



Mains Practice Question

Q. Evaluate the role of regional organizations such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in shaping India's foreign policy. (250 words)

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Approach

- Start your answer by briefly describing about regional organizations.
- Discuss the impact of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on India.
- Conclude accordingly.

Introduction

- Regional organizations play a crucial role in shaping the foreign policies of nations. They provide a platform for nations to engage in dialogue, build relationships and work together towards common goals.

Body

- **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)** is a regional organization comprising eight South Asian countries, including India. It was **established in 1985** with the aim of **promoting economic and social development**, as well as regional cooperation and peace in South Asia.
 - **Improved regional cooperation:** SAARC has played a significant role in promoting regional cooperation and fostering better relations among South Asian countries.
 - This has enabled India to engage in constructive dialogue with its neighboring countries and build relationships based on mutual respect and trust.
 - **Promotion of regional trade:** SAARC has provided a platform for the promotion of regional trade and investment.
 - This has benefited India's economy by opening up new markets and increasing the flow of goods and services between South Asian countries.
 - **Conflict resolution:** SAARC has played a role in resolving conflicts and promoting peace in South Asia.
 - For example, India and Pakistan have used SAARC as a platform to engage in dialogue and resolve their differences peacefully.
 - **Political obstacles lead to emergence of new block:** Political obstacles such as **tensions between India and Pakistan** have hindered the progress of SAARC.
 - Therefore, India's policy started focusing on new blocks like **BIMSTEC (the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation)** is a multilateral regional organisation established with the aim of accelerating shared growth and cooperation between littoral and adjacent countries in the Bay of Bengal region), to promote regional economic and cultural cooperation.
- **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)** is a regional organization comprising **10 Southeast Asian countries**. It was established in 1967 with the aim of promoting economic and

political cooperation in Southeast Asia.

- **Strategic Partnership:** ASEAN and India share a strategic partnership and have been engaging in dialogue and cooperation on regional and global issues.
 - This relationship is shaping India's foreign policy by creating a new dynamic in the region that emphasizes India's role as a major player.
- **Economic Integration:** ASEAN has been a major focus of India's **economic diplomacy** and has played a significant role in shaping India's foreign policy.
 - India has been actively participating in various trade agreements with ASEAN nations, which have helped to **boost economic ties and cooperation.**
- **Counterterrorism:** ASEAN and India share a common concern about terrorism and have been working together to address the threat.
 - India has been **strengthening its counterterrorism capabilities** through cooperation and collaboration with ASEAN nations.
- **Security Cooperation:** ASEAN and India have been working together to **enhance their security cooperation, particularly in the areas of maritime security and cyber security.**
 - This has helped India to expand its role in the region and has played a significant role in shaping India's foreign policy.
- **Cultural Exchange:** ASEAN and India have a **rich cultural heritage** and have been working to **enhance cultural exchange and cooperation.**
 - Thus, it played an important role in shaping India's foreign policy by **promoting greater understanding and collaboration** between the two regions.

Conclusion

- SAARC and ASEAN have both had positive and negative impacts on India's foreign policy. SAARC has played a role in promoting regional cooperation, trade, and peace in South Asia, but has been hindered by slow progress and political obstacles.
 - ASEAN has improved economic cooperation, political stability, and regional security in Southeast Asia, but India's influence in the organization is limited due to its peripheral position and political challenges.
 - To maximize the benefits of these regional organizations for India's foreign policy, India should **continue to engage actively and constructively in both SAARC and ASEAN,** while also **exploring other opportunities for regional cooperation and integration.**