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Passage-Based Questions on English for CLAT UG [Part 22]

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Passage 1 (P.1)

For centuries the Arctic remained largely absent from geopolitical calculations, perceived more as a frozen wasteland than a strategic frontier. Yet climate change has begun to redraw the map of global competition in ways few policymakers anticipated a generation ago. As polar ice retreats, previously inaccessible shipping routes are gradually becoming navigable for longer portions of the year. The Northern Sea Route along Russia's coastline and the Northwest Passage through Canada's archipelago promise to shorten the distance between Europe and Asia by thousands of kilometres, thereby transforming global trade logistics.

This geographical shift has triggered renewed strategic interest among Arctic and non-Arctic powers alike. Russia has invested heavily in icebreakers, military infrastructure, and port facilities along its northern coast, seeking both economic advantage and strategic leverage. Meanwhile, countries such as China, though geographically distant from the Arctic, have declared themselves "near-Arctic states" and expressed interest in what they term a Polar Silk Road. Such claims have raised concerns among traditional Arctic powers about whether the region might become another theatre of great-power rivalry.

However, the Arctic is also governed by an intricate web of international law and diplomatic institutions. The Arctic Council, established in 1996, has served as the principal forum for cooperation among Arctic states on environmental protection, sustainable development, and scientific research. Unlike traditional military alliances, the Council deliberately excludes security matters from its mandate. This has allowed it to function as a rare space of cooperation even during periods of broader geopolitical tension. Yet the durability of this cooperative framework remains uncertain.

As economic stakes rise, so too do the incentives for unilateral action. Some analysts warn that infrastructure development under the guise of economic expansion may gradually acquire strategic dimensions. Ports built for trade can host naval vessels; scientific research stations may

double as surveillance platforms. In geopolitics, the boundary between civilian and military infrastructure is rarely fixed.

Despite these concerns, many scholars argue that the Arctic may ultimately resist the pattern of confrontation that has characterised other regions. The extreme environment, high operational costs, and shared ecological risks create powerful incentives for cooperation. Oil spills, shipping accidents, or ecological disasters in the fragile Arctic ecosystem would affect all coastal states irrespective of political alignment.

Thus the Arctic presents a paradox. It is simultaneously a zone of emerging competition and enduring cooperation. Whether it evolves into a stage for strategic rivalry or remains a model of pragmatic governance will depend less on geography than on the political choices of the states that seek to shape its future.

1. The central argument of the passage is that the Arctic?

a. will inevitably become a military conflict zone

b. remains largely irrelevant to international trade

c. has already replaced the Indo-Pacific as the centre of global politics

d. is experiencing growing strategic interest but may still sustain cooperation

2. The author refers to the Arctic Council primarily to show that?

a. Arctic states have abandoned military competition

b. a cooperative institutional framework already exists in the region

c. Russia dominates Arctic diplomacy

d. the Council regulates global trade routes

3. The phrase “Polar Silk Road” in the passage most nearly implies?

a. a historical trade route revived by Arctic states

b. a diplomatic alliance among Arctic countries

c. China’s attempt to link Arctic routes with broader trade ambitions

d. a scientific collaboration project

4. Which of the following best describes the author’s tone?

a. Alarmist and pessimistic

b. Analytical and cautiously balanced

c. Satirical and dismissive

d. Emotional and celebratory

5. Which statement, if true, would most strengthen the author's claim that cooperation may persist in the Arctic?

a. Arctic oil reserves are larger than previously estimated

b. Arctic states sign a binding agreement on environmental emergency response

c. China increases its naval presence in Arctic waters

d. Russia withdraws from the Arctic Council

Passage 2 (P.2)

Modern globalisation has produced supply chains of extraordinary complexity. A single smartphone, for example, may contain rare minerals extracted in Africa, microchips manufactured in East Asia, design specifications developed in California, and final assembly undertaken in Southeast Asia. For decades this intricate network was celebrated as a triumph of efficiency, allowing firms to minimise costs while maximising production. However, recent crises have exposed the vulnerability embedded within this very efficiency.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted manufacturing hubs across continents, while geopolitical tensions between major powers have prompted governments to reconsider their dependence on foreign suppliers. Suddenly, the virtues of global integration began to appear as potential strategic liabilities. Governments have responded by advocating "supply chain resilience," a concept that emphasises diversification, redundancy, and domestic capacity. Policies promoting semiconductor manufacturing in the United States and Europe illustrate this shift.

Similarly, several countries have begun encouraging companies to relocate critical manufacturing closer to home through subsidies and tax incentives. Yet the attempt to redesign supply chains raises complex economic dilemmas. Efficiency and resilience often move in opposite directions. Building multiple supply nodes increases security but also raises production costs. Companies accustomed to lean operations may resist restructuring unless governments bear part of the financial burden.

Moreover, supply chains are not purely economic constructs; they also reflect geopolitical relationships. Trade partnerships often mirror diplomatic alliances. As strategic competition intensifies, economic networks may gradually reorganise around blocs rather than global integration. This process, sometimes described as "friend-shoring," involves relocating production to politically aligned countries rather than strictly the most efficient ones. The long-term implications of this transformation remain uncertain.

A fragmented trading system could reduce global economic growth and increase costs for consumers. At the same time, greater resilience might prevent catastrophic disruptions during crises. The challenge for policymakers lies in balancing these competing priorities without undermining the benefits that global trade has historically delivered. In this sense, the debate over supply chains is not merely technical or economic. It reflects a deeper question about the future of globalisation itself: whether the world will remain economically interconnected or gradually divide into competing economic spheres.

