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Unpacking India's "National Interest," After The Ukraine Crisis: Behind The "Russia Tilt"

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Abstract: *Among the foremost democracies and critical allies of the United States, India's response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine has stood out in line with India's national interests. New Delhi has chosen a calculated public neutrality towards Russia despite its displeasure with Moscow's conflict. It has repeatedly voted against Russian aggression in Ukraine in the UN Security Council, General Assembly, and Human Rights Council but has thus far refrained from explicitly naming Russia as the aggressor of the conflict. "Strategic ambivalence" has been used to define India's precarious balance in the Ukraine war. The present paper strives to analyse Indo-Russian relations in the contemporary state of geopolitical flux and abstruse world order.*

Key Words: foremost democracies, calculated public neutrality, displeasure, repeatedly, aggression, General Assembly,

India will struggle to tread the middle ground as Russia - China and US-led blocs consolidate their global coalition" - C. Rajamohan Since the beginning of the Cold War, New Delhi and Moscow have maintained cordial ties. This connection was considerably strengthened by the signing of the 20-year "Peace, friendship, and Cooperation" treaty in 1971, which occurred during the height of the East Pakistan conflict. Russia has remained a crucial ally and the principal supplier of armaments to India notwithstanding the post-Cold War and the ensuing expansion of relations between India and the United States. India has refrained from denouncing Russia's invasion of Ukraine out of a yearning to maintain good relations with Moscow for strategic and geo-political reasons, including Moscow's long-standing support for India's stance on Kashmir and India's reliance on the Russian defence industry. India's relations with Russia have been influenced by four main factors: a shared desire to establish a multipolar world order, a path-dependent arms relationship, and an ongoing residual mistrust of the US policies in significant segments of India's strategic think tank.

The Russia-India relationship would undergo significant alterations as a result of modifications to these four elements brought on by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. India and Ukraine however, have cordial relations and work together in many fields like education, reciprocal legal assistance, and joint ventures in outer space. It is worth noting that In December 1991, the Government of India recognised the Republic of Ukraine as an independent sovereign state and established her embassy in Kiev in 1992 and the Ukrainian mission in New Delhi was inaugurated in February 1993. India has to walk on a tightrope to balance its relationship with two countries involved in a head-on violent conflict involving NATO and pursue its national interest in a global order reflected in geopolitical flux and changing strategic disorder.

INDIA'S RUSSIAN DILEMMA- India's excessive reliance on Russian Weapons- According to the SIPRI report and defence experts, more than 80% of Indian weapon platforms now in use are made in Russia. The main issues with this are: a) India's military purchases may be in jeopardy if Russia decides to upgrade its arsenal because of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis, and b) experts question the actual efficacy of Russian weapons because they haven't performed as expected in the Ukraine war.

Russia's support in the Security Council: Russia's vote in the Security Council will become less trustworthy as it comes closer to China. Despite these worries, Russia would be an important player in India's defence calculus.

Sustainability of India's energy imports from Russia: The infrastructure required for the People's Republic of China to utilise more Russian fossil fuels is being developed. Once completed, this may lead to the diversion of the maximum volume of Russian energy resources towards China especially amid a crisis, compromising India's energy security.

Issues with safeguarding non-alignment: During the Cold War, non-alignment was accomplished because neither the US nor Russia targeted India directly. However, a Cold War 2.0 in the 21st century between the US and China is conceivable. It is more challenging to remain non-aligned because China is viewed by India as a strategic adversary.

A limited Western helping hand to India: In times of crisis India can't expect wholehearted Western support for instance, when soldiers were martyred on the Chinese border a few years ago, the Western nations and India did not work optimally together. The recent visit of Antony Blinken to China just before Prime Minister Modi's state visit to the U.S.A. and White House statement for establishing military-to-military communication with China to reduce friction is a grim reminder to India.



INDIA'S BALANCED APPROACH- There are good grounds for India to be pleased that the West now understands better its position on Ukraine. The Indian response to the problem has been under constant fire from the Western media and think tanks in recent months for being lacking in moral clarity and strategic coherence in the face of Russia's unwarranted aggression.

India neither defended nor condoned Russian aggression: New Delhi has resisted outright condemning Russian aggression against Ukraine for the past year and has urged a truce between the warring parties. At the same time, India refrained from endorsing Russian aggression, stressed the necessity of adhering to the UN Charter, emphasised the inalienability of territorial sovereignty, forbade the use of nuclear weapons, and attempted to raise awareness of the negative economic effects of the conflict on the "Global South."

