 444 days)
Aftermath	Iran–Iraq War (1980–88); Shia–Sunni rivalry reshapes West Asia

What it is: Iran's Shah — restored by an Anglo-American coup in 1953 and propped up as the Gulf's policeman — combined breakneck modernisation with brutal repression (his SAVAK secret police) and subservience to Washington. In 1978–79 a broad coalition of bazaar merchants, students, leftists and clergy rose against him; the exiled Ayatollah Khomeini, broadcasting from Paris, became its symbol. The Shah fled in January 1979, Khomeini returned to a million-strong welcome, and a referendum created the Islamic Republic — clerical rule under the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih*. Militant students then seized the US embassy, holding 52 Americans for 444 days and wrecking US–Iran relations permanently.

Why it matters: The revolution created political Islam's first modern state and the Shia–Sunni cold war that still defines West Asia: Saudi Arabia and Iran have competed across Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen ever since. It triggered the Iran–Iraq War (1980–88, a million dead) and decades of sanctions, nuclear standoffs and proxy conflicts. For India, Iran is a civilisational neighbour, an oil supplier and the gateway to Central Asia (Chabahar port) — managing the relationship under Western sanctions pressure is a standing foreign-policy challenge.

Key facts: The 1953 CIA-MI6 coup against the nationalist Mossadegh (who had nationalised oil) is the revolution's deep background. The hostage crisis destroyed Jimmy Carter's presidency. Khomeini's successor, Khamenei, has ruled since 1989. The 2015 JCPOA nuclear deal (which the US quit in 2018) remains the framework of the nuclear dispute.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks 1979 and Khomeini. Mains wants the revolution's regional consequences and India's Iran dilemma — energy, Chabahar, and balancing Saudi Arabia, Israel and America. It's a compact, high-value IR topic.

38. 38. Gulf Wars (1991 & 2003)

Key fact	Detail
First Gulf War	Iraq invades Kuwait (Aug 1990); US-led coalition liberates it (Jan–Feb 1991, Operation Desert Storm)
Second (Iraq War)	US invades Iraq (March 2003) on WMD claims — none found
Consequences	Saddam executed (2006); sectarian war; rise of ISIS

What it is: In August 1990 Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, and President George H. W. Bush built a UN-authorised coalition of 35 nations that crushed Iraq in six weeks of air war and 100 hours of ground combat (January–February 1991) — the "New World Order's" first showcase. Twelve years later, his son George W. Bush invaded Iraq on claims of weapons of mass destruction and al-Qaeda links; both proved false. The swift 2003 victory dissolved into a grinding insurgency, sectarian civil war and, eventually, the rise of ISIS from the wreckage. Saddam was captured, tried and hanged in 2006; America finally withdrew combat troops in 2011, only to return against ISIS.

Why it matters: The two wars are the rise and fall of unipolarity in miniature: 1991 showed American-led order at its most legitimate; 2003 showed it at its most hubristic, discrediting preventive war and straining the Atlantic alliance. The 2003 invasion's chaos destabilised the region for a generation — Syria's civil war, the refugee crisis reaching Europe, and Iran's expanded influence all trace back to it. For India, the Gulf is home to nine million expatriates and the source of most oil imports; every Gulf crisis is an evacuation-and-energy contingency (Kuwait 1990 saw India's largest airlift).

Key facts: UN Resolution 678 authorised the 1991 liberation; the 2003 invasion had no UN mandate. The "Highway of Death" images marked 1991's end. The 1990–91 airlift brought 170,000 Indians home from Kuwait — then the world's largest civilian evacuation. ISIS seized Mosul in 2014 from post-invasion Iraq's ruins.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks 1990–91 and 2003. Mains wants the comparison (multilateral vs unilateral intervention) and the consequences for West Asia — plus India's diaspora-and-energy stakes. It's the definitive case study on the limits of military power.

