BLOGS

Passage-Based Questions on English for CLAT UG [Part 20]

Adtiya Aryan · 15 Jun 2026

Passage 1 (P.1)

The post Cold War international order was built on the assumption that economic interdependence would soften geopolitical rivalries. Institutions such as the World Trade Organization were meant to anchor a rules-based order, while multilateral cooperation was expected to reduce the likelihood of major-power conflict. Yet, the early decades of the 21st century have unsettled this optimism. Trade wars, technology restrictions, weaponized supply chains, and renewed territorial disputes indicate that economic interdependence has not erased power politics; rather, it has reshaped its instruments.

Amid this shifting landscape, the concept of “strategic autonomy” has re-emerged as a guiding principle for several middle powers. Strategic autonomy does not imply isolationism or neutrality. Instead, it reflects a calculated refusal to align permanently with any single power bloc. Countries pursuing this approach aim to diversify trade partnerships, maintain independent defense procurement policies, and avoid being drawn into zero-sum rivalries between major powers. The renewed emphasis on strategic autonomy is partly a response to the fragmentation of global supply chains. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities of hyper-globalization, revealing how dependence on a limited number of manufacturing hubs could disrupt essential sectors ranging from pharmaceuticals to semiconductors.

Consequently, states began rethinking the balance between efficiency and resilience. “Friend-shoring” and “near-shoring” entered diplomatic vocabulary, signaling that economic partnerships would increasingly be evaluated through a security lens. However, strategic autonomy faces structural constraints. Deep economic integration makes complete disengagement impractical. Moreover, security partnerships often require political alignment, particularly in areas such as intelligence sharing and advanced defense technology. The tension between economic diversification and security commitments creates a delicate balancing act.

A state that seeks too much autonomy risks alienating powerful allies; one that aligns too closely risks strategic dependency. Critics argue that strategic autonomy may inadvertently weaken collective deterrence against aggressive states. If middle powers prioritize flexibility over solidarity, coordinated responses to violations of international law may become fragmented. Supporters counter that rigid bloc politics heighten global polarization and reduce diplomatic space for de-escalation.

Ultimately, the debate over strategic autonomy reflects a broader uncertainty about the future of global governance. The unipolar moment has faded, but a stable multipolar equilibrium has yet to crystallize. In this transitional phase, states are not merely reacting to geopolitical shifts; they are actively redefining the principles that will structure international relations in the decades to come.

1. The author’s primary argument is that strategic autonomy ?

a. Is a disguised form of neutrality

b. Represents a pragmatic adaptation to global fragmentation

c. Weakens international institutions irreversibly

d. Is economically unsustainable

2. The reference to “friend-shoring” primarily illustrates ?

a. A moral approach to trade

b. Economic nationalism

c. The securitization of economic policy

d. The decline of multilateralism alone

3. The author would most likely agree that strategic autonomy ?

a. Eliminates dependency entirely

b. Is free from diplomatic costs

c. Involves navigating competing pressures

d. Guarantees multipolar stability

4. Which assumption underlies the critique of strategic autonomy?

a. Collective deterrence requires cohesion

b. Middle powers lack agency

c. Globalization cannot be reversed

d. Economic efficiency outweighs security

5. The tone of the passage is best described as ?

a. Alarmist

b. Nationalistic

c. Cynical

d. Analytical

Passage 2 (P.2)

Globalization was once celebrated as a force that would dilute geopolitical rivalry by binding states together through mutual economic dependence. However, recent developments suggest that interdependence can itself become a tool of coercion. When trade routes, financial networks, or technological standards are concentrated within a few dominant states, those states acquire leverage over others.

The freezing of foreign exchange reserves, restrictions on access to global payment systems, and export controls on advanced technologies demonstrate how economic infrastructure can be weaponized. Unlike traditional military sanctions, these measures often operate within legal and institutional frameworks, blurring the distinction between economic policy and geopolitical strategy. This transformation raises normative concerns.

On the one hand, economic tools may offer alternatives to armed conflict. Sanctions and trade restrictions can signal disapproval without immediate recourse to violence. On the other hand, their humanitarian consequences may be severe, disproportionately affecting civilian populations. Moreover, overuse of economic coercion risks incentivizing parallel systems, as targeted states seek to insulate themselves from future vulnerability. The development of alternative payment systems and regional trade blocs reflects this dynamic.

Rather than strengthening global integration, coercive economic statecraft may accelerate fragmentation. Financial decoupling and technological bifurcation could create rival spheres of influence, undermining the universality of existing institutions. The deeper concern is structural: when economic networks become instruments of power, trust in global governance erodes. States begin to view economic engagement not as a mutual benefit but as a potential liability.

In such an environment, efficiency gives way to resilience, and openness yields to precaution. The paradox of interdependence, therefore, is that the very mechanisms designed to foster cooperation may become catalysts for division. Whether the international system adapts through reform or fractures into competing blocs remains uncertain.

