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Q7(a)

India continues to invoke its time-tested policy of strategic autonomy vis-à-vis both the United States of America and Russia by rejecting US' offer of mediation on Kashmir issue and by refusing to criticize Russia in its ongoing war against Ukraine.

Comment

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · PSIR GS 2 · 20 marks · Indian Foreign Policy

Indian Foreign Policy: Determinants of foreign policy; institutions of policy-making; continuity and change.

Core demand of the question

- Define strategic autonomy in Indian practice (not isolation, not alliance)
- Explain refusal of U.S. mediation on Kashmir
- Explain refusal to join Western condemnation of Russia over Ukraine (oil, platforms, history)
- **Comment:** both are autonomy; they are not moral symmetry

Revision summary

Strategic autonomy means India will not outsource core security choices to a patron.

Kashmir is treated as bilateral; U.S. mediation offers are refused, especially after terror shocks such as Pahalgam.

On Ukraine, India avoids Western condemnation blocs while buying oil and keeping Russian platforms, without endorsing conquest.

The two refusals share a doctrine but not the same moral file.

- **This is NonAlignment 2.0 practice:** partners, not instructors.

Introduction

Strategic autonomy is India's long habit of refusing to outsource core security choices. It is not isolation. It is not a treaty alliance. In the 2020s it is tested on two loud files: **U.S. offers to mediate on Kashmir**, and **Western pressure to denounce Russia** over Ukraine. Delhi's double refusal is the question's fact. The comment is that this is autonomy as **issue-based stubbornness**, not a claim that the two wars are the same.

Body**Kashmir and mediation**

India holds that Jammu and Kashmir is a **bilateral** matter with Pakistan, framed by **Simla (1972)** and **Lahore (1999)**, not a trusteeship of Washington. After **Pahalgam 2025**, any U.S. presidential offer of good offices would look, in Indian politics, like a reward to terror's sponsors. Autonomy here is **domestic legitimacy plus legal position**. The United States is a Quad partner; it is not a Kashmir referee. Accepting mediation would reopen internationalisation that Delhi has spent decades closing. Hyper-realist signalling and

autonomy meet on this point.

Russia and Ukraine

India abstained in several UN votes, raised **dialogue and diplomacy**, increased **discounted oil**, and kept defence-spares logic alive because the Indian arsenal is still partly Russian. History - 1971, the Cold War veto - still counts in the bureaucracy. Autonomy here is **material**: you cannot condemn your mechanic in the middle of a two-front problem with China. It is also **diplomatic**: a Global South that remembers Iraq and Libya will not be lectured into a NATO morality play. This is not approval of the invasion. Jaishankar has said territory should not be changed by force. It is a refusal to let Brussels or Washington write India's communiqué.

Comment

The two refusals sit in one doctrine and **differ in ethics**. Kashmir mediation is a sovereignty red line about India's own territory and a terror context. Ukraine is someone else's war in which India is a customer and a fence-sitter with a China problem. Treating them as identical 'plague on both houses' would be cynical. Treating autonomy as a blank cheque for any great-power violence would be worse. The mature line: India will take U.S. technology and Russian hydrocarbons, and will not take instruction on either file. That is energetic, sometimes cold, strategic autonomy. It is consistent with NonAlignment 2.0 more than with NAM theatre.

Flow diagram

Strategic autonomy -> No US Kashmir mediation
Strategic autonomy -> No Russia-condemnation camp
No US Kashmir mediation -> Bilateral Simla
No Russia-condemnation camp -> Oil platforms China problem

Conclusion

Rejecting U.S. Kashmir mediation and refusing to join a Russia-condemnation bloc are one autonomy, two tests. The first is a territorial red line. The second is a material and Global South hedge. Neither makes India a U.S. ally or a Russian client.

Facts & figures

Simla 1972

Bilateral frame for India-Pakistan issues; the legal-political basis for rejecting third-party Kashmir mediation.

UN abstentions

India's repeated UNGA/UNSC abstention pattern on Ukraine resolutions, paired with verbal support for diplomacy and territorial integrity in the abstract.

Russian inventory

A large share of Indian military hardware and spares still traces to Russian design, which binds the Ukraine communiqué.

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