39. 39. End of Apartheid (1994)

Key fact	Detail
System	1948–1994 — legalised racial segregation and white-minority rule in South Africa
Turning point	Mandela released (Feb 1990); first multiracial elections (April 1994)
Reconciliation	Truth and Reconciliation Commission under Desmond Tutu

What it is: Apartheid — Afrikaans for "apartness" — was the National Party's system (from 1948) of classifying South Africans by race and reserving land, votes, jobs and cities for the white minority. The African National Congress, led by figures like Nelson Mandela (imprisoned 1964–1990 on Robben Island), fought it through protest, armed struggle and international isolation — sports boycotts and sanctions bit hard. Facing economic collapse and township revolts, President F.W. de Klerk released Mandela in February 1990 and negotiated the transition; in April 1994 South Africans of all races voted together for the first time, electing Mandela president. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission then chose confession over vengeance.

Why it matters: Apartheid's fall is the 20th century's great moral victory — proof that sustained internal resistance plus international pressure can defeat even entrenched racism without civil war. The reconciliation model influenced conflict resolution worldwide. For India, this is personal history: Gandhi's political education happened in South Africa

(1893–1914), India was the first nation to raise apartheid at the UN (1946) and led the boycott — the relationship is civilisational, not merely diplomatic.

Key facts: The Sharpeville massacre (1960) and Soweto uprising (1976) were the struggle's bloodiest landmarks. Mandela and de Klerk shared the 1993 Nobel Peace Prize. The 1955 Freedom Charter ("South Africa belongs to all who live in it") was the movement's founding document. India re-established full diplomatic ties in 1993, before the first democratic election.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks 1994, Mandela and Robben Island. Mains wants the India–South Africa connection (Gandhi to Mandela) and the reconciliation model — excellent ethics and IR material. It's also the closing chapter of the decolonization story.

40. 40. Globalization & WTO (1995)

Key fact	Detail
WTO born	1 January 1995 — Marrakesh Agreement (1994); succeeds GATT (1948)
HQ & members	Geneva; 166 members — the rule-book of world trade
India's battles	Food security vs farm-subsidy caps; fisheries; the Appellate Body crisis

What it is: The post-Cold War 1990s saw trade barriers fall worldwide, supply chains stretch across continents, and capital flow freely — globalization's high tide. Its institutional anchor is the World Trade Organization, born on 1 January 1995 from the Uruguay Round's Marrakesh Agreement, replacing the provisional GATT (1948) with a permanent body whose rulings bind members. The WTO's promise was rules-based trade: lower tariffs, settled disputes, special treatment for developing nations. The reality has been messier — the Doha Round (2001) collapsed over farm subsidies, and America's blocking of Appellate Body judges since 2019 has paralysed dispute settlement.

Why it matters: Globalization reshaped every economy, including India's: the 1991 reforms plugged India into this wave, and IT services rode it to global scale. But the backlash — job losses in rich countries, the 2008 crisis, Covid supply shocks — has revived protectionism and "friend-shoring." For UPSC, the WTO is where trade meets sovereignty: India's food-stockholding fight (the Bali "peace clause," 2013) is the classic case of development needs versus global rules, and it recurs in Prelims and Mains alike.

Key facts: GATT's eight rounds cut industrial tariffs from ~40% to ~4%. The WTO's most-favoured-nation rule forbids discrimination among members. India has been both a major complainant and respondent in disputes. The 2013 Bali package and the 2022 Geneva fisheries deal are the WTO's rare recent successes.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks 1995, Geneva and GATT-to-WTO. Mains wants India's negotiating stance — food security, the peace clause, the Appellate Body crisis — and the broader globalization debate. This topic bridges history and the economy syllabus.

41. 41. 9/11 & the War on Terror

Key fact	Detail
Attacks	11 September 2001 — al-Qaeda hijackers hit the Twin Towers and the Pentagon; ~3,000 dead
Response	Afghanistan invaded (Oct 2001); Iraq (2003); bin Laden killed (May 2011)
Endgame	US withdrawal from Afghanistan (Aug 2021); Taliban back in power

What it is: On a clear September morning in 2001, al-Qaeda terrorists flew hijacked airliners into New York's World Trade Center and the Pentagon — the deadliest attack on American soil since Pearl Harbor. President Bush declared a "war on terror": Afghanistan's Taliban regime, which sheltered bin Laden, was toppled within weeks (October 2001), and the campaign metastasised into Iraq (2003), drone wars across the region, Guantanamo detentions and sweeping

surveillance laws. Bin Laden was killed in Abbottabad, Pakistan, in May 2011. Twenty years later, America withdrew from Afghanistan in chaotic scenes (August 2021) and the Taliban walked back into Kabul — the war's original enemy, undefeated.