America demonstrated kindness towards India's position: There was some appreciation of Delhi's perspective, India's historical equity in its relationship with Russia, and the limitations it imposed on India during the Biden administration. Officially Washington never allowed the intensity of the European Ukraine crisis to override America's longer-term need to work with India to stabilise the Indo-Pacific. While this cannot be true of Europe, the continent was nonetheless directly embroiled in the most serious battle to occur since the Second World War. A broken peace has caused real anguish in Europe. India's involvement in nuclear power installations as well as food shipments: Recent reports in US media detail the diplomatic assistance provided by India at a few pivotal times during the more than one-year war, including in resolving disputes throughout the grain shipment agreement with Ukraine and lowering the risks of a conflict aimed at the nuclear power plant in eastern Ukraine at Zaporizhzhia.

Factors Driving India's Status: India's military tensions with China and Delhi's continued reliance on Russian military supplies coincide with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It also happens at a time when Delhi is striving to put up a global alliance to oppose China's flagrant violations of the territorial sovereignty of its neighbours in Asia. New Delhi has currently positioned itself well by advocating for diplomacy to address the Ukraine issue. But if Russia invades Ukraine, pressure on India to change its stance will rise. Any such investigation must ultimately result in an objective evaluation of the geopolitics of Central Europe. New Delhi cannot continue to view this important region solely through the prism of Russia's conflict with the West. It has to accept the fact that its strategic significance is growing. Russian security concerns in Central Europe are valid, but they can only be addressed by political negotiations. Moscow is not allowed to forcibly extend a sphere of influence upon the future allies.

Impact on food, energy security, and economy- Global food costs are skyrocketing as a result of the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the economic sanctions that arose. This has the potential to starve millions of people, particularly in low-income nations. Because of Russia's embargo on Ukraine's Black Sea ports, food prices have risen, according to Ukraine and its Western allies, who have accused Russia of turning food into a weapon. The world food crisis is being attributed by Russia to Western sanctions. No political settlement appears to be on the horizon. To promote the export of cereals and fertilisers from Russia and Ukraine, the United Nations and Turkey have begun negotiations with the Russian government.

Even though the food market has been under pressure for the past two years due to post-pandemic global demand, extreme weather, shrinking food stocks, high energy prices, supply chain bottlenecks, and export restrictions and taxes, the recent convergence of all these factors in response to Russia's invasion is unprecedented and has caused food inflation rates to soar around the world. The Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) Food Price Index, which analyses the international movement of the most widely traded commodities, reached its highest position in March 2022 since records began in 1990 as a result of the suspension of Ukrainian exports. Together, Russia and Ukraine provide more than 25% of the world's wheat supply.

According to the Foreign Agricultural Service of the United States Food and Drug Administration, Russia contributes around 20% of the world's exports of wheat, the most extensively cultivated grain. Ukraine accounts for the remaining 8%. Long-term, Russia's invasion of Ukraine could hasten the world's transition to renewable energy, but it will have immediate negative effects on energy prices and market dynamics. First, nations are developing backup plans in reaction to the oil and gas shortfall. A ban on the import of Russian oil and gas was imposed by the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. By 2024, the EU also hopes to reduce its reliance on Russian gas and oil. Questions regarding national sovereignty, democracy versus autocracy, human rights, and the international system of governance are being raised by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This implies that whatever its outcome, it might signal a turning point for the global security system.

CONCLUSION- It is essential to put an end to the war in Ukraine since the Western economy, particularly, is



experiencing an energy and inflation crisis. India's role as a peace broker in the Ukraine conflict has had little effect. The West and Russia need to see that their hopeless quest for total victory is doing more harm than good. It will be better for the world if the war ends sooner. India does not want Russia to become weaker or for Ukraine to be destroyed and divided as the outcome of the conflict in the country. India wants the conflict to end right away for there to be a new balance of power in terms of security so that the world's economy can be stabilised and priority is shifted to more significant concerns like UN reforms and climate change. Therefore, India should maintain its realistic, pragmatic neutrality and keep standing for a workable resolution to the Ukraine problem. India has so far managed to maintain 'strategic autonomy' in its decision-making while advancing its national interests. However, the Western alliance would put additional pressure on India to support the right side as long as the conflict lasts. In such a scenario, enormous diplomatic efforts to end the standoff must occur and the forthcoming G-20 presidency can serve as a platform in that regard to realise India's Prime Minister word's "This is not an era of war, let's talk peace".

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