6. The central paradox identified in the passage is that?

a. Military power is declining

b. Economic cooperation may generate strategic vulnerability

c. Sanctions are always ineffective

d. Trade blocs ensure stability

7. The author's concern regarding "parallel systems" suggests that?

a. Sanctions strengthen global unity

b. Financial integration is irreversible

c. Alternative systems are legally invalid

d. Coercion may encourage institutional fragmentation

8. The passage implies that economic coercion differs from military coercion because it?

a. Is always humane

b. Operates within institutional frameworks

c. Is less politically controversial

d. Requires no state power

9. Which of the following would weaken the author's broader concern?

a. Evidence that sanctions consistently deter aggression without systemic fragmentation

b. Expansion of regional trade agreements

c. Creation of new digital currencies

d. Increased export controls

10. The tone toward economic statecraft is?

a. Entirely condemnatory

b. Uncritically supportive

c. Cautiously critical

d. Indifferent

Passage 3 (P.3)

Climate negotiations increasingly reveal a divide between historical responsibility and future obligation. Developed economies, having industrialized earlier, contributed disproportionately to cumulative greenhouse gas emissions. Developing states argue that equity demands recognition of this historical imbalance. Yet, rapidly industrializing countries now account for a significant share of annual emissions, complicating the binary narrative of responsibility.

The principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities” (CBDR) attempts to reconcile these tensions. It acknowledges that while all states share an obligation to address climate change, their capacities and historical contributions differ. However, operationalizing this principle has proven contentious. Disagreements arise over climate finance, technology transfer, and timelines for net-zero commitments.

Geopolitical competition further complicates climate cooperation. Major powers may frame green technology leadership as an arena of strategic rivalry rather than collective survival. Subsidies for domestic clean-energy industries, though environmentally beneficial, can trigger trade disputes. Thus, climate diplomacy exists at the intersection of ecological urgency and geopolitical calculation. Moreover, vulnerable states emphasize adaptation and loss-and-damage funding, arguing that mitigation alone is insufficient.

For them, climate change is not an abstract future threat but an immediate developmental crisis. The tension between mitigation commitments and adaptation financing underscores differing priorities shaped by geography and economic capacity. The future of climate governance will likely depend on whether states can transcend short-term competitive impulses.

If climate policy becomes another domain of zero-sum rivalry, collective action may falter. Conversely, if technological innovation is framed as a shared global good, cooperation could redefine the architecture of global governance.

11. The tension described in the first paragraph arises primarily from?

a. Scientific disagreement

b. Trade protectionism alone

c. Lack of climate data

d. Competing interpretations of fairness

12. CBDR attempts to balance?

a. Sovereignty and democracy

b. Mitigation and trade

c. Historical responsibility and present capacity

d. Technology and agriculture

13. The reference to green subsidies triggering trade disputes illustrates?

a. Environmental hypocrisy

b. The intersection of climate policy and geopolitics

c. Failure of innovation

d. Lack of regulation

14. The author suggests that vulnerable states prioritize?

a. Technological dominance

b. Adaptation and loss-and-damage funding

c. Carbon markets

d. Trade liberalization

15. The overall stance of the passage may best be described as?

a. Optimistic about inevitable cooperation

b. Skeptical yet open-ended

c. Dismissive of climate negotiations

d. Hostile to developed economies

Answers

1. B – The passage suggests that strategic autonomy has returned mainly because the global system is becoming fragmented. Countries are therefore using it as a practical way to balance relationships, rather than as a strict policy of neutrality.
2. C – The idea of “friend-shoring” shows that economic partnerships are no longer based purely on efficiency. Instead, security concerns are now shaping trade decisions, which reflects the securitization of economic policy.
3. C – The passage highlights that countries trying to maintain strategic autonomy often face pressure from major powers and alliances. As a result, autonomy requires carefully balancing different and sometimes conflicting interests.
4. A – Critics argue that if too many countries focus on autonomy instead of alignment, global coalitions may weaken. In their view, effective deterrence depends on countries acting together rather than individually.
5. D – The author does not strongly support or oppose strategic autonomy. Instead, the passage examines its advantages and criticisms in a balanced, analytical manner.

6. B – The passage explains that economic interdependence was once seen as a way to promote cooperation. However, it can also make countries vulnerable to pressure when economic ties are used as tools of coercion.
7. D – When countries face economic pressure, they often try to create alternative trade routes, payment systems, or institutions to reduce dependence. This can gradually fragment the global system.
8. B – Economic coercion often works through formal mechanisms such as sanctions or financial restrictions, which are usually imposed within existing international systems and institutions.
9. A – If sanctions regularly stopped aggression and did not cause fragmentation, it would challenge the author's argument that economic coercion weakens global institutions.
10. C – The author acknowledges that economic tools may prevent military conflict, but also points out their risks. This makes the tone carefully critical rather than completely negative.
11. D – The disagreement arises because developed countries produced most emissions historically, while developing countries now contribute significantly to current emissions. This leads to different views about what a fair distribution of responsibility should look like.
12. C – The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities recognizes that all countries must act on climate change, but their obligations differ based on past emissions and their current economic capacity.
13. B – When countries subsidize their own green industries, it can create tensions in global trade. This shows that climate policy is closely connected to economic competition and geopolitics.
14. B – Many vulnerable countries are already facing the effects of climate change. Therefore, their main concern is financial support for adaptation and compensation for climate-related losses.
15. B – Although the passage highlights tensions and disagreements in climate governance, the author does not completely dismiss the possibility of cooperation. The tone remains somewhat skeptical but still open to future solutions.