Why it matters: 9/11 ended the 1990s interlude and militarised American foreign policy for a generation, with costs in the trillions and hundreds of thousands dead. It normalised the vocabulary of terrorism worldwide — every state, including India, reframed its security challenges through it. For India, 9/11 was diplomatically useful: it globalised the terrorism discourse India had long pushed (after Kargil and the Parliament attack months later, in December 2001), though it also complicated the region by making Pakistan an "ally" America needed.

Key facts: The 9/11 Commission called it a "failure of imagination." NATO invoked Article 5 for the first time in its history. The Patriot Act (2001) vastly expanded surveillance powers. India's Parliament attack (13 December 2001) came three months after 9/11, in its long shadow.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks 2001 and al-Qaeda. Mains wants the war on terror's balance sheet and its impact on South Asia — Afghanistan's fate is directly tied to India's security. It's also useful in internal-security answers on terrorism's global networks.

42. 2008 Global Financial Crisis

Key fact	Detail
Trigger	US subprime mortgage collapse; Lehman Brothers falls, 15 September 2008
Spread	Banking freeze → global recession; G20 summits coordinate the rescue
Aftermath	Bank bailouts, austerity vs stimulus debate, Occupy movements, rise of populism

What it is: American banks had stuffed trillions of dollars of shaky "subprime" mortgages into complex securities sold worldwide; when house prices fell, the securities turned toxic, banks stopped trusting each other, and credit — the economy's oxygen — froze. Lehman Brothers' bankruptcy on 15 September 2008 turned panic into freefall: stock markets crashed, iconic banks were nationalised or swallowed, and the world slid into the worst recession since the 1930s. Governments responded with bank bailouts and stimulus packages, coordinated through emergency G20 summits (Washington 2008, London 2009). Recovery was slow and uneven — and the political fallout lasted far longer than the recession.

Why it matters: The crisis shattered faith in deregulated finance and in the experts who promised it was safe — the intellectual backdrop for the populist wave of the 2010s. It made the G20, not the G7, the world's economic steering committee, giving India a bigger seat at the table. For India, the crisis was a stress test the country largely passed: conservative banking regulation, limited exposure to toxic assets and a quick stimulus kept growth positive — a vindication UPSC loves to cite when comparing India's financial model with the West's.

Key facts: The US Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) authorised \$700 billion for bank rescues. Iceland, Ireland and Greece became symbols of national ruin; Greece's debt crisis nearly broke the euro. The Dodd-Frank Act (2010) tightened American financial regulation. India's response — rate cuts, stimulus packages, infrastructure spending — is standard Mains material.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks Lehman Brothers and 2008. Mains wants the causes (deregulation, complex derivatives, rating-agency failures) and India's relative resilience — a favourite economy-plus-history crossover. Compare with 1929 for a full-marks answer on financial crises.

43. Arab Spring (2011)

Key fact	Detail
Spark	Tunisia, December 2010 — street vendor Bouazizi's self-immolation

Spread (2011)	Egypt's Mubarak falls; Libya's Gaddafi overthrown and killed; Syria descends into civil war
Outcome	Tunisia alone kept its democracy — later eroded; region mostly back to authoritarianism or war

What it is: In December 2010 a Tunisian fruit-seller, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself on fire after police harassment — and the Arab world exploded. Within weeks Tunisia's Ben Ali fled; Egypt's Tahrir Square forced Mubarak out in 18 days; Libya's uprising, backed by NATO air power, ended with Gaddafi's killing; Yemen and Bahrain shook; Syria's protests were met with bullets and became a catastrophic civil war. Social media carried the revolutions live, and for a moment it seemed the entire region would democratise. A decade later, only Tunisia had a working democracy — and even that unravelled — while Egypt returned to military rule and Syria lay in ruins.

