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Russia-Ukraine War: India's Viewpoint

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The Russia-Ukraine War has acquired its own momentum over the last eight months. Russia and Ukraine both entered into the risky zone crossing all the lines. Both Russia and Ukraine are talking about the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), knowing very well the disastrous consequences of WMD use in any form. Both sides are sharing mis-information to avoid global criticism. Given India's longstanding and important defence relationship with Russia and cordial relationship with Ukraine, the Russia-Ukraine war has put India into a difficult position. India is deeply concerned over the turn of events in Ukraine and believes all states should respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other states. There are enough indicators that this crisis has deepened India's strategic challenges and the perspective from India is that this war will not benefit the interests of any society.

Contrary to the narrative in the west that India stands with Russia in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, while abstaining on the resolutions, India also criticized Russia's actions in Ukraine, condemned killings in Bucha and called for an independent investigation. India is not supportive of Russia's atrocities and also it is unlikely to join the United States and Europe's campaign to politically and economically isolate Russia. India adopted a position in line with its own national interest.

On whose side India is?

India is on the side of peace and on the side that respects the UN charter and its founding principles. India wants to investigate all the atrocities and abuses committed in Ukraine. Dr. Jaishankar, India's external affairs minister stated at the UN, "India feels if egregious attacks committed in broad daylight are left unpunished, then UNSC must reflect on the signals they are sending on impunity," and "India believes and advocates there can be no justification for violation of human rights." India is on the side that calls for "dialogue" and "diplomacy". India's Prime Minister Modi thanked both Russia and Ukraine for their help in evacuating nearly 20,000 Indian students under "Operation Ganga" from the war zone since February-March 2022. However, the Indian Prime Minister during the SCO summit in Uzbekistan, held on 15th & 16th September, stated to Russian President that "today's era is not an era of war". Mr. Modi emphasized the need for diplomatic balancing vis-à-vis the west and called for "immediate cessation of violence and hostilities". India's Prime Minister mentioned, "no solution can ever be arrived at the cost of human lives" and called for starting talks on the "path of peace" and work towards "ending the conflict".

The India-Russia bilateral relationship has been marked by close understanding and convergence of views on major issues and concerns. Russia occupies a special place in India's foreign policy.

Both are strategic partners and this partnership is based on many years of fruitful cooperation tested by time and events of historic dimensions. Russia is a major defence partner of India. This multifaceted relationship has created an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding between the two countries. India has so far refrained from criticising Russia, despite pressure from the West. India strongly feels that dialogue should open up for resolving this conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Russia has been a key supplier of weapons and energy to India. India's military assets even today are mostly of Russian origin requiring Russia's continuous maintenance and spare parts delivery. India recently purchased the S-400 missile system from Russia, however, due to recent sanctions on Russia under the US CAATSA (Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act), it is expected that this may jeopardize India's prospects of obtaining a waiver in this deal. Facing an increasingly aggressive China on its borders, India values its relationship with Russia. In India, opinion on Russia-Ukraine conflict is neither "pro-Russia" nor "pro-west", but "pro-India" and India's strategic community is concerned seeing this continuous worsening situation and calls for immediate termination of violence and end to aggression.

India's security concerns

This prolonged war is making everyone vulnerable, triggering an unprecedented energy crisis and acute food shortages. India is facing economic and energy security concerns like many other countries around the world. India is the third largest energy consumer in the world and the Russia-Ukraine conflict has impacted its energy security. This crisis has dealt a blow to globalisation, the supply chains have been disrupted. Shortages of food grains, fertilizer shortages, trade disruptions due to sanctions affected India's economy. Energy has become a full-fledged weapon of war which is as effective as missiles and bombs in the Ukraine-Russia crisis. Today, hydrocarbons have become an important tool of geopolitics. The countries which depend on energy imports have become victims of energy geopolitics. India imports almost 80 per cent of its oil and 45 per cent of its natural gas for domestic consumption. The long-term and sustainable option for an energy hungry country like India is to make a transition towards renewable energy. One such area is liquid hydrogen due to the scale and size of India's market and suitable climatic conditions. India has the potential to emerge as the cheapest producer of green hydrogen and is working towards this end, but the process will take time to satisfy its domestic demands.

Maintaining strategic stability is important for India, as India will preside over the UNSC in December. In 2023, India will lead the



Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and will also chair the Group of 20. India's leadership role in negotiation could be important at this juncture for both Russia and Ukraine.

The present crisis has made it amply clear that to win a major war, a nation should be self-dependent to fulfil military needs of its armed forces. India's overwhelming dependence on Russia for military hardware does not augur well for its national security. It is expected that Russia's economy would be badly hit by western sanctions, while its military industrial complexes would be busy in fulfilling the needs of its own military first, in a way, this might delay arms supplies to India. If this situation arises then it would be against India's interests and if present crisis stretches for a longer period, then this might create severe concern for India's defence supply. While diversifying its sources of arms imports, India should be careful not to create other dependencies for e.g. with US, France or Israel. Therefore, it is important to give a push to its "Make-in-India," campaign in the defence sector. At the same time, India should also assess the performance of Russian arms and weapon systems in the Ukraine conflict and can decide whether it was poor strategy or poor performance of weapons that denied Russia a swift victory over Ukraine.

