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Q6(a)

Critically analyze the different phases of India's foreign policy since independence. How justified, do you think, is S. Jaishankar's classification of the current phase as the phase of 'energetic diplomacy'? 15+5=

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · PSIR GS 2 · 20 marks · India's Contribution to the Non-Alignment Movement

India's Contribution to the Non-Alignment Movement: Different phases; current role.

Core demand of the question

- Periodise Indian foreign policy since 1947 (Nehruvian, Indira/realist, 1991 opening, nuclear 1998, U.S. deal, Modi years)
- **Then, for 5 marks:** evaluate Jaishankar's 'energetic diplomacy' as a label for the current phase
- **Be critical:** energy is real; structure and neighbourhood delivery still bind

Revision summary

- **Phases:** Nehruvian NAM, post-1962/1971 realism, 1991 economic opening, 1998 nuclear break, U.S. civil nuclear bargain, then Modi-era multi-alignment.

The core across phases is strategic autonomy, not a simple **Nehru**-to-neoliberal conversion.

- **Jaishankar's energetic diplomacy fairly describes tempo:** G20, minilaterals, argumentative Global South voice.
- **It is weaker as a claim of structural success:** LAC, Bangladesh and industrial depth still bind.

Treat 'energetic' as method, not as a new telos.

Introduction

Indian foreign policy since independence is best read as **phases of autonomy**, not as a conversion from innocence to cunning. Each phase kept a core - strategic space for a poor, then rising, civilisational state - and changed the **mix** of moral language, force, and markets. **S. Jaishankar's** claim that the present phase is **energetic diplomacy** is a 5-mark rider on that history, not a replacement for it.

Body**Phases since 1947**

Nehruvian years combined NAM, Panchsheel, Commonwealth membership and UN activism with a weak hard-power base. 1962 was the crash. **Shastri and Indira Gandhi** moved toward a harder realism: 1965, the 1971 treaty with the Soviet Union, the Bangladesh war, and the 1974 PNE. The 1980s mixed regional assertion (Sri Lanka, Maldives) with a still-closed economy.

1991 is the true hinge: Look East, a search for capital and technology, and the slow death of autoarkic diplomacy. 1998 Pokhran-II ended the multilateral-default nuclear path (Q8(a)) and forced a new bargain with the United States. The **2005-08 civil nuclear** path under Singh, and economic globalisation, made Washington a partner without a treaty. **Neighbourhood First, Act East**, and the Quad's revival after 2017 mark the Modi years: more public alignment with FOIP, more religious-civilisational language, and a still-careful Russia account.

Energetic diplomacy (the +5)

- **Jaishankar, in The India Way and in office, means** tempo and theatre: G20 presidency, Voice of Global South, IMEC, I2U2, a flood of 2+2s, vaccine and diaspora diplomacy, and an argumentative refusal of lectures on Ukraine and Kashmir. Energy is measurable in miles flown and in coalitions assembled. It is **justified as a label for style and for coalition-craft** in a fluid 2020s.

It is **less justified as a miracle phase**. The LAC after Galwan is not a diplomatic triumph. Bangladesh 2024 showed neighbourhood leakage. Energy does not erase dependency on Russian platforms or on imported energy. Hyper-activity can be a substitute for manufacturing depth. Compared with **Nehru's** doctrinal clarity or 1991's structural break, 'energetic' describes **method** more than a new end. The end remains autonomy in a multipolar Asia. The method is busier, more minilateral, and more unapologetic. That, fairly, is a phase. It is not the end of history.

Flow diagram

Nehru NAM -> Indira 1971
 Indira 1971 -> 1991 Look East
 1991 Look East -> 1998 nuclear
 1998 nuclear -> US nuclear deal
 US nuclear deal -> Energetic multi-alignment

Conclusion

India moved from NAM moralism through Indira's Soviet-leaning realism and the 1991-98 market-and-nuclear turn to a multi-aligned present. Jaishankar's energetic diplomacy names the tempo of that present with justice. It should not be mistaken for unbounded power.

Facts & figures

1971

Indo-Soviet Treaty and the Bangladesh war - the high point of a realist, Soviet-leaning phase.

1991 / Look East

Balance-of-payments crisis opened the economy and the eastern diplomatic arc.

The India Way

Jaishankar's book-and-practice brand: issue-based coalitions, unapologetic interest, high diplomatic tempo.

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