Why it matters: The Arab Spring is the great cautionary tale about revolutions: removing a dictator is easier than building a state. Libya's collapse flooded the region with weapons and created the chaos ISIS exploited; Syria's war drew in Russia, Iran, America and Turkey, killed half a million people and sent refugees streaming into Europe — reshaping European politics. For India, the lesson was practical: evacuations from Libya (2011) and Yemen (2015, Operation Raahat) tested diaspora protection, and the oil-price spikes hit the economy.

Key facts: Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood won the 2012 election, then was overthrown by the army in 2013. NATO's Libya intervention (UN Resolution 1973) went from civilian protection to regime change — a precedent Russia cites over Ukraine. Syria's war created the century's worst refugee crisis. India's Operation Raahat (2015) evacuated 5,600 people from Yemen, including 4,640 Indians.

How UPSC tests it: Mains asks why the Arab Spring failed — know the structural reasons (no democratic institutions, military entrenchment, sectarian divides, foreign interference). Prelims may ask Tunisia 2010–11. It's excellent material for answers on revolution, democracy and intervention.

44. 44. Rise of China

Key fact	Detail
Take-off	Deng's reforms (1978) — "socialism with Chinese characteristics"
Milestones	WTO entry (2001); Belt and Road Initiative (2013); world's second-largest economy
Friction	South China Sea claims; Taiwan; border standoff with India (2020–)

What it is: In 1978 Deng Xiaoping opened China to markets while keeping the Communist Party's iron grip — special economic zones, foreign investment, and export manufacturing that lifted 800 million people out of poverty in a generation, the fastest enrichment in human history. WTO membership in 2001 plugged China into global supply chains; by the 2010s it was the world's factory and second-largest economy. Under Xi Jinping, China turned assertive: the Belt and Road Initiative (2013) built ports and railways across Asia and Africa, island-building militarised the South China Sea, and the 2020 Galwan clash froze India–China relations.

Why it matters: China's rise is the single biggest fact of contemporary world politics — the end of the unipolar moment and the engine of today's US–China rivalry. Its model (authoritarian politics plus market economics) challenges the assumption that prosperity requires democracy. For India, China is the defining strategic challenge: the boundary dispute, the trade deficit, the BRI's China–Pakistan Economic Corridor through PoK, and the contest for influence across South Asia and the Indo-Pacific. Every Indian foreign-policy answer today runs through Beijing.

Key facts: Shenzhen grew from a fishing village to a megacity on the SEZ model. China's 2001 WTO entry is debated as the West's great strategic miscalculation. The nine-dash line claims ~90% of the South China Sea, rejected by a 2016 arbitral tribunal. The Galwan Valley clash (June 2020) killed 20 Indian soldiers and ended the Wuhan–Mamallapuram engagement phase.

How UPSC tests it: This is among the most-asked contemporary topics: Prelims on BRI/CPEC and the South China Sea; Mains on India–China relations, the trade deficit, and the Indo-Pacific. Know the 1978–2001–2013 timeline and the Galwan turning point.

45. 45. BRICS & Multipolarity

Key fact	Detail
Formation	BRIC summit, Yekaterinburg (2009); South Africa joins (2010); expanded 2024–25
Institutions	New Development Bank (2014, Shanghai); Contingent Reserve Arrangement
Idea	Voice for emerging economies; challenge to Western-dominated institutions

What it is: BRICS began as an investors' acronym (Goldman Sachs, 2001) and became a summit reality in 2009, when Brazil, Russia, India and China met at Yekaterinburg; South Africa joined in 2010. The bloc created the New Development Bank (2014, headquartered in Shanghai) and a currency-reserve pool as alternatives to the World Bank and IMF. After the 2024–25 expansion (Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, UAE among the new members), BRICS now represents nearly half the world's population. It has no charter, no secretariat and plenty of internal contradictions — India and China are strategic rivals sitting at the same table — but it endures as the flagship of the multipolarity idea: a world not run from Washington alone.

Why it matters: BRICS is where the Global South's frustration with Western institutions gets organised — demands for IMF quota reform, de-dollarisation experiments, and alternative development finance. For India, BRICS is the perfect multi-alignment instrument: a platform where India engages China and Russia without Western mediation, while the NDB funds Indian infrastructure. Critics call it a talking shop; supporters call it the future's scaffolding. UPSC wants you to hold both views.

