



## India's Stand on Ukraine Crisis

This editorial is based on ["Ukraine and the anatomy of India's neutrality"](#) which was published in The Hindu on 08/04/2022. It talks about the Russian invasion of Ukraine and India's response to take a stand on the matter.

**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.

Since independence India's response to the international war crisis has not gone to a major shift. The instance has always been pro-USSR and pro-Russia after the breakup of USSR. In the present times,

### What was India's Response For International Crisis in the Past?

- Russian troops were stationed in Hungary, intervening at the time of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 but India did not condemn.
- In 1957, a year after the intervention in Hungary, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru explained in Parliament why India took a non-condemnatory approach. "There are many things happening in the world from year to year and day to day, which we have disliked intensely. We have not condemned them because when one is trying to solve a problem, it doesn't help calling names and condemning."
- Jawahar Lal Nehru's axiom has continued to guide India's approach to conflicts, especially those involving its partners. Be it the Soviet interventions in Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968) or Afghanistan (1979), or the American invasion of Iraq (2003), India has more or less followed this line.

### What is India's Stand on Russia-Ukraine War?

- India's response to Russia's invasion on Ukraine — condemnation of the civilian killings without any name calling, and abstention from UN votes — is not fundamentally different from this historically cautious neutrality.
  - India abstained on a US-sponsored **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)** resolution that deplores in the strongest terms Russia's aggression against Ukraine.
  - India abstained from a **United Nations General Assembly** resolution that censured Russia for its military actions in Ukraine.
  - 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.

## ▪ India's position on the Ukraine crisis is not an isolated one.

- South Africa, another major democracy, abstained from the UN votes that sought to condemn Russia.
- The United Arab Emirates, a close American ally in the Gulf that hosts thousands of U.S. troops, abstained from a vote in the UN Security Council.
- Israel, the U.S.'s closest ally in West Asia, condemned the Russian attack but refused to join the sanctions regime and said no to sending its defence systems to Ukraine.
- Turkey, a [North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\)](#) ally, did the same and is mediating between Ukraine and Russia.
- But none of these countries has come under the kind of pressure and public criticism from the West that India has.
- U.S. President Joe Biden said India's position was "somewhat shaky". His Deputy National Security Adviser for International Economics warned India of "consequences" if it conducts trade with Russia circumventing American sanctions.

## Why is India Being Selectively Targeted by the Western Countries?

- There could be three broad reasons — **political, economic, and strategic**.
- From a **political point of view**, the West has carefully tried to construct a narrative that Russian President Vladimir Putin's attack on Ukraine is an assault on "the free world".
  - This narrative would look weak if the world's largest democracy (India) sits out of the West-led bid to punish the Russians.
- From an **economic point of view**, sanctions on Russia were imposed largely by western countries. Only three Asian nations have backed the sanctions — Japan, South Korea and Singapore. China, the world's second largest economy, has not abided by the American sanctions.
  - If India also continues to trade with Russia, working around the payment curbs, that would invariably blunt the effect of the sanctions on the Russian economy.
- **Strategically**, this is the most important global crisis since the end of the Cold War. India has improved its strategic partnership with the U.S., and the West in general, over the last 30 years, while at the same time retaining warm ties with Russia.
  - This balancing was not tested in the recent past. But with the Russian attack on Ukraine and the near-total breakdown in ties between Russia and the West, countries such as India are now faced with a difficult choice of picking a side.
  - Given the transformation of India's partnership with the U.S., which also sees India as a counterweight to China in the Indo-Pacific region, many expected India to give up its strategic autonomy and take a stand that aligns with that of the West. It did not happen.

## How is the West Responsible for the Tragedy of Ukraine?

- The West is not an innocent bystander in the whole Ukraine crisis. Ukraine was promised NATO membership in 2008 which it never got. The promise itself was enough to shake up Russia's security calculations and it moved aggressively, annexing Crimea and supporting militancy in Donbas.
- The U.S. continued to provide money and limited weapons to Ukraine but never took any meaningful measure to bolster Ukraine's deterrence against Russia.
- So, the West not only failed to deter Russia, but its limited responses to war are also pushing Russia deeper into the Chinese embrace.
- Should India accelerate this embrace by toeing the anti-Russian Western line or retain its terms of engagement with Moscow which could allow Russia to diversify its Asian relations? India has opted for the second option.

## What can be the Way Forward?

- **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 “atma nirbharta” 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.

## Conclusion

- India is not a client state of any great power (even client states have not joined the sanctions regime). It is not a member of any alliance system — the **Quad** (India, Australia, Japan and the U.S.) is not an alliance.
- Like any other country, India also retains the right to take policies based on pragmatic realism and its core national interests. And India thinks that a neutral position anchored in strategic autonomy which keeps channels open with both sides is what serves its interests.
- It does not mean that India supports the war. It has not. The U.S., India's most important strategic partner, does not seem to appreciate these nuances.

### ***Drishti Mains Question:***

Like any other country, India also retains the right to take policies based on pragmatic realism and its core national interests. Discuss the statement in the light of the recent Russia-Ukraine war.