



Russia-Ukraine Conflict

This editorial is based on [“Stay the Course”](#) which was published in Indian Express on 26/02/2022. It talks about the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

For Prelims: Russia-Ukraine Conflict, Regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, Black Sea, Cold War, NATO, Minsk Protocols, Warsaw Pact.

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

The [Ukraine crisis](#) has crossed a critical point, with Russia following up its [recognition of rebel regions in eastern Ukraine \(Donbas region\)- Donetsk and Luhansk](#) with a full-fledged invasion to “demilitarise” and “denazify” Ukraine.

This decision by Moscow is a rejection of the inviolability of national borders in Europe as agreed to in the **Helsinki agreement of 1975** and a **major challenge to the global order**.

While on one hand **Russia remains India’s biggest and time-tested supplier** of military hardware, the **US, the EU, and UK are all vital partners** that India cannot afford to antagonise. Considering India’s strategic interests, a **balanced approach** that India has followed till now, is a pragmatic way forward.

What is the Conflict?

- Contestation about [post-Cold War central European territoriality](#) and resurrecting a burnished Russian past is at the **core of the Ukraine crisis**.
- Ukraine and Russia share hundreds of years of cultural, linguistic and familial links.
- For many in Russia and in the ethnically Russian parts of Ukraine, the shared heritage of the countries is an emotional issue that has been **exploited for electoral and military purposes**.
- As part of the Soviet Union, Ukraine was the second-most powerful Soviet republic after Russia, and was crucial strategically, economically and culturally.
 - The **balance of power in the region, Ukraine being a crucial buffer** between Russia and the West, [Ukraine’s bid for NATO membership](#) and **Russian interests in the Black Sea** accompanied by the **protests in the Ukraine** are the **major causes of the ongoing conflict**.

What is the Current Scenario?

- The conflict is now the **largest attack by one state on another in Europe since the [Second World War](#)**, and the first since the Balkan conflict in the 1990s.

- With the invasion of Ukraine, agreements like the **Minsk Protocols of 2014**, and the **Russia-NATO Act of 1997 stand all but voided**.
- The **G7 nations strongly condemned** Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
 - **Sanctions have been imposed** by the U.S., the **European Union (EU)**, the UK, Australia, Canada and Japan.
- **China rejected calling Russia's moves on Ukraine an "invasion"** and urged all sides to exercise restraint.
- **India did not join the Western powers' condemnation** of Russia's intervention in Crimea and kept a low profile on the issue.
 - More recently, **India abstained on a US-sponsored UNSC resolution** that "deplores in the strongest terms" Russia's "aggression" against Ukraine, with New Delhi saying dialogue is the only answer to settling differences and disputes and voicing "regret" that the path of diplomacy was given up.
 - **China too abstained, along with the United Arab Emirates (UAE)**.

What is Russia's Stand?

- NATO's expansion **violated promises made prior to the breakup of the Soviet Union**, that Ukraine's accession to NATO would **cross Russia's red lines**, and that NATO's strategic posture poses a continuing security threat to Russia.
- NATO's expansion as a politico-military alliance, even after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the **Warsaw Pact, was** a U.S.'s initiative intended to temper European ambitions for strategic autonomy and to **counter Russia's resurgence**.
- The Ukraine crisis was justified by the Russian President on the grounds of **security interests and the rights of ethnic Russians** in former Soviet Republics.
- Russia wants an assurance from the West that **Ukraine will never be allowed to join NATO**. Kyiv is currently a "partner country", which implies that it will be allowed to join the military alliance in the future.
 - The US and its western allies are **refusing to bar Ukraine** from NATO, claiming it as a **sovereign country that is free to choose its own security alliances**.

How will India be impacted by this Conflict?

- The Russia-Ukraine crisis will **send cooking gas, petrol and other fuel bills soaring** for Indian households and businesses. **Higher oil prices add to freight/transportation costs**.
- Depending on how long global oil prices remain elevated, the tensions could raise **questions on the RBI's credibility** in making inflation projections and **upset the government's budget calculations**, particularly fiscal deficit.
 - The surge in crude oil prices will lead to an **increase in India's oil import bills**, and gold imports could jump back up, **keeping the rupee under pressure**.
- India's imports of petroleum products from Russia are only a fraction of its total oil import bill and, thus, replaceable.
 - However, getting **alternative sources for fertilisers and sunflower oil** may not be as easy.
- Exports to Russia account for less than 1% of India's total exports, but exports of **pharmaceuticals and tea could face some challenges**, as will shipments to **CIS countries**. Freight rate hikes could make **overall exports less competitive**, too.

What Could Be The Way Forward?

- **Immediate Ceasefire**: Unlike during the Cold War, though, the global economy is now deeply integrated. The **costs of a prolonged conflict are too dire**, foremost in terms of the **loss of life** and suffering that is already underway in Ukraine.
 - The world is **still reeling from the Covid-19 pandemic**, which hurt the poorest countries and people the most, it can ill-afford a conflict-induced slowdown.
 - It is **incumbent on Russia to implement a ceasefire** and, subsequently, for both sides to **return to the negotiating table**. Escalation is not an option.
- **New Security Order for Europe**: Without justifying the manner in which Russia has chosen to

“right” the perceived “wrongs”, the current crisis somehow **results from a broken security architecture in Europe.**

- A **sustainable security order** has to reflect current realities: it cannot be simply an outgrowth of the Cold War order, and it has to be driven from within.
- Also, a European order that does not **accommodate Russia’s concerns through genuine negotiation** cannot be stable in the long term.
- **Reviving Minsk Peace Process:** A practical solution for the situation is to revive the Minsk peace process.
 - Therefore, the West (US and Other western Countries) should push both sides to **resume talks and live up to their commitments as per the Minsk agreement** to restore relative peace on the border.

What is an India-Specific Way Forward?

- **Geopolitical Aspect:** India has to brace itself for some immediate challenges flowing from the Russian actions.
 - It will have to **balance the pressure** from one strategic partner to condemn the violation of international law, with that from another to **understand its legitimate concerns.** India managed these pressures during the 2014 crisis of Crimea annexation, it shall again manage it effectively.
- **Economic Aspect:** On the fiscal side, the Government, which has been conservative in its revenue assumptions in the Budget, has the **room to pre-emptively cut domestic fuel taxes** to nip inflationary expectations, **stoke faltering consumption levels** and **sustain India’s fragile post-Covid-19 recovery** through this global churn.
- **A Balanced Approach: India-Russia ties** have 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.
 - At the same time, 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.
 - Delhi must **talk continually to all sides**, and engage with all of its partners, keeping in mind that there is **no justification for the violation of any country’s territorial sovereignty.**
 - India must also make it clear to coercing countries that their **“with us or against us” formulations are hardly constructive.**
 - The best course is for all parties to **step back and focus on preventing an all-out war**, rather than divide the world and return it to the days of the Cold War.

Drishti Mains Question

Discuss the implications of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on India and the right approach that the latter shall take in this regard.