Arms Control: India's Objection to the Regional Framework

News context: 2 November 2026 | Published: 4 November 2026

Mains: GS-II: international institutions, India's foreign policy and global security; GS-III: security challenges

Prelims: the UN General Assembly's First Committee, conventional weapons, the Disarmament Commission



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Why in the News

On 2 November 2026, the **First Committee** of the UN General Assembly approved a draft resolution on the control of conventional arms at the regional and subregional levels. It received **180** votes in favour and **2** against; no one abstained. The countries voting against were **India and Israel**. The draft's document number is **A/C.1/81/L.6**.

This news is not important only because India was in a small minority. The real question is: can a country's defence needs be understood only from the military balance of its own region, or must the global spread of security relationships also be considered? India's objection was centred on this second aspect.

An important distinction: in the UN's official meeting record, this is the stage of the **First Committee approving a draft and sending it to the General Assembly**. Do not

take it as final adoption by the General Assembly in plenary, or as a new arms-control treaty that has come into force at once.

What Are Conventional Weapons?

Conventional weapons are weapons that are distinct from the category of weapons of mass destruction. They can include tanks, armoured vehicles, artillery, combat aircraft, warships, many types of missiles, small arms and ammunition. Here 'conventional' does not mean old or technologically backward weapons; modern weapons can also fall in this category.

According to the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, possessing and using these weapons in accordance with international law is not in itself prohibited under the UN Charter. Even so, their uncontrolled spread, their reach to non-state groups and their impact on civilians create serious security and humanitarian risks. Separate legal restrictions also apply to certain weapons and their use.

Concept	Simple meaning
Arms control	Agreed rules and limits on the number, deployment, transfer or use of weapons
Disarmament	The effort to reduce weapons or to eliminate a category of weapons
Confidence-building measures	Reducing the risk of miscalculation and unwanted conflict through sharing information, dialogue and transparency
Subregional arrangement	Security cooperation among a few neighbouring countries within a larger geographical region

Which Direction Is the Draft Taking?

According to the UN's meeting record, the draft calls for immediate consideration of conventional arms control issues at the regional and subregional levels. It requests the **UN Disarmament Commission** to consider framing principles that could become the basis of regional arms-control agreements.

The argument for the regional approach is that to reduce arms races, distrust and border-related tensions between neighbouring countries, building agreement within that region can be useful. Achieving security with fewer military resources is the goal of this thinking. But drawing a region's boundaries and comparing defence capabilities does not become simple on its own.

That is why a **draft resolution, discussion on principles and a binding agreement** are three different stages. Support for or opposition to a draft can also be about its specific language and proposed process, not only its broad purpose.

Why India's Objection?

According to the available details of India's explanation of vote, First Secretary **Anmol Sher Bedi** described conventional arms control as a global issue. India did not agree with the reasoning of taking it forward mainly in a regional and subregional framework.

- **Security beyond borders:** a country's security concerns are not limited to its geographical neighbourhood. So the idea of balancing defence capabilities only within a region may not be sufficient.
- **Discussion already held:** India asked how the need to frame principles afresh on the same subject was being decided after the Disarmament Commission's earlier consensus-based conclusions. Older UN records confirm the Commission's previous work on conventional arms control and confidence-building.
- **Objection to specific language:** India's vote was on a particular draft. It would be wrong to call it opposition to every kind of arms control or disarmament.

An earlier official statement by India also clarifies this distinction. In October 2023, India had reiterated its commitment to disarmament and control measures related to conventional weapons, and had stressed a balance between legitimate defence needs and humanitarian concerns. That older statement is not this news story's direct explanation-of-vote document, but a background source on India's broader policy.

The Role of the First Committee

The General Assembly's First Committee works on subjects related to **disarmament and international security**. It considers the relevant drafts, votes on them and sends them to the General Assembly for further action. It is not the Security Council, and its voting does not come under the Security Council's veto system.

The **Disarmament Commission** and the **Conference on Disarmament** are also not the same body. The First Committee works with these bodies in the wider disarmament machinery. In the exam, it is essential to distinguish the Committee, the Commission, the Conference and the General Assembly's plenary.

Regional Initiatives and Global Security

The benefit of regional initiatives: dialogue on shared problems, rules suited to local conditions, prevention of accidental military clashes and transparency measures can be developed. So rejecting regional cooperation altogether would not be a useful conclusion either.

Its limit: security alliances, an external military presence, the supply of technology and capabilities that exert influence at long range can also affect a region's balance from outside. A limit considered sufficient for one country can feel unsafe to another. Even when the number of weapons is equal, their technology, deployment and military use can differ.

The policy test: any arrangement will last only if it recognises the legitimate security needs of the participating countries, keeps reciprocity and makes compliance verifiable. Rather than treating human security and national defence as opposing choices, a trustworthy balance between them will have to be found.

To understand India's multilateral security thinking in a wider context, read: **Quad Foreign Ministers' Delhi Meeting: From Hormuz to the South China Sea**

Way Forward

Building a majority in arms control matters, but real success lies in making rules that can be implemented and building trust between countries. Regional dialogue can be useful if it is not seen as cut off from global security relationships. For India, the balanced path will be to keep practical options alongside its objections, cooperate in stopping illegal arms transfers and continue constructive participation in transparency measures.

Mains Practice Question

Examine the usefulness and limits of the regional approach to conventional arms control. In this context, discuss India's concerns relating to global security. (250 words, 15 marks)

Answer Outline

Introduction: explain the meaning of conventional arms control and establish the relationship between regional dialogue and the wider security system.

Main Body: write the benefits of regional confidence-building, transparency and preventing arms races. Explain the challenge of external powers, technology, alliances and unequal defence capabilities. Present India's vote as an objection to the language of a specific draft, not as complete opposition to disarmament. Make the difference between committee approval and a final agreement clear.

Conclusion: make legitimate defence needs, human security, reciprocity and credible verification of compliance the combined basis.

Prelims Practice Questions

Question 1. With reference to the First Committee of the UN General Assembly, consider the following statements:

Statement 1: Its work relates to the subjects of disarmament and international security.

Statement 2: Its approval of a draft by itself creates a new binding arms-control treaty.

Statement 3: It sends drafts to the General Assembly for further action.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only

(b) 1 and 3 only

(c) 2 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

▼ Answer and Explanation

Answer: (b) The First Committee works on disarmament and international security and sends drafts to the General Assembly. Approval of a draft in the committee cannot be taken as the creation of a binding treaty by itself.

Question 2. With reference to conventional weapons, which of the following statements is correct?

(a) Only old-technology weapons come in this category

(b) All modern missiles are by themselves weapons of mass destruction

(c) Tanks, warships and combat aircraft can also be included in this category

(d) No humanitarian or legal restriction can apply to conventional weapons

▼ Answer and Explanation

Answer: (c) Conventional weapons are a category distinct from weapons of mass destruction. Modern tanks, warships and combat aircraft can fall within it. Specific international legal restrictions apply to certain weapons and their use.

Sources

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7. United Nations: reference to the 2017 conventional-arms confidence-building measures