Key facts: The NDB's first president was India's K.V. Kamath. The Contingent Reserve Arrangement (\$100 billion) is BRICS' financial safety net. The 2024 Kazan summit pushed de-dollarisation discussions. India has used BRICS to keep channels open with both Russia and China even during border tensions.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks the members, 2009 and the NDB's HQ. Mains wants the evaluation: is BRICS a serious alternative or a photo opportunity? And India's balancing act within it. It's core contemporary IR material.

46. 46. Climate Politics: Kyoto to Paris

Key fact	Detail
Kyoto Protocol	1997 (in force 2005) — binding cuts for developed nations only; US never ratified
Paris Agreement	2015 (COP21) — all nations pledge cuts (NDCs); goal: well below 2°C
India's line	Common but differentiated responsibilities; per-capita emissions still low

What it is: Climate diplomacy's first act, the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, imposed binding emission cuts on developed countries while exempting developing ones — the "common but differentiated responsibilities" (CBDR) principle. It stumbled: America never ratified, and the exempted economies (including China) became the biggest emitters. The 2015 Paris Agreement flipped the model — every country pledges its own cuts (Nationally Determined Contributions), reviewed every five years, aiming to hold warming "well below" 2°C and ideally 1.5°C. Paris is universal but voluntary, which is both its strength and its weakness: pledges still fall far short of the temperature goal.

Why it matters: Climate politics is where development and environment collide — the defining equity debate of our time. India's position is the classic developing-country case: low per-capita and historical emissions, vast development needs, and extreme vulnerability to warming. India's pledges (500 GW non-fossil capacity by 2030, net zero by 2070)

and initiatives (International Solar Alliance, 2015) are the positive side of the story. For UPSC, this topic sits at the junction of environment, IR and ethics — usable in three papers.

Key facts: The UNFCCC was born at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. The US quit Paris under Trump (2017), rejoined under Biden (2021). COP28 (Dubai, 2023) agreed for the first time to "transition away" from fossil fuels. India's per-capita emissions are roughly a third of the world average.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks Kyoto 1997, Paris 2015 and CBDR. Mains wants the equity debate and India's stance — a standard environment-plus-IR answer. Link it to the Environment notes on this site for the science behind the politics.

47. 47. NPT, CTBT & Disarmament

Key fact	Detail
NPT	1968 (in force 1970) — five recognised nuclear-weapon states; others pledge not to acquire
CTBT	1996 — bans all nuclear test explosions; not in force (needs 44 ratifications)
India	Has signed neither — calls NPT discriminatory; tested in 1974 and 1998

What it is: The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (1968) is the grand bargain of the nuclear age: the five states that had tested before 1967 (US, USSR, UK, France, China) keep their arsenals while everyone else pledges never to build one, in return for disarmament promises and access to peaceful nuclear technology. The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (1996) would outlaw all nuclear explosions, but it has never entered into force — key states including America, China and India haven't ratified. India refused both, calling the NPT "nuclear apartheid": it tested a "peaceful nuclear explosion" in 1974, declared itself a nuclear-weapon state with the 1998 Pokhran tests, and has since sought the rights of a nuclear power without signing the treaty — winning the 2008 NSG waiver as a result.

Why it matters: The non-proliferation regime is fraying: North Korea quit the NPT and built bombs, Iran's programme advances, and the US-Russia arms-control architecture (INF, New START) has largely collapsed. Disarmament — the NPT's unfulfilled promise — is back on the agenda as great-power rivalry returns. For India, the issue is existential policy: the no-first-use doctrine, the triad, and the quest for NSG membership and a permanent Security Council seat are all entangled with the nuclear question.

Key facts: The NPT's review conferences happen every five years; the 2015 and 2022 rounds failed to agree. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (2017) is opposed by all nuclear states. India's 1974 test triggered the creation of the Nuclear Suppliers Group. The 2008 India-US civil nuclear deal effectively recognised India as a responsible nuclear power outside the NPT.

How UPSC tests it: Prelims asks 1968, 1996 and India's non-signature. Mains wants India's critique of the NPT and the disarmament debate — a strong ethics-plus-IR answer. Link to the UN-reforms topic for the institutional angle.