India's military modernisation has to be based on the latest technologies that are suited to national context and conditions. Technology is a great leveller and acts as an equaliser in situations where the military gap is significant between two adversaries. A 'Tech Great Game,' seeking technological superiority is unfolding and will play an important part for geopolitical domination. Efficient information warfare has allowed Ukraine to have an upper hand in the battle of hearts and minds against Russia. This has allowed Ukraine to take advantage in boosting the morale of its own citizens, facilitating military support from other countries and in receiving support from people who sympathise with Ukraine.

The Armed forces of Ukraine did not have a drone unit until recently, but with assistance from Western countries, they have been able to use drones in the fight against Russia. India's armed forces have taken note of this development. Indian policy makers are also studying and analysing how Ukraine managed against Russia's superior information and hybrid warfare capabilities. India's prominent media outlets were resonating pro-Russia narrative, also many regional media outlets were expressing their anger over NATO and the west for this war. However, there are certain liberal media voices, who condemn the atrocities and inhuman violence against innocent civilians that is continuing due to war. Though the Indian population in general has anti-west feelings and is of the opinion that Russia was pushed to go for war due to provocations by NATO and the western nations. However, the debate on how long India will maintain its "neutral" status is posing serious concern. Recent price hikes due to inflation is creating domestic problems and taking account of the escalating human costs of the war this "neutral" position could be altered in the coming months due to national interest considerations.

New Delhi feels there is an urgent need to enhance strategic communication and international cooperation. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has shifted attention from the Indo-Pacific which does not bode well for India's security concerns. New Delhi has been strengthening its strategic partnerships with countries like US, Japan and Australia in the Indo-Pacific to balance China. India is the only country in the QUAD which has not condemned Russia in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. However, India is not comfortable with the new cold war scenario either. India is already feeling pressure to distance itself from Russia. Recently, US supported India's neighbour and opponent Pakistan with \$450 million aid and providing the F-16 for countering terrorism activities emanating from Pakistan. At the same time, the US ambassador to Pakistan, Donald Blome, referred to the POK (Pakistan Occupied Kashmir) as Azad Jammu and Kashmir, while visiting the region. Also, since January 2021, there has been no diplomat appointed as US Ambassador to India and this gap has been the longest ever. Other NATO nations are also pressuring India to move away from Russia in various ways such as increasing visa delays for students and workers in NATO nations. Recently, Germany consolidated its bilateral relationship with Pakistan providing 10 billion aid to Pakistan and finalizing many infrastructure projects with Pakistan. Nonetheless, India believes its strategic partnership with middle-powers like France, Japan and Australia would play an important part in safeguarding its interests in future. Russia-China proximity is a reality that India has to face. At the same time, the reduction in tensions between the US and Russia is important for India. Russia-China proximity is a reality that India has to face.

Is this conflict a struggle between authoritarianism and democracy?

Many used the 'democracy versus authoritarianism' discourse in the Russia-Ukraine war, but it is not the case. The basic dissonance between Russia and Ukraine, the two prominent states of erstwhile Soviet Union, arose from Ukraine's assertion of its autonomy and preference for gradual integration with the Euro-Atlantic community. Russia wanted to keep Ukraine within its own sphere of influence. Major areas of discord between Russia-Ukraine are tensions over the (i) Black Sea Fleet, (ii) Crimean Peninsula, (iii) borders (iv) ethnic issues, (v) Ukrainian affiliations with euro-Atlantic community, (vi) oil and gas supply. It is also a conflict between NATO's (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) eastward expansion vs maintaining Russia's hegemony in its immediate neighborhood. Ukraine considers itself as the meeting point of eastern and western civilisations and has been trying to return to Europe through integration with the west. However, Russia always considers Ukraine's inclination to join NATO as a major security concern for Russia. Ukraine has great security, political as well as, economic significance for Russia. Ukraine on its part feels an existential need to assert its identity as distinctly different from Russia and that is important for its nation building.



Way Ahead

- Russia-Ukraine crisis has galvanised the Trans-Atlantic security alliance and could pave the way for Russia's long-term isolation from the west.
- India will exercise careful diplomacy to deal with the current flux in great power relations, so as to carefully handle the security challenges for safeguarding its national interest .
- India is working towards stabilizing the situation in Ukraine and ending armed hostilities and striving for diplomatic resolution of the conflict.
- India is concerned about its citizens living in Ukraine and issued an advisory for them to return to India before the war escalates further.
- India is working to facilitate communication and play a non-partisan, honest broker between the two sides.
- The referendum and nuclear threats have pushed the war into the next phase and India is preparing to shoulder greater responsibilities in restoring peace and promoting dialogue between Russia and Ukraine.
- As per India, diplomacy and talks are the logical options and immediate ceasefire is needed for an early resumption of peace and resolution of this conflict

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