6. The author suggests that global supply chains were initially praised because they?

a. maximised efficiency and reduced production costs

b. eliminated international trade barriers

c. guaranteed economic independence

d. simplified manufacturing processes

7. The concept of “friend-shoring” refers to?

a. reducing trade with neighbouring countries

b. shifting production to politically allied states

c. establishing free trade agreements with rivals

d. restricting foreign investment

8. Which of the following best captures the dilemma described in the passage?

a. Governments cannot regulate multinational corporations

b. Trade agreements prevent supply chain reforms

c. Economic efficiency may conflict with strategic security

d. Globalisation has already collapsed

9. The passage implies that government incentives for domestic production may?

a. reduce costs for companies

b. make global trade unnecessary

c. eliminate dependence on foreign trade entirely

d. compensate firms for the expense of restructuring supply chains

10. Which of the following would the author most likely agree with?

a. Globalisation will soon disappear entirely

b. Supply chain restructuring involves both economic and geopolitical considerations

c. Only corporations should decide supply chain structures

d. Governments should completely abandon global trade

Passage 3 (P.3)

Rare earth minerals occupy an unusual position in modern geopolitics. Though relatively obscure to the general public, they form the technological backbone of contemporary industries ranging from renewable energy systems to advanced military equipment. Components in wind turbines, electric vehicles, smartphones, and missile guidance systems all depend on these specialised materials. Despite their name, rare earth elements are not necessarily scarce in geological terms. Their rarity lies primarily in the difficulty and environmental cost associated with extracting and refining them. Mining operations often produce significant chemical waste, making production both technically complex and politically contentious.

For several decades, one country – China – has dominated the global supply chain for rare earth processing. Through early investment, strategic industrial policy, and relatively lax environmental regulation in earlier decades, China secured a commanding position in refining capacity. As a result, many countries now depend heavily on Chinese processing facilities even when the raw minerals originate elsewhere. This concentration of supply has raised concerns about strategic vulnerability. Policymakers in the United States, Japan, and Europe worry that geopolitical tensions could disrupt access to these essential materials. Consequently, several governments have begun investing in alternative mining projects, recycling technologies, and domestic refining capacity. However, reducing dependence is easier said than done.

Establishing new supply chains requires enormous capital investment, regulatory approval, and years of technical development. Moreover, rare earth extraction often faces resistance from local communities due to environmental risks. Ironically, countries seeking independence from foreign supply chains must confront environmental trade-offs within their own borders.

The debate therefore extends beyond economics or security. It raises broader questions about sustainability, technological progress, and geopolitical power. As the global transition toward clean energy accelerates, demand for rare earth minerals is likely to increase dramatically Whether this demand leads to diversified supply chains or deepens existing dependencies remains uncertain. What is clear, however, is that control over these obscure minerals may quietly shape the strategic balance of the twenty-first century.

11. The author describes rare earth minerals as “unusual” primarily because?

a. they are rarely used in technology

b. they are geologically scarce everywhere

c. they are strategically crucial despite limited public awareness

d. they are inexpensive to produce

12. According to the passage, China’s dominance in rare earth processing is largely due to?

a. exclusive mineral reserves

b. historical investment and industrial policy

c. international trade restrictions

d. lack of foreign competition in mining

13. The passage suggests that efforts to diversify supply chains may face opposition because?

a. rare earth minerals are unnecessary for technology

b. environmental concerns may hinder new mining projects

c. global demand is declining

d. governments lack interest in the issue

14. Which inference can be drawn from the passage?

a. Rare earth minerals will soon become obsolete

b. Environmental considerations complicate geopolitical strategies

c. China will permanently control global technology

d. Rare earth mining has no economic significance

15. The author’s overall perspective can best be described as?

a. narrowly economic

b. environmentally indifferent

c. geopolitically analytical

d. strongly critical of technology

Answers

1. D – The passage says the Arctic is becoming strategically important but still has strong reasons for cooperation, so the situation is mixed, not purely conflict-based.

2. B – The Arctic Council is mentioned to show that there is already a system where countries cooperate, especially on environment and research.
3. C – “Polar Silk Road” suggests China wants to connect Arctic routes to its larger global trade plans, similar to its other trade corridor projects.
4. B – The author neither panics nor celebrates; they discuss both risks and cooperation calmly, which makes the tone analytical and balanced.
5. B – If countries sign an agreement to handle environmental disasters together, it shows shared interests, which supports the idea that cooperation can continue.
6. A – Global supply chains were praised because they reduced costs and made production efficient by spreading work across different countries.
7. B – Friend-shoring means shifting production to countries that are politically friendly, even if they are not the cheapest option.
8. C – The passage keeps saying efficiency and security clash, meaning what is good economically may not be safe strategically.
9. D – Governments give subsidies because restructuring supply chains is expensive, so incentives help companies bear the extra cost.
10. B – The author repeatedly shows that supply chains depend on both economics and geopolitics, not just business decisions.
11. C – Rare earth minerals are called unusual because people don’t talk about them much, yet they are very important for modern technology and defence.
12. B – China dominates not because it has all the minerals, but because it invested early and built strong processing capacity.
13. B – New mining projects often face resistance due to pollution and environmental damage, which makes diversification difficult.
14. B – The passage shows that countries want independence, but environmental concerns make that harder, linking ecology with geopolitics.
15. C – The author looks at the issue mainly from a strategic and global power perspective, so the approach is geopolitically analytical.