



The Right Approach for India

This editorial is based on [“Time for India to Redefine its Relationship with Russia”](#) which was published in The Hindu on 26/03/2022. It talks about consequences of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict and the right approach for India in this regard.

For Prelims: Russia Ukraine conflict, Cold War, NATO, UNSC, UNGA, UNHRC, Indo-Pacific region.

For Mains: Ukraine-Russia Conflict and India’s Interests in Ukraine and Russia, Implications of Conflict on India.

[Russia’s actions on Ukraine](#) have decisively shaped international opinion and the Indian foreign policy is going to be affected in a profound manner. The most important question facing Indian diplomacy is how to navigate India’s great power relations in the future.

The Russia-Ukraine war, as of now, has resulted in no ceasefire but a number of sanctions being imposed on Russia whose impacts will be visible not only for Russia but for the West as well.

In the world where China is already looking forward to challenging the United States and expanding its influence, if the China-Russia relationship strengthens further, **India may be forced to recalibrate its relationship with Russia and side up further to Quad.**

How the Conflict has Brought Changes in the Global Order?

- Russia’s attack on Ukraine has **put India in a foreign policy conundrum** that will not disappear soon because Russia’s action has changed the global order.
 - The Western world has imposed **unprecedented sanctions against Russia and banned energy imports** which will cause **collateral damage for both the Russian and western economies** leading to high inflation.
- The conflict and the consequent sanctions have raised **concerns over the impact on global finance, energy supplies, and transportation.**
 - Many European countries depend upon Russia for their energy needs to a large extent. If the conflict and sanctions continue, **energy supplies to Europe at peak wintertime may be blocked by Russia** as had happened earlier in 2006-07 and 2009.
 - There are also apprehensions if these sanctions are going to **constrain India’s ability to import Russian oil**, which hasn’t been the case as of now.
- **Russia closed its airspace to 36 countries.** Also, many shipping planes will now need to take a different route, **adding to fuel costs.**
 - Russia and Ukraine both are **large exporters of wheat, corn, and minerals** such as nickel, palladium, and aluminium, which are essential for manufacturing industries, including mobiles and automobiles.

- A fall in the supply of these items from Russia and Ukraine will lead to **further price pressure**.

What has been India's Stand on Russia - Ukraine Conflict?

- Initially, India **abstained on a US-sponsored [United Nations Security Council \(UNSC\)](#)** resolution that deplores in the strongest terms Russia's aggression against Ukraine.
- India **again abstained from voting at the UNSC** on the **Russia drafted resolution** on the Humanitarian situation in Ukraine which demanded that calling for a negotiated ceasefire for enabling safe, rapid, voluntary and unhindered evacuation of civilians.
 - Unlike during the past abstentions relating to Ukraine, it was the first time that India **sided with the West** in this conflict **(even if by an abstention)**.
- India **[abstained on a vote at the UN Human Rights Council](#)** in Geneva. The Council moved the resolution to set up an international commission of enquiry into **Russia's actions in Ukraine**.
- India, China and 33 other nations recently **abstained from a [United Nations General Assembly resolution](#)** that censured Russia for its military actions in Ukraine.
 - Other abstaining nations include Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, besides Central Asian and some African countries.
- India also **abstained from the [International Atomic Energy Agency \(IAEA\)](#)** resolution that was related to safety at four nuclear power stations and a number of nuclear waste sites including **[Chernobyl](#)**, as the Russians seized control of them.

What is the Strategic Challenge for India?

- Amid a series of sanctions imposed on Russia, its isolation from the West, collapse of the Ruble and the dire state of the Russian economy, what must worry India is the fact that **Russia will now become increasingly dependent on Chinese support to defend its policies**.
 - Russia has sought Chinese help to bail out the economy, hit by sanctions and cancelled oil purchases.
 - According to the US, it has also sought military hardware from China.
- India's real strategic challenge is surfacing in the **[Indo-Pacific with the rise of China](#)**, as Beijing has consistently sought to expand its zone of military, economic and political influence through the **[Belt and Road Initiative \(BRI\)](#)**.
- Though India would like the U.S. to continue to focus on China, it is **not possible for Washington to ignore Russia's aggression** along **[NATO's](#)** periphery.

Why India needs to Maintain a Balanced Approach?

For India, staying non-aligned represents the least geopolitical risk -

- The cost of joining the West with full gusto risks alienating India's most important military partner, **Russia, which accounts for 62% of India's arms imports** since 2010.
- Staying overtly silent on Russia also risks **jeopardising India's links with the US and [Quad](#)**, which seek a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.

Alliance with Russia

- In the Cold War period, India saw the Soviet Union as a **trustworthy partner against Western hegemony**.
- Following the disintegration of the USSR, India joined Russia and China (and Brazil and South Africa) **against the unipolarity of the U.S.**
- India maintained its partnership with Russia, an important arms supplier.
- In present times, strong India-Russia ties have also **ensured that Delhi has not been entirely left out** of the **[conversation on Afghanistan](#)**, and in **[Central Asia](#)**, while also providing some leverage with the US.

Alliance with the West

- The **US, the EU, and UK are all vital partners**, and India's relations with each of them, and the

Western world in general, go far beyond the sum of their parts.

- Everyone in and around the government must think seriously about India's relations with Russia as it has drifted much closer to China.
 - In the halls of global diplomacy, nations have interests which go beyond friendships.
 - While China holds its grip over Russia, the **U.S. is most likely to emerge as the country that will bolster India's future as a great power.**

India must make it clear to coercing countries that their **"with us or against us" formulations are hardly constructive.**

What is the Need of the Hour for India?

- **Self-Reliance in Arms:** In order to deal with the [Chinese expansionism](#), adventurism on its own borders, and a South Asian region suddenly [vacated by America's military presence in Afghanistan](#), **India needs both the US and Russia** to fend off a Chinese strategic and geo-economic threat in Asia.
 - However, it is important to realise that when there is conflict between the two major powers, they have to fight their battles alone. Hence, **self-reliance is the key.**
 - Only when **India attains true "atmanirbharta" in arms**, it will be able to look the world in the eye.
- **Balanced Approach:** If the **India-Russia partnership is critical on land** in Asia, the [QUAD](#) is imperative when it comes to countering Chinese maritime expansionism in the [Indian Ocean region](#).
 - The imperative to counter China remains a cornerstone of Indian foreign policy, everything-including Delhi's position on Russian action in Ukraine- flows from that.
- **Realising West's Interests in India:** Within India's foreign policy establishment, there is ongoing debate on what India might gain or lose by its neutrality and the consequences of siding with the West.
 - There is also the thinking that the **West cannot afford to cut away from India at this point**, as it **needs India's markets**, and India's heft as a democracy as it seeks partners to contain China.

Drishti Mains Question

Discuss how the Russia-Ukraine conflict has impacted global geopolitics and what India shall do to preserve its interests.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs):

Q. Recently, India signed a deal known as 'Action Plan for Prioritisation and Implementation of Cooperation Areas in the Nuclear Field' with which of the following countries? (2019)

- (a) Japan
- (b) Russia
- (c) The United Kingdom
- (d) The United States of America

Ans: (b)

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