48. 48. UN Reforms Debate

Key fact	Detail
Demand	Expand the Security Council — the G4 (India, Brazil, Germany, Japan) seeks permanent seats
Grievance	1945's power map frozen: Africa and Latin America have no permanent seat
Obstacle	Any reform needs P-5 agreement — including those who lose relative power

What it is: The Security Council still reflects 1945: five permanent members with vetoes, ten rotating members, and no permanent voice for Africa, Latin America, or the world's largest democracy. Reform proposals have circulated for decades — the G4 (India, Brazil, Germany, Japan) wants permanent seats, the African Union demands two (the Ezulwini Consensus), and "Uniting for Consensus" (led by Italy and Pakistan) opposes new permanent seats altogether.

India makes the strongest case: founding member, largest peacekeeping contributor, world's most populous nation, a major economy — yet kept out while the Council's legitimacy erodes with every paralysed vote on Syria, Ukraine or Gaza.

Why it matters: The reform debate is the clearest measure of whether global institutions can adapt to new power realities or will decay into irrelevance. For India it is the top multilateral priority — every foreign minister raises it, every summit declaration mentions it. The honest assessment UPSC rewards: some progress (the 2023 G20 admitted the African Union; reform text negotiations inch forward) but the veto-holders have no incentive to dilute their privilege, so change will be slow and transactional.

Key facts: The Council has 15 members: 5 permanent, 10 elected for two-year terms. India has served eight elected terms, most recently 2021–22. The "veto initiative" (2022) forces a General Assembly debate after every veto — a small accountability win. France publicly backs India's permanent membership; China does not.

How UPSC tests it: This is a perennial Mains question — know the G4, the African position, the Coffee Club opposition, and India's specific arguments. Prelims may ask the Council's composition. Always close with the realistic assessment: support is broad, but P-5 consensus is the wall.

49. 49. Nationalism vs Globalism

Key fact	Detail
Globalist wave	1990s–2000s — open markets, liberal intervention, "end of history" optimism
Nationalist pushback	2010s onward — Brexit (2016), Trump (2016), trade wars, "my country first" politics
Tension	Sovereignty vs interdependence — the defining argument of our era

What it is: The post-Cold War decades bet on globalism: open trade, international institutions, and the idea that interdependence would tame nationalism. The 2010s broke the bet. The 2008 crisis discredited the experts, China's rise challenged the rules, migration crises strained Europe, and voters rebelled — Brexit (2016), Trump's election (2016), and strongman politics across continents. Covid then exposed supply-chain fragility, and the US–China trade war made "decoupling" respectable. The result is not deglobalization but a messier thing: regional blocs, friend-shoring, industrial policy comebacks — globalization with borders.

Why it matters: This is the master theme behind half the contemporary syllabus: WTO paralysis, the UN's struggles, the EU's crises, the return of industrial policy (including India's own PLI schemes and Atmanirbhar rhetoric). Understanding it lets you connect topics that look separate — why trade talks stall, why alliances shift, why "self-reliance" is back in fashion. For India, the theme is lived policy: open to the world (G20 presidency, trade deals) yet protective of strategic autonomy — globalist in economics, nationalist in security.

Key facts: The Brexit referendum (June 2016) passed 52–48. Trump's 2018 tariffs launched the US–China trade war. "Friend-shoring" — moving supply chains to allies — entered the policy vocabulary after Covid. India's Atmanirbhar Bharat (2020) is the domestic expression of the same impulse.

How UPSC tests it: Mains loves this as an essay and GS-II theme: is globalization retreating? The strong answer refuses the binary — interdependence continues, but on national terms. Use it as the concluding frame for answers on trade, institutions and foreign policy.

50. 50. World History: PYQ Trend Analysis

Key fact	Detail
Prelims pattern	2–4 factual questions yearly — treaties, years, personalities, "who said what"
Mains pattern	1–2 questions in GS-I — causes, consequences, comparisons, India linkages

What it is: Step back and look at how UPSC actually asks world history. In Prelims, the questions are factual and matchable: the year of the Treaty of Versailles, who propounded the Truman Doctrine, which conference launched NAM, the significance of the Marshall Plan. Statement-based questions pair events with the wrong years — the tables in these notes are built for exactly that. In Mains, GS Paper I typically carries one or two world-history questions, and they reward structure over detail: causes and consequences of WWI, why the League failed, decolonization's patterns, or the Cold War's end. The India linkage is the difference between an average and a top answer.

Why it matters: This topic turns 49 topics of content into exam strategy. The pattern is stable: UPSC does not ask obscure facts — it asks the anchor events of each era and expects you to reason about them. Industrial revolution, the two world wars, decolonization and the Cold War's turning points account for the large majority of questions; everything else is supporting detail. Knowing the pattern tells you where to spend revision time in the final month.

Key facts: Frequently repeated Prelims themes: 1914–18 and 1939–45 dates, Versailles 1919, the UN's 1945 founding, NAM 1961, the Berlin Wall 1989. Favourite Mains formulations: "critically examine," "discuss the causes," "compare and contrast." The last decade shows rising weightage for contemporary themes (multipolarity, climate, West Asia) over 19th-century Europe.

How UPSC tests it: Use this page backwards: pick any topic above and frame two Prelims-style statements and one Mains question from it — that is precisely how the paper is built. In the final month, revise only the tables and the "How UPSC tests it" paragraphs; they compress each topic to its testable core.

5 Revision Tips for World History

1. **Draw one master timeline and keep it on your wall.** A single line from 1776 to 2025 with 30 anchor dates (revolutions, wars, treaties, foundings) does more than any amount of re-reading. Add to it as you study; in the last month, reproduce it from memory twice.
2. **Learn every topic as a cause-and-effect chain.** Versailles → humiliation → Depression → Hitler → WWII is one chain; 1945 → bipolarity → proxy wars → 1991 is another. UPSC's Mains questions are chain questions — they ask "why" and "with what consequences."
3. **Put every event on a map.** The Scramble's borders, the two world wars' fronts, Cold War blocs, West Asia's fault lines — geography fixes history in memory and answers map-based Prelims questions as a bonus.
4. **Attach the India link to every topic.** WWI → Home Rule; WWII → Quit India; Suez → non-alignment vindicated; 1991 → India's reforms. Examiners reward answers that show world events through Indian eyes.
5. **Revise tables, not paragraphs, in the final month.** Each quick-revision table on this page holds the 3–4 facts Prelims statements are built from. If you can recite the tables, you can answer the paper.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How much weightage does world history carry in UPSC?

Modest but steady. Expect 2–4 factual questions in Prelims and usually 1–2 questions in GS Paper I Mains. It will not make or break your result alone, but it is high-yield for the effort: the syllabus is bounded (mid-18th century to present) and the questions repeat around the same anchor events.

2. Which book should I read for world history?

The standard recommendation is Norman Lowe's *Mastering Modern World History* for depth, or the old NCERT *Contemporary World History* (Arjun Dev) for a quicker base. These 50 topics cover the same ground in exam-ready form — use a textbook only for topics you want to explore further. Our [booklist page](#) has the full list with how-to-use notes.

3. Do I need to memorise all the dates?

No — memorise the anchor dates only: 1776, 1789, 1815, 1914–18, 1919, 1929, 1939–45, 1945, 1947, 1961, 1962, 1989, 1991, 1995, 2001, 2008, 2011. UPSC's statement questions shuffle events against years, and these anchors let you place everything else approximately. The tables mark which dates matter.

4. How do I connect world history with current affairs?

Read every world-history topic as the background of today's news: the UN-reforms debate explains the Ukraine/Gaza paralysis; Sykes-Picot explains West Asia; the Cold War explains NATO's expansion. When a news story breaks, ask which topic on this page it belongs to — that habit turns current affairs into revision.

5. Is world history asked in Prelims, or only in Mains?

Both. Prelims asks the factual layer — treaties, years, personalities, organisations and their headquarters. Mains asks the analytical layer — causes, consequences, comparisons and evaluations. The "How UPSC tests it" paragraph under each topic tells you which layer that topic belongs to.

6. How should I structure a world history answer in Mains?

Open with the context (one line placing the event in its era), then causes, then course or key developments, then consequences — and close with the India linkage. Add a small timeline or map reference where possible. Keep it to the syllabus: examiners want judgment about big events, not encyclopaedic detail.